

John P. Portelli
Mount Saint Vincent University

Controversies in Teaching

A review essay

William Hare.
CONTROVERSIES IN TEACHING.
London, Ontario: The Athlouse Press, 1985.
139 pp. \$8.95.

As a distinct area of academic study, philosophy of education is a recent development. However, if one seriously reviews the abundant publications in this area, one cannot doubt that there is such a thing as the philosophy of education. One can also safely conclude that during the last twenty five years, work in philosophy of education has been predominantly influenced by analytic philosophy which has been the major mode of doing philosophy in "general" or "mainstream" philosophy since the beginning of this century.

If one focuses on the works of philosophers of education during the last decade one can observe two phenomena: (i) A rather harsh and, in my view, extreme and somewhat misdirected criticism of the recent work in analytic philosophy of education due to a lack of recognition of the second phenomenon to be identified, and (ii) The mode of doing analytic philosophy of education in the last decade has changed.

Analytic philosophers of education, who have softened the exclusivity of their extreme analytic stance, have, without abandoning an analytic stance, recognized the relevance of normative (in particular, ethical) and contextual dimensions to philosophy of education. One is referred to, for example, the work of R.S. Peters, R.F. Dearden, Pat White, Jonas F. Soltis, and Robin Barrow. It is thus historically **erroneous** to say that analytic philosophers of education have had no interest in normative issues. (Whether or not the normative positions put

forth are tenable is another matter which has to be decided on the basis of the soundness of the arguments put forth in defence of a certain view).

Following the recent developments in "mainstream" philosophy, analytic philosophers of education have reflected on their early work, realized certain mistakes and broadened their approach to analysis and made their work more relevant to specific practical educational issues. As George F. Kneller (1984) has observed: "During the last decade...analysts have become less obsessed with ordinary language and readier to engage in moral and social criticism. Some have begun to evaluate educational institutions and recommend reform. They are tackling such controversial issues as the right to equal education, the rights of children, affirmative action, and reverse discrimination. They are speaking out on such practical problems as desegregation, moral education, curriculum choice, and teaching as a profession" (p.25-26). Moreover, they have also defended substantial positions although these have varied from one author to another. Some still talk about analytic philosophers of education as if they are expected to produce and defend **common** views about, for example, epistemological, ethical, or metaphysical theories. It is important to note, however, that there is not, for example, such a thing as **an** analytical, epistemological, or metaphysical view though analytic philosophers have defended very substantial views on such matters. (See, for example, the work of A.R. White, Saul Kripke, P.F. Strawson, and D.W. Hamlyn).

The work of William Hare falls within the recent developments in analytic philosophy of education. This is evident in his book **Open-mindedness in Education** (1979) as well as in one of his recent books **Controversies in Teaching (1)**. **Controversies in Teaching** consists of a selection of Hare's published articles between 1970 and 1979 "which seemed of most interest to practising teachers" (p.vii). The author thus hopes that this book will encourage teachers to reflect on the basic issues that arise in the educational process. The articles, which are grouped in four parts -- "Slogans in Education", "Aims", "Teacher Education" and "The Role of the Teacher" -- have been edited in order to include more recent references and to have uniformity. The book also includes a new and helpful introductory chapter on the nature and value of philosophy of education.

To fully appreciate the articles in this book one ought to understand and keep in mind the framework within which Hare operates. He distinguishes between two senses of philosophy: (i) The popular usage of the term philosophy as when one talks about "the philosophy of life" or "the philosophy of the team"; philosophy is seen as a superscience which provides an encompassing outlook about something, and (ii) Philosophy as the discipline which examines arguments, concepts, and forms of justification. Hare defends the latter conception of philosophy.

Work in analytic philosophy has been associated with this view of philosophy. Unfortunately critics have identified the role of this mode of doing philosophy simply with clarifying concepts by analysing the usage of the term or terms in question. And they conclude that such a linguistic exercise is futile for it does not lead to philosophical progress. Such an interpretation of analysis is too narrow and incomplete.

As Hare clearly explains in the introductory chapter, "any simplistic view of analysis (i.e., the one that identifies analysis with ordinary language usage analysis) is inadequate" (p.2). What are then the qualities of conceptual analysis? According to Hare, analysis is "interested...in trying to bring out those features which are necessary to the idea in question" (pp.1-2), or "to ask which features or aspects are central to a practice, institution, or concept" (pp.3-4); analysis examines claims and elucidates assumptions in order to test the connection between such claims and assumptions to practical recommendations; "analysis can often reveal that value judgements are lurking in what appear to be descriptive claims" (p.4), and deals with the question of justifying value judgements (p.27), and analysis investigates and clarifies the arguments put forth for something or some view we believe in or adhere to, and in doing so "analysis can begin that process of self-awareness, which, as Socrates realized, is the beginning of wisdom" (p.5). (It is important to note that the process of self-awareness, which is usually associated with an existential perspective, is related to and of interest to analysis).

Hare, then, is working within a modified and more valuable framework which includes a concern for clarity of thought and argument, relates to practical educational concerns, discusses crucial normative issues that arise in the educational process, and defends substantive positions. The philosophical and educational issues discussed in **Controversies in Teaching** are relevant to those concerned with theoretical and practical problems in education. Moreover, the inquiry of these issues is carried out in a very intelligible and sensible way.

What are some of the concepts and positions Hare analyzes and clarifies? How are they related to practical educational concerns? The concepts he examines include the following: "relevance" (Ch.2), "innovation" (Ch.3), "appreciation" (Ch.5), "culture" in relation to education (Ch.6), "being disadvantaged" (Ch.7), "practice teaching" and "models of field experience" (Ch.9), "Controversial issues" (Ch.11), and "teaching", "teacher" and "critic" (Ch.12). In each case the analysis is carried out, keeping in mind the educational context from which Hare cites several examples. Moreover, the conclusions of the analyses are related to certain educational recommendations. For example, in Chapter 5, "Appreciation as a Goal of Education", he points out the relevant considerations (arising from the analysis of appreciation) which influence curriculum recommendations. According to Hare,

these considerations point out or "argue for the appropriateness of appreciation as a goal of aesthetic education" (p.58). Accepting such a goal and attempting to achieve it will introduce "rational argument and discussion into the educational context" (p.59). The activity of appreciation does not call for further justification since "the objective is to estimate value" (p.59), and it also reminds us of "the importance of the education of the emotions in the aesthetic domain" (p.60).

Hare also examines and criticizes the assumptions and implications of some popular educational positions and slogans, for example, "to learn is to experience and such experiences should be enjoyable" (Ch.2). He carefully and at considerable length deals with Holt's view in **Escape from Childhood**, such as, that "the rights, privileges, duties, and responsibilities of adult citizens be made available to any young person of whatever age, who wants to make use of them" (p.41), or "the right of curiosity" (p.47). Also dealt with are Kohl's views with regard to teacher preparation and certification - that certification is not necessary for someone to convey what one knows and that one should not be prevented from sharing with others what one knows.

As stated earlier, Hare does not simply investigate educational concepts and positions; he puts forth and defends some very substantive positions.

1. Hare holds that not all experiences and learning are educationally valuable, and "enjoyment is not a necessary condition of learning" (p.16). In other words, more than simply referring to something as being an experience is needed to justify the inclusion of that thing in an educational program. As Dewey (1938) warned us, we have "to discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not" (p.33), for "experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other" (p.25). With regard to the second part of this position, Hare admits that "it may be desirable to make our lessons as enjoyable as possible" (p.16), but this does not mean that all educational experiences have to be enjoyable. Some have related the notion of "enjoyment in education" to "fulfilling one's desires." But again as Dewey (1938) pointed out, fulfilling one's desires does not always lead to educational experiences: "Desire for something may be intense. It may be so strong as to override estimation of the consequences that will follow acting upon it. Such occurrences do not provide the model for education" (p.69).

2. Although the point may be contrary to popular belief, Hare argues that in educational matters "relevance is not our only, nor our most important value" (p.24). This position arises partly because of his adherence to the view that "educational activities can be regarded as having **intrinsic value**" (p.24). Contrary to Jane R. Martin's view (1979), but following R.S. Peters, Hare believes that the distinction between intrinsic and

extrinsic value to educational activities makes sense. Given such a view, then the question of relevance with regard to activities within the intrinsic value category does not arise, for such activities can be pursued "not merely because they lead on to something else" (p.24). If this distinction is accepted, and given Hare's analysis of relevance, then, in my view, it follows that most of the popular attacks on the inclusion of certain activities in the educational process are misdirected. In other words, such criticism as X ought not to be included in the educational process because X is not relevant to future employment or not related to the real world (whatever that means) are misdirected criticisms, if X is worthwhile in itself. The question which needs to be further investigated and which is not dealt with by Hare is: "How do we identify that something is worthwhile in itself?"

3. With regard to "the right of curiosity" defended by Holt, Hare argues that restrictions of this right do not always lead to the denial of freedom of thought (Chapter 4).

4. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, which deal with aims in education, Hare proposes and contends for certain goals and objectives. For example, he defends the appropriateness of application as a goal of aesthetic education and the implications of accepting such a goal. With regard to the area of cultural diversity he includes the following objectives: the development of **awareness** of the fact of cultural diversity, the development of an **understanding** of other cultures, the development of the **respect for persons**, and the development of **critical ability**.

5. On several occasions Hare raises the moral question of the justification of the content of the curriculum. One kind of justification that he offers in the chapter on "Education Amid Cultural Diversity" goes thus: "...if education is centrally concerned with the development of understanding, then it is reasonable to take into consideration the **problems** and **issues** which will call for understanding in the student's life" (p.65). He emphasizes that "these sorts of considerations, rather than political ones for example, are relevant in determining a school curriculum" (p.66). And this is in line with the comments he makes in the introductory chapter with regard to the distinction between educational and political considerations. Although one can formally distinguish the political realm from the educational realm, it seems to me, that there might be cases where political considerations become relevant in determining a curriculum -- in such cases the two realms would be very closely related. As Mary Warnock (1977) argues: "It is impossible **wholly** to separate educational from moral and political arguments" (p.10). This line of thought is also pursued by Pat White (1973).

6. Hare defends, in principle, the idea of teacher preparation and certification even if teaching, in the sense of "forcing information", is substituted by "guiding and assisting" (Ch.8).

7. Chapter 10 speaks for the worthwhileness of including philosophy (in the second sense identified earlier) courses both in a B.Ed. program as well as in schools.

8. Hare, in making some suggestions with regard to the manner of teaching controversial issues, argues for their inclusion, and establishes that it is logically impossible to give "a general argument" for neutrality in education (Ch.11).

9. Hare defends the view that teaching is, among other things, an intentional activity, i.e., one that aims at producing learning, which is the role of the teacher although the teacher may do other things (for example, make a contribution to knowledge). And so, he concludes that "the teacher needs to gauge the state of mind of those whom he is teaching" (p.112). With regard to the role of the teacher, his sympathies would not be with the extreme child-centered theorists, although he grants that such theorists do have some valuable suggestions to make (See p.125). Hare's remarks on the role of the teacher are similar to those of Dewey, who criticized the extreme progressivist view. He believed that the educator ought to utilize the situations available in order "to **lead the learner** on to grasp the relation in the given cases of experience" (Dewey, 1938, p.84). Moreover, the teacher is conceived as a mature person who has the responsibility to guide "the pupil's intelligence" (p.71) and this is seen as "an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it" (p.71).

These examples should be enough to establish my claim that Hare's work falls within the more recent developments in analytic philosophy of education. Although in his substantive positions he does not provide an elaborate, encompassing philosophical view (in the traditional sense of philosophy), nonetheless one should not get the impression that these positions are unrelated and disjointed. Most of these views are a logical unfolding and application of his conception of education -- one that comes very close to that of R.S. Peters -- whose characteristics he identifies in various chapters. One might also get the impression that Hare's view of education is a "conservative" one that merely defends the **status quo**. This is not the case. As I pointed out earlier, some of his views are reminiscent of some of Dewey's views. Moreover, when called for by the principle of justice, Hare admits of fundamental social change (p.22).

The topics discussed in this collection of articles are varied and provocative, and they ought to be of interest and relevance both to philosophers of education and teachers; they definitely ought to encourage students in education to undertake further research in the field of philosophy of education, which according to R.S. Peters (1983), ought to be both practically relevant and philosophically competent -- two qualities which are present in **Controversies in Teaching**.

NOTE

Hare has published another book in 1985: **In Defence of Open-mindedness** (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press).

REFERENCES

- Dewey, John. (1938). **Experience and education**. New York: Collier Books.
- Kneller, George F. (1984). **Movements of thought in modern education**. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Martin, Jane R. (1979). Response to Roemer. In Jerrold R. Coombs (Ed.), **Philosophy of education, 1979** (Proceedings of the 35th Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, 190-194). Normal, IL: Philosophy of Education Society.
- Peters, R.S. (1983). Philosophy of education. In P.H. Hirst (Ed.), **Educational theory and its foundation disciplines**, 30-61. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- White, Pat. (1973). Education, democracy and the public interest. In R.S. Peters (Ed.), **The philosophy of education**. London: Oxford University Press.