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BOOK REVIEWS

Recent 'British' philosophy of education

Virtue Ethics and Moral Education, Edited by David Carr and Jan Steutel, London & New York, 1999. xvii & 263pp., ISBN 0-415-17073-7 (hbk).

Professionalism and Ethics in Teaching, by David Carr, London & New York: Routledge, 2000. i-xiii & 275pp., ISBN 0-415-18459-2 (hbk): ISBN 0-415-18460-6 (pbk).

The Aims of Education, Edited by Roger Marples, London & New York: Routledge, 1999. i-x, 213pp., ISBN 0-415-15739-0.

Thinking Again: education after postmodernism, by Blake, Nigel, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith and Paul Standish, Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1998, ISBN 0-89789-511-8 (hbk): 0 89789-512-6 (pbk).

I have put 'British' in scare quotes because not all of the authors and contributors to this volume are in fact British but include Australian, Dutch, Flemish and South African contributors as well as philosophers domiciled in North America. But I use the term 'British' because it captures an essence, or theme, or style of doing philosophy of education that is, in my view, essentially British. Indeed one book refers in its preface to British *and* European contributors, as if Britain is not in Europe! (No doubt sufficient prejudice still abounds either side of the channel to wish that this were not the case). This way of doing philosophy is firmly rooted in the, analytic programme initiated in British philosophy of education by Richard Peters and Paul Hirst. Important as this programme was, and is, in philosophy of education and education it has, in my view, an exclusionary attitude especially towards modem continental philosophy. It is therefore limited. Its limitations hinge around its inability to be able to deal, as a methodology, with issues that have arisen in the last two decades, well caught by Lyotard's (1984) notion of performativity. Lyotard argues that education systems in the western world are no longer driven by metanarratives such as autonomous people, emancipation, or the production of an educated elite, but by demands to subsume education under the economic demands of wider social systems. Thus education becomes part of political economy. Analytic philosophy cannot deal with these exercises of power. The major exception in this review is, in my view, Blake et al. (1998). They are explicitly aware of these performativity issues and whilst not abandoning their 'British' roots employ, adroitly, a not inconsiderable number of poststructuralist arguments. In what follows I will consider Blake et al last, turning to the other books in the order presented above.

Carr and Steutel's *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education,* is an important book for philosophy of education and for moral education because to date philosophers of education have, at best, expressed little more than an interest in virtue ethics. The editors' intentions in producing this book are twofold: to become clearer about the philosophical claims of virtue ethics; and to try and distinguish different ways in which moral education may be held to be implicated in the development of virtues. In the collection there are seventeen papers by themselves and a group of thirteen other distinguished philosophers and educators.

The editors provide an account of virtue ethics designed to distinguish it from deontological and utilitarian approaches to ethics in their introduction. They regard virtue ethics as theoretically basic to a conception of moral education and attempt to provide a coherent and systematic account

of virtues as a condition of any virtues approach. From an initial definition of a virtue approach "that it takes moral education to be concerned simply with the promotion of virtues" (p. 4), they narrow the definition down to define virtue ethics as being *aretaic* rather than *deontic.* 'Aretaic' is derived from the Greek word for excellence, 'arete'. Aretaic predicates such as 'good' and 'bad', 'admirable' and 'deplorable' are said to differ from deontic predicates such as 'right' and 'wrong' 'obligatory', 'deplorable', etc. They point out, following Nicholas Dent (chapter 2), that deontic appraisals "incline to a quasi-legal construal of moral imperatives as externally imposed demands or unwelcome constraints" (p.8). Aretaic judgements are treated as basic or primary in relation to deontic judgements and deontic judgements and predicates at best are seen as derivative or reducible to aretaic ones. There is said to be a strong logical version and a weaker ethical version of such priorities. Finally they say that virtue ethics may take the form of *agent ethics* where aretaic judgements about agents are basic, *act ethics,* where actions are basic and, finally, hybrid ethics where agents *and* actions are basic (p.11).

In the next three chapters, Part 2, - Nicholas Dent, Nancy Sherman and Joseph Dunne explore general issues. Dent looks at virtues and teleological accounts of ethics, Sherman at character development in relation to Aristotelian virtue, and Dunne at virtue and learning. The next three chapters in Part 3 explore types of virtues. James Wallace (chapter 6) explores the virtues of benevolence and justice, Michael Slote considers self and other regarding virtues (chapter 7) and Randall Curren discusses moral and intellectual virtues.

In Part 4 Bonnie Kent explores an Aristotelean thesis on the unity of the virtues (chapter 8). Jan Steutel, starting from what R.S. Peters had called the 'virtues of a higher order', characterised by such traits as perseverance, determination, consistency and courage, talks of the virtues of *will-power* with core traits of persistence, endurance and resoluteness (chapter 9). David Carr's paper on weakness of the will, that "most intractable of philosophical problems", completes the section (chapter 10).

John Haldane in Part 5 (chapter 11) explores the relative priority of intention, act and purpose from what he calls a third way (p. 156), ie, from the position of virtue ethics, *character.* Paul Crittenden (chapter 12) returns again to Kohlberg's theory of moral development and, in particular, Kohlberg's 'discrediting' of Aristotle's bag of virtues or Boy Scout approach to morality (p. 170). Eamon Callan discusses liberal virtue claiming that it "is the genuine article" (p. 184).

In the final section the papers become more explicitly educational. Joel Kupperman argues that even if Kant and the utilitarians were offering something like computer software what is still needed is good character and that which gives value and reliability to an entire life. Ben Spiecker concerns himself with early moral education and whether allegedly non-rational training and habituation are important to the formation of the virtues. In chapter 16 Kenneth Strike raises questions about the effect of liberalism's privatizing of human flourishing because of its insistence on a plurality of traditions and the reluctance in public schools to focus on other than moral content that has public standing.

In the final chapter the editors return to the virtue approach to moral education and identify some areas of pedagogical importance (pp. 252-3). They are concerned by a failure in philosophical 'virtue-theoretical dispatches' that education and moral education in particular have been ignored. This in spite of the attention given to it by "all great moral philosophers' (p. 241). They attribute this to a "a surprising dearth of contemporary educational philosophical work on virtue theory' and the failure of such theoretical philosophical work to impact on processes of moral development (loc cit.). They lament the fact that twentieth-century research and enquiry into moral development has been left to the psychologists and their competing theories.

This is an important book for educational philosophy and moral education. It is however quite theoretical philosophically. However for philosophy of education and moral education the philosophical aspects must be dealt with and that the book does well.

David Carr's *Professionalism and Ethics in Teaching* is timely because of increasing international interest in professional ethics and business ethics. This book is well worthy of consideration as a text in a course on professional ethics, or for a course in studies in education where professional ethics might be an important component. Thus it could serve as an important counter to much of the contemporary technicist based approaches to management and leadership and pre-service teacher education.

The book is divided into five parts: Part I is entitled Education, Teaching and Professionalism; Part II is Educational Theory and Professional Practice; Part III is Professional Ethics and Ethical Objectivity; Part IV is Ethics and Education, Morality and the Teacher; and Part V is merely entitled Particular Issues. Each of these sections is reasonably self contained, drawn as they have been from earlier published material. However whilst this does lead to a reiteration of many ideas and principles it also means that each section serves as a 'whole'.

Carr "argues a case for viewing the professions as moral projects; and teaching and education as genuine professions". He takes issue with technicist views of teaching and with conceiving teaching as simply skills and competency based and, instead, explores the moral role of the teacher and the moral goals of teaching (p. vii). Whilst I agree with much that Carr holds, I have two general concerns. First I would raise issue as to the ability of an analytic philosophical approach to be able to counter objections to his positions which are, he admits, only philosophically arguable. Second, he neither considers poststructuralist philosophy nor considers turning to other disciplines which do discuss such things as power and its effects, or modem power and performativity (Lyotard, 1984). Thus he has no effective answer to those who assert that teaching is merely concerned with skills and competencies and proceed from positions of power to institute this in practice.

With those general concerns the book would serve as a very good text in a professional ethics programme for a course in ethics in education. Whilst I am concerned about the sufficiency philosophically of an analytic approach to key concepts yet, nevertheless, this ground must be covered in such courses and as an introduction to the topic of ethics and professional ethics it does it well.

Roger Marples, *The Aims of Education* is a new collection of essays on the aims of education (with the possible exception of Marple's own paper, which is a draft of an earlier published paper). The authors are a group of well known, if not distinguished, philosophers of education from Europe (including Britain), North America, Australia and South Africa. Most of the essays, within the liberal tradition, are concerned with the promotion of autonomy as an educational aim. This in spite of Kevin Harris' opening essay which notes that 'education' "is a changing, contested and often highly personalised, historically and politically contested concept'. Nevertheless Robin Barrow, Peter Gilroy, Roger Marples, Richard Pring, Ken Strike, James Walker, John White and Christopher Winch, in particular, pursue the topic of autonomy as an educational aim.

However, within the volume, autonomy takes different forms, and is not always the sole preoccupation of the contributors. David Carr is concerned with curriculum, Penny Enslin with national identity, Morwenna Griffiths with social justice, William Hare, and Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, with critical thinking, Paul Hirst with social practices, and Richard Pring with the teaching of values. John White is quite critical of the ways in which autonomy is tracked out in the volume, Kevin Harris asks whose aims of education should be realised and Paul Standish explores the possibility of education *without* aims.

In these days of neoliberal performativity (Lyotard, 1984) Robin Barrow is surely correct in pointing out that the question of what our educational aims should be is of critical importance. In these days of performativity, of rational planning invaded by technicism (Standish, p. 41), there may be fixed aims imposed from without, or there may even be no such aims of education at all. Either way there may only be schools with technical problems to be solved by an emphasis on skills, competencies, efficiency and accountability. Ultimately this is to replace *ends* talk with *means* talk.

I agree with Barrow and the writers in this volume (and with the authors of Blake, et al.) that philosophers of education must return to the topic of aims, but without fixing or stifling education and its freeing activity (Dewey, 1916). But how that is to be done philosophically is another matter. As I have indicated, in many ways the contributions remain within the analytic paradigm.

John White occupies a privileged position in the volume because he was allotted the brief of commentating freely on the chapters of the other contributors. White, starting from the proposition that a defensible liberalism requires "an attachment to personal autonomy" (p. 185), questions his co-authors on their commitment to "this autonomy aim". He critiques Harris for not making clear what philosophers should be doing in "theorising the empirical", Barrow, essentially for "aristocratic pronouncements", Standish for leaving the aims of education as being ineffable (p. 187), Strike for opening up the possibility of indoctrination, and so on. His summing up of his co-authors' positions is somewhat testy as it seems that he is "not sure what to make of ... (these) ... arguments". Perhaps bis comment that "there is as yet no consensus about what liberalism is or what educational aims would be in line with it" (p. 195) is a fair summary of both bis position and the book. That liberalism is a far from coherent set of principles is scarcely a new idea. Nor is the idea that it provides a fertile ground for critiquing other allegedly liberal views, especially neo-liberalism. But that, in my view, is of course liberalism's strength.

Finally we tum to Blake et al's., *Thinking Again: education after postmodernism.* I welcome this book because, as suggested above, there has been somewhat of a vacuum in British philosophy of education on French philosophy and poststructuralism, in particular. The British version of philosophy of education has, in general, been less friendly towards poststructuralism and postmodernism than has been the case in North America and in parts of Australasia. This reflects divided opinions as to what counts as philosophy. On that topic it was George Simmel the German sociologist who said: 'Philosophy is its own worst enemy.'

But it would not be correct to say that the authors adopt a poststructuralist position. They do not attempt to provide a viable, if not radical, philosophical alternative to traditional British philosophy of education? But nor has it domesticated the potential radicalness of poststructuralism by incorporating it into traditional British philosophy of education. Instead however, it adopts, uses, and adapts poststructuralist arguments to provide within, or in parallel with the analytical tradition, a sound philosophical critique of technicism and performativity. In spite of what Mrs Thatcher may have said, there are not only schools in the world because, also, there *is* education.

In my view this is a very important book in British philosophy of education. It adopts what might be considered the most difficult and technical approach in poststructuralism - the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida (tempered with Wittgenstein and Rorty) - and uses the work and ideas of Derrida by working *with* Derrida. This makes *Thinking Again* a technical text in some sections, but it is an accessible text.

The subtitle of their book is 'education after postmodernism'. One of Postmodernism's theses (if we can say that) is about playfulness and style in writing, a point recognised by the authors. They adopt a style which is not that of traditional philosophy of education. Questions of style, of bow to write *and* do philosophy are to found throughout French philosophy and several decades before the emergence of the poststructuralists. For example questions about writing were omnipresent for Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. Beauvoir was to present her metaphysical ideas in her early novels along with content which was highly autobiographical. Wittgenstein and, more recently, Stanley Cavell have been very conscious of questions of style and its importance in doing philosophy. Regrettably it is not a major feature of contemporary writing and discussion in philosophy of education.

It should be obvious that I prefer the latter book because it takes poststructuralism and postmodernism seriously without trying to domesticate them within the British analytic tradition. Also it concerns itself in its form, or its mode of presentation, with important questions of style (for

a fuller critical review see Marshall, 2000). This is not to say that the other books reviewed are not unimportant. Far from it, as I have attempted to portray.

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References

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