

## Introduction

### Philosophical Pluralism: The Promise of Fragmentation

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Preceding editors of this volume have remarked repeatedly upon the growing diversity in philosophical traditions, methods, and topics in educational philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This edition continues the trends previously noted. Many of the essays represent approaches long-established in educational philosophy. Some of the essays develop arguments concerning critical thinking and the critical citizen.<sup>2</sup> Other essays use the tools of analytic philosophy to discuss the acts of teaching and the curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Other essays extend our understanding of the ethics of care.<sup>4</sup> Several pieces discuss forms of pragmatism, including views on John Dewey's epistemology, ethics, and pedagogy, as well as the contemporary pragmatism of Richard Rorty.<sup>5</sup> A couple essays debate educational ethics arising out of existentialist philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Some essays employ the thought of ancient philosophy in an effort to reach educational prescriptions.<sup>7</sup> A few essays discuss aesthetic education.<sup>8</sup> Still other pieces reflect the long-standing styles of philosophy as political commentary or social critique.<sup>9</sup> But, much of the work in this volume represents a significant alteration of previous philosophical work. Poststructural and postmodern theory,<sup>10</sup> gay and lesbian philosophy,<sup>11</sup> anti-racist theory,<sup>12</sup> and ecological thought are represented<sup>13</sup> — leading to the redefinition of the discussion, the styles of writing and thinking, and the possibilities of subsequent discourse.

The “fragmentation” of the field of educational philosophy has been accompanied by a degree of apprehension, since the multiplicity of perspectives places fundamental issues in question: the mission of the field, the standards by which work should be judged, the possible recommendations that educational philosophers might pass on to educators. One ideal offered recurrently in educational philosophy is one of consensus. Harry Broudy, for instance, argued that educators should strive to reach agreement upon fundamental ideals, philosophical methods, curricular contents, and principles of teaching so we might speak with one voice and successfully reshape public school practice.<sup>14</sup> But consensus building is not the operative force in educational philosophy at present.

Quandries concerning the identity of educational philosophy are compounded by contemporary criticisms of philosophy itself. In the United States, Richard Rorty has presented a powerful critique of any vision of philosophy — and philosophy of education — as a universal discourse.<sup>15</sup> He has argued that universalistic languages will always be too blunt to capture the specific truths of particular situations. In France, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault have also argued for perspectives which elevate context-specific theorizing over any general philosophical system.<sup>16</sup> These criticisms of the philosophical endeavor place educational philosophy in question and have, in turn, fueled criticisms suggesting that the most philosophical of educational philosophy is too far removed from practice to offer educators meaningful guidance in the pressing tasks of schooling.<sup>17</sup>

Amidst these charges of fragmentation, philosophical crisis, and irrelevance, I find significant grounds for hope in the essays of this volume. While fragmentation of the field is itself undeniable, the diversity of approaches — as Wendy Kohli has suggested — allows previously marginalized philosophical perspectives to gain a voice within the discipline.<sup>18</sup> And to my mind, the distinctive task of philosophy is served more powerfully by a multitude of perspectives than by a small number. If philosophy is a speculative process of exploration — where our most basic assumptions concerning the nature of reality, truth, value, and justice are questioned and alternative conceptions proposed — then we are likely to benefit most completely from the rich and complex interchanges attending a field with extensive disagreement.

A diversity of perspectives multiplies our opportunities to question and reconceive our basic assumptions. Moreover, broad-ranging debates promise to strengthen the work done within any particular tradition. Debates within a philosophical tradition allow us to develop our standards of rigorous argumentation, but debates between traditions force us to confront the problematic character of our most basic assumptions — allowing each philosophical tradition to gain a reflexive understanding of itself in comparison with other traditions. And since those foundational assumptions often embody our most critical mistakes, a field of educational philosophy characterized by cross-paradigm discussion promises especially fruitful insights.

#### RESPONSES TO THE DILEMMAS OF THE FIELD

And indeed, a field of diverse educational philosophies offers a range of responses to the pending crisis in educational philosophy. Many of the essays in this volume address the crisis in educational philosophy, although they do so in a variety of contradictory ways. One response to the charges that philosophy as a universal discourse is dead and that educational philosophy written in this tradition will be irrelevant to practice comes in the form of the robust health of philosophy devoted to critical thinking. Working straight-forwardly within the enlightenment tradition, philosophers of critical thinking have produced results which confound any assessment suggesting that universalistic philosophies are dead: contrary to the critiques of universalizing thought, the universal descriptions of critical thinking continue to be viewed as enabling within a broad range of specific schooling circumstances. Contrary to the criticism that the most philosophical of educational philosophy will be irrelevant to schooling, critical thinkers have — simultaneously — established solid links to the parent discipline of philosophy and seen their work institutionalized in curricula across the country and world. In this volume, the critical thinking tradition is represented in several essays. Hanan Alexander and Harvey Siegel debate the appropriate role of a theory of the good in critical thinking. And Benjamin Endres argues that Habermas's work might be used to buttress the thought of critical thinkers. Tapio Puolimatka argues that the conception of a critical citizen is logically implied by the conception of democracy.

A second response to the widespread criticisms of universalizing philosophical perspectives comes in the form of work that takes the critiques of Rorty, Lyotard, and

Foucault quite seriously and develops styles of argumentation in keeping with the context-specific orientation that can be gleaned from their works. In "Of Fractious Traditions and Family Resemblances in Philosophy of Education," Pradeep Dhillon attempts to pave the way for widespread discussion of Lyotard by showing that his methodological assumptions find common ground with some of the most traditional analytic philosophy. Other essays do not endeavor to establish the epistemological legitimacy of post-structural perspectives, but employ those works towards valuable educational goals. Denise Egéa-Kuehne draws from Derrida to argue that teachers cannot assume a stance of neutrality vis-a-vis right-wing efforts to censor the curriculum, that teachers have a "double duty" to recall tradition and to open students to alternatives to the tradition. Chris Mayo employs the methods of Foucault and the perspective of Eve Sedgwick to disclose ways in which the debate over the gay and lesbian components of the proposed Rainbow curriculum for New York altered the visibility of gay and lesbian lifestyles, disturbing the "homosexual/heterosexual binary." Zelia Gregoriou develops a performative conception of reading in her Deleuzian interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, "Reading *Phaedrus* Like a Girl; Misfires and Rhizomes in Reading Performances." And Gert Biesta employs the thought of Derrida in an effort to demonstrate that transmission conceptions of education are fundamentally mistaken.

A third response to the charge of educational philosophy's irrelevance appears in the essays devoted to political, social, and educational commentary. This volume offers strong examples of educational policy analysis which insightfully wed ethical, epistemological, political, and educational understanding. Contemporary policy debates concerning the desirability of multicultural education and educational separatism are addressed in five of the featured essays in this volume. Walter Feinberg, Barbara Houston, and Kenneth Strike offer a range of reactions to the justification for multiculturalism provided by Charles Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition."<sup>19</sup> In fundamental sympathy with Taylor, Feinberg endeavors to bolster the case for multiculturalism in the face of common critiques of the movement. Also sympathetic with Taylor's concerns, but sobered by the possibilities for divisiveness in contemporary societies, Houston describes the sort of commitment to dialogue that might maintain unity despite relations polarized along lines of class, race, and gender. Strike, while sympathetic with many of the aims of multiculturalism, argues that Taylor's justification of multiculturalism is inadequate because Taylor is unwilling to ground his argument in a conception of respect for individuals.

The essays of Stacy Smith and Kevin McDonough address the distinct but related issue of separatist education; both authors endeavor to justify the separate education of African American youth or women in specific circumstances.

In describing these three distinct responses to the crisis in educational philosophy, I do not intend to imply that these are the only sorts of responses one finds in this volume; numerous topics of study and perspectives have not been mentioned. I only hope to lend plausibility to the suggestion that a diversity of positions allows multiple responses to the powerful arguments indicating the irrelevance and end of philosophy. By fostering the development of diverse, potentially irreconcilable,

philosophical perspectives, the field of educational philosophy appears that much stronger — that much more able to respond to the challenges of this particular juncture in history.

#### THEORETICAL GULFS

Even though the diversity within the field of educational philosophy makes the field stronger in fundamental ways, it nonetheless poses challenges to educational philosophers. Arguments arising out of one tradition often belittle the methods and perspective of other traditions. Theorists can easily be dismissed on the basis of their tradition alone. What one philosopher takes to be a prudent path leading to the improvement of education and perhaps the larger society, another philosopher may well consider mistaken, or worse yet, pernicious.

Yet, these are the challenges of philosophical discourse; fundamental — potentially unbridgeable — disagreements arise when philosophy is pursued in earnest. For the philosophical endeavor appropriately involves the intersection of disparate worldviews. People — writing from a diversity of experiences, representing sometimes conflicting interests, using a wide range of philosophical perspectives, and addressing a variety of questions — are likely to develop radically opposed philosophical perspectives. There is nothing new about fundamental disagreement. One of the featured essays in this volume — Jim McClellan's "Theoretical and Practical Reasoning: An Intractable Dualism?" — argues that theoretical and practical reasoning may be fundamentally incompatible — at least within capitalist society. McClellan's powerful and humorous discussion captures one dimension of disagreement that reverberates throughout philosophical discussions. Posing a dilemma is perhaps more profound than solving a problem, and McClellan's analysis can help us understand the gulf separating many of the epistemological studies and ethical-political works in this volume. The epistemological studies often develop standards of knowing that are far different than the epistemologies implicit in the moral and political essays.

Indeed, the divisions between epistemological and ethical-political studies written *within* the same philosophical tradition may prove to be just as intractable as the gulfs separating enlightenment theorists from postmodernists. Consider, for example, the divergent assumptions characterizing epistemological and ethical-political studies within pragmatism — perhaps the tradition most identified with the field of educational philosophy. The engaging exchange appearing in the featured essays by Christine McCarthy and Craig Cunningham fairly represents the focus of many epistemological studies. McCarthy seeks to save pragmatism from relativism by developing a form of pragmatic realism; she articulates a realist ontology and a pragmatic epistemology in an effort to show that pragmatism can meet Harvey Siegel's nonrelativistic standards of truth. While Cunningham is sharply critical of McCarthy's interpretation of Dewey and her effort to wed Deweyan epistemology to a Piercean ontology, Cunningham seems largely in sympathy with McCarthy's effort to save pragmatism from relativism.

McCarthy's and Cunningham's agreement on the need to avoid relativism stands in stark contrast to the epistemological assumptions implicit in papers

developing pragmatic conceptions of ethics and politics. For example, Audrey Thompson endeavors to reinterpret pragmatism from the standpoint of African American scholars, and she argues that the very heart of Dewey's epistemology, the scientific method, needs to be reconceived if pragmatism is to be sensitive to the political aspects of experience captured in the works of authors like Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. DuBois. Thompson apparently does not consider the pragmatic tradition to be sufficiently relativistic; she fears the scientific method codifies a set of epistemological standards congruent with the interests of the dominant Anglo group but not characteristic of the epistemological standards found among African American authors.

In his rejoinder to Thompson's argument, Alven Neiman spends no time considering the potential relativism of Thompson's argument (as we might surmise McCarthy or Cunningham would have). Neiman, in contrast, appears concerned that Thompson's effort to articulate a method of political pragmatism betrays a continuing bewitchment with the objectivist claims of universalizing discourses. Neiman opposes the very task of developing philosophical methods, whether they be the traditional scientific method developed by Dewey or the political method proposed by Thompson. In short, Thompson's position is criticized — not for asserting that epistemological standards are relative to ethnicity — but for maintaining any commitment to a method intended to produce generalizable claims.

From the perspective of some epistemologists, Thompson's and Neiman's comfort with relativistic positions renders their work incapable of leading to anything that might be considered "knowledge." From the perspective of Thompson and Neiman, the work of many epistemologists operates to maintain the cultural exclusiveness and theoretical rigidity of the pragmatic tradition. While there is little reason to expect that these disparate perspectives can be reconciled, epistemological and ethical-political works are perhaps of most help to each other as a source of questions: Have ethical-political philosophers deemphasized the importance of traditional epistemological concerns, that is, determining the standards of knowledge? Have epistemologists been willing to develop criteria that remain within a particular ethnic or cultural tradition?

#### ATTEMPTED SYNTHESSES

One of the most ambitious responses to fragmentation in the field of educational philosophy appears in the form of work intended to employ two or more potentially irreconcilable perspectives — showing the value of each in the process. While the possibility of neat resolutions of divergent perspectives seems remote, these efforts at synthesis have produced powerful insights and wedded the strengths of competing traditions.

Betty Sichel's admirable Presidential Essay, "Beyond Moral Stories," approaches one of the most difficult philosophical divisions, that between a rule-based ethics and an ethics of care. Sichel attempts to establish the complementary character of the "thin" guides of rule-based ethics and the "thick" narratives characterizing an ethics of care. She begins with the moral import of stories but quickly questions whether "the exclusive form of moral discourse can be either thin or thick or whether

one of these must have priority.” Where stories may deepen our moral understanding of particular people and circumstances, as well as provide guidance and motivation in life, they have little power to protect an abused child, for in this latter case, we invariably invoke rules of fairness. A rule-based ethics is critical in basic concerns of justice, such as when a child’s rights must be protected. Sichel endeavors to show the respective places of a rule-based ethics and an ethics of care using a narrative, a story of a court-ordered child advocate. Guided in the most general ways by the laws, the rights of the child, and a court ruling, the advocate can only perform her role because she possesses the embodied and empathetic understanding informed by the child’s story.

A second approach towards theoretical reconciliation appears in Nicholas Burbules’s contribution to this volume, “Deconstructing ‘Difference’ and the Difference This Makes for Education.” Beginning with a neo-Habermasian view stressing the central role of dialogue, Burbules and Suzanne Rice have written essays which seek common ground with postmodern theories.<sup>20</sup> Burbules here attempts to highlight the many contributions of claims to difference, while defending the legitimacy of claims to sameness. Theories of difference — whether feminist, multicultural, or postmodern — have played a critically important role in problematizing both philosophical and educational efforts to strive for homogeneity. Difference theories, he says, “shift the burden of proof onto the presumption of sameness.” While Burbules believes in the quest for common educational goals, he argues that the search will be both theoretically and pragmatically more defensible if it begins with the assumption of plurality. While granting the portrait of diversity painted in many postmodern writings, Burbules analyses a variety of claims to difference in an effort to show that such arguments commonly assume a place for sameness — that difference and sameness are two aspects of the same insight.

While the field of educational philosophy is not likely to be reunited through efforts like those of Sichel and Burbules, some agreement will be achieved, and some strong philosophy will result as competing traditions are united, compared, or juxtaposed. However, the attitude and method exemplified in these synthetic efforts serves us well. For both Sichel and Burbules start from the assumption of disagreement. Along with this assumption comes both the confidence that divergent perspectives embody important understandings and the humility needed to recognize the limitations of any one theoretical vantage point. Sichel’s and Burbules’s essays show both a sustained endeavor to sympathetically understand divergent traditions and the critical initiative needed to stake out a new position which combines strengths of the two perspectives. In works like these we can taste the fruit of fragmentation.

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1. Nicholas C. Burbules, “Introduction,” *Philosophy of Education, 1986*, ed. Nicholas C. Burbules (Normal: Philosophy of Education Society, 1986); Hanan Alexander, “After the Revolution, The Normative Revival in Post Analytic Philosophy of Education,” *Philosophy of Education 1992*, ed. H.A. Alexander (Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1993); Alven Neiman, “Coherence, Inclusion, Prognosis: Remarks on the State of the Philosophy of Education Society at 51 Years Old,” *Philosophy of Education 1995*, ed. A. Neiman (Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1996).

2. James McClellan, Jr., "Theoretical and Practical Reasoning: An Intractable Dualism?"; C.J.B. Macmillan, "The Freedom of the Playpen,"; Hanan Alexander, "Rationality and Redemption: Ideology, Indoctrination, and Learning Communities"; Harvey Siegel, "Can Reasons for Rationality be Redeemed?"; Benjamin Endres, "Habermas and Critical Thinking"; Mark Weinstein, "Decentering and Reason"; Tapio Puolimatka, "Democracy, Education and the Critical Citizen"; Randall Curren, "Democracy and the Foundations of Morality."
3. Robert Orton, "Teacher Beliefs and Student Learning"; Bruce B. Suttle, "Can Hypocrites Be Good Teachers?"; Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, "Good Sex As the Aim of Sexual Education"; Dwight Boyd, "The Politics of the 'Good' in Good Sexuality."
4. Betty Sichel, "Beyond Moral Stories"; Michael Katz, "Moral Stories: How Much Can We Learn From Them and Is It Enough?"; Barbara Applebaum, "But That is Not What I Mean: Criticizing With Care and Respect"; Ann Diller, "Criticizing With Care and With Respect for What We Are All Up Against."
5. Christine McCarthy, "When You Know It, and I Know It, What Is It We Know? Pragmatic Realism and the Epistemologically Absolute"; Craig Cunningham, "Really Living in Space-Time"; Suzanne Rice, "Dewey's Conception of 'Virtue' and its Educational Implications"; Timothy H. Smith, Dewey on Virtue"; Rob Reich, "The Paradoxes of Education in Rorty's Liberal Utopia"; Shirley Pendlebury, "Utopia Flawed?"; Fay Rosner, "Moral Dimensions of Classroom Discourse: A Deweyan Perspective"; John Covalesskie, "Moral Reflection and Moral Education"; Naoko Saito, "Dewey's Idea of Sympathy and the Development of the Ethical Self: A Japanese Perspective"; Donald Arnstine, "Dewey Without Doing"; Audrey Thompson, "Political Pragmatism and Educational Inquiry"; and Alven Neiman, "No More Method!"
6. Patricia Rohrer, "Infinitely Interesting: Bloom, Kierkegaard and the Educational Quest"; Paul Farber, "Education's Ills and the Vanity of the Philosopher."
7. Deron Boyles, "Sophistry, Dialectic, and Teacher Education: A Reinterpretation of Plato's *Meno*"; Terry Hall, "Sophistry and Wisdom in Plato's *Meno*"; David Carr, "Varieties of Incontinence: Towards an Aristotelian Approach to Moral Weakness in Moral Education"; Victor Worsfold, "*Akrasia*: Irremediable But Not Unapproachable."
8. Estelle Jorgensen, "Justifying Music in General Education: Belief in Search of Reason"; Iris Yob, "Can the Justification of Music Education be Justified?"; Timothy S. Valentine, "Moral Education and Inspiration Through Theatre"; and Kal Alston, "Are You a Good Witch or a Bad Witch?"
9. Walter Feinberg, "The Goals of Multicultural Education"; Barbara Houston, "Multiculturalism and a Politics of Persistence"; Kenneth Strike, "Taylor, Equality, and the Metaphysics of Persons,"; Stacy Smith, "Voluntary Segregation: Gender and Race as Legitimate Grounds for Differential Treatment and Freedom of Association"; Kevin McDonough, "The Complex Ethics of Separate Schools"; Robert Heslep, "The Moral Presuppositions of Multicultural Education"; Paul Wagner, "Tolerance and Intolerance: Gricean Intention and Doing Right By Our Students"; James D. Marshall, Education in the Mode of Information: Some Philosophical Considerations"; Richard Brosio, "Pixels, Decenteredness, Marketization, Totalism and Ingmar Bergamn's Cry for Help"; Jana R. Noel, "Physical and Cultural Dimensions of Horizon"; Alexander Sidorkin, "The Glass Beads Game."
10. Denise Egea-Kuehne, "Neutrality in Education and Derrida's Call for 'Double Duty'"; Hilary Davis, "The Double-Bind of Double Duty"; Gert Biesta, "Education, Not Initiation"; Frank Pignatelli, "Narrowing the Gap Between Difference and Identity"; Nicholas Burbules, "Deconstructing 'Difference' and the Difference this Makes for Education"; Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Humpty Dumpty An Ovalar Model of Resistance to Modernist Recidivism"; Pradeep Dhillon, "Of Fractious Traditions and Family Resemblances in Philosophy of Education"; Michael Guzenhauser, "Epistemological Reversals Between Chisholm and Lyotard"; Zelia Gregoriou, "Reading *Phaedrus* Like a Girl; Misfires and Rhizomes in Reading Performances"; Greg Whitlock, "Concerning Zelia Gregoriou's 'Reading *Praedrus* Like a Girl'"; Lynda Stone, "A Rhetorical Revolution for Philosophy of Education"; and Jaylynn N. Hutchinson, "A Revolution By Any Other Name."
11. Chris Mayo, "Performance Anxiety: Sexuality and School Controversy"; Maureen Ford, "Opening the Closet Door: Sexualities Education and Active Ignorance."
12. Natasha Levinson, "Beginning Again: Teaching, Natality and Social Transformation"; Wendy Kohli, "Teaching In/For the Unenunciative Present."
13. Huey-li Li, "On the Nature of Environmental Education (Anthropocentrism versus Non-anthropocentrism: The Irrelevant Debate)"; Dale Snauwaert, "The Relevance of the Anthropocentric-Ecocentric Debate"; Paul Morgan, "Reconceiving the Foundations of Education: An Ecological Model"; Xiaodan Huang, "Counter the Dangers of Education."

14. Harry Broudy, "Needed: A Unifying Theory of Education," in *Curriculum Change: Direction and Process*, ed. R.R. Leeper (Washington: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1966).
15. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Richard Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication — Reply to Arcilla and Nicholson," *Educational Theory* 40, no. 1 (1990): 41.
16. See, for example, their contributions to *After Philosophy? End or Transformation?* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).
17. Tony Johnson, *Discipleship or Pilgrimage? The Educator's Quest for Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY, 1995).
18. Wendy Kohli, "Contextualizing the Conversation," in *Critical Conversations in Philosophy of Education*, ed. Wendy Kohli (New York: Routledge, 1995), xiv.
19. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
20. Nicholas C. Burbules and Suzanne Rice, "Dialogue Across Differences: Continuing the Conversation," *Harvard Educational Review* 61, no. 4 (1991): 393-416; Suzanne Rice and Nicholas C. Burbules, "Communicative Virtues and Educational Relations," *Philosophy of Education, 1992*, ed. H.A. Alexander (Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1993): 34-44.