

## Introduction

Chris Higgins

*Teachers College, Columbia University*

This volume includes 27 refereed papers, 2 invited addresses, and 28 invited response essays, together representing the state of the field.<sup>1</sup> Philosophy of education is a vital and growing discipline. This vitality may result from the fact that educational philosophy is as wide-ranging and methodologically diverse as any academic field, while remaining small enough to constitute a genuine community of inquiry. Thus, philosophers of education have learned (and must continue to learn) how to talk across a wide range of significant differences.

Analytic philosophy of education, for example, flourishes alongside the so-called “continental” or history of philosophy of approach. *Philosophy of Education 2004* contains analytic papers on the place of race in moral education (Lawrence Blum); on the grounds of teacher authority (Randall Curren), on the public funding of religious schools (Frances Kroeker), and on the tensions between liberalism and liberal education (Kenneth Strike); as well as papers on figures in the history of philosophy such as Plato (Huey-li Li), Nietzsche (Avi Mintz), and Buber (Sean Blenkinsop). Of course, there are also papers which straddle the analytic/continental distinction such as Duck-Joo Kwak’s investigation of indoctrination and authenticity in teaching or Walter Okshevsky’s discussion of Habermas’s contribution to moral education.

Meanwhile, the terms “continental” and “history of philosophy” themselves conceal a wide diversity of approaches. In this yearbook, we find discussions of continental thinkers such as Foucault (Justen Infinito), Gadamer (Linda O’Neill), and Derrida (Claudia Ruitenberg) as well as work drawing on feminism (Maureen Ford), pragmatism (Chris Hanks), critical race theory (Cris Mayo), and psychoanalysis (Charles Bingham). We find essays on historical figures as diverse as Herbert Feigl (Gary Matthews), Keiji Nishitani (Yoshiko Nakama), and Martin Luther King (Suzanne Rice).

As if this philosophical diversity were not enough, there is also a healthy debate in the field over how closely our work should be tied to schooling and school reform. Some of the papers mentioned above proceed on the assumption that the purpose of educational philosophy is to clarify muddled concepts, raise neglected questions, and reinvigorate moribund debates, but not necessarily to provide prescriptions for practice. On this view, the illumination of fundamental educational issues needs no further justification in the form of a practical payoff in contemporary schools. Indeed, one important function of such work is the reminder it serves that education and schooling are not synonymous.

Still, much work in the field does tend to move from discussion of philosophical concepts or thinkers to broad educational recommendations. In his presidential address, for example, Francis Schrag concludes his inquiry into the tensions between the perfectionist and egalitarian inclinations of educators with a call to

continuing nurturing the “hierarchical republic of letters” integral to the project of liberal education. Schrag proposes that we ought pursue equality through the redistribution of wealth rather than disavowing our love for the “best of what’s been thought and said.”

There is also a growing amount of work that engages directly with policy debates. In this volume, for instance, there is an argument against allowing private donations to public schools on the grounds that the community of moral concern should not be equated with the boundaries of the school district (Ranjana Reddy); a critique of the technical conception of teaching assumed in the call for “scientific,” “evidence based practice” in the No Child Left Behind Act (O’Neill); a review of philosophical discussions of equality in *Educational Theory* in the fifty years since *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Sarah McGough); and an examination of the state’s right to demand that state-funded research be generalizable in the wake of the National Research Council’s report on scientifically-based educational research (Bryan Warnick).

There are also two papers in *Philosophy of Education 2004* that take up directly the question of the nature and role of philosophy of education. Following the revival of Hellenistic philosophy in the work of Hadot and others, Stephanie Mackler notes that philosophy need not be applied to problems of schooling to have an educational relevance. Rather philosophy and education can be seen as already sharing a common project: the art of living well. Emery Hyslop-Margison suggests that contemporary academic work has become alienated labor supporting the neo-liberal state, and urges educational philosophers to choose a genuine intellectual life of public political engagement.

The other papers in the yearbook deal with a wide variety of topics. The liberalism/communitarianism debate, for instance, continues to provide fertile ground for philosophers of education. John Covalesskie worries that liberal culture has not fostered citizens capable of democratic governance, which would require something like a character education in the democratic virtues. Kenneth Strike argues that liberal education, if conducted with integrity, does promote a conception of human flourishing, violating the liberal ideal of neutrality of intent, but that this is so much the worse for liberalism. Eunsook Hong asks how civic education should be conceived in a country such as Korea where the worry is not so much the spillover of comprehensive liberalism into the private sphere, but the tendency to conduct public life on the model of one dominant conception of the good life. In her featured essay, Frances Kroeker aims to show that religious schools can provide adequate civic education in a pluralist society, thus meeting one of the chief objections against the public funding of such schools. Suzanne Rosenblith examines the epistemological strain of teaching religion in a pluralist society, where one must balance respect for difference and respect for truth, reasoning, and evidence.

Questions about diversity and difference animate other papers in this volume. Cris Mayo looks at developments in whiteness theory, worrying that the recent trend toward embrace of white agency is likely to shore up rather than debunk white privilege. Maureen Ford draws on three concepts from feminist theory — arrogant

perception, world traveling, and social uptake—to outline how schools offer pitfalls and possibilities for responding to the difference of students. In an invited address, John Kekes contends that the professoriate has largely abandoned its primary duty—to expand and teach the fund of truths in each discipline—for political activism; and he argues that inclusivist rhetoric in higher education conceals a liberal agenda which excludes conservative points of view from college campuses. In her featured essay, Claudia Ruitenberg explores the conception of language operating in current debates over censorship, showing that neither those who would bar specific expressions from textbooks and class discussions nor those who denounce all such concern as censorship fully appreciate the power and unpredictability of speech acts.

*Philosophy of Education 2004* also contains several papers on moral education. Three papers explore neglected aspects of virtue ethics. Building on the work of Foucault and William Desmond, Justen Infinito offers a new perspective on courage by outlining the varieties of courage required in self-creation and other aspects of the moral life. Suzanne Rice draws from the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., not only to revisit cardinal virtues such as love, courage, and hope, but to consider dispositions such as non-conformity and impatience. Lawrence Blum examines the lack of attention given to issues of race in moral education and proposes two candidates for race-related virtues not reducible to the standard virtues of character education. Walter Okshevsky works out of communicative ethics rather than virtue theory, explaining that Habermas' discourse ethics shows the importance of epistemological considerations to moral education and the moral life.

In addition to the papers by O'Neill, Warnick, Rice, and Okshevsky already described, two other essays in the yearbook deal with topics in epistemology and the philosophy of science. Chris Hanks takes issue with Richard Rorty's claim that for pragmatists there is nothing to say about truth, showing how debates about truth remain fertile ground for a number of key pragmatists. Meanwhile, Michael Matthews examines the epistemological and educational positions of two positivist thinkers, Herbert Feigl and Philipp Frank, to show that most of the views attributed to positivism as the bugbear of educational research are quite at odds with those held by actual positivists.

Another area of focus is the teacher-student relationship. Avi Mintz turns to Nietzsche's middle works to recover a positive notion of discipline for education. Randall Curren explores what might ground a teacher's authority to use force, synthesizing relational and socio-political justifications of the teachers' authority. Duck-Joo Kwak revisits the literature on indoctrination to show that a teacher's moral authority may depend on how authentically she owns up to the contingency and heteronomy of the beliefs she passes on to students. Sean Blenkinsop argues that once Buber's lecture, "Education," is understood in the context of his theological writings, it becomes clear that Buber sees teaching as an asymmetrical relationship which nurtures mutual dialogue to the point that the teacher-student relationship is transcended. Charles Bingham suggests that students should be encouraged to "use" their teachers, and that far from harming teachers such an approach is likely to free teachers from the paralyzing notion that they must endlessly perfect their methods since they alone are responsible for student learning.

Arrogance, authenticity, and authority; censorship, courage, and civic education; democracy, discipline, and dialogue; positivism, perfectionism, and pluralism: even this list fails to exhaust the range of topics. This volume also includes a paper on the cosmological assumptions underlying environmental education (Li) and an essay on the resources offered by Zen Buddhism to respond the widespread nihilism in contemporary life (Nakama). Thus, *Philosophy of Education 2004* brings together a rich assortment of approaches and topics. It reminds us of our common concerns even as it recasts these from a variety of angles and in a fresh light.

I would like to thank my doctoral assistant, James Stillwaggon, for his many hours of painstaking work on this volume and the conference that accompanied it. From administrative labors to substantive editorial work, James handled each task with intelligence and a much-needed sense of humor. I would also like to thank: Fran Schrag for giving me this opportunity and for his solidarity throughout; Kathy Hytten whose tireless work for the society includes bringing each new program chair/yearbook editor up to speed; and, Sarah McGough and Diana Dummitt for their hard work in preparing the manuscript.

---

1. The refereed papers were selected out of 85 submissions, each of which was blind reviewed by three readers. The three refereed papers ranked highest by the program committee and chair were chosen for the honor of “featured essay.”