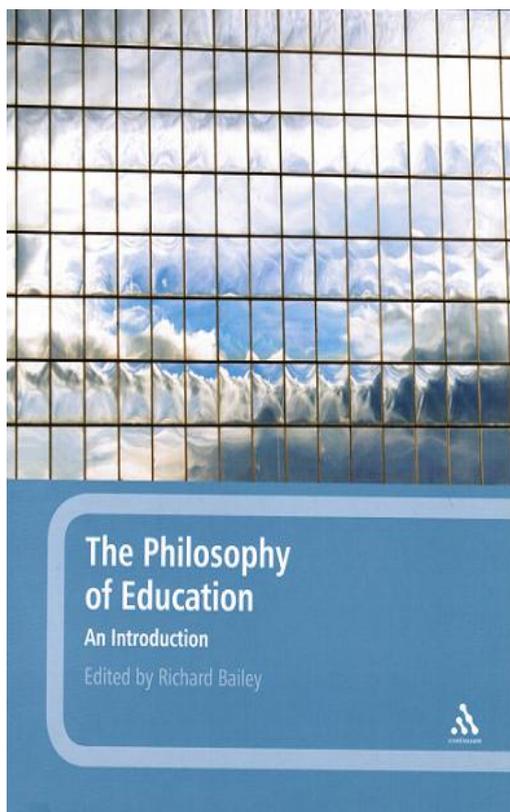# *The Philosophy of Education. An Introduction*
By: VV.AA., Richard BALEY (Ed.)
London: Continuum

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1. The book's ambitions

Bailey's problem-based introduction to the philosophy of education, seeks to encourage its readers to reflect philosophically about education. Comprised of thirteen chapters, each by a different author (or multiple authors in the case of the Brighouse/ McAvoy chapter), nine of the chapters attempt to balance the encouragement of the student's own thinking, the development of an argument and the provision of a survey of thought in relation to some particular philosophical cum educational problem. With the further exceptions of Harry Brighouse and Paula McAvoy, who are writing in the United States, all of the contributors are working in UK universities, many of them having chairs or being senior scholars there.

Although each of these chapters focuses on a distinctive issue, and so the book to that extent is naturally segmented, there is something of an argumentative thread which runs through the book as a whole: namely, a validation, by argument and demonstration in turns, of philosophising about education as being both interesting and important. Thus, two of the other four chapters do some logically prior, reflective work: they aim to convince us that education needs philosophy at all (Paul Standish's 'What is the philosophy of education?' and Richard Pring's 'Does Education need Philosophy?'). Closing the book, the remaining two of the other four chapters address readers who have been convinced of the distinctiveness of philosophical reflection and the need for it in educational matters, with John Gingell's 'Reading philosophy of education' and Richard Smith's 'Writing philosophy of education' providing something of a 'how to' guide and delivering on what their titles promise.

2. The nine problem-based chapters

'What is education for?', by Roger Marples, critically discusses three philosophical curriculum theories in relation to the aims of education (namely, RS Peters' and Paul Hirst's defence of the academic curriculum, Richard Pring's defence of a vocational curriculum and John White's defence of a well-being directed curriculum). 'What should go on the curriculum?', by Michael Hand, asks what *could* and what *should* go on the curriculum, before evaluating two of the same theories as Marples' chapter (RS Peters' defence of the academic curriculum and Richard Pring's defence of a vocational curriculum), in addition to virtue based approaches to the curriculum. 'Can we Teach Ethics?' by James C Conroy dedicates less space to addressing the title question than to the matter of how we are to determine the nature of goodness in the first place. 'Do Children Have Any Rights?', by Harry Brighouse and Paula McAvoy, assesses two rival theories for children's rights (namely the choice theory and the interest theory) together with two arguments made by Onora O'Neill that children ought not to be thought of as rights bearers. They argue that children have three kinds of rights corresponding to three fundamental interests: rights which protect the distinctive goods of childhood (e.g. a right to play), rights which protect welfare interests which they share with adults (e.g. a right to shelter, but not a right to sexual relations), and a right to protect one's future capacity for agency. 'Can schools make good citizens?', by Tristan McCowan, engages with the debate of quite how we are to conceive of a citizen and suggests a rough definition in order to proceed with the debate, before discussing the levels at which schools can contribute to forming citizens. 'Should the State Control Education?', by Judith Suissa, shows how engaging with the title question leads to yet more fundamental issues than simply balancing the rights and responsibilities of children, parents, and communities, such as evaluating

justifications for, and rival frameworks of, the state.

Carrie Winstanley's chapter 'Educational opportunities – who shall we leave out?', does an excellent job of introducing the complexities of distributing finite educational resources amongst competing claimants. Usefully, egalitarian theories of distribution are broken down into three kinds (equality of resources, outcome and opportunity), complicating any simple claim that children ought have equal rights to education. 'Should schooling be compulsory?', by Dianne Gereluk, adjudicates between arguments for and against parental rights over their children's education, conceiving of the question as being whether the state or parents should have the last say. After discussing these arguments in relation to the case of Yoder Vs Wisconsin – in which the United States Supreme Court decided that Wisconsin could not compel Amish children to attend public schooling beyond the eighth grade – Gereluk concludes that a balance should be found between state and parental influence. Finally, 'What's wrong with indoctrination and brainwashing?', by Richard Bailey, evaluates rival conceptions of indoctrination, suggesting that it be characterized as a teaching style which inculcates non-evidential and non-critically held beliefs. Bailey contends that such a teaching style is wrong because it is 'incompatible with the principles of open-mindedness and autonomy … central to liberal democracies' (p. 145). Valuably, Bailey also criticizes the insidious notion that indoctrination is unavoidable since we must impart *some* beliefs to children without justifying these to them. Bailey agrees that children often are not capable of understanding the reasons which justify the beliefs which adults impart. However, he contends that so long as there *are* reasons which warrant the relevant beliefs, imparting those beliefs does not necessarily count as indoctrination. It seems that we ought to add (or at least make explicit) a further condition though: that the educator *knows* the reasons which warrant the relevant beliefs.

3. Reflections on the book as a whole

While the authors demonstrate philosophical thinking, they also survey positions on their chosen topics, pose related questions for the reader's consideration and recommend further reading. To put them in contact with primary source material in manageable chunks, each chapter includes extracts from key texts in the philosophy of education, such as RS Peter's influential book, *Ethics and Education*. However, sometimes these are argumentatively idle, despite being included in the main body of text, which seems odd even for an introductory philosophical text.

Introductory texts have a choice between providing a maximally impartial overview on the one hand, and an argumentatively engaged one on the other. In its ambition to demonstrate the philosophy of education in action, it is this latter approach which the book's contributors have taken. Bailey's introduction states that the book's principal aim is to stimulate the reader's own thought: in the case of each contribution, he says 'the goal is to inspire and provoke you to think for yourself'. While this might seem to subordinate its duty to truth to its duty to pedagogy, in some respects these duties are two sides of the same coin here, since the book does better at demonstrating good philosophical thinking the more robust the arguments of the contributors, as well as the more accessible they are.

Unfortunately, the book seems not to have been proofread, as is evident from many chapters' containing awkward grammar and typos which include spelling mistakes. The book appears been rushed and could have been improved in some simple ways. For instance, while Bailey does a fantastic job glossing a philosophical term of art, that term had already appeared earlier in the book. Glossing them as they appear in the book as a whole, or placing them in a glossary at the back and not just in his chapter would

benefit newcomers to philosophy. Indeed, there seems to be a lack of editorial explication; the editorial vision is left largely implicit since it is not communicated in the introduction but only evident in the succession of chapters. Further, while Bailey lists a series of interesting questions in his editorial piece, but does not explain why those which do not feature in the actual book were not selected or why those questions which do actually appear in the book were.[1] While sense of the ways in which the various questions explored in the book relate to each other would have contributed to readers understanding of the questions themselves, one might suggest that the job of mapping these questions in relation to one another is work for the reader. Still, a chapter or editorial discussion would likely benefit the reader in this task

4. Hand's contribution on curriculum content

While I should like to engage philosophically with many of the contributions in this book, given the limited space available in a book review, I shall limit myself to just two. 'What should go on the curriculum?' asks *Michael Hand*. Firstly Hand points out that 'the question what *could* go on the curriculum' is logically prior to the question of 'what *should* go on the curriculum' (p. 49). Failing to find any satisfactory answer to this question, Hand proceeds to evaluate what he calls 'the leading curriculum theories in the philosophy of education' (p. 59), finding compelling objections to each of them. He concludes by saying that on both questions, further philosophical attention is badly needed. This chapter ought to inspire further thought from students and established education researchers alike, and I hope that it does.

It is surprising that Hand proceeds to discuss what he identifies as the logically subsequent question having found the question which he takes to be prior, to be as yet unresolved. The prior question being unresolved, it should be impossible to move on to the subsequent question. Were one to risk an answer to what *could* go on the curriculum, it might be this: the intention behind education fundamentally ought, quite simply, to be an intention to make a (positive) difference to those being educated. That is, to bring about something which would not be the case were the education not to take place. This leaves wide open (and fruitfully so) the question of what sorts of difference we ought to aim for and how we ought to bring them about, that is the question of what *should* go on the curriculum.

Hand himself has made an interesting contribution to the question of what belongs on the curriculum: the possibility of truth argument, and, *implicitly*, the certainty of truth argument. Hand argues that a discrete, compulsory, open-ended subject focused on the critical examination and assessment of religious beliefs should form part of pupils' schooling because: religious claims (about God, salvation, life after death, etc.) are momentous, distinctive and plausible, so children are entitled to an education which enables them to make intelligent judgments about the truth or falsity of such claims.[2] The notion

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[1] The questions Bailey lists are these: 'What should we teach?'; 'what experiences are most valuable/ relevant/ necessary for students?'; 'Who should pay for schooling?'; 'Are some ways of organizing or presenting the curriculum inappropriate?'; 'Should schooling be compulsory?'; 'Should all students be taught together, or grouped according to their ability?'; 'Should schools prepare their students for the world of work?'; 'Is the ideal outcome of schooling a happy/rational/spiritual/good person?'; 'What type of person should teachers aim to develop?'; 'What should the values and ethos of the school be?'.

[2] Hand, M., 'Religious Education' in J. White (ed.) *Rethinking the School Curriculum: Values, Aims and Purpose* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004)

that religious claims are plausible, but not certain, motivates the open-endedness of the subject, the distinctiveness of the claims motivates the discreteness of the subject and their momentousness together with their credibility motivates their appearing on the curriculum at all. Were some religious beliefs *certain* (or as nearly certain as can be), as opposed to merely plausible, then, by the lights of Hand's argument, this together with their distinctiveness and momentousness would seem to motivate a discrete, closed and confessional, compulsory subject. It is a shame that Hand does not discuss his own work in this context, but it is perhaps understandable since his work is not as prominent as the work which he does discuss.

5. McCowan's contribution on schooling for citizenship

McCowan asks whether schools can make good citizens, which might at first blush appear to be an empirical question. However, as McCowan makes clear, it conceals many prior, philosophical questions. While making clear at the outset that it is the English school system which he has in mind, McCowan draws upon examples from around the world to illustrate his points, thus making it clear that his is a question of international significance. Drawing a distinction between 'citizenship' in the sense of a legal status and a more normative sense, which comes with attendant standards of behaviour and attitude, he surveys some rival ideas of citizenship in this second, contested sense.

McCowan's own analysis of the concept of citizenship looks at points to be more of an analysis of the kinds of societies within which one can be a citizen. In truth, one cannot provide one without the other, because a conception of a citizen presupposes a conception of a society within which they go about their affairs. The analysis comes in four parts: differences with respect to the rights and duties conferred on individuals between given states, differences with respect how universal and consistent the status of citizenship is amongst people in any given state, differences with respect to how far a given states' sense of identity stretches – whether it is global, or more insular, and differences with respect to how far citizens are expected to conform to norms or reflect critically on them. The last analysis seems to run the concepts of freedom of thought and speech together with the concept of freedom of action. However, speech is itself an action. Moreover, freedom of speech without freedom of action is superficial, being of the character 'say and think what you like, but just you try it'! Thus they rightly belong together in the same category.

McCowan contrasts thinkers who subordinate the cultivation of critical thought to the cultivation of national identity, with those who place critical thought at the centre of their conception of citizenship (giving the example of a liberal democracy). However, he does not offer much in the way of arguments supporting either view or attempt to adjudicate between them. This is likely because of the space constraint. McCowan provides a provisional conception of citizenship relevant to the English context in order to proceed to the question of whether this can be facilitated by schools. Since this second question is more empirical and pedagogical in character, it seems to me that the chapter ought to have focused on the prior, more philosophical questions and have provided and engaged with more of the relevant arguments for determining what a good citizen is. As it is, the chapter provides as excellent overview of both the philosophical and more pragmatic issues relating to citizenship education.

6. Whom the book may interest and how it may be of use

As a whole, Bailey's book is engaging and easily accessible for the non-specialist. The questions addressed are all very interesting ones and the book certainly succeeds in its primary aim of inspiring and provoking philosophical thought: my own thinking has certainly benefitted much from the many stimulating arguments and important considerations presented and discussed in each of the chapters. Many individual chapters ought to feature on policy, philosophy, social justices and teacher training courses. Although pitched at the introductory level for those in teacher training, philosophy undergraduates, and non-philosophers interested in education, many of the chapters could be used as good starting places for academic philosophers and philosophy postgraduates interested in the specific problems discussed.