Book Reviews

Postmodern Philosophical Critique and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Higher Education
Roger P. Mourad Jr, 2000
Westport, CT, Bergin & Garvey
121 pp.
ISBN 0-89789-488-X (hbk)

In his *Postmodern Philosophical Critique and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Higher Education*, Mourad argues that because the influence of postmodernism is now evident in all disciplines in higher education, it is important to explore the significance of its critique especially for what it means to engage in scholarly inquiry. To this end, he employs a mixture of Continental, and American pragmatic philosophers—Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, and Schrag. His message is that the importance of postmodernism lies in its challenge to the modernist belief that our ‘intellect can direct human civilization toward a progressive realization of ideal forms of human existence and understanding that are universal, knowable, and achievable’ (p. 2). This condition is commonly known as the project of modernity, a project that Mourad says Jurgen Habermas identifies with the French Enlightenment. But both modernists and postmodernists would agree that, even though the Enlightenment project is still the dominant cultural form underpinning education throughout the Western world today, the historical record shows it clearly falls short of realizing its own humane intentions. While modernists seek to reform and improve their project, postmodernists want to move intellectual discourse out of the modern. Modernism, he claims, believes in progress through getting close to the essential nature of things, including human nature. Postmodernism’s incredulity towards such absolute foundations as ‘human nature’, ‘reason’, ‘progress’, ‘truth’, and ‘science’, is its point of departure from modernism. Clearly this political project goes beyond the boundaries of any one discipline. If successful, postmodernism would be a severe challenge to the disciplines, and, of course, to higher education, as we know it.

The Modernist Realm

Mourad explores the foundations of inquiry in higher education with an exposé of its progressive conceptions of truth, science, democracy and humanity. He argues that the form of inquiry based on such notions is rooted in the past, and is, therefore, inadequate for today’s conditions. A fundamental aim of modern philosophical work is ‘the pursuit of an essential epistemological foundation’ (p. 6), much of which speculates on the progress of science. Mourad suggests, however, that there is ‘no
theory of knowledge without an inquiry' (p. 7) and, he argues, universities have got it wrong; they take the disciplines as preexisting realities, as a priori to inquiry; these disciplines continue essentially unchanged after any such inquiry. Even inquiry itself that 'seeks knowledge of preexistent reality with the aim of showing that it should be changed, does not avoid this critique' (p. 7). For Mourad, such intransigence limits, and eventually defeats, modern inquiry's aim of making a better world. Because the intellect of the inquirer is assumed to be outside this reality, modernists regard theory as the bridge between intellect and reality. In this view, theory is seen as an aspect of a pre-given reality, a 'human re-creation of reality in the form of an explanation of the way something as independent of the knower' (p. 78), an autonomous object, however obscure. In the modern university this theory has the status of 'pure' theory, and approaches the autonomy of its object. This type of theoretical knowledge is foundational because it has an autonomous object; theory is one step removed from reality, a view borrowed from science. A second type— theoretical knowledge of practice—is regarded as inferior as it is two steps removed from the essence of its object. Pure theory is seen as superior because it is the practice of gaining access to its object, that is, things that are independent of the knower and thus independent of the practices that access it. Universities regard their work as being about 'pure' theory. 'It is arguable that an implicit justification for academic freedom is grounded in the belief the inquiry pursues knowledge of objects that are independent and objective' (p. 79). Because this view of theory is associated with the search for truth, it might also be credibly argued that it is also a moral position that gives academic freedom an ethical quality. In addition to the disciplines, academic fields of study are also implicated and 'interdisciplinarity is sometimes offered as a way out'. But, Mourad argues, interdisciplinarity is largely an 'uncritical extension of the disciplines rather than a critical alternative' (p. 80). 

Despite the productive value of the disciplines, they are also problematic. For instance, their very success has produced incoherence as ever more distinctions are developed to categorize knowledge.

Although Mourad wants to move beyond the disciplines, he still wants to retain them because to ignore them would 'imply the 2600 years of inquiry of preexisting, persisting, reality is not legitimate, which is unreasonable' (p. 8). Through cross-disciplinary inquiry, he wants to use the disciplines as a base for expanding inquiry rather than constraining it. Space must be created outside the disciplines 'to generate intellectually compelling ideas' (p. 8). The aim of inquiry, then, becomes exploration, rather than explanation, and creation, rather than improvement. Such research would require scholars from disparate disciplines to combine. This would be Mourad's model of the postmodern university.

In the modern university, inquiry is associated with 'progress', 'science', 'democracy', and 'humanity', each of which is associated with the social good. Although it does not exhaust its possibilities as a guide to its purpose, such social good is a major aim of higher education. Even the nostalgic idea of 'inquiry for its own sake' is embedded in a relation to one or more of the modern foundational purposes. And each purpose proposes a unified society whose origins of truth, science, democracy, and humanity, are located in past times, which include Classical Greece,
European Renaissance, and the French Enlightenment. Progress based on these modernist ideas is to be a collective effort carried out on behalf of society. 'The authority of the past is still the guide for addressing current problems, because these problems are essentially manifestations of classical questions. Therefore, appropriate inquiry for these problems leads us towards truth' (p. 14). This is because modernists accept that the human condition is ahistorical and universal, and wisdom can be accumulated to establish the conditions of possibility for inquiry. For example, '[f]or Whitehead, human civilization improves itself over time, because it has to, and practical Reason, which renders knowledge effective, is essential in that improvement ... the basis of all authority is the supremacy of fact over thought' (p. 15). 'The substance of good citizenship is knowledge of a common language of the Western cultural and intellectual tradition' (p. 20). The very multiplicity of interpretations is possible only on the basis of this common language.

Mourad also points out that the attempt to show that Newman's idea of a university as an educationally justifiable foundation by extending its reach to the global community 'seems to go too smoothly, given [the] acknowledgment that the university is in crisis' (p. 22). To simply reform the university is inadequate because modernist reform leaves its foundations intact which 'may be symptomatic of a larger oversight among the multitudes of contemporary critiques of higher education' (p. 22). In contrast, he argues, progress might be made through the deconstruction of unquestioned modernist assumptions.

Mourad's Postmodern Criticisms

The significance of postmodern critique for scholarly inquiry, then, is that it questions the efficacy of the assumption that Enlightenment notions of progress are actually possible. From almost any perspective (e.g. technological, genealogical, moral), the modern pursuit of knowledge has reached intractable limitations and requires alternative ways of conceptualizing and structuring inquiry. Mourad's first line of attack is through the work of Lyotard for whom knowledge involves patterns of linguistic expression that are embodied in language games. Although not an exhaustive basis for understanding social relations, language games are a bare minimum for society to exist. Whether explicit or not, the rules of a language game that concern truth are the basis of a contract. Scientific knowledge, for example, requires that a 'time' standard be experimentally verifiable according to the rules of science. Because scientific knowledge has had such high status as truth per se, it is worth noting that science is a form of social authorization through public discourses—an authorization process carried out by public officials who are not scientists but who often authorize science through the use of performative language under agreed protocols. This performativity is legitimated by virtue of their status as agents of the State, itself often the sole funding authority. Both science and traditional discourses are forms of legitimation and both resort to narrative; it is the narratives that determine the criteria of competence and illustrate how they must be applied. Although different kinds of language games are incommensurable with each other, science is worthy of special attention because its legitimation 'has particular
Two overarching narratives have legitimated modern science. The first is the political version that wants to empower people from political domination. This form deals with a universal meta-subject that is ‘the people’ who are supposedly self-governing, but because science cannot prescribe morals and yet still wants to play its own game of legitimating itself, this narrative has become delegitimated. The second narrative concerns the historical meta-subject that legitimates itself through historically unfolding reason and the state plays an equivalent game. This game has collapsed because ‘its metaphysical foundation was revealed to be unscientific’ (p. 30).

The historical record shows that in the wake of the decline of such metanarratives, logical positivists attempted to ‘legitimize science on the basis of the authority of the rules of scientific verification’ (p. 30). That attempt failed, of course, because if logical positivism were to account for all phenomena and yet remain constant, ‘it must be grounded on assumptions that cannot themselves be demonstrated’ (p. 30). Other explanations also began to emerge, which effectively undermined science as the one true account. On the basis of fundamental inconsistencies there developed a pluralism of incommensurable languages and truths, all of which, like science, attempted to account for reality and knowledge. Postmodern science reflects this pluralism when it ‘theor[ises] its own evolution as discontinuities, non-rectifiable, and paradoxical’ (p. 30) ‘[and because they] embody perspectives about reality and science ... most scientists would consider to be very unscientific’ (p. 31).

Since the decline of the metanarrative and logical positivism, a new version of the science game has been legitimated. It has been labeled ‘performativity’ because it optimizes its performance through technological innovation and features the demise of ‘the Professor’, a role that underpins the modernist metanarrative. Nowadays, ‘a professor is no more competent than the memory bank networks in transmitting established knowledge [and] no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games’ (Lyotard in Mourad, p. 32). Ultimately, however, systems theory will not work; the modernist pursuit of truth and science under the assumption of an historical progression of ideas ‘implies that reality is stable or evolves systematically over time’ (p. 32), a reality that Lyotard suggests is ‘an ultimately inexplicable multiplicity’ (p. 32). Under a notion of a multiplicity of language games, science on the one hand, and ethics and politics on the other, are comprised of different kinds of statements that are not reducible to one another. Science is denotative whereas ethics and politics are prescriptive, and, in each case the rules are different. For example, justice cannot be derived from scientific and the scientific cannot be derived from the just; justice is, rather, contextualized in local practices. And for Lyotard, scientific knowledge and ethical knowledge are both local knowledges (p. 33). In neither case does the emancipation of ‘the people’ or the universal historical progress of ideas hold. Nevertheless, the modern university subscribes to these two outmoded ideas of emancipation and progress.

Mourad argues that as an alternative we might begin with a notion of inquiry conceived as an intellectual activity rather than with any sense of improving an historical body of knowledge or the liberation of ‘the people’. The purpose of any such alternative activity is to create more rules in the game, or very rarely, to create
a new game, both of which allow for new moves or new activities. The alternative involves an effort to promote postmodernism, which in the modern is present but which, because of its nascent state, is unpresentable. It is precisely because of this nascence that the inquirer in the postmodern condition must be free to experiment rather than merely repeating what is already known or following in the wake of a research programme that must be approved by ethics and other types of research committees. A major flaw in research authorized by committees is that for it to approve a research project, they must already know its outcomes to be able to credibly evaluate its worth, in which case, there would seem to be no point in conducting the research.

To become a 'knower' the inquirer, then, must first be an addressee before being a sender in a conversation. Knowledge derived from free inquiry initially works within the limits of the disciplines but breaks those limits wherever possible. In such a postmodern mode of inquiry, education would not have to be appropriated for other purposes in order to secure its relevance. Mourad suggests that because society is composed of many divergent language games rather than being a unified whole, education could make its own world of practice that produces inquirers who pursue freedom in their activities. This education would be for life, a life focused on the Nietzschean value scale of health and vitality rather than the search for eternal truths, a priori reason, or the universal emancipation of a fictitious meta-subject.

Mourad then moves to the work of Rorty to extend Lyotard's criticism of the (erroneous) modern epistemological project that purports to represent some deeper reality. He says that the value distinction between science and other domains of knowledge is a cultural consideration—a function of educational and other institutional patterns’ (p. 39). For Rorty, language might be better thought of as a set of tools rather than a set of representations—'tools that change their uses and products of their use' (p. 41). This language allows for a conception of meaning that is 'endlessly alterable through a continual recontextualisation of signs’ (p. 41) rather than limiting language to some practical use, a form of ‘abnormal’ knowledge. What Mourad disputes in Rorty's account is the idea that self-reformation through language necessarily makes things more comfortable and secure. In contrast, he argues that truth does not necessarily follow the freedom to speak. It is, rather, abnormal knowledge that sustains inquiry. This is the abnormality that the intellectual community must ‘normalize’, and, through those efforts, hold out the hope of changing practices through different ways of knowing the world. As Rorty suggests, if the disciplinary tradition is based on values rather than fact, the way is open for change; any 'self'-value added by the inquirer would also add to the value in the world and thus legitimate the inquiry.

Mourad says that Schrag articulates a reconfigured idea of reason that incorporates the basic claims of a postmodern critique acknowledges the ‘absence of absolute, ahistorical criteria that leaves intellect in a state of indeterminacy’ (p. 44). Schrag offers what he calls a transversal notion of reason that is ‘operative across disciplines, genres of disciplines, and culture spheres (p. 46), without transcendent truth. Mourad points out that Schrag’s version of reason ultimately fails because it
does not take power relations into account and nor does it admit to the neoconservative nature of much postmodern inquiry.

Mourad also presents the Derridean irresolvable play of opposing signifiers within language as the basis for undecidable opposition. Such play does not avoid politics because play happens from an interpretable position that itself can function as new knowledge of limits and directions for an intellectual community. Derrida says those philosophical texts that attempt to explain truth and knowledge claims unjustifiably invoke what he calls a metaphysics of presence, a condition that is present whenever knowledge is presented as unquestionably whole or pure. Truth and knowledge claims are themselves products of epistemology and, therefore, do not problematise subjectivity; rather, they resonate a metaphysics of presence. The very intellect that conducts a critique is doing so in its Cartesian mode of ‘clear and distinct ideas’, that is, from the basis of what we now view as its own inadequacy; the failing is that it assumes its own knowledge is certain. Under a metaphysics of presence, knowledge claims—including those about the self—are not merely equivalent to other claims; they are foundational modes of understanding all those other claims. Although this self is a cultural construction based on knowledge already assumed, because of the metaphysics of presence, it cannot see its own predicament; the metaphysics of presence implies we are making progress towards the end of history and thus provides an illusion of hope.

In its pursuit of knowledge, Western philosophy has assumed the propriety of speech over graphic writing. The justification has been that, since writing is a signification of a signifier for human thought, it is twice removed from the essence of thought. Speech, on the other hand, is only one stage removed from ‘reality’ and (it is ordinarily claimed), more likely to render an undistorted representation of the inner truth of human thought. Metaphors are derived from writing, thereby defying the claims of philosophy about speech as \textit{a priori}. ‘The apparently inescapable infiltration of the idea of writing into the idea of speech (and vice versa) is not a large scale linguistic or logical error that can be cleaned up by analytic reason. Rather, it is a paradox of signification that renders the idea of knowledge, where “knowledge” is the signification of that which is essentially present to a properly attuned mind, illusory’ (p. 64). Put another way, if knowledge is self-presence, it is a presence legitimated because it is ‘known’ by the knower, it is a circular process; since self-knowledge is based on the metaphysics of presence it is illusory as surely is Western philosophy based on it.

Mourad employs Saussure to explain Derrida’s idea that both the signifier and the signified are presented as complimentary elements of a unified sign. Derrida claims that this process is ‘simply a recent reiteration of the philosophical prioritization of speech over writing’ (p. 65). The meaning of a sign is purely arbitrary; its meaning is derived from its position in a set of sign relations. It follows that a sign itself has no essential meaning. Therefore, the signified concept is not able to refer only to itself for its meaning—otherwise it refers to nothing essential, merely a convention—that is a sign that has no essential meaning. So knowledge based on a sign is not a self-presence; instead meaning comes from a ‘systematic play of differences’ (p. 65). In other words, we cannot know who we are through only knowing ourselves.
Speech can only refer to a unified sign and is not able to deal to a systematic play of differences; speech disappears once it happens, leaving no relationship with other entities. And since the meaning of a sign is arbitrary, signification is a human invention and human thought is inscription before anything else. The privileging of speech as a first-order practice over writing as a second-order practice is thus unjustified. Western philosophy, however, continues to assume the primacy of speech as an indicator of knowledge without reference to writing. In this schema, writing is viewed subordinately as the graphic substitution for speech; this writing is phonetic writing. Here the function of writing is understood as inscription based on an assumption of a unified and durable sign. But graphic writing requires elements such as spacing and punctuation marks that are not phonetic. Such elements serve to indicate differences between words in written text, yet in themselves, they convey no meaning. The differences in sound between spoken words function in the same way—the sound differences also serve to convey differences in meaning even though the sound differences have no meaning in themselves. In both speech and writing, that difference is necessary for meaning but is, in itself, absent or outside meaning, indicating that the idea of pure essence is a fiction. Meaning depends on non-meaning or absences, not pure essences; absence creates presence. Difference, then, has no meaning even though it is a necessary condition for meaning.

Writing and speech both signify meaning but are not identical. Each activity signifies meaning for the other through **différence**, a combination of difference (what the other is not), and **deferral** (delayed meaning that can never be signified). Speech and writing are thus related in a kind of intertextuality. **Différence** is a condition that is signified whenever discourse points towards a transcendental signified (p. 69). Meaning is constituted through difference from writing, and speech is constituted with reference to writing. A sign has meaning in relation to other signs so speech (a sign) has meaning in relation to other signs, one of which is writing. This suggests that speech derives its meaning from its difference (i.e. what it is not) from writing. Writing and speech are both signifiers and ‘[t]here is no form of either of these signifiers that simply mirrors something that is absolutely not itself a signifier’ (p. 67). Thus the sign is disorganized and the idea that there is a presence that is not a sign is problematic. What was previously thought to be an essence is now known as a signification of conventions. Representation is thus tangled with the signed, and so representation has all the problems associated with meaning. Language constructs its object and so language constitutes what it describes; the very activity of description (signification) results in inscription. Inscription is then (re)presented as reality through a signifier that signifies the signified (i.e. inscription) in a circular process; there is, therefore, no pure distinction between signifier and signified. To illustrate this idea, Derrida has inverted the customary hierarchy of meaning (writing is now privileged over speech) not simply to promote one concept over the other but to allow for play in the structures—a recognition that difference can be used creatively. This creativity prevents any meaning, word, position, becoming foundational; play in the structures therefore invests interpretation through speech and writing with the hope of freedom from fixed meanings. Play is not just an undecidable oscillation merely because it destabilizes what is basic to the idea of normal
disciplinary inquiry; play is made possible through difference. Once difference is exposed, it is made potent because an alternative approach to inquiry is exposed. And since the play of difference is generated from what we have, we are not free to leave Western epistemology for an utterly new form (p. 69)—we still need the structures to play with.

Mourad also presents us with a Foucauldian account of power/knowledge, which argues that, although inextricably intertwined and not reducible to each other, power and knowledge imply each other. Knowledge (e.g. the human sciences) has been instrumental in the production of useful and docile subjects through the use of power. Foucault claims those modern political notions like ‘freedom’ and ‘liberation’ are prerequisites of, rather than a response to, totalization. If this is so, education is involved in a political project. And because truth is produced by power/knowledge, truth is also inherently political and, therefore, in the production of truths for the sake of the system itself, ‘intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power’ (p. 60). Education as a system of power produces subjectivities, and is, therefore, integral to the question of who we are. Under Foucault’s idea of the ‘strategic reversibility of power relations’, we could refuse the modernist subjectivity produced in us because not to do so would be to submit to an infinite progression towards absolute control or what Fukyama calls ‘the end of history’. Foucault’s project, then, places us squarely within the politics of institutions. Through the production of an abnormal account of education, Foucault provides a glaringly different view that calls into account current practices. The so-called ‘normal’ or liberal account of education is challenged through such an abnormal genealogical account.

Another problem Mourad deals with is the question of the relation between the inquirer and the object of inquiry. He says the object of the inquiry is separate from the knower, unknown to the knower, independent and unproblematic; the essence of the object must be assumed since it is not known. But under research conditions the knower desires to know the object. Therefore the object is not autonomous of the knower. Any explanation, therefore, achieves a new determinate relationship to the object—there is a movement from indeterminacy to determinacy. All of this gives the appearance of a move from the unfamiliar to the familiar. However, Mourad says this is not really how it is. The indeterminate object is the familiar object in that it is commonplace for people to experience reality as it simply appears without analyzing it. By contrast, to explain an object is to ‘render the object unfamiliar in that it takes the object out of its given, commonplace state and places it in a different state’ (p. 93). In this process theory engenders a sense of the particular, the unusual, and the local, contra the modernist theory that aspires to abstraction and generalization. If explaining the world changes it; ‘an explanation, then, is the end point of an inquiry’ (p. 94). So, seeking familiar situations to be explained and rendered as unfamiliar is the motive for research in this postmodern mode.

If every knower and their relationship to an object is different, without the modernist restriction involved in the search for preexisting reality an inquirer can develop new knowledge through an explanation that redefines the familiar as unfamiliar. There will not ever be a tidy finished result because all explanation
eventually becomes familiar and there is in fact no final truth to be found. If all explanation eventually becomes familiar we could be lulled into a false sense of ‘knowing as truth’, which as Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, and Rorty, argue, is not credible. That is why Mourad positions the inquirer as the beginning of this postmodern pursuit of knowledge; the inquirer has to reject what is given in order to think again for an explanation that renders the familiar unfamiliar. It is not a flight from reason in that reason is but one of the tools of inquiry. New disciplinary knowledge per se is not the desired outcome, inquiry is.

A Cautionary Tale

The caution that follows is more an attempt to alert readers to a need for a wider ‘reading’ of Mourad’s work than can be obtained from merely reading the text itself. It is not meant to denigrate what is otherwise a useful critique of the pursuit of knowledge in higher education. The rationale for what follows is that, for any given text or event, there are appreciable relationships with other texts and events, and strictly speaking, since Mourad’s account is not a creation in any romantic sense, it is vulnerable to other textual interpretations.

In an interesting argument for the benefits of space outside disciplinarity, Mourad has argued for the value of the postmodern position on inquiry as a critique of modernist forms of knowledge. His critique of modernism is based on the problems of ‘empowerment’, belief in ‘scientific progress’, and the problem of ‘pre-existing reality’ that is not affected by the result of inquiry. He deems modernism as skewed in its search for presumed truth under a transcendent rational progressive order. But his characterization may be erroneous. It depends if the view one holds of modernity is limited to this type of metaphysics. If it could be shown that writers in modern period have actually accepted chaos, emotions, complexity and the flux of life generally, Mourad’s argument would be weakened in that postmodernism would be attacking a straw target which, with a minimum of effort, could be destroyed.

The writers employed by Mourad as representative of a postmodern critique of the Enlightenment project of the pursuit of knowledge in higher education—Foucault, Rorty, Derrida, Lyotard, and Schrag—share one thing in common; they want to undermine the idea that there is some deeper reality or identity underlying our world. That is to say, they all may be described as anti-foundationalist thinkers—thinkers who want us to attend to the practices of the world without understanding such practices to be solely the product of some fundamental essence or absolute. Thus the search for, and the belief in, a fundamental essence is the way in which Mourad characterizes the Enlightenment project of the pursuit of knowledge in higher education. There are, however, indications of alternative accounts of the characteristics of the Enlightenment subject.

In his account of the Enlightenment, Wade points to a thinker—Jean-Jacques Rousseau—whose ideas have had a powerful effect on philosophy since the Enlightenment. He says that Rousseau identified more than a priori reason in our make up. For instance, he acknowledged "the power of dreams and asserts that had all his
dreams turned to realities, he would have imagíné, rêve, désiré, encore'.

‘[H]e believed in the doctrine of the sensations’. ‘Moral conscience he now regards as an innate feeling for virtue, whereas in the past he regarded it as essentially a rational faculty’ (p. 151). ‘[M]oral freedom which is the ultimate good can only be firmly secured if reason is working in close connection with conscience—sentiment intérieur’ (p. 159). ‘All of this would seem to indicate that each of these factors—reasons, feeling, passion, conscience, sentiment intérieur, even prejudices—have a role to play in the nature of man. However, as each plays its role, one becomes aware that no item is solely trustworthy or autonomous’ (p. 159). ‘Rousseau insists that reason which is thus elaborated is very different from the abstract reason of Descartes. ‘This sentiment intérieur, Rousseau defines as (i) an inner conviction added to rational to conclusions, and (ii) a sentiment which can affirm things inaccessible to reason. It is a feeling which is not in opposition to reason. It merely comes to Rousseau’s assistance when reason is suspended. Rousseau explains that the rule to refer these things to feeling is confirmed by reason ... [conscience] is a guide to reason when reason falters’ (p. 164). Contrary to Foucault, Rousseau ‘maintains that there is no difference between knowing one’s self and feelings one’s self’ (p. 174). ‘Human nature is confusion and disorder ... [Rousseau] lacks an organizing reason [and he] blames philosophers in large measure for man’s unsatisfactory conditions. He condemns them for the artificial character of their principles’ (p. 175). ‘Rousseau wants a philosophy at the point of contact of consciousness and reason. It is another morale, another aesthetic, a penetration of soi and nature, another politics and religion. It depends greatly upon the imagination’ (p. 177).

More recently, Mortgenstein has argued that ‘Rousseau’s theory of authenticity calls for the reformulation of these categories of private and public so that these cognitive structures can be envisaged as porous instead of rigidly exclusive [it is] Rousseau’s salient point—that life cannot be reduced to antithetical categories of “Self” and Other’. Mortgenstein says she can discern ‘two principles anterior to reason, one of which ardently interests in our well being and self preservation, and the other [which] inspires in us a natural repugnance at seeing any sentient creature perish or suffer, especially one of our fellow beings’ (p. 58). ‘Although Rousseau first introduces pity as a basic instinct, it is not clear that pity also develops a social quality that allows us communities of people to lead a peaceful, stable existence together’ (p. 58). Although an imperfect groundwork for creating affective authentic social cohesion, ‘Rousseau does not give up on the idea of love as the basis for achieving both personal and political authenticity’ (p. 119).

Rousseau wrote about a new ‘inner’ self of considerable moral substance. Whereas Descartes’ self appealed to logic, Rousseau emphasized feeling rather than reason as the key to the self, ‘and the private sense of goodness rather than the logic of self reference was its justification’ (p. 17). In examining Rousseau’s confessions, Gutman argues that ‘by abandoning himself entirely to his reverie, to the imaginary, the imagining self is annihilated, and the self and nature, me and not me, are merged into an undifferentiated and undivided unity’. In other words, the individual differentiated self must merge with the world in order to create happiness...
ness. Rousseau’s notion of the self is thus not confined to rationality. Rousseau must be taken into account even though ‘[t]o discover a means of weighing judiciously the relative merits of reason, feelings, and conscience in Rousseau would seem to require the wisdom of a Solomon’. And since Wade says it is plausible to argue that ‘since the formation of Christianity, there has been in Western Europe no man more influential upon Western civilization’ (p. 119), we might well highlight Rousseau’s ideas in any account of the Enlightenment project.

Hume also had attempted to expose the limitation of reason. ‘“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions” is a well known expression of his views on reason and the passions. But, also, human beings had personal sentiments, or interests, which were the basis for our moral attitudes and were evoked by the “objects” of moral appraisal. These sentiments could not be subsumed under rationality and could not be over-ridden by others, either by their arguments or by their persuasion or threats’. Houlgate points to Hegel who, he says, is important to any Enlightenment account and who is traditionally said to appeal to a belief in an essentialist or foundational belief, a position for which Houlgate provides a number of powerful references. However, Houlgate argues that this foundationalist interpretation of Hegel is, in fact, deeply mistaken; for Hegel ‘reason does not constitute the foundation of change in the world; reason is not some pre-existing “Idea” (as Nietzsche calls it) that underlies nature or history and drives us forward to freedom. Hegel’s claim is that national and historical change itself proves to be rational, and that rational ends are brought about by nothing other than observable natural processes and historical actions; in this sense Hegel is not a foundationalist’ (p. 27). Houlgate distinguishes Hegel from Derrida, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (and by implication, Foucault and Lyotard who derive and extend their work from Nietzsche and Heidegger). As he argues ‘[a]ny comparison of their thought with that of Hegel would thus have to pay very careful and subtle attention to the different ways in which they submit metaphysical foundationalism—the belief in a unified, identifiable, enduring ground of things—to critique or deconstruction... their thought falls short of Hegel’s radical anti-foundationalism’ (p. 45).

Conclusion

In the limited foray into the question of modern subjectivity in the cautionary tail, this review indicates a self that is not limited to rationality, a view that is a foundational element in Mourad’s attack on postmodernism. These limitations do not discount Mourad’s Postmodern Critique, however; it is a persuasive argument that presents a useful poststructuralist critique of higher education. Admittedly, the questions posed by Rousseau, Hume and Hegel are above and beyond the task Mourad set for himself, they do point to possible and fruitful lines of inquiry into the further possibilities for a critique of the pursuit of knowledge in higher education. Finally, because the Postmodern Critique assumes considerable prior philosophical knowledge, it would be more suitable for the advanced pursuit of knowledge (ironically) in higher education rather than undergraduate work.
Notes

1. It is important to note that Foucault did not regard himself as a postmodernist.

2. See e.g., Michel Foucault, Power knowledge, in: Colin Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham & Kate Soper, p. 118 (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1977).

3. See, e.g., Michel Foucault, Afterword: the subject and power, in: H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, pp. 208–226 (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982).

4. I owe this line of thinking to my colleague, James Marshall.

5. O. Wade, *The Structure and Form of the Enlightenment*, Vol. II, *Esprit révolutionnaire*, p. 124 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977).

6. Wade, p. 124.

7. M. Mortgenstein, *Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity: self, culture, and society*, p. 245 (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

8. Michel Foucault, Truth and power, in: Colin Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham & Kate Soper, p. 115 (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1977).

9. Wade, p. 158.

10. James Marshall, ‘Varieties of neo-liberalism: a Foucauldian perspective’. *New Zealand Association for Research in Education*, AREA Conference, New Orleans, 2000.

11. S. Houlgate, Hegel’s critique of foundationalism in the ‘Doctrine of Essence’, in: Anthony O’Hear (Ed.), *German Philosophy Since Kant. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 44*, pp. 25–45 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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**School Choice and Social Justice**

Harry Brighouse, 2000

Oxford, Oxford University Press

222 pp.

ISBN 0-19-829586-3

Harry Brighouse begins his book outlining a new theory of justice for education with the following admission:

When I started reading about education policy I was dismayed by two recurrent features of the literature: the lack of clarity on all sides about what counted as social justice in education, and why; and the paucity of influence that egalitarian liberalism, which, quite rightly in my view, predominates in political philosophy, has had on theorizing about education. (p. 1)

There would be more clarity, he adds, if egalitarian liberalism had more influence, and he offers his view in the hope that it will ‘undermine the success of post-modern, communitarian and libertarian theories that distract education theorists from what really matters’ (p. 2). I would have thought that the most direct way of undermining
postmodernism and communitarianism would be to engage with these positions in argumentation rather than laying out some new position. Yet Brighouse offers nothing more than a series of glancing blows at postmodernism and communitarianism and certainly not a systematic engagement with texts. His one comment is that both postmodernism and communitarianism ‘are bound to a relativism about values’ (p. 4).

This is a criticism that I have heard endlessly repeated, like a mantra, which in face of the complete non-examination of particular positions or arguments, is simply fatuous. It is like dismissing ‘egalitarian liberalism’ on grounds of cultural imperialism. The charge is empty and operates as a kind of polemic unless one can make it stick in relation to the consideration of particular authors or positions. At the very least, I would expect a discussion of particular texts, arguments or positions adopted by particular authors to show that they embrace a relativism about values, and, in addition, an argument to demonstrate that they share certain features. Without providing either, and summarily, Brighouse dismisses postmodernism and communitarianism as relativist, depriving ‘us of the ability to advance cogent moral critiques of existing institutions’ (p. 4). This one line dismissal of two complex traditions, of course, makes a nonsense of, say, Michel Foucault’s detailed ‘moral’ and historical critiques of the prison, the clinic, and the school, and of his return to the liberal ethical subject in his later writings (see, for instance, Foucault, 1997).

It is simply not the case that we cannot advance moral cogent critique of existing institutions without the liberal universalism Brighouse entertains. Like Richard Rorty (1999, p. xvi), I think the word relativist should be dropped from our vocabulary, especially if it means that we have ‘to accept the Greek distinction between the way things are in themselves and the relations which they have to other things, and in particular to human needs and interests’. Indeed, I think Rorty (ibid.) is right in arguing both that ‘we have to give up on the idea that there are unconditional, transcultural moral obligations, obligations rooted in an unchanging, ahistorical human nature’ and that this attempt is what unites European post-Nietzschean philosophy and American pragmatism. As it stands Brighouse’s comments about postmodernism and communitarianism do more to brand and characterise his own ‘egalitarian liberalism’ than providing any intelligent discussion of what might be considered to fall outside political liberalism. It is a classic move for liberals of Brighouse’s persuasion, to lay out criteria for a universally true liberalism in terms of ethical individualism, neutrality, autonomy, tolerance and the like, then to consistently fail to employ such criteria at the level of their own argumentation.

There are illuminating analytical accounts of the moral theory of poststructuralism. Todd May (1996, p. 10) provides ‘both a moral theory and metaethical standpoint that is confluent with the broad commitments of poststructuralism’, based upon what May calls the principle of antirepresentationalism—the principle that ‘representing others to themselves—either in who they are or in what they want—ought, as much as possible, to be avoided’ (p. 13). May agrees with realists that moral claims ought to be taken seriously as claims of fact but not because they are explanatory; he agrees with non-cognitivists that moral claims are commitments while denying that this requires a projectivist or expressivist semantics; he believes
with rationalists that moral discourse is logically bound to guiding action but denies that this is a product of necessary practical reasoning; and he holds with relativists that 'our own moral discourse may be culturally circumscribed, but deny that that fact means we ought to hold our moral claims modestly' (p. 20). May's position is anchored in a conception of 'descriptive' (or scientific) discourse as deeply normative, 'in a reductionist account of truth; and in a view of all discourses as practices in a wider social field' (ibid.) I mention the elements of May's position because, to some extent, it indicates both the possibilities and the complexities of assessing postmodernism or poststructuralism in relation to moral or political theory.

So what is 'egalitarian liberalism' and does Brighouse really offer a new theory of social justice in education? Let me summarise his position in his own words. 'Egalitarian liberalism' is comprised of the following institutional commitments and values:

1. Ethical individualism: 'liberalism assumes that individual persons are the sole intrinsic objects of moral concern' (p. 5).
2. Neutrality: liberals are committed to the neutrality of the state (at least, neutrality of intent [p. 7]).
3. Individual rights and their protection by the state.
4. The significance of the private sphere understood as 'a range of permissible options among which the individual must be the sole arbiter of how they choose' (p. 10).
5. Autonomy and toleration: autonomy means individual rational self-governance (p. 12) and implies a requirement of toleration.

There is nothing new here in my view. Indeed, it seems like a restatement of very familiar themes, values and commitments that define the liberal tradition. What is more, and given his earlier remarks concerning truth and universality, Brighouse in the main simply asserts these features.

In the following chapters, Brighouse examines the case for school choice, focusing on Friedman's case for vouchers (Chapter 2) and 'three red herrings', that is three arguments, respectively, from commodification, democracy and the common good, which, he believes, do not go through (Chapter 3). In Chapters 4 and 6, Brighouse advances two principles—autonomy and equality—that should govern educational delivery, and defends them against objections in Chapters 5 and 7. In the remaining two chapters, Brighouse examines existing school choice programmes and the question of school choice for social justice.

He concludes:

I’ve tried to show that social justice in education allows a good deal of scope for having parents choose among schools for their children. The standard bureaucratic model of public or state schooling has not delivered justice in education ... [in the USA and UK], and there are reasons to think that an appropriately designed choice scheme could do better. (p. 206)

And:
Public education as we know it may, for all its faults, be a bulwark against the inegalitarian tendencies of the market and the inclinations of fundamentalists to control their children’s lives. (p. 207)

The book is disappointing. It is a restatement of themes that anybody coming out of analytic philosophy of education could repeat in their sleep. It is almost as though nothing has changed in the last 25 years. Certainly, I find the blurb on the dust jacket ‘Brighouse provides a new theory of justice for education, arguing that justice requires that all children have a real opportunity to become autonomous persons, and that a state uses a criterion of educational equality for deploying educational resources’ utterly preposterous.

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Reclaiming Education
James Tooley, 2000
London & New York, Cassell
258 pp.
ISBN 0-304-70567-5

I have heard the description of James Tooley in British circles as the enfant terrible of philosophy of education and there is a certain perceptible self-styled conscious ingredient in his work that picks him out as someone who is prepared to stand against the grain—to speak out against the state and State education and for both privatisation and the market. The book is called reclaiming education, meaning from the State. Tooley wants to turn formal education over to the private sector and to civil society. As he says emphatically at the end of his introduction: ‘I believe there is no justified role … for the state in education’ (p. 23).

These views, apart from distinguishing him from most of his peers and providing a kind of instant brand recognition, require argument. On what are they based? Tooley begins indirectly by mentioning three challenges: ‘how are we to meet unsatisfied demand for educational opportunities of all kinds’; the hoary old chestnut—‘what is meant by ‘education’? as opposed to schooling; and, ‘what does society require from education’? It is not clear to me that these are, indeed, fundamental challenges facing education. The answer to each of these complex
problems receives the chorus answer, ‘reclaim education from the state’, which can be done through the withdrawal of state support in terms of provision, funding and regulation.

But before we get to the arguments, Tooley wants to clear up three ‘fundamental confusions’ which bedevil us when we try to understand exactly what we mean by ‘markets’ and by ‘education businesses’. The first problem is indicated with most of the education literature dealing with ‘choice’: it objects to certain reforms but, on the whole, these reforms have little to do with markets. By ‘market’ Tooley tries to establish the following necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the concept: no state provision, no state funding, minimal regulation, easy entry for new suppliers, and a price mechanism. Tooley’s argument is that ‘choice systems’ are not markets, and that most educational critics of the new right miss the point because they don’t distinguish between them. The second confusion Tooley makes is between ‘education for the market’ and ‘markets in education’; it is with the latter that his book deals. The final distinction made is ‘between businesses getting involved in schools … and education businesses whose only business is education getting involved in schools’ (p. 18). It is only the latter that Tooley wishes to defend.

A quick word on these distinctions, the first of which purports to be ‘conceptual’. What really needs definition in this comparison is ‘choice system’ for we have established usage for the concept of market that dates from old English and old Saxon etymology. Tooley’s ‘conceptual’ argument here ignores the general usage of the concept ‘market’ which does not involve the necessary and sufficient conditions he lays out. It also ignores the political economy of contemporary education reform and the literature that details ‘parallel’ forms of privatisation, including quasi-markets, of which so-called ‘choice systems’ are a part. So, far from clarifying matters conceptually, Tooley adds to their confusion. The other distinctions are redundantly obviously. By the third distinction, one begins to wonder what other rabbits Tooley is going to pull out of his hat before getting to perform the main illusion.

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Professionalism and Ethics in Teaching
David Carr, 2000
London & New York, Routledge
275 pp.
ISBN 0-415-18459-2 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-18460-6 (pbk)

David Carr’s book is timely because of the recent and emerging emphases in public life over professional ethics and business ethics. This book is well worthy of consideration as a text in a course on professional ethics, or for a course in studies in education where professional ethics might be an important component—e.g. in educational management or leadership. There it would serve as an important
counter to much of the contemporary technicist-based approaches to management and leadership and pre-service teacher education.

The book is divided into five parts: Part I is entitled Education, Teaching and Professionalism; Part II is Educational Theory and Professional Practice; Part III is Professional Ethics and Ethical Objectivity; Part IV is Ethics and Education, Morality and the Teacher; and Part V is merely entitled Particular Issues. Each of these sections is reasonably self-contained, drawn as they have been from earlier published material. However, this does lead to a reiteration of many ideas and principles.

Carr 'argues a case for viewing the professions as moral projects; and teaching and education as genuine professions'. He takes issue with technicist views of teaching and with conceiving teaching as simply skills and competency based and, instead, explores the moral role of the teacher and the moral goals of teaching (p. vii). Whilst I agree with much that Carr holds, I have two general concerns. First, I would raise issue as to the ability of an analytic philosophical approach to be able to counter objections to his positions which are, he admits, only philosophically arguable. Second, he neither considers poststructuralist philosophy nor considers turning to other disciplines which do discuss such things as power and its effects, or modern power and performativity (Lyotard, 1984). Thus he has no effective answer to those who assert that teaching is merely concerned with skills and competencies and proceed from positions of power to institute this in practice.

In Part I, the book argues for the 'inherently ethical character of any distinctive occupational category or profession—to show that the standard professions are in a significant sense moral projects—and to defend the claim that teaching and education are genuine professions in this sense' (p. xi). His opening major argument is (p. 3):

(i) that teaching is a professional activity;
(ii) that any professional enterprise is deeply implicated in ethical concerns and considerations; and, therefore,
(iii) that teaching is an enterprise which is deeply and significantly implicated in ethical concerns and considerations.

He says that any work on ethics and teaching written for a series on professional ethics (of which it is a part) 'would appear committed to certain key claims or assumptions' (i–iii above), but that these key assumptions 'should not be allowed to go unquestioned' (p. 3). So far so good, it might be said, but there seem to be problems with this opening conceptualisation and framing of the argument.

First (iii) is said to follow from (i) and (ii). It is not therefore a basic assumption or claim and one may only need to commit oneself to (i) and (ii). Second, (i) and (ii) may both be false and (iii) true which is not an invalid argument. But (i) and (ii) need to be shown to be true also for Carr's claims to go through.

Here Carr turns to conceptual analysis of the concepts of teaching, education, profession and professionalism. One is reminded of forms of analysis around these concepts, especially education and teaching, in the analytic programmes of philoso-
phy of education originated especially by Richard Peters and Israel Scheffler in the 1960s and 1970s. If we stay with the concept of 'teaching', Carr says:

... on the most basic construal of teaching, it is arguable that there are normative constraints on teaching which are less technical and aesthetic, more moral or ethical. Good teaching is not just teaching which is causally effective or personally attractive, it is teaching which seeks at best to promote the moral, psychological, physical well being of learners, and at least to avoid their psychological, physical and moral damage. (p. 9)

One immediately notes that it is only arguably that at the most basic construal of the concept of teaching an ethical dimension exists. In other words, if that is the case, the concept is essentially contestable and it is possible that a technicist non-ethical concept of teaching exists. This critical issue cannot be resolved then by analysis on its own. Even though I would like to agree with Carr that the concept of teaching has an ethical dimension, I would admit that it was a concept which I held, that it was a prescriptive account of the concept and that I hold it for certain reasons associated with what it means to educate, and to not abuse the relationship between mentor and learner, etc. Thus I would hold that (i) is not obviously true and that 'teaching' may not have an ethical dimension as part of its definition. I do not believe that the substantial basic positions that Carr wishes to claim can be established by conceptual analysis. But this may take us out of philosophy of education, at least as conceived in the traditional British approach to philosophy of education. It would certainly raise questions about power and its exercise and how it comes about that people come to believe that teaching is to be associated with skills and competencies or, indeed, that teaching is an ethical concept. Of course John Austin's account of the performative use of language (Austin, 1962) may indicate a starting point in British philosophy for approaching this second question.

Having said that, Carr takes us through an important conceptual minefield which should be traversed by initiates to the analysis of this group of concepts. But here I find his account of the concepts of 'profession' and 'professional' more promising. Carr's approach remains the same: 'in time honoured philosophical fashion—with some observations on the common use of such terms' (p. 22). Whilst starting from looking at common-sense uses of the term 'profession', which appear to indicate some categorial distinctions between the professions and other occupations, he notes that sociologists often see such categories as merely reflecting social distinctions. Yet he is to dismiss these potentially counter arguments because 'it may be doubted whether this could have been the only basis for familiar categorial distinctions between professions, vocations and trades' (p. 22). He is to return to philosophical consideration of criteria for these categorial distinctions, and not to issues about discourses, knowledge and power and how truths come to be accepted as Truth. Here, for example, Michel Foucault has much to tell us about how psychiatry became a profession by inserting itself into the French legal system at a time when its knowledge base was very scant and highly questionable (Foucault, 1978). Given my reservations about this type of approach, Carr nevertheless handles this well, advancing an important notion that the kind of service with which professions are
concerned provide access to human rights (p. 27). But a problem still persists. Is the
doctor who kills at Auschwitz, or in Georgia State Prisons, by injecting a person with
deadly drugs, a professional?: or is he merely a professional doing it badly?

Part II is designed to defend teaching as a profession against the objection that
teaching does not draw upon or possess a clearly identified knowledge base—it is not
theory-dependent, to use Carr's own phrase. Once again Carr is adamant that in the
area of the relationship between educational theory and practice 'some very elemen-
tary ground-clearing conceptual analysis' is required (p. 59). This in spite of 'the fact
that much ink has been spilt on this question in post-war literature of educational
philosophy and theory'. Carr's interesting solution is to challenge the view that
'theory' has some fixed meaning so that only one thing could be meant by the
important notion of the relationship between theory and practice or between theory
and rational agency. Carr is surely right on this general position. Whether his
solution (advanced in Chapter 5) to return to Aristotle's notion of phronesis as
opposed to techne—right ends as opposed to truth—is the best way to go may be
another matter (see also Carr & Steutel, 1999, on virtue ethics). Thus Carr claims
that education is essentially a moral practice 'which is deeply implicated in values
and conflicts of values—rather than a technological enterprise' (p. 76). Thus educa-
tional issues and questions must always be inherently open-ended, and professional
competence cannot be reduced to those dispositional skills or competencies which
a teacher is required to employ (and exhibit).

Professional competence is concerned then with wise judgements concerning right
ends and not merely skills or, at best means to those ends. Teachers of course need
both forms of competency.

Part III turns to the next step in Carr's argument. If education as phronesis is
concerned with wise judgement then such judgements must exhibit objectivity.
Otherwise phronesis might reduce to subjectivism, relativism and whimsical choices.
First, Carr argues for the objectivity of values and, second, he considers rival
conceptions of education. He has already dismissed the deschoolers in Chapter 2
and it is postmodemism's and communitarianism's turn in Chapter 7. They are
both summarily dismissed. (Interestingly Dewey gets little coverage either.) Carr
believes then that 'there is a case for regarding any exclusively subjectivist account
of values as little more than a contradiction in terms' (p. 131). But from this
objectivist position he goes on to say:

the key issue for professional ethics with respect to the logical status of
values and evaluation is not that of the subjectivity or otherwise of value,
it is rather that of whether such values are, irrespective of objectivity,
relevant or applicable across the board of professional conduct and endeav-
our. (p. 132)

It would seem then that for professional ethics the issue is now not whether a
particular value in question has relevance for any human agent but whether it has
value for a profession or a professional. It seems that I could act differently in my
professional capacity than I could in my private life as a human agent. This is, I
believe, a crucial problem for any approach to professional ethics—as many of the
'whistle blowers' in professional life have shown us. Carr does not pursue the issue which he has raised but turns instead to consider rival conceptions of education, between traditional and progressive, between child-centred and knowledge-centred and various notions of religious education.

Part IV is concerned with exploring the ethical complexities of serious reflection upon the aims and purposes of education. Chapter 9 looks at the ways in which teachers or teaching may be found wanting ethically. Thus he considers various levels of technical incompetence, bad human relations including violence and abuse, indoctrination, and the setting of a bad image, i.e. of behaviour which is a bad role model for young people. These are important ethical aspects of teaching and they are well covered by the author, with the possible exception of the section on punishment. The author, in adopting traditional philosophical models and justifications, does not seriously ask the question as to whether such models and theories are conceptually applicable to children (Marshall, 1975).

Chapter 10 pursues these issues more generally into the aims of education, schooling and teaching, and discusses the issues inherent in the effort to promote what must be ethically contestable and morally problematic goals of human flourishing. Chapter 11 considers the moral role of the teacher.

Part V has two final chapters, one on the moral role of the teacher and the second on its extension into general professional principles. But a key claim of the book is that it is not just a question of following stated rules and principles for the profession, and that everything will be all right. Teaching is concerned with the moral development of others and any particular professional principle depends for its application of a particular judgement as to its applicability and appropriateness. This requires wise judgement from individual teachers, who are themselves well grounded in appropriately educated qualities and character. Here I would agree with Carr.

With the two major reservations I have stated this is an important book for any person in the 'world' of education, and especially for courses in professional ethics. The conclusions reached and the general positions adopted are I believe important in these days of technicism and performativity. My problems are mainly over the philosophical methodology. That revolves around fundamentally different views of what philosophy and philosophy of education might be.

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