The Need for Guiding Principles in Higher Education

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CURRENT PROBLEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Professor A. Myers

First semester, 1942-1943

THE NEED FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Milo A. Rediger
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THE NEED FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES in HIGHER EDUCATION

Reason for choice of subject:

Our course is entitled "Current Problems in Higher Education". Of current problems there are indeed many during a period of international crisis. It is true of higher education as it is true of every other phase of personal or communal life that, during wartime, problems become not only greater in number but also become more acute and more pressing in their demand for immediate solution. Hence, we must be primarily concerned with those immediate problems and must deal with them in the light of all the available data.

But perhaps the most significant "current" problems are those which have post-emergency implications. It is inevitable that important changes in education will take place as a result of the present upheaval. There are things to be considered which are not limited to the time-bounds of this war, for example, the current trend in the teaching- or the absence of teaching- of American history in our own public school system. Add to this, as a further example, the trend toward undisciplined, undirected experience in the more radical camps of progressive education- a rank misunderstanding and subversion of true progressive education- with the resultant lack of moral consciousness on the part of the school product. These and other facts make one wonder what "turn" education will take under the pressure of war conditions and the problems of post-war reconstruction.
Policies and methods for post-war administration of education must be formulated now—although now is scarcely soon enough. In this endeavor we are immediately confronted with questions such as, What shall be the direction of our planning? What shall be our aims and our goals? What shall be our guiding principles? Our answers will be more, much more, than a mere rationalization of existing conditions. A philosophy of education is not a justification of the status quo; it is not a rationalization of what is, but rather a set of guiding principles for what, in the light of human experience, ought to be. It should give not only general direction to our policies, but concrete suggestions for proper procedure in the details of organizational and administrative action.

Significance of the subject:

In the writer's opinion, it is possible for education to "lose its way". Many of the current problems of higher education may be direct or indirect results of the fact that education in the recent past has, to some extent, lost its way. When society finds itself in crises like the present one—tragedies of the first order, involving almost every nation of the world and costing lives and money beyond calculation—it means that someone has been "brought up" wrong; someone has been trained to make improper decisions or not trained to make proper ones.

This is not an attempt to fix the blame for the present world crisis upon educational systems alone; but it seems proper to point out the part that education can play in either the avoidance or the recurrence of similar or worse crises in the future.
For certainly the educational system of a nation, considered in its broadest sense, is its most powerful means for the molding of persons who are properly fitted to carry on the responsibilities of life in a socially complex society.

Considered in this broad context, the educational facilities of a people include not only schools, but home, school and church. The more closely these institutions are correlated and united in their ultimate aims, the more efficient will they be in the building of a stable and peace-loving society. If it is true that "history teaches that men don't learn the lessons that history teaches" about war, it is not because men are unaware of the costs and the tragedies of previous wars, but is, rather, because there are other aspects of human nature and human experience besides the knowledge of past events that must be reckoned with.

Information about the economic and political aspects of war will become effective in averting further disasters only when it is properly attended by the building of character and the development of attitudes essential to life in human society. Too often education prepares the younger members of a society to live in a world of things but neglects the fact that they will live in a society made up of other beings like themselves—beings with ideas, opinions and desires.

Has Education "lost its way"?

It is one thing to have in mind or at hand a store of facts or information, and quite another thing to be able to evaluate the data of human life, personal and social, and to make decisions with respect to the many and varied aspects of it. If Americans,
or any other people, are to be able to make proper decisions in times of social, economic and political crises, they need to be taught values as well as facts. Factual information is important, but it may well be that, in view of tragedies like the present one, the teaching of valuation is even more important.

The question is often raised, "Can values be taught?" And, if we answer in terms of means and methods usually employed in the transmission of factual information, we should have to admit that they cannot. Values, and the capacity for valuation, must develop as part and parcel of the total personality of the student. The possibility of teaching values, then, lies with the educator not as a mere transmitter of facts, but as a friend and guide under whose skillful direction students, as persons, come to maturity. Values may be inculcated in the developing personality of the student by the combined processes of teaching and living, or, in other words, by teaching thought of as a process of life-sharing.

But education, in its emphasis upon transmitting factual, technical, vocational information has to a great extent neglected the teaching of values. This is due largely to two assumptions—assumptions which, in the opinion of this writer, are fallacious—that have come to be basic principles in several present-day philosophies of education. One of these is the degree of confidence which is placed in the "goodness" of human nature in all of its potentialities. To say that we must only discover the desires and tendencies of the student and help to foster and express them, that we need not attempt to awaken and enhance the best desires
and tendencies nor discourage others leaves much of human experience unaccounted for. It is to admit that very little, in fact, is to be gained from the experience of those who have already passed through the process of maturation, and that education is merely a means by which knowledge may be obtained more rapidly than it could otherwise be assimilated. The other assumption holds that the criterion, the ideal or the pattern for individual development is to be found in the already existent society. In other words, it assumes that the society is practically the best possible one. An examination of these assumptions seems unnecessary to those who are committed to the belief that there are no absolutes, no permanent values— and therein lies the danger of losing one's way with respect to education.

This is not an attack upon the "new education"; in fact, in the writer's opinion, the principles and methods of the new education offer, for the most part, better means for teaching both information and valuation than do the stereotyped and conventional methods of the traditional school. But in so far as the assumptions mentioned above, the first if which assumes too much and the second too little, are made the basis of training, education has "lost its way".

One may still ask, "What has all of this to do with higher education?". We have already said that home and church are, in a broad sense, educational institutions as well as are the schools. Then, one may argue, let the home and the church deal with character-building and valuation while the school deals out information. This argument may be directed with special force toward
higher education where specialization begins. However, there are other factors to be considered. It is at the college level that young people begin to think seriously about the social, economic and political problems in the solution of which they will have and must take a part. They begin to think about the meaning and value of life; they seek goals and direction for their activities. True it is that certain personality traits and thought trends may have been established long before this stage is reached, but it is at this point that we find the most urgent need for direction and motivation in order that those traits and tendencies may be modified in the light of the problems to be solved and be properly applied to them.

**The need for motivation:**

Motivation may be considered from more than one point of view. It may be a force that drives or impels, while, on the other hand, it may consist in a "final cause" which draws and leads, inspires and encourages. The educative process must be a dynamic one, motivated by more than the mere "you must" of parents and teachers. The accumulation of knowledge merely for its own sake is insufficient as a goal for the process. To have knowledge merely for the sake of making a living is not sufficient. To "make a living" is a far cry from what it means to make a life. The drives of necessity may produce an existence, but the primitive savage lived on a plane as high as that.

Education cannot merely be "impelled" or "pushed on" from one generation to another. It must have a worthy end in view, and both educator and educand must be aware of the goal. That
goal ought to center in the development of a worthwhile life
and of an appropriate society in which to live it; in short,
the realization of values.

So far as the individual is concerned, I like

The need for direction: to think of it as internal motivation

Thus the "dynamic" of the educative process yields not only
motivation but also direction, and the motive force comes to be
not a mere "efficient cause" but a "final cause" toward which the
activity of the process is directed, that is to say, an educa-
tional ideal.

The history of education, in so far as it has been develop-
ed as one of the social sciences, reveals the fact that the ed-
ucational ideal has always been something of a combination of
national and religious ideals which were held by the particular
society or people in question. The important point to be noticed
here is that the younger members of the society were always ed-
ucated, however crude the methods may have been, according to
what the good man or the good citizen should be. The normative
element was always present, and the norm was based upon what the
nature of human personality was considered to be.

In the opinion of this writer, the whole educational problem
turns on that pivotal consideration, namely, one's basic philosophy
of life and of man. What the educator does will be determined by
what he believes education should do. If he holds the educand to
be a mere collocation of material atoms which responds mechanici-
ally to stimuli from its environment, his emphasis in education-
al theory and practice will naturally be upon the importance and
the manipulation of the learner's environment. If he, on the
other hand, believes that the student is a developing self-conscious person who, because of his personality, has infinite worth and dignity, he, the educator, will be primarily concerned with stimulating and directing the development of the learner by centering attention on him and only secondarily upon environment. Obviously the process is bi-polar—both learner and environment are essential features of an educational situation. However, whether the educator considers the learner to be a responding mechanism or a developing person, with all that true personality implies, will largely determine how he will direct the educative process.

What is the nature of human beings?:

It was Pestalozzi who said that the basic principle of education is not teaching; it is love. This suggests a "dynamic" relationship between teacher and pupil rather than the more stereotyped relationship of information transmission. Comenius, before Pestalozzi, had combined human development and religious experience as inseparable aspects of the same process, and from that combination derived a philosophy of education which he called The Great Didactic. It stresses the development of the whole person in the light of man's true nature.

In the educational ideal, then, the goal toward which the process should be directed, no aspect of man's total nature should be neglected. It is possible to place too much stress upon bodily and mental development and forget that the will and the spirit need to be educated also. This is the realm of valuation, the realm of decisions and choices.
Statement by President H.M. Wriston of Brown University:

"The great need in the American educational system right now is the production of a surge of moral energy comparable to the surge in industrial production. We know that Hitler is bad but we are doubtful as to what is good. This clearly shows the weakness of our educational system which fails to give us a sense of perspective. We should be more concerned with the human spirit and less concerned with Wallace's quart of milk."

President Wriston has called attention to a very significant fact, the matter of perspective and emphasis in education. It is not that we are to be not at all concerned with "Wallace's quart of milk", but that we, in the recent past, have come to be almost solely concerned with it and not at all with the development of the human spirit. This is a transgression of the educational ideal, a distorted concept of the educational goal, and a crime against the individual and society.

A case in point:

That phase of human experience and development which has to do with the will and the spirit of man we call religion. Our question is, Will it not be necessary to give consideration to the religious side of life and experience if our educational system is to be properly guided in relation to its goal?

In the January 7, 1943 issue of the Daily News there is an account of Josef Stalin's acceptance of 500,000 rubles from the Russian Orthodox Church, its contribution for the tank forces of the Red Army. Communist Lenin's favorite slogan had been, "Religion is the opium of the people". The Soviet Government for
years subsidized a Society of the Godless for the propagation of atheism, and persecuted all Christian sects within its borders from time to time. But now, Stalin isn't too much of an atheist to accept the Russian Orthodox Church's money for the purchase of tanks and to say,

"I hereby transmit to the Russian Orthodox clergy and to believers my greetings and thanks of the Red Army for their care for the armored tank forces of the Red Army."

The Daily News felt that this episode points out two facts; first, that if religion is the opium of the people then most people need that opium. It is easy for some people to go along in average peacetimes disbelieving in a God and a hereafter. When, however, a tragedy like a firstclass war comes along, men recognize their dependence upon some power greater than their own. The other fact revealed by this incident, as pointed out by the Daily News, is that Russia itself, in the face of crisis, is moving away from orthodox Lenin Communism and back toward toleration of religion.

When religion, or the development of the human spirit along with the development of the body and mind, is left out of an educational system, too much is left out, and the people lack what it takes to carry them through times of great trial. It may be easy for us, in our well-sheltered classrooms, smugly and scornfully to point out the faults of religious organizations and religious people, but there are "no atheists on a rubber life-raft!" Any people who are educated with respect to only a part or parts of their nature will be unprepared for those experiences which test the whole personality.
How provide for spiritual development?:

If religion is that part of human experience which fosters the development of the will and the spirit, and if it is this aspect of development that gives perspective and a proper sense of values; if, furthermore, it is at the level of higher education that the younger members of society begin to think seriously about these important matters, then "religious education" is peculiarly significant and tremendously important.

Religion as subject matter in the curriculum:

But is "religious education" to be accomplished by reinstating the subject matter of theology in the curriculum? In presenting the affirmative side of this question, I shall use the points made by Professor Ernest Johnson of Columbia in the December, 1942 issue of the "Teachers' College Record" in an article entitled "Religion in Education in the Post-war World".

Introducing the subject, Professor Johnson declares that among the factors of a durable peace none is more important than "the discipline of the human spirit". He states, furthermore, that he is not referring to religious education as it is carried on by religious agencies, but to "the place of religion in general education". His arguments, which follow in this discussion, are for the reinstatement of theological subject matter in the school curriculum.

It is possible to have religion in education without violating the principle of separation of Church and State, a principle which must be observed and preserved in a democratic nation which is so religiously heterogeneous. This is to be
accomplished by refraining from identifying the teaching of religion with any particular sect or creed or code. It is possible, furthermore, to teach without indoctrinating by "inducting students into an exploration of the intricacies of the business of living, with due regard to their attained level of thought and action". Progressive educators who readily accept this principle, says Professor Johnson, in any other field, object when religious education is mentioned because they assume that it means the propagation of a sectarian creed. And anyway, he reminds us, indoctrination is not the private sin of religious educators, and he quotes Dr. J. M. Clark, a colleague;

"One wonders if there is anyone who can use the same statistical guess for the twentieth time without being hypnotized into a belief in its reliability, even against his better judgment. If the figure fits in with his own wishful thinking, the case is often hopeless."

Religion belongs in the curriculum as authentically as does any other phase of Western culture or life. Christianity has been the dominant factor in the development of Western civilization, not excluding American government and American education. Other arguments which Professor Johnson presents have to do with the personal and institutional aspects of religion. Religion, he says, is the great integrator of personality. With due respect to psychology and psychiatry, he holds religion to be the basic organizing principle in personality. There is, of course, a difference between "a morbid religious consciousness" and "healthy religious faith and discipline". Religion as an institution is the strongest and most inclusive of human bonds; it cuts across political, economic and even national boundaries.
Then it must have a part in any educative process which is to do justice to the whole nature and life of the younger members of any society.

**Religious teaching vs. the teaching of religion:**

Though I would agree with Professor Johnson as to the place and importance of religion in general education, I am not ready to say that religion, as theological subject matter, should be put into the regular school curriculum. There are too many complex implications in the relation between a religiously heterogeneous society and the principles of democracy.

But it is not necessarily the dogmas of religion that I would be in favor of teaching. If the home and the church have a part in the educative process, as suggested before in this paper, then certainly that would be the proper function of the home and the church. This would allow for the operation of the highest degree of democracy, and would tend to direct each individual into that phase of the organizational aspect of religion into which he will best fit and from which he will derive the greatest benefit.

There are two things that higher education can do, relative to the problem under discussion, in order that the total educational experience of the younger members of society may be properly directed in accord with our educational goal. The one is negative, the other positive.

Higher education must refrain from generating an atmosphere that is distinctly anti-religious. A good intelligence and a high degree of knowledge does not necessarily imply skepticism
about the phases of human experience which have to do with values and with faith. If faith in the assumptions posited by the scientist is justified for the sake of and in the process of arriving at scientific knowledge, then faith in a religious sense, a faith which produces even more important results in the business of living and adjusting to the world in which we live, is also justifiable. Why should higher education destroy in the lives of America's young people faith in the things which have given us those treasures that we prize most highly? Liberty, freedom, equality and all of the other worthwhile factors that make up American democracy have their roots in the religious consciousness and experience of past generations. Break with religious faith and you break with the very principles for which we say we are fighting this war. Let us, in higher education, refrain from opposing what has been given to young people by the home and the church.

The positive thing that higher education can do is to promote a wholesome program and atmosphere in which students may develop a complete personality, in which all aspects of human nature are cultivated, and in which valuation as well as information is taught. How can this be accomplished unless religion as subject matter is put into the curriculum? If teaching is life-sharing rather than, or in addition to, the transmission of knowledge; if the development of persons in the entirety of their natures is the goal of education; and if the relationship between personalities, primarily between teacher and student, is of paramount importance in the educative pro-
cess; then what we are striving for can be accomplished by what I have called religious teaching rather than the teaching of religious subject matter.

To inspire noble aspirations, to stimulate faith in the purposiveness of the universe and of human life, to encourage a recognition of the value and dignity, the worth and sacredness of humanity, to foster a proper evaluation of the rights and privileges of all people everywhere—to do these things is to render the greatest of all services to youth. If the teacher himself is imbued with these principles and with a healthy religious faith, he can, almost without reference to the particular subject matter with which he may be dealing, "share" this with his students.

True, this places a great weight of responsibility upon teachers in higher education. Certainly it will mean at least a turning away from the crass materialism of the recent past, a redeclaration of faith in the God of our Fathers, and a sincere attempt to imbue the younger members of society with ideas about the dignity, worth and purposefulness of human life.

Integration in education: (Conclusion)

To divide education by distinct and uncrossable lines into secular and religious is inconsistent with the philosophy of education I have tried to indicate in this paper, and need not be done. Sectarianism is the stock argument which is usually offered against religion in education. But we do not refuse to discuss fundamental economic or political principles and issues
just because there many different "isms" in each field. Nor
do we object to the creation of a "democratic" atmosphere in
the classroom for fear that it will turn the minds of the
students against monarchy or oligarchy. Rather, we want our
young people to do their thinking in an atmosphere which will
contribute to a choice of the best.

Religion is a legitimate phase of life and experience,
and it, too, its principles and its spirit, must be a natural
part of the educative process. Let the home and the church,
together with the "personality" of each individual, determine
his particular organizational relationships with religion.
Let education, especially at that stage of the student's ed-
ucational experience where he does his serious thinking and
makes important decisions and choices, inspire and guide,
encourage and stimulate, and direct the development of the
young according to a suitable ideal, namely, the realization
of all of the potentialities of human personality.