I

AIMS OF EDUCATION—
A CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY

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I was recently commenting sourly to a colleague in psychology on the proclivity of educators to fasten on some small piece of research—for example, on 'discovery' or 'creativity'—and to puff it up into an educational panacea. He remarked wryly that teaching was such an uphill job that teachers had to have some sort of a booster every five or ten years to keep their spirits up. Bible texts are no longer any good; so snippets of research have to do instead! Traditionally, of course, such boosters have been called 'aims of education'. But why? Panaceas have abounded in politics; but we do not hear about aims of politics. Why should education in particular be associated with aims? Or has this a purely contingent explanation in that Dewey wrote about 'aims of education' and Whitehead later put together a collection of essays and addresses under the title of The Aims of Education, and so a fashion was set? Or is there a more deep-seated explanation?

Had I the time—and also the necessary scholarship—I would like to follow up this question and discover the precise period at which educators became, as it were, so target-minded. But my task in this symposium, as I understand it, is to exhibit the approach of the analytical philosopher to questions about aims of education, not that of the historian of ideas. One has to ask, therefore, why the demand for educators to formulate aims seems so natural, whatever its historical origin, and what sort of function is performed by such formulations. In other words the concepts both of 'aim' and of 'education' have to be explored and some comments have to be made about the function performed in educational discourse by their juxtaposition.

I shall not have time to enter into questions to do with the justification of aims which are, both philosophically and practically speaking, the most interesting and important questions about them. Philosophy, as I

understand it, is concerned mainly with the questions, ‘What do you mean?’ and ‘How do you know?’ I shall be concerned only with the first of these questions about the aims of education.

**AIMS**

Dewey has much that is illuminating to say about ‘Aims in Education’ in Chapter VIII of his *Democracy and Education*; yet one of the all-pervading weaknesses of his treatment of the concept of ‘aim’ is that he regards it as equivalent to that of ‘purpose’. Of course ‘aim’ belongs to the same family of concepts as does ‘purpose’, so also do ‘intention’ and ‘motive’. They are all conceptually connected with actions and activities; but there are subtle differences between them in the ways in which they are so connected.

Actions and activities are identified, in the main, by reference to how the agent conceives what he is doing. Of course, there are very often characteristic movements of the body; but these are never sufficient for identification. We might say, for instance, that a person was raising his hand. This would be a safe bet in normal circumstances because it is only on rare occasions that people have their hands raised. But such a specification of an action would be minimal; for it would be improbable that he was just raising his hand. Perhaps he was testing the direction of the wind, voting, or signalling to someone. We could thus identify the action as a case of any of these. But we would probably have to ask him which it was to be sure. We might say to him, ‘Are you signalling to someone or testing the direction of the wind?’ If, however, we were not very sure from the context what the alternative specifications might be, we might say, ‘What is your purpose in raising your hand?’ We would, in other words, identify it in a minimal sense as a hand-raising action and seek an explanation of it by asking for the agent’s purpose in performing the action so specified. We might even, in certain specific contexts, when perhaps we were suspicious as well as puzzled, about his action, ask for his motive in raising his hand. But we surely would not ask what he was aiming at in raising his hand, in order to remove our puzzlement. If we said this it would sound rather quaint—unless, that is, he looked as if he was going to throw something. What, then, is specific about the concept of ‘aim’ which gives rise to the quaintness of such a question?

The concept of ‘aim’ always carries with it some of the nuances associated with its natural home in contexts of shooting and throwing. It suggests, first of all, the concentration of attention, and the specification of some precise objective. The desires of the agent are directed, as it were, towards some distant target, and there must be concentration of effort and attention in order to hit it. The question ‘What are you aiming at?’ is therefore rather like the question ‘What are you trying to do?’ with the additional suggestion of concentration on some specific objective.

‘Aiming’ is also like ‘trying’ in that it suggests that there is some difficulty involved in the task and a very real possibility of failing short or of not bringing it off. Very often, indeed, when the question ‘What are you aiming at?’ is asked, there is a very definite implication of bungling and confusion, of effort not properly co-ordinated or directed. In this respect, however, talk about ‘aims’ is not as extreme, or as pessimistic in regard to practice, as talk about ‘ideas’. ‘Ideals’ are connected with wishes; they pick out objectives which, by definition, cannot be realized in practice. If they become more practicable, if, as it were, the sights are lowered a bit, they become ‘aims’, which are objectives that can be attained, given concentration and co-ordination of effort. But there is still the very strong possibility of failure lurking in the background. Needless to say, the term ‘purpose’ carries no such suggestions, though the term ‘intention’ suggests the possibility of mistake rather than of failure. (Compare ‘What did he intend to do?’ and ‘What was he aiming at?’

These features of the concept of ‘aim’ indicate the specific social function performed by raising questions about the aims of actions or activities. ‘Aim’ conveys, first of all, some suggestion of an objective that is not too near at hand or too easy to attain. It conveys, secondly, some suggestion that the action or activity in question is not obviously structured in relation to such an objective. We ask people what they are aiming at when they are working away at something but it is not quite clear at what. It is, in other words, an attempt to get them to specify an action or activity in relation to some objective that is not altogether obvious or near at hand. We are saying, as it were, ‘What precisely are you trying to do?’ To ask a person what he is aiming at is not primarily to demand an explanation for what he is doing. It functions more as a criticism or as an exhortation than as a request for an explanation. It is,

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1 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), p. 120.
as it were, putting the onus on him to specify his objective more precisely and to concentrate his efforts accordingly.

This explains why ‘aims’ are so typically associated with institutions such as clubs and political parties, in which people join together to work at achieving something of common concern. It is important for them to specify this fairly precisely in order to bring to the forefront what is distinctive of their efforts. The formulation of their aims has an important social function in focusing their efforts in a specific direction. Similarly, institutions like the police force and the army have aims definitive of them. In so far as an individual is a member of the police force his actions and activities must be conceived of under the aspect of preserving order in a community. He may have all sorts of idiosyncratic purposes; but in so far as he is a policeman he must conceive what he is doing as directed towards this over-all objective.

It would be fascinating to explore further the comparatively uncharted region of ‘aims’, ‘ideals’, ‘intentions’, and ‘purposes’. But this paper is meant to be in the philosophy of education, and, though the cardinal philosophical sin is to fail to make important distinctions, it is almost equally sinful to make distinctions that are not used, that do not work in an argument. The points so far made on the concept of ‘aim’ should prove sufficient to clarify the question originally posed about the naturalness of talk about aims of education. The main points made are:

1. We tend to ask about aims in contexts where we think it important to get people to specify more precisely what they are trying to do.
2. Aims suggest the concentration on and the direction of effort towards an objective that is not too palpable or close to hand.
3. Aims suggest the possibility of failure or of falling short.

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

Why should all this be so peculiarly apposite in the case of education? A quick answer might be that education is a highly diffuse and difficult activity in which many earnest people engage with great seriousness without being altogether clear what they are trying to do. The demand for the aims of education is therefore a salutary request for teachers to survey what they are doing, get their priorities straight, concentrate their attention on them, and discard irrelevancies. Also, as tangible results are very difficult to come by in education, the constant possibility of falling short, of never quite bringing it off, is always present to the educator. Hence the appropriateness of all the talk about ‘aims’.

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This answer is almost right. Or, to put it more concretely, the general contours of the answer are right; what are lacking are the specific features of the concept of ‘education’ which would make it interesting. The main respect in which it is not quite right is that education is not an activity. We do not say, ‘Go along, go and get on with your educating’ as we would say, ‘Go along, go and get on with your teaching.’ Educating is no more an activity than reforming or improving are. What is it, then?

‘Education’, like ‘reform’, is not a concept for picking out any specific activity, but for laying down criteria to which a family of activities must conform. We do not say, ‘Have you been educating them or instructing them in algebra this morning?’ though we might say, ‘Have you been educating them by instructing them in algebra this morning?’ There are innumerable activities which might count as educating people just as there are innumerable activities that might count as reforming them. To call such activities ‘education’ is to say that they conform to certain very general criteria.

The criteria involved can be divided into two main groups. There will be, firstly, those that characterize the successful outcome of education in the form of an educated man; there will be, secondly, those that characterize the processes by means of which people gradually become educated. The latter cannot, of course, be characterized without the former, but they cannot be characterized simply by saying that they are efficient means for producing a desirable end. They are, rather, a family of ongoing tasks culminating in the manifold achievements involved in being educated.

It can immediately be seen why there is a tendency to talk both about the aims of education and about the aims of reform. For both these concepts have, as it were, a norm built into them, which functions as a very distant target for such activities, and which structures them in a certain direction. ‘Education’, like ‘reform’, picks out a family of processes culminating in a person being better; ‘education’ picks out a family of processes culminating in a person having an outlook and form of life that is in some way desirable. It could be just as much a logical contradiction to say ‘My son has been educated, but nothing desirable has happened to him’ as it would be to say ‘My son has been reformed but has changed in no way for the better.’ Both concepts, in other words, suggest a family of processes ‘aiming at’ a norm.

This connection with commendation does not, of course, prevent us from speaking of ‘poor education’ when a worth-while job has been
botched, or 'bad education' when we think that much of what people are working at is not worth while, though it is a nice question to determine at what point we pass from saying that something is 'bad education' to saying that it is 'not education at all'. There is also the derivative derisive sense when we say that a person was 'educated' at a public school, just as we might say of somebody that he was a 'good' man. The word can also be used derivatively in a purely external, descriptive way when we speak of an 'educational system', just as we can use the term 'moral' of someone else's code without committing ourselves to the judgements of value of those whose code it is. Anthropologists can talk of the moral system of a tribe; so also can we talk as sociologists or economists of the educational system of a community. In employing the concept in this derivative sense, we need not think that what is going on is worth while, but members of the society, whose system it is, must think it is worth while.

This normative aspect of both 'educate' and 'reform' makes them both special cases of what Ryle calls 'achievement verbs'.

They are like 'win', 'find', 'remember', and 'learn' in that some sort of success is implied by them. They differ, however, in that there is no one activity such as running a race or searching that terminates in success, and in that the success in question, unlike that involved in winning or in finding something, must be of value. Any answer, therefore, to the question 'What are you aiming at?' given by educators or by reformers will consist in a more careful specification of the achievements constituting being educated or being reformed. As 'aim', however, suggests some distant objective, and as it is possible to teach things like science or mathematics, which are usually taught for educational reasons, with a view to increasing productivity or some other such extrinsic end, it is only too easy to slip into looking for some distant objective beyond education which educators might be trying to bring about qua educators. But this would be impossible if education means the initiation of people into a worth-while form of life; for how could there ever be any end of value beyond this which it would be possible to bring about? The mistake comes through raising questions about what education itself might lead on to which are pertinent enough when asked about activities of teachers that are usually, but not always, conducted for educational reasons. Engineering, for instance, can be taught in schools or colleges purely with a view to increasing productivity; but people cannot be


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educated by being taught engineering with a view to bringing about anything which would not itself fall under the concept of what an educated person is. And engineers can be highly educated people. Of course, economists or politicians can look at schools or educational systems, as it were, from the outside and can ascribe instrumental aims to them. But proposals of that sort are not, strictly speaking, proposals about the aims of education. Rather, they are suggestions that things should be taught, or schools used, for purposes that are not strictly educational.

It could rightly be remarked that this explication of a concept cannot settle the issue between the advocate of purely vocational training and the advocate of education. A defender of training might agree that education involves the initiation of people into a worth-while form of life but might maintain that the community had not the resources for such a luxury. To this, the advocate of education might reply that the economist's position is ultimately incoherent. For if education involves the transmission of what is intrinsically worth while, what is going to be done about its transmission if the schools are geared purely to the production of technicians to keep the wheels of industry turning? For either such productive work must itself become endowed with ultimate significance, or it must be regarded as instrumental to something else which is so endowed. In either case, some education will have to go on somewhere, as well as training. And so the argument might continue. The analysis of 'aims of education' would not, of course, settle the substantive issue; for moral decisions can never be extracted from conceptual analysis. But it does at least help to spotlight the points at which decisions have to be taken.

Education, then, like reform, has norms built into it, which generate the aims which educators strive to develop or attain. But the norms in question are highly indeterminate; for what constitutes a person becoming better or having a desirable outlook? Requests for aims of education or of reform are therefore requests to specify the norm more concretely. Is it a sense of responsibility that is important in the case of reform? Or is it concern for others? Is it the development of critical awareness in the case of education? Or is it sensitivity to others and to significant form? Probing into 'aims' is a way of elucidating the content that a person gives to the concept of 'being reformed' or 'being educated'. Countless 'aims of education' are, therefore, possible, depending upon what features of a worth-while form of life any educator thinks it most important to foster. In spite, however, of this inevitable multiplicity of
'aims', it is possible to sketch certain general criteria of 'being educated' which indicate the dimensions along which these 'targets' or priorities lie. This must now be briefly attempted.

GENERAL CRITERIA OF BEING EDUCATED

The first thing that must be said about an educated man is that he must be one who not only pursues some particular activity such as science or cooking, but who is also capable of pursuing it for what there is in it as distinct from what it may lead on to or bring about. Of course these activities can be and often are pursued for instrumental reasons; they contribute a great deal to keeping people fed and the wheels of industry turning. But we would not call a person educated unless he was capable, to a certain extent, of delighting in such things for their own sake. A hallmark of a good school is the extent to which it kindles in its pupils a desire to go on with the things into which they have been initiated when the pressures are off and when there is no extrinsic reason for engaging in them.

This criterion of commitment to what is internal to worth-while activities, be it the pursuit of truth for its own sake or the determination to make something of a fitting form, is necessary but not sufficient for being educated. For a person could be a trained ballet-dancer or have mastered an eminently worth-while skill, such as pottery-making, without being educated. What might be lacking is something to do with knowledge and understanding; for being educated demands more than being highly skilled. An educated man must also possess some body of knowledge and some kind of conceptual scheme to raise this above the level of a collection of disjointed facts. This implies some understanding of principles for the organization of facts. We would not call a person who was merely well informed an educated man, as Whitehead so eloquently argued. An educated person must also have some understanding of the 'reason why' of things. The Spartans were morally and militarily trained. They knew how to fight and they knew what was right and wrong; they were also possessed of a certain stock of folklore, which enabled them to manage—provided they stayed in Sparta. But we would not say that they had received a moral or military education; for they had never been encouraged to get a grasp of the principles underlying their code.

Some development in depth of knowledge and awareness there must be for a man to be educated. But something still is lacking; for a man might be a very highly trained scientist, yet we might refuse to call him an educated man. This would not be because there is nothing worth while in science; for it is a supreme example of a worth-while activity. It could not be because such a man cares nothing about it and has no grasp of its principles; for the hypothesis is that he is dedicated to it and has a good grounding in its principles. What, then, is lacking which might make us withhold the description of 'educated' from such a person? It is surely the possibility that he might be narrowly specialized. He might work away at science and know almost nothing of anything else and not see its connection with much else in a coherent pattern of life.

When educationalists proclaim that 'education is of the whole man', they are enunciating a conceptual truth; for 'education' rules out narrow specialization just as it rules out a purely instrumental approach to activities. Think of the difference, for instance, between sex education and sex training. We use the phrases 'trained in' and 'trained for' when we wish to talk about vocational, utilitarian, or specialized pursuits. We do not speak of a person being educated in, or for, or at anything in particular. This does not mean, of course, that an educated man must not be trained in something. It only rules out the possibility of his being just trained. A trained artist, or scientist, or historian is not necessarily an educated man; for he may have a deep but circumscribed understanding in these spheres. To what extent a person has to develop in all the various forms of awareness (for example, scientific, historical, mathematical, moral, aesthetic, religious) in order to be educated would be difficult to determine. The main function of this criterion is to rule out narrow specialization rather than to suggest positive requirements.

There is one further positive requirement that must underpin all that has been said about the educated man in respect of knowledge and understanding. This is that it must permeate his way of looking at things rather than be 'hived off'. It is possible for a man to know a lot of history, for instance, in the sense that he can give correct answers to questions in examinations and classrooms; yet this might never affect the way in which he looked at the buildings and institutions around him. He might never connect what he had learnt about the Industrial Revolution with what he saw in the Welsh valleys or in Manchester. We might describe such a man as 'knowledgeable' but we would not describe him as educated; for 'education' implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows.

This transforming quality of education is what makes the contrast often drawn between life and education ridiculous; for it is by education
that mere living is transformed into a quality of life. For how a man lives depends upon what he sees and understands. In schools and colleges there is, of course, a concentration on activities like literature, science, and history, which have a high degree of cognitive content. But an educated person is not one who simply goes on engaging in such activities when he leaves such institutions; he is one whose whole range of actions, reactions, and activities is gradually transformed by the deepening and widening of his understanding and sensitivity. There is no end to this process; for as I have remarked elsewhere: 'To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view. What is required is not feverish preparation for something that lies ahead, but to work with precision, passion, and taste at worth-while things that lie to hand.'

These, then, are the more specific features of being educated. But as multiple criteria are involved, it is obvious enough that emphasis will be given at different periods to different aspects of what it means to be educated. Such emphases emerge as 'aims of education'. For, as Dewey shrewdly remarks: 'For the statement of aim is a matter of emphasis at a given time. And we do not emphasize things which do not require emphasis—that is, such things as are taking care of themselves fairly well. We tend rather to frame our statement on the basis of the defects and needs of the contemporary situation; we take for granted, without explicit statement which would be of no use, whatever is right or approximately so.' Some, for instance, in revolt against mere information and book learning, emphasize the importance of the inquiring and critical attitude or the necessity for understanding principles; others, perhaps appalled by the development of specialization, draw attention to the importance of 'wholeness'. The 'cult of the intellect' is attacked by those who stress 'the training of character'; others advance the claims of aesthetic sensitivity to counteract the blunting effect of the mass media. The very fact that education involves multiple criteria is perhaps one of the underlying reasons why statements of aim seem so necessary. If anyone is engaged in an activity like cooking or fishing that has a palpable and determinate point to it, talk of 'aims' seems rather otiose; but when there is a group of activities directed towards a cluster of ends that are highly indeterminate, the demand for 'aims' serves an obvious function. It focuses attention on some neglected priority.


5 John Dewey, op. cit., p. 130.

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It might be objected that some over-all aim might be ascribed to education as a group of activities, just as it might be ascribed to politics. Could it not be said, for instance, that just as the aim of reform is to make men better, so the aim of education is to initiate men into a reflective form of life. It could be said—but it would not be very informative; for it would be merely a way of drawing attention to what it means to educate or reform someone. There are times when it is necessary to say such things, just as there are times when it is necessary to say things like 'the function of government is to govern'. For instance, suppose a group of technically minded bureaucrats and businessmen were trying to transform an educational system into a system of vocational and technical training, it might then be appropriate to draw attention to the connection between education and some intrinsic values of a community by enunciating such an over-all aim. In other words, it would serve a useful function in a context where the educational function of schools or colleges, as distinct from their training, or selective function, was being neglected. But a remark like this would have little function in drawing the attention of educators to what was important within education—that is, assuming that they were all concerned with education and not with using schools and colleges for other purposes which are extrinsic to education. In a similar way, somebody speaking of what was done within a Borstal or Approved School, might say 'The aim of reform is to make men better, you know.' This would have point if the inmates of such reformative institutions were merely being used as cheap labour by the state, or if they were being brutally treated without any attempt to strengthen their desire to become respectable citizens. But the enunciation of such over-all aims would be pointless as aids to getting clear about priorities within reform or within education. And the function of talk about aims in education is usually to clarify the minds of educators about their priorities.

PRINCIPLES IMPLICIT IN EDUCATIONAL PROCEDURES

There is, however, another collection of what look like over-all aims for education which have a rather different function. I have in mind aims such as 'growth', and 'the self-realization of the individual'. These are often cited as omnibus aims of education; yet they do not seem to be tautologies masquerading as aims, in the way in which aims such as 'to initiate man into a worth-while form of life' seem to be. What is to be made of aims such as these?

Such aims go further than a general slogan such as 'the development
of individual capacities’, which functions as a demand that educators should take account of individual differences, that education should not be laid on in too uniform a way, but should be adapted carefully to differences in ability and aptitude. For such a demand could be made simply by those concerned about the efficient provision of functionaries for the state, though more often it is made by those who are claiming equality of consideration for the individual as a matter of individual right. But this general plea has to do with the distribution of education: it suggests no particular procedures of educating people. It could be made by those who are wedded to very formal and authoritarian methods. The plea, however, for self-realization, or that children should be allowed to grow, goes far beyond such a purely distributive demand.

Aims of this sort have their natural homes within an individual system of thought and they draw attention to the claims of the individual to pursue his own bent. Perhaps there is a tendency for children to be treated in too uniform a way, or to be moulded too readily for some occupation demanded by the state. Such ‘aims’ proclaim that education must permit areas of discretion within the sphere of what is thought desirable, that autonomy and self-origination are important in education. The child must be allowed to discover things for himself and learn by making his own mistakes. Attention is thus focused on procedures of education which involve both psychological theories about learning and moral principles about how children should be treated—for example, with respect and with regard to their freedom.

The basic point, then, about aims of education which cluster around the cliché that the aim of education is ‘the self-realization of the individual’ is that they draw attention to a class of procedures of education rather than prescribe any specific direction or content for it. Indeed, child-centred theorists often went so far as to maintain, mistakenly in my view, that procedures involving what David Ausubel calls receptive learning, are not education at all. Education, they argued, must involve some kind of ‘leading out’ procedure; as the usual sort of formal instruction involves no such ‘leading out’, it is not education at all. I have elsewhere attempted to uncover the minimal conceptual basis for this conversion of a moral policy into a definition, so will not go over this again. Anyway, it has little bearing on the question of aims.


Those who draw attention to the importance of individual avenues of exploration in education by enunciating aims to do with ‘growth’ or self-development often give the impression that this can replace reference to old-fashioned matters to do with content. It is not so much the acquisition of knowledge that matters, they argue, as the inquiring attitude. It does not now matter that the child should master some science or become skilled in art; what matters is that his capacity for choice should be nurtured by being presented with alternatives. But reflection, I think, will reveal that what Dewey said about ‘aims’ in general applies pre-eminently to aims such as the self-realization of the individual, which emphasize the importance of learning by individual experience and discovery and the importance of a principle of options in a curriculum. For this stress on individual self-realization has point when an educational system is either geared to the demands of the state, such as for more scientists or technicians, or when individuals are being moulded relentlessly in accordance with some dull or doctrinaire pattern. There is point, under such conditions, in stressing the difference between people and the ethical principle of respect for each individual’s right to develop in his own way. But although aims such as these can be enunciated under such circumstances, the standard content of education is more or less taken for granted, though not explicitly stated. For no educator, when confronted with abilities and inclinations such as those of a lotus-eater or of a Marquis de Sade, would say that these ought to be developed to the full. No educator would advocate bingo and billiards on the curriculum if a child ‘chose’ them. The plea for self-realization is a plea for types of procedure which takes for granted matters of content, in the old-fashioned sense; it is a plea for principle of options within a range of activities and modes of conduct that are thought to be desirable. For not all desirable things are within the scope of every individual; not all of them fall in some minds even the faintest spark of inclination. The plea is both for cutting the coat of what is desirable according to the cloth of individual aptitude and for the procedural principle that individuals should be allowed some say in discovering what this is.

The self-realization of the individual, then, is limited to the development of self in modes of thought and conduct that are regarded as desirable, or at least as not undesirable. The traditional content of the curriculum and of the community’s form of life is taken for granted; but within this the demand is that the individual should be allowed to grow at his own pace and follow his own bent. Furthermore all such avenues of self-development are inescapably social in character. They are
engaged with others; there is usually a body of knowledge or at least some kind of 'lore' attached to them even if they take the form of games or pastimes; there are good and bad ways of proceeding, which the individual has to pick up from others more experienced in them. The 'potentialities' of the individual can be developed only within the framework of some socially structured pursuit into which he has to be initiated.

So much, then, for general aims to do with 'growth', 'the self-realization of the individual', and so on. The burden of my argument has been to show:

1. These 'aims' draw attention to the importance of a group of principles involved in certain types of educational procedures, connected with autonomy, self-origination, individual choice, and individual differences.
2. Stress on such principles more or less takes for granted aspects of education which were dealt with above under the concept of being educated. The values of a community provide the background of content in relation to which a plea can be made for individual differences and a principle of options.

THE FUSION OF CONTENT AND PROCEDURE

It seems, then, that aims of education can draw attention to principles immanent in types of educational procedure as well as to aspects of what it means to be educated. But why, it might be asked, should anything to do with procedures of education have bearing on its aims? If the cash value of all the talk about the self-realization of the individual is to emphasize certain procedures for developing educated people, why should anyone erect the principles immanent in such procedures into over-all aims? 'Aim' suggests the structuring of an activity in a certain direction. Procedures are, as it were, processes with rules built into them. How can principles immanent in them be regarded as aspects of aims which give direction and concentration to the activities of educators? The answer, surely, is connected with the impossibility of conceiving of educational processes in accordance with a means–end model and of making any absolute separation between content and procedure, matter and manner, in the case of education. This point I must now try to explain.

In dealing with the concept of education I distinguished first of all various criteria of being educated and tried to relate aims of education to emphases on some one criterion rather than another within this general area. I then dealt briefly with other sorts of aims which draw attention to principles immanent in the procedures—for example, instruction, learning by experience, and discovery—by means of which educated people are developed. But the point must now be made that what I have called principles of procedure can also be regarded very much as a matter of content. This, indeed, is one of the features of 'education' which makes any attempt to conceive it as taking a means to an end, or as developing a product by means of processes, quite inappropriate.

Consider, first of all, the general rules which must be imposed as conditions necessary for classroom teaching. The discipline imposed by the teacher, the equality of consideration with which he treats individuals, the respect and degree of liberty which he accords to them, are, on the one hand, rules which are necessary for the distribution and organization of education. But, on the other hand, an essential part of the moral education of children is that they should make these principles, which form the framework of their explorations, their own. They will develop as moral beings if they treat the principles immanent in such procedures as content which is subtly imparted to them. The same sort of point applies negatively. If a child is always provided with some extrinsic incentive for learning—for example, marks or prizes—he may learn quite a bit of what he is expected to learn. But he may also pick up the principle that effort is only worth while if something has some palpable use or reward attached to it. And this is a negation of one of the basic criteria of being educated.

Secondly, there are those principles of procedure which are presuppositions of worth-while activities such as science or history. There must be respect for evidence and a ban on 'cooking' or distorting it; there must be a willingness to admit that one is mistaken; there must be non-interference with people who wish to put forward objections; there must be a respect for people as a source of argument and an absence of personal invective and contempt for what they say because of who they are. To learn science is not just to learn facts and to understand theories; it is also to learn to participate in a public form of life governed by such principles of procedure. In so far, therefore, as a person is educated scientifically, he will have to absorb these principles of procedure by means of which the content of scientific thought has been accumulated and is criticized and developed. He must take this sort of social situation into his own mind. Indeed, the mind of the individual is largely structured by the principles of such public situations in which he participates.

Educational theory has too long been haunted by misleading models of what an educational situation is. On the one hand, there are those who regard it as one in which some high-minded operator ‘shapes’ children
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the meaning of life. In more recent times, after the ‘revolution in philosophy,’ there is a danger of too little being claimed. He still has a spectatorial role all right; for his concern with the second-order questions ‘What do you mean?’ and ‘How do you know?’ assures him of that. But it is thought that the inappropriateness of the philosopher pronouncing qua philosopher on matters of substance must make his contribution to educational theory of greatly diminished importance. Rather than make any general comments about this topic, I propose instead to conclude this paper by indicating the general implications for educational theory of the analysis that I have given of ‘aims of education’.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL THEORY

1. The analysis both of ‘aim’ and of ‘education’ should reveal the inappropriateness of conceiving of an aim of education as some end extrinsic to education which education might lead up to or bring about. On this general point I am very much in agreement with Dewey.

2. The analysis reveals the absurdity of the expectation that there could ever be one agreed aim of education. If such an over-all aim were ever produced it would be tantamount to a tautology, to saying that there ought to be concentration on education. The ineluctable multiplicity of aims is due to two main features of the concept of ‘education’:

(a) The fact that the concept of ‘an educated man’, which represents the achievement aspect of education, encapsulates distinct criteria, attention to which may pull the educator in different directions. For instance, emphasis on the criterion of ‘wholeness’ may militate against the emphasis on understanding of principles—that is, breadth and depth are difficult aims to combine.

(b) Aims can also relate to principles immanent in procedures of education, such as the importance of freedom and individual self-origination. It was argued, however, that if these are to be aims of education, they can be understood only against a background in which the general criteria involved in being educated are taken for granted. This is an important point to make against some child-centred educators who emphasize principles of procedure with a seemingly cavalier disregard for matters of direction and content.

3. Sometimes, when people fasten on to the idea that philosophy involves the analysis of concepts, they embark on this without asking

THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

In the old days, when the philosopher was thought of as ‘the spectator of all time and all existence’, too much was claimed for the philosopher of education. It was thought that he could issue high-level directives for education as well as pronounce on God, freedom, immortality, and

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For further development of this, see Peters, Ethics and Education, chap. ii.
themselves what is illuminated by such analysis or what further philosophical questions are thereby opened up. My claim is that the above analysis of 'aims of education' does provide some sort of illumination of the issues by sketching the contours both of 'aim' and of 'education' of the issues by sketching the contours both of 'aim' and of 'education'. But it also opens up vast vistas for further philosophical work.

(a) It was claimed that most 'aims of education' are attempts to emphasize aspects of what it means to be educated. But no substantive pronouncements were made about the content to be given to the concept of 'being educated'. It was, however, suggested that this involves certain formal criteria—commitment to modes of thought and conduct that are regarded as worth while in themselves, which involve some depth of understanding, and which are not pursued with cavalier disregard for other ways of looking at the world. A curriculum is largely composed of such activities and forms of awareness. The question inevitably arises, why these should be thought worth while rather than things like bingo and billiards. This raises, of course, in an acute form, the old Utilitarian question about the grounds of the preferability of poetry over push-pin. An answer to this can be developed only by delving deep into ethics. But I would claim that making explicit these criteria involved in 'being educated' helps to map the paths along which such a justification must proceed. I cannot substantiate this without deploying the arguments. I can say only that I found these criteria of great help in making the attempt elsewhere.²

(b) It was also claimed that 'aims of education' can relate to principles such as freedom and respect for persons, which are built-in to procedures of education. Now questions can be raised about the efficiency of such procedures; but there are also crucial questions, seldom asked by educators, about the justification of the principles which are immanent in them. It might be found, for instance, that 'learning by discovery' was rather an inefficient method of learning; but, in so far as such a procedure involves an emphasis on freedom, it might be preferred, in spite of its inefficiency. But this would necessitate arguments to show why freedom is desirable. This analysis, therefore, draws attention to the need for more fundamental work in ethical theory to justify the fundamental principles underpinning the whole 'progressive' approach to education.

² In *Ethics & Education* ch. v. and in No. XII of this collection on 'The Justification of Education'.
AIM

Turning now to Professor Peters's analysis of 'aim', we see that he has given us three conditions:

10 Professor Peters, I'm sure, would find this too narrow. Perhaps a better, though murkier formulaion would be that C is part of the analysis of K if, and only if, it would be in some sense inconsistent to say that exemplifications of K frequently or always fail C. Thus, a single or even a few failures might be tolerated, but not all that many. The main point still remains: the relation between K and C might not be logically necessary, but it cannot be merely contingent. This broader formulation is the one against which the adequacy of Professor Peters's analysis is to be tested.

1. We tend to ask about aims in contexts where we think it is important to get people to specify more precisely what they are trying to do.
2. Aims suggest the concentration of attention on and the direction of effort towards an objective that is not too palpable or close to hand.
3. Aims suggest the possibility of failure or of falling short.

Now, let me make it plain that I take these statements to be unarguably true; but what I cannot accept is that they stand to the concept 'aim' in any such relation as the condition of being unmarried stands to the concept 'bachelor'. That is, I cannot believe that these constitute even part of the analysis of the concept 'aim'; nor that if we found out that people used 'aim' in violation of just these conditions we should think that their concept of 'aim' was different from ours.

Consider condition (1). It is, of course, false that always, in asking about aims, we are asking for a more precise specification of what people are up to. How often, indeed, are the aims of education enquired into mainly as a prelude to a discussion of their merits and not as an invitation to describe more determinately what people are doing? The question is, then: Is it inconsistent, even if false, to say that people rarely, if ever, ask about aims in order to get more precise descriptions? I submit not; but those who feel themselves demurring might consider the possibility that what generates the oddness of speaking this way is not the concept 'aim', but rather the concept of 'asking a question'; if we never questioned people in order to get more precise information, then perhaps we would not have the concept of 'questioning' which we do have; but we needn't thereby have lost our concept of 'aim'.

What, then, of condition (2)? Is it in some sense inconsistent or linguistically deviant to say, 'At last long last people have had the good sense to aim only at those things which are fairly near to hand and fairly easily achieved'? What if virtually everyone undertook to aim for just those things we could comfortably achieve? Would we be obliged to say that the concept 'aim' had changed? Or would we say that people had changed? The latter, surely. (Suppose you ask an ancient and gouty, blue-nosed Tory what are the aims of his party; could he not reply, perfectly coherently, that they are to leave everything as it is? According to Professor Peters our politician would be abusing, not the national interest, but rather, the concept 'aim'!) In making aims 'kissing cousins' of ideals (which are defined as being unrealizable in practice), Professor Peters is stipulating a meaning for 'aim' for which condition (2)
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holds only vacuously. In effect, Professor Peters has changed the subject. He purports to be speaking of the concept of 'aim' when in fact he seems to be talking about something importantly different, namely the concept of a 'distant aim'.

Of course, one can easily sense the temptations of condition (2). As a matter of fact, many of our aims are rather distant; were it otherwise we could hardly be ambitious. But more important, there are certain aims, intelligibly described as limiting cases of aims, that are very close to hand, namely those that once achieved can never be achieved again.

If, for example, I now aim at being elected president for 1967-8 of the local chapter of the Sigismondo Society, and if I later succeed, then, to be sure, I can no longer aim at that. So we have two facts: (1) there is now some distance between me and the presidency; and if I win, there will be no distance whatever; and (2) if I win, I can't have that aim any longer; for me, winning can't be an aim. In examining these facts one might be inclined to think that because, after my election, there is no distance between me and my aim, it is not any longer properly called an aim. But, in reply to this, I suggest that it is not because what I aim at has become maximally close to hand, but rather because its description incorporates reference to a date such that the achievement of the aim, of that very aim, is logically unrepeatable. Indeed, if all aims were thus logically insusceptible of continuous or repeated realization, then we should have at least one model for 'aim' which sustains one possible interpretation of the claim that aims not only are not, but cannot be, too palpable or near to hand. But unhappily, it is far from true that all, or even most, aims satisfy this model.

A similar protest can be made about condition (3). Must we agree that if most of the things we aimed at were practically certain of realization, we should then have a different concept of 'aim'? Can I not say, without inconsistency, that all I aim for in life is a roof over my head, twenty dollars a week, and the freedom to stroll the parks of Toronto, and that, happily, I regularly get what I aim for? And if I do say this have I in any way bruised our notion of 'aim'?

Suppose, finally, that we had all the know-how to achieve easily and with virtually practical certainty the aims of education (whatever these might be). Then, in the light of Professor Peters' analysis of 'aim', it would be inconsistent or conceptually misguided to say that education had any aims; but what is this but to say that education would thereby be made aimless?—All of which, surely, is hopelessly paradoxical.

EDUCATION

If I understand him, the following is a list of conditions each of which Professor Peters takes to be part of the concept 'education'. A person is educated only if (1) he takes delight in what he does for its own sake; (2) he understands the principles which underlie such worth-while activities; (3) he engages in many such pursuits: he is not narrowly specialized; (4) his outlook is influenced and his sensitivity deepened by what he knows.

Of course, I accept these as being, in the main, de facto regularities pertaining to many educated persons. But permit me three cavils. First, we speak of a person as having had a specialized education; we speak of him as being educated, but because of laziness, impecuniosity, ambitiously, or other considerations, as not having followed through, as having narrowly focused his concerns, or as no longer taking delight in the matters he had proper time for in his youth. These ways of speaking, which are not surely to be thought of as conceptually odd, actually imply that the person in question is educated. (Of course he may not be ideally or perfectly educated, but Professor Peters is not speaking of these; he is speaking, rather, about what the unadjecticed word 'education' means. Indeed, it is here that I am bound to charge him with offering us an analysis but giving us a proposal—to change the meaning of 'education'—in the guise of an account of what we do in fact mean by it. What supports me in this, I think, is that according to Professor Peters' criteria we should be required to withdraw the word 'educated' from virtually all the people we presently believe to be educated. Which is just to say that Professor Peters would have us drop the word as ordinarily used by fluent speakers of our language.) Second, we regularly (and rightly) withhold the appellation 'educated' from persons who satisfy each of the above conditions: the craftsman who pursues many trades, who engages in a sparkling variety of hobbies and pastimes, who knows the ins and outs of navigation, book-keeping, sword-fishing, karate, cabinetmaking, weaponry, combustion mechanics, bird-watching, boxing, plastering, flower-arranging, roofing, and Montana Red Dog, but who has no academic competence, is not educated, even though he might fulfill our conditions.

Professor Peters would certainly reply to this that these formal conditions are relevant only when they pertain to the right sorts of activities. Indeed, he alleges that what counts as the right sort of activity is somehow socially determined. Hence my third point: a primitive society, wholly barren of academic riches, might well specify a wide
range of activities as worth while (hunting, archery, mating, dancing, feats of strength and endurance, magic, medicine); and if any member of that society pursued the whole range of such activities in satisfaction of the four conditions, Professor Peters’s position would oblige him to say that the man was educated. And this, I believe, Peters would not want to say.

COMMENTS

WILLIAM H. DRAY

Professor Peters has discussed the question whether education has aims, with a view to displaying the sort of contribution analytical philosophers can make to educational theory. Let me confess that I should be delighted to find him showing that our expertise is badly needed in this inviting field. Like Professor Woods, however, I have to report some misgivings. Mine are not so much about particular analytical conclusions Professor Peters draws, as about the whole conception of the analytical philosopher of education’s task which, in spite of the many wise things he says about education along the way, may seem to emerge from his analysis. Let me draw your attention first to a respect in which I think he may have misrepresented the philosopher’s task, and then to one in which I think he has left that task obscure.

Whether or not Professor Peters’s analysis of ‘aim’ and ‘education’ are satisfactory in detail, I take it that it is a major claim of his argument that there is something logically odd about speaking of education having aims at all. No problem is raised by saying something like ‘The aim of vocational training is increased productivity’, for this would be either an empirical report of what people hope to achieve by means of such training, or a perfectly intelligible prescription of what they should aim at. But such statements as ‘The aim of education is initiation into a worth-while form of life,’ or ‘The aim of education is cultivation of the intellect’ according to Professor Peters, only ‘masquerade’ as pronouncements of a similar sort. In reality they are empty tautologies. They are tautologies, however, into which it is quite ‘natural’ for educators to slip, since the various subject-matters used in educating can all themselves be studied for extrinsic purposes or aims. Such tautologies, furthermore, often have a ‘social function’. The first sort reminds us, in circumstances where this may have been forgotten, what education really is; the second claims, in a confused but nevertheless effective way, educational priority for a certain subject-matter, skill, or procedure at a certain place and time.

Now, what is disturbing to me about this as a specimen of analytical philosophy of education is what may appear to be the philosopher’s acceptance of what his analysis, especially in the second sort of case, represents as a defective way of talking. It is true that Professor Peters explains how ‘natural’ this way of talking is; but the reason it needs explanation is that, on his own showing, it is an error. It is true that he justifies the error; but he does so only in the sense of showing its tactical advantage as a persuasive device in the warfare of educational policy-makers. I do not want to suggest that the offering of such explanations and the detection of such linguistic tactics fall completely outside the analytical philosopher’s proper function. But I regard it as even more central to his function, given his interest in conceptual logic, that he should expose and deplore the errors in so far as he believes them to enter into educational theory. What Professor Peters’s conceptual analysis challenges us to recognize, it seems to me, is that typical uses of statements of the form ‘The aim of education is …’ are not only false, but depend for their utility on their falsehood. Whether Dewey, whom Professor Peters quotes in this connection, would be prepared to put it this way is perhaps debatable; but I think Professor Peters should be.

Even this, however, does not really bring out the extent of the conceptual irregularity which I take Professor Peters’s analysis to represent as typical of educational theory. According to him, when we say the aim of education is initiation into a worth-while form of life, or the cultivation of the intellect, we call its aim is in fact its nature, or a part or aspect of it. That is the case for interpreting ‘aim’ statements as unwitting tautologies. But such statements, I would want to claim, are, on Professor Peters’s own analysis, not even well-formed tautologies—as, for example, ‘Education is initiation’ or ‘Education is cultivation of the intellect’ would be. The incoherence of taking a part or aspect of something as its own aim may perhaps appear more clearly if we look at a more homely example. Compare the following two statements about baseball:

‘Baseball is (among other things) aiming to hit pitched balls.’
‘The aim of baseball is (among other things) to hit pitched balls.’

The first of these may indeed be a tautology, baseball being, in conception, a game requiring the constituent aim of hitting pitched balls. But
given the conceptual truth of the first, the second statement is a logical
monster. So are the alleged tautologies about the aims of education.
In tolerating them, what Professor Peters fails to denounce, I fear, is not
just the venial sin of taking conceptual truths for substantive empirical
or prescriptive utterances; it is the mortal sin of mistaking nonsense for
sense. It would be a pity if his interest in what might be called the
'pragmatics' of educational discourse gave educational theorists the
impression that analytical philosophers would not generally make a fuss
about this sort of thing.

The second general question about the job of the analytical philo-
sopher which Professor Peters's paper leads me to raise is an old
favourite among critics of philosophy as analysis; yet it seems to be
one which it is especially important to have articulated in philosophy
of education. This is the question, whose concepts the philosopher con-
ceives himself as analysing in order to make his distinctive contribu-
tion to educational theory. Professor Peters's discussion proceeds as if
he will have little difficulty finding a relatively clear and generally
shared, if rather complex and often theoretically misunderstood,
concept of education to work upon. Many of the specific conceptual
conclusions he draws, however, make me wonder about this assumption.
Let me indicate a few examples.

Professor Peters defines education as initiation into a worth-while
form of life, and he emphasizes at various points and in various ways
the evaluative aspect of the concept. At one point he endeavours
to display this aspect by claiming that it would be logically self-
contradictory for a father to say 'My son has been educated but nothing
desirable has happened to him.' I find this difficult to accept. For the
father might surely be taken to be asserting quite coherently that the
state of his son after being educated was, on the whole, less valuable
than his state at the beginning—a judgement he might be driven to, for
example, if his son, in the process, had become self-satisfied or a snob.
Nor does it seem to violate the logic of the concept to imagine the same
judgement being expressed by an anti-intellectual religious fundamen-
talist, who has no difficulty recognizing the marks of the educated man
in his university-trained son, but thinks them in themselves all to the
bad. The latter's concept, especially, seems to me much more likely to
reflect what Professor Peters says about initiation into a public form
of life than about initiation into a valuable one. In this respect, it
confirms also to the concept I find myself employing and I doubt that this
is just a case of what Professor Peters calls 'derivative' use.

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Even if we accept the formula 'initiation into a worth-while form of
life', an associated difficulty arises for me out of what is to be under-
stood by 'initiating'. By this, Professor Peters sometimes appears to
mean no more than 'introducing', although in a way which facilitates
understanding rather than mere knowledge. Much of the time, however,
he clearly means a good deal more. Thus, although at one point he
makes it a criterion of being educated only that a person should be
capable of pursuing a worth-while activity 'for what there is in it', he
goes on almost immediately to tell us that what is required is commit-
ment 'to what is internal in worth-while activities'. This seems to me to
interpret the concept in far too behavioural a way. One paradoxical
consequence would be the impropriety of calling a man educated who
revolts against his own culture. It would require Jews, for example, to
say that St. Paul suddenly lost his education on the road to Damascus,
whereas they are much more likely to regard him as an educated rene-
gade. And it would make questions about a man's character logically
redundant, once we have assurance that his moral education is empe-
cable, whereas I should want to leave logical room for saying that it
was, in part, the excellence of a man's moral education that enabled
him to be so wicked: he fully grasped the moral enormity of what he
nevertheless chose to do.

I have reservations also about Professor Peters's central claim that
there is a conceptual error in asserting that someone seeks to become
educated for some extrinsic purpose or aim. It seems to me perfectly
coherent, for example, to say of a person who believes that God Him-
self is a snob, that he is preparing himself for the life everlasting by
becoming educated. I can understand Professor Peters ruling this out,
having read what he regards as certain desirable motivations into the
concept of an educated man; but his reading them in strikes me as
highly prescriptive. I find it even more difficult to follow him when
(unless I have misunderstood his point) he makes it a conceptual re-
quirement that the man's teachers also be properly motivated. 'People
cannot be educated', he insists, 'by being taught engineering with a view
to bringing about anything which would not itself fall under the con-
cept of what an educated person is.' [My italics.] But it would surely be
strange to withdraw our judgement that a man is educated on discover-
ing that his teachers had only pretended to value education for its own
sake. Thus, when Professor Peters declares that economists and politi-
cians, who ascribe instrumental aims to the schools, do not 'strictly'
make proposals about the aims of education, I can agree only that
education shouldn’t, not that it couldn’t have such aims. And this is not a conceptual thesis.

Finally, I begin to wonder whether I in fact share Professor Peters’s concept of education when he incorporates certain procedures into the concept. ‘Education’, he tells us, is a concept ‘for laying down criteria to which a family of activities must conform’. These criteria characterize both the successful outcome, the ‘educated man’, and the ‘processes by means of which people gradually become educated’. By including the latter in his explication of the concept, Professor Peters presumably makes it a logical impossibility to educate anyone other than by the proper procedures (some of which he goes on to discuss). These would certainly appear to exclude, say, plugging a man into an ‘instant education’ machine. It seems not implausible to me, however, to hold that the impossibility of ‘instant’ education, if any, is a causal rather than a logical matter; it is not obvious that ‘educated’, like ‘evolved’, entails certain things about the history of its referent. Yet if Professor Peters were to carry a majority against me on this point, I should not mind too much. For what I want to emphasize is simply the difficulty for philosophical analysis that may arise out of genuine differences of concept among individuals and groups, and perhaps also sometimes (for example, in the present case) out of indeterminacy of concept as well. This difficulty needs to be distinguished from the sort Professor Woods raises when he claims that Professor Peters did not in fact get the logical analysis of ‘education’ right. For the question is, what it would be to get it ‘right’.

Not that the problem of identifying exactly what the analytical philosopher is supposed to analyse is unique to the philosophy of education. But there is a tremendous difference between the problem of analysing the concept of education and the problem, say, of analysing the concept of knowledge in general epistemology, or (to suggest what may seem a more relevant comparison) the concepts of fact or interpretation in philosophy of history. The epistemologist can claim with considerable plausibility that, on the whole, he finds people agreeing about what they can say they know and on what would count as supporting or undermining claims to knowledge. The philosopher of history can limit himself usefully to analysing the fairly stable conceptual networks of those who are generally recognized to be historians; and even if he is forced to admit that he takes account only of what ‘reputable’ or ‘good’ historians do, he may still feel that his feet are on reasonably firm ground. Such ground is not so obviously available to the analytical philosopher of education. He could always, of course, mark out useful work for himself by attempting analyses only of specific educational theorists or schools, with little further ambition than to help us (and them) understand what they are saying, and perhaps to police it for internal consistency. But Professor Peters’s paper suggests that he, at any rate, would accept no such limitation. It would thus be interesting to know more precisely what he takes to be the objects of the analytical philosopher of education’s analysis. Would he, for example, resist the suggestion that what the philosopher really does is fabricate a concept of education out of his vision of what people ought to become, and then hope its circulation may have a beneficial effect upon the schools? If educators are asked to consider the contribution that analytical philosophers can make to educational theory, they deserve the clearest possible answer to this question.

REPLY

RICHARD S. PETERS

The conditions under which my paper was read and discussed were scarcely ideal from the point of view of the philosopher. To start with, it was the opening paper of the International Seminar, which had to be addressed to the general public and not simply to members of the Seminar. It had, therefore, to be a talk fit for philosopher kings and yet one that preserved the common touch. This, by the way, is the usual predicament of anyone working in the philosophy of education. If he gets too technical, he loses touch with most teachers, whose activities he is trying to clarify, criticize, or justify. If, on the other hand, he succeeds in communicating with teachers, he is in danger of being criticized by philosophers for being too crude or superficial, even though they may pay him a back-handed compliment by remarking that what he says is wise!

Secondly, I had no preview of the comments on my paper made by Professor Dray and Professor Woods, which followed each other in rapid succession. I was therefore able only, in the time allotted, to pick a few of the many acute points made and to plunge around trying to...
answer them ‘off the cuff’. It therefore seems appropriate to attempt to do both the commentators and myself justice by adding a few further remarks, either dealing with points that I missed altogether in my immediate reply, or expanding some of the replies that I then gave, now that I have had some time to study more carefully what they said.

PROFESSOR DRAY’S COMMENTS

Logical Impropriety of Talk about ‘The Aim of Education’

I entirely accept Professor Dray’s first point about the logical impropriety of talk about ‘the aim of education’. His account of what I was trying to say is both accurate and probably more clearly put than my own version. He is, perhaps, a bit sharp with me when he scolds me for not being rather more critical of this way of talking. I have, in the past, been very critical of it in various talks and writings, and thought that my whole analysis was an implicit criticism.

I must confess, however, that when I was asked to utter yet again on this subject for the International Seminar, I told myself: ‘What new is there for me to say about it?’ I decided to pursue my long-standing puzzlement a bit further about the concept of ‘aim’ (on which, like the concept of ‘education’, no previous work has been done) and to try to work out what could have led people to talk in this way about education. Hence my mention of ‘naturalness’ which Professor Dray finds so distressing. Such ‘naturalness’ is not a purely psychological matter; it is connected in my analysis with the social function of talk about ‘aims’. Professor Dray seems to think that once the philosopher has shown that talk about the aim of education is often an unfortunate way of proclaiming a tautology or uttering an analytic truth, he should stop people talking like this and then shut up shop. But surely, just as it is philosophically interesting to explore the analytic use of statements and the functions served by uttering tautologies, so it is interesting to see why this may get mixed up with talk about ‘aims’ in educational discourse. My analysis shows, too, that there are many quite appropriate ways of using ‘aim’ in educational discourse—for example, ‘My aim as a teacher is . . .’ In other words, it does not rule out the propriety of all talk of aims in educational situations.

The Case of the ‘ Educated’ Snob

A father who comments that his son has turned out to be a snob because of, rather than in spite of, his education is, I think, using ‘educa-

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tion’ in an external, descriptive sort of way, like a person who says of a criminal, ‘He is reformed all right; but as a result he just takes it out on his wife.’ Would this show that ‘reform’ is not connected with making people better? This external, descriptive use certainly covers the case of the anti-intellectual fundamentalist who regards university education as all to the bad. In his own Bible classes he might equally well remark that what people got in universities was not education at all. It is like saying, ‘He is a moral man all right; but he fiddles his income-tax’, where ‘moral’ is used in what Hare calls the ‘inverted commas’ sense.12

I do not think, by the way, that Professor Dray’s suggestion that I should change my first criterion from ‘initiation into a valuable form of life’, to ‘initiation into a public form of life’, will do. For swearing, going to watch horse-racing and greyhound racing are very much part of a public form of life. But we would hesitate to associate them with education.

Commitment to What Is Worth While

Professor Dray’s ingenious objections to my suggestion that an educated person is one who is ‘committed’ to what is internal to worthwhile activities involve a too substantive rendering of what I had in mind. I meant that such a person must care, to a certain extent, about the point of the activity and be not unmoved by the various standards of excellence within it. I am not sure to what extent he would have to accept any particular content, for example, the law of supply and demand if he had been initiated into economics. But in the case of science, for instance, a man must think that, to a certain extent, truth matters and that relevant evidence must be produced for assumptions; in the case of morals, the suffering of others, or fairness, must not be matters of indifference to him. What sort of philosophical education would a person have had if he did not bother much about consistency or cogency in argument? This does not imply that such a man will not be capable of ‘cooking’ the evidence, of being ruthless or unjust, and of being inconsistent at times. But it does imply that he will feel bad if he does behave in such ways. What the Jews would have said about Saul on the Damascus road, I am not sure. It would depend on the extent to which they believed in indoctrination, with the rigid insistence on an unshakeable content of belief that goes with it. But certainly they would

have said that he was not educated if he had been quite insensitive to all aspects of religious experience.

**The Motivation of Teachers**

The reply I made during the Seminar to Professor Dray on the question of the motivation of teachers needs to be a bit expanded. In my paper I was mainly concerned with the achievement aspects of education. I did, however, say, 'Engineering, for instance, can be taught in schools or colleges purely with a view to increasing productivity; but people cannot be educated by being taught engineering with a view to bringing about anything which would not itself fall under the concept of what an educated person is.' Professor Dray understandably took 'people cannot be educated' to relate to the achievement aspect, and raised his eyebrows at the suggestion that a certain kind of motivation of teachers is necessary if people are to emerge as educated men. But in my clumsy sentence, 'people cannot be educated' was meant to refer to the *task* aspect. I meant that in so far as teachers work at educating people and regard the teaching of engineering as part of this, then they must emphasize those aspects of engineering which are consonant with their concept of an educated person. I went on to point out that engineers can be highly educated people. But it would obviously be only empirical speculation to suggest that they will emerge as such if, and only if, their teachers emphasize the educational aspects of engineering rather than just train them for a job.

**A Moral, Not a Conceptual, Thesis?**

Professor Dray thinks that it is a moral, not a conceptual, thesis that education cannot be related purely to vocations and skills. I argue that it is a conceptual thesis; for we do not speak of people being educated as cooks, in engineering, or for anything specific such as farming. In

[The following is the relevant passage from the discussion at the Seminar.]

Peters: About the question of the teacher's motive. I think one has to distinguish, in talking about the concept of 'education,' between two points of view: that of *task* and that of *achievement*. Now, in my paper, what I was mainly concerned with was the achievement aspect. Whatever the motives of the teacher—he might be interested in pay, or prestige in the community—he might, nevertheless, be an inspired teacher, and some of the pupils might end up by being educated. I wasn't concerned with the motives of the educator, only with people being educated. I was only dealing with what the state of mind is of the person who emerges from this sort of process, with the achievement aspect.

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such contexts we speak of training. That is perhaps why people say vacuous things like 'Education is for life'; for they want to say that it is for something extrinsic; yet the logic of the concept forbids them to specify anything in particular which education is for. I think I am right about this. It may be the case—indeed it is almost a platitude nowadays—that people are of much more use in industry if they are educated rather than just trained in some skill that quickly becomes outdated. So education is a good investment from the point of view of the economy. But that does not make industrial productivity the aim of education. What I did argue in my paper, however, is that this conceptual point about education does not straight away settle the dispute about policy between those who advocate education and those who advocate technical training.

**A Fabricated Concept?**

Of course it was not my intention, as Professor Dray darkly hints at the end of his comments, to *fabricate* a concept of education out of my vision of what people ought to become. Actually, my analysis is rather content-free, which Professor Woods, for different reasons, found unsatisfactory in his fascination with carpenters and games-players. I take the concept of 'education' to be *almost* as unspecific in terms of content as something like 'good' or 'worth while', with the notion of 'transmission of' or of 'initiation into' prefixed to it. It is slightly more specific than 'good' because of the cognitive criteria to do with depth and breadth of understanding and awareness that I suggested also went with it. But I am more prepared to entertain the suggestion that I may have tightened up the concept a bit in my analysis when it emanates from Professor Dray than when it emanates from Professor Woods; for I do feel that Professor Dray is more sympathetic to the sort of conceptual analysis that I was attempting both of 'education' and of 'aim'.

**PROFESSOR WOODS'S COMMENTS**

**Tight or Loose Conceptual Connections**

Professor Woods obviously has little sympathy for the type of conceptual analysis that stems from the later Wittgenstein, in spite of his softening down of his approach in his footnote; for no one who had much sympathy for such an approach would take the hoary example of the relationship between 'being a bachelor' and 'being unmarried' as.

**See above, p. 30 n. 10.**
a particularly helpful one if he was interested in getting clearer about concepts as general and as elusive as those of 'aim' and 'education'. Much more appropriate parallels would be concepts such as 'motive' and 'reform', as I suggested. Nevertheless, as I made clear in the discussion, I accept his general point that the connection between the concepts and what is suggested as part of their analysis must be conceptual rather than de facto. But I obviously have a much looser notion of what counts as a conceptual connection, or of what it would be 'logically odd' to say, than he has. But more of this later.

**Hobbies and All-round Understanding**

Perhaps there was a slight misunderstanding on Professor Woods's part of my third criterion of 'wholeness' or 'not narrowly specialized'. He interprets this as implying that an educated person must engage

15 [The following are the relevant passages from the discussion at the Seminar.]

**Peters:** I don't take it to be the philosophical analyst's job, with a concept like 'education', to formulate hard and fast, necessary and sufficient conditions which must always be satisfied if the word is to be used correctly. The point of approaching the concept as I did can be expressed as follows: We have developed certain ways of talking in which we use the word 'education' rather than 'training'. There are clear examples of when we would use one rather than the other: the stock example which I gave is the difference between sex education and sex training. Now, given that a way of talking has emerged to mark such a difference, the point of doing what I did is to get clear about the distinctions which lie behind the use of our words. Really, the main point is to become clearer and clearer about the contours of the concepts which have emerged; we cannot pin them down with a definition.

**Phenix:** I heard Professor Woods say, in effect, that the kind of analysis that has been undertaken, namely showing the kinds of situations in which one uses the term 'aims', is not what he calls philosophical analysis.

**Woods:** I'm not sure that I would be right in saying that it is not relevant to philosophical analysis, but I think I am right in saying that the inquiry into use, à la Peters, is certainly not the specification of conditions pertaining to the use of the given word associated with the given concept, which conditions stand to that word in other than a merely contingent or de facto relation. English-speaking analytic philosophers have introduced a number of terms to describe the kind of relation which must obtain between such conditions and what they are conditions of. They all have at least this one thing in common, namely the denial of the relation of merely de facto regularity. It is something stronger than that, although it need not be strict logical necessity.

I would think that what Professor Peters has to say, on the strength of his understanding of the analysis of a concept in terms of the job it does in a given linguistic context, could all be true and illuminating. But what would be true would, in my opinion, be de facto true. It would be a plain matter

16 [The following is the relevant passage from the discussion at the Seminar.]

**Woods:** Suppose there is a man who is a carpenter, who delights in carpentry for its own sake, who appreciates and understands the underlying principles of his trade. He extends his interest to a whole range of worthwhile pursuits, both hobbies and pastimes, crafts, other trade pursuits. He delights in them for their own sake, understands their underlying principles, is so affected by his understanding of those principles, that his life takes on a new quality. These are surely worthwhile pursuits engaged in for their own sake.
down no positive requirements; I also made it clear that this is a cognitive requirement. People often suppose that educated people are those who continue doing, when they leave schools and colleges, all those things that they did there as distinct activities. This is obviously absurd. What is not absurd, however, is that their awareness should be sensitized in various dimensions—for example, moral, aesthetic, scientific, historical—and that they should continue to learn and explore in them without making all of them their hobbies. I do not see why a man who takes up carpentry, or who is a devotee of some game, should not develop in this way.

I think that my own answer, together with Professor Dray’s intervention in the discussion, dealt adequately with the point about a primitive society, in which Professor Woods also failed to grasp what I was trying to say about cognitive requirements.\(^{11}\)

Specialized Education

Professor Woods’s point about ‘specialized education’ is not difficult to deal with either; for often we add an adjective to cancel out a criterion built into a concept that has multiple criteria. The example of ‘knowledge’ is a good parallel, which should be more acceptable to one with Professor Woods’s purist proclivities. When a woman says that she knows that a man is a scoundrel, she suggests (a) that she thinks he is a scoundrel, (b) that she has good grounds for her view, and (c) that it is true that he is a scoundrel. But we could say of her that she has ‘intuitive knowledge’ of this. ‘Intuitive’ here has the main function of cancelling the criterion (b), that she has good grounds for her view. I do not see why ‘specialized education’ should not be a similar sort of case.

Educated but Lazy

To Professor Woods’s point about the person who, through laziness, and so on, does not go on with the worth-while pursuits of his youth, I would reiterate what I have just said about hobbies. If his outlook on his specialized occupation and on life generally was very little influenced by ‘the matters he had proper time for in his youth’, I would say that he was uneducated. If, however, the precipitates of them were not altogether ‘inert’, why, in my view, should he not be called educated? The question of degree comes in, of course; but I do not propose to go over all that again.

Aiming at What Is Close at Hand and Easy to Hit

To turn to the concept of ‘aim’ which I too have always found rather elusive: The preliminary point needs to be made that I would count as a conceptual connection one that pertains to the general use of a concept in a public language. It is quite possible, however, that once a concept has been learnt and begins, as it were, to acquire a life of its own, usages develop that seem inconsistent with the general use. But they are parasitic on the general use and would not be intelligible apart from the general use. To take a well-known example: G. E. M. Anscombe has argued\(^ {12}\) that no one could intelligibly be said just to want a saucer of mud. For whatever could one do with it if one had it? (‘Wanting’, it is argued, implies some criterion such as this.) But could it not be argued in reply that the concept of ‘wanting’ is learnt in standard situations when this criterion is satisfied, and that its general use is connected with such situations; but that, once it has been learnt, it can be applied perfectly intelligibly by the odd individual to situations where this condition is not fulfilled? There is, then, a conceptual connection between ‘wanting’ and ‘being able to do something with what is wanted’; but this does not mean that there cannot be idiosyncratic usages where this connection does not hold. But these later usages could not be the general practice. I would call this sort of connection a conceptual one and not just a de facto one.

This general thesis about conceptual connections enables me to deal with most of Professor Woods's objections to my thesis about the general use of 'aim'. He suggests, in his second objection, that there is nothing inconsistent or linguistically deviant in saying that we are aiming at something that is fairly near at hand and fairly easy to obtain. (Note the use of 'fairly'! When does 'fairly near' turn into 'fairly far'?) But his example does not show this; for he has to add a special background to make such talk sound convincing. He has to put in: 'At long last people have the good sense to aim only at those things which are fairly near at hand and fairly easily achieved.' He then asks whether we would say that our concept of 'aim' had changed or that people have changed, if virtually everyone undertook to aim at those things that he could comfortably achieve. But does he then think that the general use of the concept of 'aim' is independent of general facts about human nature? I would think that, because people in the main are as they are—that is, somewhat prone to set themselves difficult and distant targets—that the concept of 'aim' has developed a general use outside its natural home of shooting and throwing. If people had been different, they probably would not have developed this concept. To take a parallel: The concept of 'ought' has a very important function only because men can reason and have inclinations which suggest alternative courses of action to them. Once, however, men have developed such concepts, they can use them in derivative and idiosyncratic ways.

As a matter of fact, Professor Woods's third objection seems to me to depend not just on a derivative but on a quaint way of speaking. I would never normally say that all I aim for in life is a roof over my head, twenty dollars a week, and so on. If I did say such a thing I would use the word 'aim' to produce a certain kind of deflationary effect, because usually talk about people's aims in life is linked with the specification of more distant and exalted types of objectives. Professor Woods's claim that there would be no inconsistency in this shows his determination to fit the analysis into a logically tight straitjacket. My case is that it would be quaint because of the primary use of the concept of 'aim'. Conceptual analysis should take account of quaintness as well as of inconsistency. It should also be sensitive to the manifold purposes served by ways of speaking.

The Assessment of Aims

Professor Woods's first objection is surely pretty naïve. He thinks that the fact that we can discuss people's aims from the point of view of their merits is a counter-example to my thesis that the general function of talk about aims is to get people to specify their objectives more precisely. Surely all one has to reply is that the assessment of aims is second-order type of talk. The concept of 'aim' gets off the ground in contexts such as those that I have suggested. But once this way of talking gets established, we can classify aims and pronounce on their merits. To take a parallel case: The fact that we can compare the types of commands given by schoolmasters and drill sergeants and assess them in various ways affects in no way the analysis we give of the distinct function performed by the language of commands as distinct, say, from that of advice.

Conclusion

I agree, then, with Professor Woods that the connection between the concepts that I have dealt with and the type of analysis that I have suggested is not as tight as that between the concept of 'bachelor' and that of 'being unmarried'. It would take me too long to explain why, in the case of the concept of 'aim' especially, it would be absurdly single-minded to look for a connection as tight as this. But I hope I have done something to make implausible Professor Woods's suggestion that the connections I have suggested are purely de facto connections. I have a suspicion, however, that he thinks that, if the connections are not as tight as that of his favoured example, they are too elusive to be philosophically important. Such a purist view, I suggest, would stop most works in ethics, philosophy of mind, epistemology, political philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion—as well as in the philosophy of education. And that would be a pity.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

R. S. PETERS

The matter, however, is not quite as straightforward as this; for 'education' is not quite so straightforward a concept as 'cure' or 'reform'. In particular it is doubtful whether 'education' is always used
to designate processes that lead up to a general end in the way in which 'cure' and 'reform' always seem to be used. Doubt can be thrown on this parallel by probing to see whether any conditions that even begin to look like logically necessary conditions have been provided for the use of the term 'education'. To test this counter-examples have to be produced.

(a) Objections to the desirability condition. Roughly speaking, two types of conditions have been suggested for the use of the term 'education': namely desirability conditions and knowledge conditions. Let us consider first counter-examples to the desirability condition. They are as follows:

(i) We often talk of the educational system of a country without commending what others seem concerned to pass on. This objection can be met by citing the parallel of talking about the moral code of another community or of a sub-culture within our own. Once we understand from our own case how terms such as 'educate' and 'moral' function, we can use them in an external descriptive sort of way as do anthropologists, economists, and the like. As observers we appreciate that, in the moral case, their way of life is valuable to them, and, in the case of an educational system, we appreciate that those, whose system it is, consider that they are passing on what they think valuable. But we, as observers, do not necessarily commend it when we use the word 'moral' or 'educational' to refer to it.

(ii) We can talk of poor education or bad education. This can be met by saying that we are suggesting that the job is being botched or that the values with which it is concerned are not up to much.

(iii) A much more serious objection, however, is that many regard being educated as a bad state to be in. Their objection is not to a particular system of education, but to any sort of education. They appreciate that 'education' has something to do with the transmission of knowledge and understanding. Indeed they probably associate it with books and theories. And this is why they are against it; for they think of it either as useless or as corrupting. Of course they bring up their own children, perhaps in traditional skills and folk-lore. But they do not see any connection between what they think valuable and 'education', and have no specific word to differentiate the handing on of what they think valuable from handing on a lot of other things.

*This last point suggests one way in which the objection could be met.

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It could be argued, with some cogency, that people who think that being educated is a bad state to be in lack our concept of being educated. Their understanding has not become differentiated to the extent of needing a special word for referring to the passing on of what they do think is valuable. They have a concept of education; for they use the term to refer to what goes on in schools and universities. But they have not our concept. The only trouble about this way of dealing with the objection is that people who lack our concept of education are, at the moment, rather numerous. 'We', in this context, are in the main educated people and those who are professionally concerned with education; and 'we' are not in the majority of people who use the word 'education'. So it is doubtful whether the desirability condition of 'education' is a logically necessary condition of the term that is in current use. It stands in this relation to a more specific, differentiated concept that has emerged. This possibility will be considered in more detail later (see pp. 54–5).

Another way, not of really meeting the objection but of accounting for the discrepancies with regard to the desirability condition, is to suggest that the knowledge conditions are the only proper logical conditions, and that the desirability condition is dependent on them. On this view the fundamental notion involved in being educated would be that of having knowledge and understanding. Because knowledge and understanding are valued in our culture, both for their own sake and for what they contribute to technology and to our quality of life generally, being educated has come to be thought of as a highly desirable state to be in—but not by everybody. Whether or not the desirability condition is fulfilled would depend, therefore, upon contingent facts about the attitude of people talking about education to the passing on of knowledge and understanding. The desirability condition, therefore, would not be, properly speaking, a logically necessary condition of the use of the term 'education'. It would rather be a contingent consequence of certain people's valuations.

This way of simplifying the analysis has much to commend it:

(i) It certainly takes care of those who regard education as a bad thing. As, on this view, the connection between education and something that is valued depends only on the contingent fact that people value knowledge and understanding, it is not surprising that simple people or hard-headed practical men are against it. For it seems to serve no useful function in their lives; indeed it may be seen as an influence that is likely to undermine their way of life. If they see that it may help them to
run a farm or to cure a disease they may accord a limited value to it, but only of an instrumental type.

(ii) There would be no need to make any elaborate philosophical moves to deal with cases where we speak of education and educational systems without approving or disapproving of what goes on. Education would be, as indeed it is sometimes called, the 'knowledge industry'. We could talk of it in the same way as we talk of any other set of practices that we might or might not think important.

(iii) 'Poor' or 'bad' education would simply mark the efficiency with which knowledge was handed on or the worth of the type of knowledge that was handed on.

This, then, is a most attractive simplification of the analysis. Its main feature, however, is that it puts all the weight of the analysis on the knowledge conditions, and it is questionable whether they are strong enough to support it. They must therefore be tested by counter-examples in the same way as was the desirability condition.

(b) Objections to knowledge conditions. The knowledge conditions, it will be remembered, include both depth and breadth of understanding.

(i) An obvious counter-example would be, therefore, that we often talk of specialized education. This objection could be met by saying that often, when we have multiple conditions, we can withdraw one of them by using a countermanding word. For instance, people talk of knowing things 'intuitively', where 'intuitively' countermands one of the usual conditions of 'knowledge', namely that we have grounds for what we believe. Similarly 'specialized' could be regarded as withdrawing the breadth condition of 'education'.

(ii) We might talk of Spartan education, or of education in some even more primitive tribe, when we know that they had nothing to pass on except simple skills and folk-lore. This objection could, perhaps, be met by saying either that the term was being extended analogically, as when dogs are spoken of as being 'neurotic', or that the people using the term had not yet developed a differentiated concept of 'education' which takes us back to the case already mentioned of people who think that education is a bad thing. As there are a lot of people who talk in a quite unabashed way about Spartan education, it is difficult to maintain that the knowledge conditions are logically necessary conditions of the term in general use. This point is strengthened by the third objection.

(3) The case of 'Spartan education' is just one of a wider class of cases. A little etymological research reveals the fact that 'education' is, or has been, used without this conceptual connection which is suggested with knowledge. The Latin word 'educare' was usually, though not always, used of physical development. In Silver Latin 'educare' was used of the rearing of plants and animals as well as children. In English the word 'education' was originally used just to talk in a very general way about the bringing up of children and animals. In the seventeenth century, for instance, harts were said to delight in woods and places of their first education. The word was often used of animals and birds that were trained by human beings such as hounds and falcons. In the nineteenth century it was even used of silkworms! (See O.E.D.) Nowadays we sometimes use it in this general way as when, for instance, we talk about Spartan education or when we use it of our own forms of training that do not have any close connection with knowledge and understanding. In other words the older usage still survives.

Arguments from etymology, of course, establish very little. At best they provide clues which it may be worth while to follow up. In this case, for instance, it seems that the word originally had a very generalized meaning. With the coming of industrialism, however, and the increasing demand for knowledge and skill consequent on it, 'education' became increasingly associated with 'schooling' and with the sort of training and instruction that went on in special institutions. This large-scale change, culminating in the development of compulsory schooling for all, may well have brought about such a radical conceptual tightening up that we now only tend to use the word in connection with the development of knowledge of understanding. We distinguish now between 'training' and 'education', whereas previously people did not. We would not now naturally speak of educating animals and we would never speak in this way of plants. But we do speak of training animals and of training roses and other sorts of plants.

These counter-examples to both the desirability condition and the knowledge conditions of 'education' make it very difficult to maintain that an adequate analysis has been given of the concept. It is possible, however, that there is some explanation of these counter-examples. It could be the case, in other words, that the cases that fail to fit the analysis could themselves be linked in some way. If we could get clearer about the principle underlying the counter-examples further light would be shed on the concept of 'education' generally.

(c) Education and the educated man. As a matter of fact there is
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way to mark them out. But it could well be that the older use of ‘education’ is widespread in which there is no such tight connection between various processes of bringing up and rearing and the development of an educated man. It may well be that many people still use the word ‘education’ to cover not only any process of instruction, training, etc., that goes on in schools but also less formalized child-rearing practices such as toilet training, getting children to be clean and tidy, and to speak with a nice accent. They may think these achievements desirable, though they have little connection with knowledge and understanding.

I do not think, however, that the word is now used, except semi-humorously, to talk about the training of animals, and I have never heard it used to honour the labours of gardeners with their plants. At least the concept has shifted more or less universally in these respects from that of the seventeenth century.

It looks, therefore, as if the concept of ‘education’ is a very fluid one. At one end of a continuum is the older and undifferentiated concept which refers just to any process of bringing up or rearing in which the connection either with what is desirable or with knowledge is purely contingent. There may be uses which link it just with the development of desirable states without any emphasis on knowledge; there may be uses which pick out the development of knowledge without implying its desirability. The more recent and more specific concept links such processes with the development of states of a person that involve knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth, and also suggests that they are desirable. The analysis of ‘education’ which compares it to ‘reform’ is of this more differentiated specific concept.

Aims of education

How, then, would reasons deriving from the later, more specific concept of ‘education’ provide guidance for a teacher concerned about educating his pupils? The general injunction to promote desirable states of a person, that involve depth and breadth of understanding, would indicate only a general direction; it would offer no specific guidance.

More specific guidance would have to be obtained by the teacher getting clearer about his aims in educating people. For the function of the formulation of aims is to specify more precisely what one is trying to achieve, one’s target in a metaphorical sense. This attempt to specify precise targets also takes over a further suggestion from the context of shooting and throwing, where the concept of ‘aim’ has its natural home, namely that the end in view is not altogether easy to achieve.
Distance and difficulty seem to be endemic to ends that we would characterize as 'aims'. Aims, however, cannot specify states of affairs that it would be manifestly impracticable to bring about. In this respect they differ from 'ideals'. A person can expatiate on his ideals as a teacher without having to raise awkward questions about practicalities. If, on the other hand, he attempts to formulate his aims, he has to have regard to practicalities. He also has to be more specific than he is licensed to be if he is asked about his ideals. An educational ideal, for instance, might be that every child should learn out of the joy of discovery. A teacher's aim, in the same context, might be a more specific and attainable objective such as that every child in his class should be brought to see some point in learning what had to be learnt.

Formulating aims in education must be distinguished from attempting to answer the general question 'What is the aim of education?' This is an unhelpful sort of question to ask in this context because the answer must either be a conceptual truth or a persuasive definition. It would be a conceptual truth if it specified an adequate analysis of the general end brought about by processes of education. In other words, if the foregoing analysis of the specific concept of 'education', as the family of processes leading up to desirable states of mind in people involving depth and breadth of understanding, is more or less adequate, then it would a conceptual truth that the production of this general end is the aim of education. It would be like saying that the aim of reform is to make men better. And to reiterate this would not provide much guidance for the teacher. Suppose, however, that something more concrete were produced as a specification of this general end. Suppose it were said that the aim of education is to produce specialized knowledge. Then a stipulative definition would be produced which would have the function of recommending a specific policy. Instead of coming out into the open and saying 'My aim in educating people is to develop specialists' covert support would be obtained for this policy by trading on the suggestion that pursuing this, and only this end, is consistent with educating people. This, it is true, would help the teacher in giving more specific guidance. But the help would be at the expense of conceptual clarity.

Suppose, then, the teacher attempts to specify his aim in educating people or the aims of a particular educational institution. What sort of answer could be given? Roughly speaking any answer which could be a more precise specification of what an educated man is considered to be. Features would be emphasized—e.g. critical thinking, specialized knowledge, autonomy, aesthetic sensitivity—which would be part of the teacher's understanding of what it means to be 'educated'. Content would be given to the general form of 'an educated man' provided by the analysis in terms of desirability and knowledge conditions. Arguments, of course, would have to be produced for emphasizing some desirable qualities rather than others. Indeed this is one important respect in which educating people differs from curing them, to revert to the comparison with medicine. In education there is as much debate about the ends of education as there is about the methods to be adopted to promote these ends. The same is not true of medicine. There is much more consensus about what constitutes being 'cured' than there is about what constitutes being 'educated'.

It is important to distinguish 'aims of education' in these cases from aims of education when the more general undifferentiated concept of 'education' is being used—e.g. by politicians talking about the educational system. A politician or administrator, in an economic frame of mind, might think of education as the means by which a supply of trained manpower is assured. He might think of education purely in this way and have no regard for the endeavours of educators who might in their turn be impervious to the economist's frame of reference. They might be concerned purely with the development of educated men and women. Of course looking at what goes on in schools and universities from this economic point of view is not necessarily antagonistic to being concerned with education in the more specific sense. Indeed a teacher might regard the development of responsible citizens, who have the competence to fulfil some occupational role, as his unifying aim as an educator. For him this civic consciousness might be the hallmark of an educated person. He might, in his approach, concentrate on getting his pupils technically equipped to do certain jobs, and attempt to make technical skill and knowledge the linch-pin of a person's depth and breadth of understanding as a citizen.

Similarly a teacher might teach a subject such as science with purely vocational or economic ends in view. He might regard himself just as equipping people for vocations or as serving a national need for trained manpower, without much thought about the development of the individuals concerned, as individuals. He might conceive of what he was doing just as contributing to economic growth. But teaching science with these limited ends in view should be distinguished from educating people. Teaching, as has already been pointed out, is not necessarily educative. On the other hand, though not unmindful of the nation's needs, a teacher might also teach science because he regarded this form of understanding as central to his concept of an educated person.