

PREFACE

THIS small book was written in an attempt to sketch out the contours of a social philosophy for American education. Let me hasten to add, however, that this bold statement of purpose carries with it no claim to novelty and no pretension to completeness. Even a more seasoned writer on the subject might hesitate to set down anything as definitive at the present time, in the midst of the wide difference of opinion among leaders of American educational thought. The very conflict of views, however, impels one to seek to formulate some position; if the statement here made reflects a sense of conviction, this arises not from any illusion as to finality but from the feeling that the ideas expressed, whatever their first source, have been assimilated into a consciously unified pattern of thought. The chapters were written out in the first instance to help me find a rational position for myself—as parent and as teacher of education—in the face of the current educational controversy concerning social fundamentals.

At the heart of the controversy is the question of education's relation to social change. On one side are

those who believe that the school must adapt itself to the changing character of civilization; indeed, they go further and assert that in the present juncture of events the school has an important part to play in helping to bring about a much needed reconstruction of our economic and social system. On the other side are those who point out that education has always been concerned essentially with the transmission of the social heritage from the past; that its primary purpose has more to do with the preservation of social stability than with the problem of change; that necessary changes must first be made by adult society outside the school, and that the new points of view should be introduced into the education of the young only after general acceptance in society at large.

Toward one or the other of these poles of thought and endeavor educators throughout the country have tended to gravitate: in one group are the "traditionalists" and the "essentialists" who place the emphasis on preserving the cultural heritage; in the other group are the "progressives" and "reconstructionists" who would build a new social order with the aid of the school.

These contrasting views, of course, represent an old philosophic contest which becomes intensified in critical times. One view draws attention to the element of change in nature and society and sees in change the opportunity for a continuous enhancement of life. The other sets a high value on the stable and the permanent and places the emphasis on what has already been achieved in the racial experience. A resolution of this

conflict cannot be found in terms of generalities; in simple reiteration of the importance of stability as against change (or vice versa); in the bland recommendation "to treat the world as changing *and* as stable"; or in the conciliatory solution of "the middle way." We are always confronting definite situations and we need to know what concrete changes are to be made, what parts of the heritage are to be kept, and how the old and the new elements are to be fused in the modified cultural pattern. But it is not to be denied that the general orientation largely influences what is seen and what is valued, and it makes a vast difference on which side of the social Great Divide one stands.

The point of view taken in the following essays will, I believe, be found to be in accord with the position of the "reconstructionists" mentioned above, of those who hold that education must participate in bringing about social change. This position is an outgrowth of two major conceptions in the philosophy of Dewey and Kilpatrick: (1) the general view that the work in the schools must be related to the activities of society; (2) the special emphasis on the necessity of reckoning with the social effects of the scientific and industrial revolutions in the revision of educational theory and practice. As is evident throughout, my educational views have been largely shaped by the teachings of these two leaders of American educational thought.

Most of all, I am indebted to them for the idea of democracy as a comprehensive philosophy of life, a broad principle finding expression in the intellectual and

social, as well as in the political, sphere. This conception they helped to crystallize in my mind a score of years ago and I utilized it as a guiding assumption in *Theories of Americanization* (published as a doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia), in which I tried to sketch the outlines of a democratic orientation in connection with the problem of cultural pluralism in the United States. In the present book I attempt a more studied analysis of this democratic thesis as the underlying social philosophy with which our education must be in accord.

There is then a basic philosophic agreement with the "Dewey school." However, there is one idea or emphasis in this general line of thought which I have been able to accept only with a substantial modification. I refer to the notion, usually associated with pragmatism, that an educational philosophy should be considered a "hypothesis." Duly recognizing the importance of this concept as a counterbalance to the other extreme view, namely, that education should be based on unchanging first principles and final ends, I feel, nevertheless, that the need of having a definite set of purposes to guide education has been greatly underestimated by disciples of the experimentalist philosophy, at least in some of the current formulations. The view underlying the following treatment is that an explicit philosophy of life, a reasoned conviction as to basic human values is prerequisite to the conduct of educational processes; that a social philosophy is the reflection of an era of civilization rather than the result of individual experience; and that, while it is true

that philosophies may—indeed, must—change, this will happen only when there is epochal change in the character of science and society.

In rewriting for publication I did not try overmuch to adjust the presentation to the requirements of a conventional textbook. In some places I have merely restated current views; at other times I have tried to scratch below the surface of the usual positions, following my own inclination, at the time, as to what the argument required. Perhaps this method is not wholly disadvantageous; as the student or general reader follows the discussion and uses the references—if he does—he will be tracing out and thinking through variously opposed arguments. It is my hope that the book will be useful in the classroom and in study groups as a guide to the current educational discussion with reference to the larger issues of common interest to educator and layman.

Besides the general acknowledgment above, I owe a special debt to Professor Kilpatrick for most careful reading and annotating of the script. The publication of the essays would not have been possible without his encouragement and that of John L. Childs of Teachers College, Columbia University; of Louis M. Hacker of the Economics Department of Columbia University; and of Sidney Hook, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, New York University; to all of whom I am greatly indebted for much helpful criticism. I would also like to express my thanks to Sol Bluhm of the Education Department of Hunter College, who has made a number of constructive sug-

gestions. Though they have not read the manuscript, I wish to express my appreciation to Professors Counts and Kandel, who have, on opposite sides of the argument, stirred my thinking through their writings. Though I cannot agree with Kandel on the main issue, it is, nevertheless, evident to me that the point of view which he upholds must be included in any balanced statement of the educational problem. My obligation to Counts stands clear from the many references to his forceful writings. Finally, I should like to say that the manuscript has had the benefit of a painstaking reading by Mr. Charles H. Seaver whose able editorial eye and hand are to be credited for not a few revisions and clarifications.

It may not be superfluous to add that the book was drafted in 1938, was partly rewritten for publication during the summer of 1939, and was completed, except for stylistic revisions, before the outbreak of the present European war. If written with the background of war some passages would undoubtedly have assumed another form. The main difference, I believe, would have been to put greater emphasis on the urgency of the need of readjusting our educational philosophy and practice along the lines indicated.

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