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Book reviews

Graham Haydon *Education, Philosophy and the Ethical Environment*, Routledge, Abingdon (Oxon), 2006.
158 pp. ISBN 13: 987–0–415–35661–9, £80 (hbk); 987–0–415–35662–6, £22.99 (pbk); 978–0–203–00270–4 (ebk)

When I was last a serious student of sociological theory, it seemed that all of the major debates of the day boiled down to the connection between society as a whole (and the lesser 'wholes': classes, races, genders which made it up) and individuals. This came in many forms, variable according to which 'founding father' happened to be in focus at the time. Is Man (sic) free to make history or does history make men (Marx, Weber)? Is freedom of action possible for individuals socialized into the collective consciousness or are they doomed to reproduce the social and cultural norms, values and roles which pre-exist them (Durkheim, Parsons)? How does individual subjectivity become objectified into 'symbolic universes' which offer both the means and the limits of social interaction (Schutz, Mead, Berger and Luckmann)? Methodologically, is the whole more than the sum of the parts? Are ultimate explanations of social phenomena in terms of groups ('holism') always reducible to the behaviour of individual actors ('individualism')?

In this book, Graham Haydon has brought such questions again into focus, but from a philosophical perspective. In this case, the significant 'whole' is the *ethical environment*, and the dialectic is between this environment (within which individuals and groups pursue their projects and live out their lives) and the individuals and groups, the consequences of whose actions, intended or not, shape that environment. Of particular concern to Haydon is the role of 'values education' in the promotion of virtue, inculcating in the young those values and attitudes of the day which are desirable, and improving the quality of the ethical environment in the process. This is problematic since establishing a consensus around values is notoriously difficult. The nearest we might get (and this, I think, is Haydon's position) is to willingly embrace diversity as a value and then work through its ramifications for schools. These include the issues of 'how far [formal education] should be taking the responsibility to make everyone aware of the diversity and richness of the ethical environment'

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(p. 38), and what should be the place of religion in education in a multifaith community? (pp. 132–3). It follows that we cannot but revisit the 'big' questions in the Philosophy of Education: what is the aim of education, what ought we to teach and how ought we to teach it?

For the novice, Haydon's Introduction sets out what philosophy can and cannot be expected to do in addressing such questions. In Chapter 1, the idea of the ethical environment, with its particular focus on the ideas of moral philosophy ('right','wrong','obligation','virtue' and so forth), is distinguished from 'the cultural climate or *zeitgeist*' (p. 21). The dialectical relationship between education and the ethical environment is then established. Chapter 2 considers diversity in the components of the ethical environment, and in what might be thought of as 'layers' of the environment, from the ethos of the school to the ethics of a global culture.

Educational ideas are, themselves, a part of the ethical environment, and in subjects such as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship, explicitly so. In this context, the third chapter focuses specifically on conceptions of *values education* distinguished according to their different aims. A values education which promotes autonomy will not be the same as one which promotes simple rule-following; one which aims to develop certain virtues or character traits will have an emphasis different from one which focuses on moral reasoning and decision-making. The tension between the well-being of individuals and the good of society is stressed, setting the scene for the next two chapters – Chapter 4 'Taking responsibility' and Chapter 5 'Intervening in the ethical environment' – before returning to the responsibilities of values education in all this.

To take some responsibility for the ethical environment – as for the natural environment, a comparator which re-emerges at various points throughout the book – involves attending to it, evaluating it and deciding whether or not to try to change it. The liberal society poses problems for evaluation (who are we to evaluate the ideas of others?), as does the circularity involved in attempting such an evaluation when the criteria for doing so are themselves a part of that environment. Haydon argues that we must try, and in so doing, make a virtue of diversity and difference. But intervention, especially by governments, has dangers: indoctrination and manipulation among them. These are examined in Chapter 5, with the help of an intriguing juxtaposition of Mill's *On Liberty* with the report *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour* from Prime Minister Blair's Strategy Unit. Haydon's conclusion is that interventions which promote 'capacities and dispositions that would be antithetical to indoctrination' may avoid such dangers (p. 109).

The final chapter ('The responsibilities of values education') concentrates on 'what schools can and should do' (p. 117) in respect of the ethical environment.

Many of the issues which concern those of us who are genuinely committed to the education of the whole person, and particularly to the moral, emotional and spiritual aspects of personhood, are considered here. These include the impact of 'marketisation' and 'commodification' generally in society, and especially on schools and schooling; the hidden curriculum which underlies, and may sabotage, stated intentions; the problematics of schools as 'communities'; religion and faith schools; and education for citizenship. Anyone who thought that educational decision-makers could ignore the ethical environment at any point in the process of generating and implementing policy should have been disabused of such an idea by the end of this chapter. The short Conclusion reminds us that citizens, teachers, academics, parents and governments all have a responsibility for the ethical environment.

This book is well-planned, logically structured and clearly argued. It is published in the 'Foundations and Futures of Education' series, aimed at teachers and students of education rather than at philosophers. As such, it includes explanations of some concepts and the ideas of key philosophers which more advanced readers may find elementary, but, for many readers, the assumption that they may not already know much about either moral philosophy or values education will be a strength rather than a weakness.

Graham Haydon has done us all a service in foregrounding the concept of the *ethical environment*. I hope that this concept, and Haydon's introduction to it, will provide the basis for a lively discussion amongst philosophers and pedagogues with an interest in the education of the whole person.

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Robin Barrow and Ronald Woods *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, 4th edition, Routledge, London, 2006.
200 pp. ISBN 0–415–38127–4, £75, (hbk); 0–415–38126–6, £19.99 (pbk)

Philosophers of education sometimes complain that their contributions to the field of education are increasingly marginalized, if not completely devalued, by others (e.g. social scientists and policy analysts). Philosophers *do* sometimes deign to speak to non-philosophers in scholarly forums and in print. (In recent years a handful of articles in *Educational Researcher* by the likes of Denis Phillips, Nicholas Burbules and Harvey Siegel come to mind.) Yet, by and large, it is likely true that non-philosophers – including teachers – seldom find anything of value in what philosophers have to say, and consequently, it would seem, too many philosophers of education have not only disengaged themselves from

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educational policy and classroom issues but have also taken the regrettable route of talking only to each other.

Fortunately, the fourth edition of Barrow and Woods' *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* reminds us that a retreat from careful thinking about the conditions under which educational practitioners operate is a mistake and that theorizing about educational practice generally is sorely needed. To theorize, they argue, is to engage in 'a sustained attempt to "think things through" with particular regard for the meanings of words as the principal medium of thought' (p. 186). Theorizing is necessary to effective educational practice, they observe, because too often 'a proper understanding of a field is hampered by reliance on general concepts' (p. 61). Thus, with characteristic precision and clarity, the authors begin by examining the concept of education itself, specifically of what it consists and the relevant criteria for determining precisely what counts as being well-educated. Barrow and Woods further scrutinize the meaning of the curriculum and the purposes for which schools are intended. Elsewhere, they carefully analyze an array of central educational concepts including indoctrination, creativity and rationality.

It is fair to say that the entire book is held together by the complementary aims of clear thinking and rationality though not of the sort that valorizes 'unencumbered selves' cut off from community and authority. Rather, they insist, the point of rationality is

> to deter people from assuming that the fact that somebody or some group has authority, in the sense of having some degree of power, in itself makes that person or group right or even—particularly worth listening to on whatever issue is pronounced. (p. 94)

There is not room here to examine each of the fourteen chapters, but I will briefly consider the line of argument in two of them.

In 'Needs, interests and experience', Barrow and Woods ask, 'is taking account of needs the same as educating according to needs? Are children's needs the only consideration in education? What are children's needs?' (p. 119). Similar questions arise related to the *interests* of children. On the matter of how education ought to specifically address children's needs and interests, they observe that consensus beyond a few uncontentious items like basic survival skills is elusive but that this is no argument for ending the discussion. Children have needs but are typically not well-positioned to know what they are or how they best ought to pursue them. Similarly, children have interests but these may not conform to what is in fact valuable for them either in the immediate sense or in the long term; therefore, children require guidance concerning how best to interpret and pursue their apparent needs and interests. The authors are equally circumspect with the notion of *experience*. They note the inherent ambiguity and frothiness in phrases like 'education for experience', 'education

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as growth' or more generally, 'child-centered' education (and apply a related critique of A. S. Neill in an earlier chapter entitled 'Self determination'). They helpfully remind us of the manner in which Dewey conceived experience, viz. that there are educative types and non-educative types of experience and that specific learning objectives are invariably linked to all educative forms of experience, including that 'children should become tolerant and rational adults, able to cope with a relatively high degree of social freedom without abusing that freedom to interfere with the freedom or well-being of others' (p. 137).

In another chapter simply entitled 'Culture', Barrow and Woods are not interested in the term as used by anthropologists but rather as a normative concept. Much of the chapter is an investigation into the relevant criteria for aesthetic excellence – including 'imaginative sensibility', 'complexity' and 'intellectual and emotional response' – yet the authors wisely observe that, once criteria have been located, standards will still have to be devised. and determining who is entitled to devise them is at least as controversial as the criteria themselves. (Harold Bloom take note!) Overall, the degree of even-handedness is impressive here, especially when the authors impugn the importance of complexity over simplicity, or challenge the idea that moral behavior such as altruism will follow from a person being 'well-cultured'. (Barrow and Woods discuss the Nazis but it was Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* who sprang to my mind here.)

The entire discussion is set against the various elitist notions of culture to be found in Arnold, Elliot and Bantock. They correctly point out that charges of 'inegalitarian' or 'elitist' against 'high culture' theories are unhelpful, in part because 'elitism' in vacuo is rather meaningless. Curiously, however, the authors make the following claim somewhat early in the chapter:

> All that is inherent in the cultural elitist thesis is the claim that individual children have different capabilities and that it is important for education to take account of these differences— and to foster and preserve elites, in the sense of highly competent groups, invarious spheres of human activity including the Cultural sphere. (p. 163)

Would that Barrow and Woods had paid as close attention to the implication and application of these words as they do elsewhere. Given the manner in which ability grouping practices routinely operate to favor children from white, middle-class backgrounds, surely terms such as 'capabilities' and 'competent groups' deserve closer scrutiny. Passing off these difficulties as 'beyond the scope of this book', the authors only begin to point to the ethical problems intimated by these terms. They ask 'Are there any criteria, such as ability, responsibility, hard work, or intelligence, which justify preferential treatment in any respect?' (p. 164). There is undeniably an empirical component here that must rely on experiment and further research, but any claim such as 'individual children have

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different capabilities' is fraught with difficulty and has clear implications for educational equity and opportunity.

A great deal of the material in this book has appeared in previous editions, though chapters entitled 'Thinking about education','What is it to be human?' and 'The postmodern challenge' have been added. Certainly the authors do not put all debate to rest. Yet in fewer than 200 pages, Barrow and Woods bring clarity and precision to a number of timely issues that bear directly upon the field of education. The book serves as an introduction to students with little if any prior philosophical training, and the authors ably handle the variety of selected topics clearly and with useful illustrations. Most importantly, throughout the book they show any dichotomy between educational theory and practice to be false. Rather, they argue,'far from theory being unrelated to practice, [theory is] a necessary prerequisite to action' (p. 187).

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David A. Turner *Theory and Practice of Education*, Continuum, London, 2007.
172 pp. ISBN: 0–8264–9107–3, £70, (hbk)

In *Theory and Practice of Education*, David A. Turner lays out an ambitious philosophical justification for the adoption of a new educational research paradigm and hence, a new generation of research models. Turner starts with the maxim that research models should be as simple as possible, but no simpler. He argues that current educational research models are too simple and that, in spite of the apparent complexity of his suggested research models (drawing on game and complexity theory), they are as simple as is possible given educational research's task of meaningfully informing policy.

Turner asserts that 'everything that is really important in the educational process cannot be controlled' (p. 30). He explains this claim by harkening to the Vygostkian split between how teachers prepare and organize (controllable) and what happens within the student (uncontrollable). I too have often marveled at how it is that, despite our best efforts, educators simply cannot *make* a student learn anything. My suspicion is that regardless of whether Turner is right – that is, his more complex models are as simple as is possible – if embracing them means acknowledging the dirty little secret that is the uncontrollability of the learning process then his new research models will be a tough sell at best. Much educational research, and to a certain extent educational policy, is predicated on the twin positivist assumptions that we can understand and control the phenomena which we study (take, for example, recent excitement about 'scientifically-based' educational research).

The first part of Turner's argument is that gross inadequacies exist in the current educational research paradigm. Interestingly, he has very little to say about this current paradigm other than very nonspecific criticisms, ones that often border on caricature. For example, his complaint of the inability of the overly-linear 'single centered' nature of educational research seems insensitive to the educational researchers who are working with more dynamic models. Do hierarchical, latent growth, typological and other modes of analysis fall prey to Turner's 'too simple' critique? Unfortunately, since he never addresses any variety within the existing educational research community we are left to wonder.

Turner's problemetization of the business-as-usual approaches of educational research is a welcome endeavor. More specifically, Turner sheds light on the fact that our models are often too simple to be useful for policymakers, and he provides the conceptual base for the development of models that – when used in appropriate settings to contend with appropriate research questions – might provide the proper level of complexity. To the degree that Turner's work illuminates the ways in which the choices a researcher makes necessarily shape the resulting research, the book is important. Turner's broadening of the conceptual base upon which educational researchers may build their projects renders the book more important. The major caveat is that his proposed theoretical base tends toward certain kinds of models that likely are not without their own sets of problems. Turner argues that, rather than avoiding this type of modeling, researchers should go into projects with their eyes wide open. Upon reflection, the potential pitfalls of conceptualizing a research design in game theory terms might outweigh the potential worth of the approach, but not always. One of the most valuable services provided by Turner is the transparency he calls for in making such decisions.

With regard to game and chaos theory-derived social research models that draw much conceptual sustenance from rational actor theory, a general concern is more with potential consequences than with the approach itself. In other words, Turner is careful to state that rational actor and market theory analyses do not obligate social reorganization according to market principles. But it is telling that not only does he issue this disclaimer but he goes farther, stating that his warning wouldn't even be necessary were it not that this phenomenon is so stupidly common. This is a red flag, as I worry, a la Lewis Mumford, Langdon Winner and others, that certain technologies (and one can think of research methods and models as forms of technology) tend toward certain social consequences. In the words of Winner, technological artifacts can and do have politics, and he posits that seemingly politically neutral domains can foster certain political dispositions. He gives the example of how adopting a certain power-generating technology is more than just a rational

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scientific choice. Choosing nuclear power will shape future decisions and options in profound ways. Strong central authority will be required to administer such a powerful resource, possibly even including security/military scale-ups to ensure control of the technology.

While it might seem a stretch to compare technologies as different as nuclear power and game theory-inspired research models, assuming that quantitative research methods are culturally, philosophically and politically neutral is a risky business. One need not look farther than the adoption of a behaviorist educational outlook. While not a problem in and of itself (and certainly even a useful conceptual frame for some brands of inquiry) behaviorism, virtually by design, tends toward reductionist understandings and explanations. Turner acknowledges this, offers his models as an upgrade to what he sees as the current behaviorism-inspired ones, and yet, he seems unable or unwilling to recognize similar potential problems with his conceptual frame. Conceptualizing phenomena in market terms has, time and again, led to reified and reductive understandings of the phenomena as actually possessing the attributes of the market that only came into being when the market model was first applied.

In addition to this general worry about the potential effects of thinking in terms of markets and rational actors in general, I also have one major specific concern. Turner states 'in game theory models, the behaviour of groups is the outcome of the aggregation of individual preferences . . .' (p. 9). He also states that 'everybody is involved in constructing their own education . . .' (p. 1). Fair enough, but Turner builds his models on these beliefs and the notion that 'perhaps more than in any other field, willpower, choice and interpersonal chemistry are crucial to the endeavour and do more to shape the outcome than background or prior experience' (p. 1). I can foresee that his models, while able to capture some of the effect of personal psychology might lose the ability to shed light on the ways in which our social structures systematically affect the likelihood that individuals will benefit from the possession of or even continue to possess willpower, choice, (positive) interpersonal chemistry and the like. Although at times he suggests the opposite, it seems reasonable to fear that in constructing models that focus on individual choice and/or preference we will lose some of our ability to examine the effect of our social arrangements and the impact of group identity in these arrangements. In short, when Turner describes his model as providing a macro-sociological lens, it seems that to make such a claim requires the adoption of an impoverished version of the macro-sociological.

All that said, Turner offers models that promise to add to the analytic tools at the disposal of educational researchers. His argument – that taking the time to find a conceptual fit between research question and research

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model – reinforces a crucial but oft-overlooked tenet of effective research. Finally, Turner demonstrates that researchers downplay the importance of theorizing at their peril. For these reasons, the book is a worthwhile read for educational philosophers and researchers alike.

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