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An Evaluation of Selected Western Educational Theories

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Abstract

Philosophy of education is concerned with the theory and practice of education. Consequently, philosophy of education can be serviced to the educational theories as well as learners and students of education. The main concern of philosophy of education is to formulate the purpose of education, the method of teaching, what should be taught and how it should be taught and how we should make for the progress of society and state. These ideas are found to be in some Western educational theories. Some thinkers said that education is a state matter and the maintenance of a good society. This paper tries to present that the contributions of some Western educational theories are still useful and applicable for powerful society and the state.

Key words: (1) Philosophy of education (2) educational theories

Introduction

Education can teach how to distinguish what should be accepted and what rejected. The goal of education is to provide knowledge, and the ideals of life. Education should be both for the individual and social perfection. Thus education is absolutely worthwhile for the society. Without education, life will be hard to live and hard to go with the world harmoniously.

Education is the most important sector in a society. Wherever a serious problem arises in a society, education can cure for the problem. So it is more important to get the right kind of education. If there is no right type of education the cultural heritage and the civilization will be lost. It may be said that education is the power of life and of human welfare.

As human culture was changing spontaneously from one generation to another, the components of culture are also changing. In the course of the development of human being the task of teaching and educational system is very important. Philosophers had been confronted with the problem of how to reveal his philosophy as true. This problem can be solved through education. Philosophers began to devote attention to the matter of education. They try to think about the purpose of education, method of teaching and what should be thought. These ideas are known as philosophy of education. In the history of philosophy of education, Greek philosophers had opened the first page of philosophy of education. Then in the modern period philosophical reflection upon education began a new philosophy of education.

Education as making a Better Citizen

Socrates (470-399) is a great philosopher as well as a great teacher. He states that education should make a better citizen and to become a happier individual. Socrates emphasizes man as a member of the group.

According to Socrates, the most valuable thing is knowledge and therefore knowledge is virtue. He had discussed many topics deeply to discover the essential truth. He taught the students to analyze and discuss to know the consistencies and inconsistencies. Moreover the student should ask question to get the truth. Socrates had proposed the method of discussion. In order to get truth one must be discussed. This method consists of taking a statement made by another and analyzing it as to know the inconsistency. This method consists of a series of

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questions until to get the truth. His method is known as dialectic method. So it can be said that Socrates' method is used to be practice of education through the history of West.

Education as the method of Reforming the Individual's Characters and the States

Plato (428- 347) gave us the first fully developed philosophy of education. In his '*Republic*' he ascribed to all human beings, three distinct abilities. They are (1) the ability to reason, (2) the ability for appetite and (3) the ability to enforce the decisions of reason, he ascribed to all states on a similar basis, three functions: (1) function of legislation (2) function of economic production and distribution, and (3) function of armed enforcement of law and foreign policy.

For Plato, education is the chief method of reforming both the individual's character and the state. In a just character each of the three abilities is exercised to the height of its powers. In a just state, each adult citizen performed that function for which he is best fitted the brightly rational engages in legislation the predominantly spirit, and the chiefly appetitive operate the economy.

A system of universal, compulsory, public education from birth to maturity ought to be instituted to bring about this individual and social improvement. All should be taught to read, to write, to count, to appreciate the traditional poetry and drama, and to engage in gymnastic exercise. Some should learn the military art, and other should study the science and dialectic. Each student should be tested and should be sent into the state to perform the function appropriate to it. Such a system of education would produce individuals whose souls are as just as their abilities allow and a state whose parts or classes are similarly harmonious.

Plato's theory of education consists of three parts; first he shows that the just state or republic and the just individual are good.

Secondly, Plato provides a metaphysical explanation of human nature and society. Every human being should possess the three abilities, and every state should perform the three functions because they are required by their forms.

Plato's epistemology gives a third support that knowledge is not an infallible; it is more useful than mere opinion. Knowledge is useful in the pursuit of justice. The only method appropriate to acquiring knowledge is that of purely rational inference. The method of learning is identical with that of discovering truth; he argues that instruction should follow the path of education wherever that is possible. Plato shares with Socrates the conviction that virtue can be known and that it is the business of education to reform conventional morality in its direction.

Education as a State Matter

Aristotle (384-322) believed that the aim of education is to make people virtuous. There are three periods in the training of education. The first period is from the birth to seven years.

In this period a child should train of the body. The second age is from seven to twenty-one years. This period should be for the formal school in this age, a student should train literature, music and gymnastics.

According to Aristotle education is a state matter. The state should determine how children should live. Moreover, the state should determine for the marriage of the student. Finally the state should use education to develop the citizen. The citizen can defend the state and make it better. So both Plato and Aristotle try to use education as a means of training good citizen.

Education as the Maintenance of Good Society

John Locke (1632-1704) accepted each man is a mental substance joined to the bodily substance. Mental activity can be described wholly in terms of two faculties: understanding

and will. The faculty of understanding enable man both to know and to desire. The exercise of education will consist in choosing desires for realizations where they conflict.

Society is based on a natural division of labor and on the need to care for off spring. The original common of the world was largely transformed into private property. Disputes inevitably arose. Since all men possessed the power to enforce the law of nature, they often could not be settled friendly. Political society came into existence to settle such dispute. The exercise of governmental power is legitimate only where it protects private-property rights.

According to Locke, a government must have popular representation, parliamentary determination of the sovereign, majority rule, and separation of legislative from executive power. Such government is the best to protect private property rights.

The purpose of education for Locke, is to produce men who will advance the happiness of community. They must be good character and property disposed toward learning.

The proper disposition toward learning possession of it but an esteem for it and the habits of acquiring can best be acquired by a tutorial education at home, by a method of putting one instinctive desire against another in order to establish them and by presentation of clear and distinct ideas to the pupils.

In both moral and intellectual training one should appeal to the interest of the child, bring him to learn for himself and give public approbation to his success. The child who will benefit from such disposition and who will contribute to the happiness of the community is the son of landed gentle man, who can look forward to a place in government. The poor should be given sufficient education to make them religious and self-supporting.

"The aim of education, Locke argued, should be an individual who knew all the proper methods of association with his fellows, who was wise in the ways of the world so that he could take care of himself at all times, who was pious, and who had enough knowledge to meet the demands of his environment. This, of course, was a practical education which would fit the young man for complete living in the world of Locke's days."²

The production and maintenance of good society is the chief objective of Locke's theory of education. The moral and intellectual training of the gentlemen will cause him to conclude that we can be perfectly certain of any proposition whose truth we can intuit, demonstrate, or perceive through our senses.

Education as a Process of Permitting and Making Possible the Natural Growth of the Child

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) thinks that the theory and practice of school especially depends on the kindergarten. He claims that the goal of education is to integrate the development of the individual, society, nature, and God. He believes that the nature of the child is good and the child should grow naturally. With regard to this point he said that

"He called his school the kindergarten, the garden of children. For him the school was to be operated as one might operate a garden. The teacher should permit and help the children to grow, just as the gardener helps the flowers to grow."³

According to Froebel the child is not merely an individual, but is also a member of the society. So the child should adjust himself to a society. On the other hand, Froebel also realized society and it's helpful in the development of the complete personality. Moreover society should designate what shall be taught in the school. Teachers are certified by the society. Therefore society is very important in education. Education is controlled by the state, and it must contribute to the citizen in the state. All of these factors show that society should have a major interest in education.

¹ S.E. Frost, jr, *Basic Teaching of the Great Philosophers*, New York, Dolphin Books Doubleday & Company, 1962, p.220

² S.E. Frost, jr, *Basic Teaching of the Great Philosophers*, New York, Dolphin Books Doubleday & Company, 1967, p.223

Education as a Life-Long Affair

This theory is held by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), English mathematician, logician, philosopher of science, and metaphysician. Whitehead regards philosophy as the critic of abstraction. Philosophy must create the ideal in harmony with scientific developments. Whitehead was a gentleman, soft-spoken, never overbearing or threatening. He encouraged students to step out on their own.

According to Whitehead, there can be no successful society till general education gives a philosophic outlook. So education is very important for a society. The aim of Whitehead is to reconcile the inconsistencies of the great philosophers. So a satisfactory philosophy must be comprehensive, and must be compatible with the development of modern sciences.

Whitehead declares that any serious fundamental change in the outlook of human society must necessarily be followed by an educational revolution. Moreover like Plato, Whitehead regards education as a life-long affair for the early childhood to the old age. Whitehead complains against metaphysics and abstract theories. His philosophy reflects his educational views.

"In the Aims of Education he says: whatever its weight of authority, whatever the high approval which it can quote, I have no hesitation in denouncing it as one of the most fatal, erroneous, and dangerous conceptions ever introduced into the theory of education. The mind is never passive; it is a perpetual activity, delicate, receptive responsive to stimulus."⁴

According to Whitehead education is discipline for the adventure of life. In this adventure, it includes intellectual adventure and the universities which are homes of adventure. Successful education must always be certain freshness for the knowledge. Education is an active process. It contains within itself the problem of keeping knowledge alive. Whitehead affirms that for all education the main cause of failure is staleness.

According to Whitehead there are three main methods in a system of education namely, the literary curriculum, the scientific curriculum, the technical curriculum. But each of these curricula should include the other two. Every form of education should give the pupil a technique, a science, a general ideas and aesthetics appreciation.

Whitehead regards teaching as an art in fact the function of art is to turn the abstract into the concrete, and the concrete into the abstract.

Education as the Social Progress of the Individual

John Dewey (1859-1952), an American philosopher, social critic, and theorist of education in the twentieth century is the most popular philosopher of education. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), British philosopher considered that happiness consists of three distinct features. These are pleasure, duty and self-realization. For many people, he believed that education should promote the vast amount of happiness. Based on the idea of Mill, Dewey accepts that pleasure is the satisfactory of the personal activity; duty is the most satisfactory activity. Self realization is that which the individual most genuinely prefers. Self realization is most widespread throughout society. His view depends on human nature. Dewey held that

"A nation is composed of political parties, religious institutions, court, etc. A good society is one which, by virtue of the ways in which its subordinate institution fit together enables growth in satisfaction for its citizens. According to Dewey, education is the process of imposing on the impulse of infants the society or the set of group habits into which the infants are born; it is the perpetuation of society. For since one of the habits to be imposed upon impulse is that of acting intelligently, education must also foster the reform of society toward on ever better condition."⁵

³ Robert R Rusk, *Doctrine of the Great Educators*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1967, p.341

⁴ Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1967, p.240

According to Dewey, education is the set of group habit or perpetuation of society. In other words education is also the basic for social process. Education should teach everything that any one is intransitive in learning. The students should interest in the subject matter he should learn. He should also participate in school affairs. According to Dewey ethical ideal is also important for the objective of education. So to be morally good is to be a set of consequences. Moreover the intelligent person can lead a better life. For Dewey, Education is not for the preparation of life, education itself is life and life itself is education.

Conclusion

As education is important, philosophy of education also plays a vital role in society. Some educational theories hold that a certain body of knowledge must form the basis of human culture and which should be transmitted to each generation. According to Socrates, education should make a better citizen. Moreover he used the technique of question and answer to reach the final conclusion of the problem under discussion. His method is still applicable and advantageous for both the teachers and the students at present. For Plato, in his philosophy of education, he sets forth an educational theory that is a view about the facts of human nature and society on which are based recommendations about the curriculum, the method and administration of education regard as means to the ultimate goal of just and good citizen living in a just and good society. Thus his method should be studied for us. For John Locke, the production and maintenance of good society is the chief objective. Such a society is one in which men find pleasure or happiness in the performance of duty. Duty is obedience to natural law as embodied in civil law concerning the protection of property. Therefore his idea seems to be useful for the pleasure and happiness of the individual and society. According to Froebel, society must not be ignored the child to be educated. The society must support the child and schools. Froebel had recognized the society for the necessity of education. So we should study his method for the development of the child and the state. According to Whitehead, teaching is an art. His emphasis may be more on the abstract or more on the concrete. It is also known as the problem of form and matter. Nevertheless according to his view, one thing is sure that education is the most important discipline for the adventure of life.

If a serious problem arises in society, this problem may be solved by education. So it is more important to get the right kind of education. Thus we should learn above Western educational theories for the improvement of our society.

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