

COMMUNICATIONS

Reply to "Concealed Aims of Education?"

Jim Paton's criticism of my article on "Concealed Aims of Education" shows how far apart writer and reader may be in their judgment regarding the meaning and intent of what appears in print. In this case each of us acknowledges, I hope, the other's competence in the English language. But for fear that Jim, hereafter "Paton", has doubts, let me admit one lapse: I should not have said that certain concepts and values based on a traditional religious orthodoxy are "taught openly in school". This wording misled Paton, who apparently thinks I meant explicit teaching. My fault.

But consider Paton's criticism of my sentence in the context of what may be laudable but futile: "Give just a moment's thought to the undisclosed purpose served by trying to make all English-speaking youngsters bilingual through oral French in all elementary schools". Paton begins his first numbered criticism with the words: "He ridicules a recent (in Ontario?) decision to teach oral French . . .", and proceeds in a passage more than twice as long as the relevant paragraph in the article to discuss the purpose and probable outcome of the innovation. I must say in reply that my text does not ridicule, nor even mention, any decision and is not an argument about oral French, but does ask — apparently in vain — for critical thinking on a possible undisclosed purpose, the theme of the whole article.

Again, in his second numbered criticism, Paton refers to an illustration I used of pupils in Las Vegas who amazed Canadian visitors by the apparent inability even to understand a question on how people of other countries regard the Vietnamese war. Paton takes me to task for criticizing American pupils, teachers and schools, and perhaps by implication our own. It is beside the point that I happen to think that the public schools of the two countries are, on the whole, the best in the world. Surely it is apparent that the article is not designed to attack or defend any school. It is designed to show the difficulties imposed on the schools by other powerful agencies to which Paton refers and by the value systems of society. It seems to me that my critic misses the point of the illustration, just as the youngsters missed the point of the question. He certainly disregards the argument of the paragraph from which the illustration was extracted. His concentration on what were illustrations and examples in my argument explains his reiterated assertion that I use a "spray-gun

technique" and possibly explains his belief that something has continued to "rile" me. From my point of view, of course, the article is a sharply focussed discussion of one idea, conceived without rancor as a novelty which might evoke interest.

In the second last paragraph of his communication Paton reminds me that talk about responsibility may "amount to cant if it does not embrace the discipline of accepting consequences". Yet my text states that "the responsible person makes good to the best of his ability any loss or harm incurred by others through deficiency in his performance". Is it reasonable to disregard that statement in favor of references to my "all-or-nothing" position and allegations that I suggest "freedom is the good word" and "educational leftists are the good guys"? It is probable, of course, that there was in my writing a concealed aim of supporting progressive education. In the article the last two hidden aims I discuss, retardation of moral development and irresponsibility, are admittedly the opposite of ethical aims which to my mind should be paramount today.

Nevertheless my conscious purpose in writing the article was to stimulate critical thought on undercover forces which affect educational practice — an exercise similar to the search in a philosophy class for assumptions which underlie statements. I should have preferred criticism of the article in relation to that purpose.

Charles E. Philips
Toronto, Ontario