

BOOKS

Henry Steele Commager. *The Commonwealth of Learning*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968. 277 + x pp. \$6.95.

In the forward to this collection of twenty-three of his articles and lectures on education authored over the past seventeen years, Professor Commager claims that much of what he has advocated in educational reform continues to be prophetic of current upheavals in American education. The accuracy of his remark will become readily apparent to the reader of this most welcome selection of essays, edited by Professor Commager's son, Professor Steele Commager.

Although Commager provides few new insights into primary sources of American educational history, his interpretation of those sources reveals a freshness of historical perspective which is conspicuously absent in much current rhetorical debate on education improvement. For example, he observes that many of the major American writers of the mid-nineteenth century were of the opinion that childhood was its own end and did not try to provide children "with material things in place of the vital experiences they have a right to" (p. 81). This statement of May 10, 1952, could well serve as a progenitor for the current dictum of Professors Edgar Friedenbergh and Jules Henry that our schools are blatantly overlooking the virtues of a humanistic education.

It is Commager's concern for a return to humanistic education which forms his consistency in point of view throughout these desultory essays on a variety of topics including the American high school, children's literature, Noah Webster, the American university, science and culture, academic freedom, and television and grouped into three sections: "The School," "The University," and "Aspects of Academic Freedom."

The central theme of each section is perhaps best summed up by the author when he demands an end to unjust discrimination at the end of the first section: "As we cannot afford the waste of natural resources, so we cannot afford the waste of human resources, a waste that is irremediable" (p. 109). And the devastation of human resources occasioned in part by educational policy is a tragedy of errors which Commager illuminates so well in historical perspective. Perhaps two examples of formal education as the wastage of human resources will reveal the direction of Commager's pen in delineating problem areas in American educational development.

He feels that often the *raison d'être* for teaching things American is both chauvinistic and provincial. That this opinion is historically justi-

fied is best seen by reading Birdsey Grant Northrop's *Education Abroad and Other Papers* published in 1873, and recently resurrected by Professor Stewart Fraser of George Peabody College for Teachers (Stewart E. Fraser, ed., *The Evils of a Foreign Education, or Birdsey Northrop on Education Abroad, 1873*. International Center, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1966). While the Reverend Northrop's demand to undergraduates to obtain their collegiate training on this side of the Atlantic, no doubt nourished by his correspondence with Joseph Parrish Thompson, is no longer supported by the Charles W. Eliots and James B. Angells of today, one can justly criticize the lack of cosmopolitanism in many a high school curriculum of the late 1960's.

Those who recall Anthony Bailey's documentation of the attempts of Vice-Chancellor, Hebdomadal Council, and Congregation at Oxford University to accommodate themselves to the age of the automobile (Anthony Bailey, "The Road and the Meadow," *The New Yorker*, May 8, 1965, pp. 129-164) will find much of interest in Commager's description of current struggles between town and gown. To be sure one such struggle involves the automobile. But Commager sees a waste of human resources in the failure of urban universities to make very much impact on American community life. This failure is due, perhaps, to the historical commitment of the American partriciate to patronize the rural and ivy-clad college. In urging that the American university give up its pastoral image, Commager alludes to the impression that Henry P. Tappan had of American university education in the mid-nineteenth century, i.e. that this education was utterly devoid of any amenities of culture. This void, Commager claims, is still characteristic of the American urban university (p. 153).

But to say that Commager is completely pessimistic about the vicissitudes of American educational policy in the past three centuries would be doing him a great injustice. The pages of this book exemplify his boundless faith in the ability of the American commonwealth of learning to accommodate new eras and new ideas.

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Thomas O. Buford, ed., *Toward a Philosophy of Education*. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. Pp. 518. (Paperback)

Thomas O. Buford's book, *Toward a Philosophy of Education*, is one of the many edited readings on philosophy of education which have been coming out with regularity from different publishing houses. Despite their differences in approach, content, and organization, authors of these textbooks are unanimous in their intention to aid students to think critically and philosophically. Buford, likewise, intends "to guide students in educational philosophy courses to see how issues in

the philosophy of education can arise and to think philosophically about these issues" (p. v).

Toward a Philosophy of Education has four chapters. It differs from other edited readings in its attempt to show the importance of knowing the cultural context out of which philosophic problems arise. Buford advises that "in order to understand the context in which the last three chapters are cast, the first chapter (which deals with the cultural context of philosophic problems) should be read first" (p. vi). Philosophy of education is "the attempt to investigate in a philosophical manner ultimate questions which persons who are experiencing their culture in conflict ask about the process of cultural transmission" (p. 7) or educative experience. Buford suggests that there are certain "issues," characteristic of culture-crisis, in society which demand of ourselves "answers about the ends to which the young in our society ought to be educated" (p. 415). In sum, Buford contends that society is in a culture-crisis which is in part or completely due to the analytic temperament (Chapter 1). The different philosophic approaches or methodologies for solving problems must, therefore, be studied in order to apply them responsibly to certain problems that derive from the transmission of culture (Chapter 2). Moreover, attention must be directed to the transmission of cultural values, or, in his expression "the process of coming to know" (p. 223), "the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and understanding," which he labels "the philosophy of learning" (Chapter 3). Finally, philosophy of education must concentrate on attempts to develop alternative cultural postures which will enable a culture in crisis to resolve its conflicts and unify itself. It must direct its efforts toward finding out the ends for which we ought to educate in order to avert the impending doom of the crisis and provide relief (Chapter 4). The book opens and closes with this theme.

Chapter 1 is a collection of readings gathered from sociology ("Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines: The Role of the Social Science," by Talcott Parsons), social psychology ("On the Meaning of Alienation," by Melvin Seeman and "The Organization Man," by William H. Whyte, Jr.), philosophical anthropology ("The Crisis in Man's Knowledge of Himself," by Ernst Cassirer), political philosophy ("One-Dimensional Man," by Herbert Marcuse), philosophy ("Existentialism," by Jean-Paul Sartre), and psychoanalysis ("The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," by C. G. Jung). "The Knowledge Revolution" by Daniel Bell is also included. The collection provides the reader with the necessary clues in understanding the spirit of modern American culture.

There is no doubt that one can benefit from these selections but one can question their presence in a book on philosophy of education. One can only surmise that Buford has an accommodating understanding of, and approach to, philosophy of education. Still one can ask if this

section is necessary to the resolution of the problem of education in a culture-in-crisis. Other important questions can also be raised, such as, what problems "properly" belong to the province of philosophy of education? how wide or narrow should be the scope of philosophy of education? is philosophy of education to be identified with the social foundations approach (whatever that is)? Of course, answers to these questions depend upon one's conviction as to what philosophy of education is. But are there no other grounds, other than conviction, on which these questions can and should be argued and supported?

The other larger question deals with the independence of philosophic thought. How necessary is it to ground one's understanding of philosophic problems in their cultural context? It appears that some philosophic ideas develop an autonomy of their own such that they outlive the original sources which produced them. Also, they seem to have an innate force and beauty such that they can be studied, understood, and appreciated apart from their historic and social connections.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 investigate the following questions respectively: "How are we to go about the job of rethinking education, *on what grounds* can we claim that knowledge is acquired, to what *ends* should one educate" (p. 15)?

Chapter 2 is, in my opinion, the most readable part in the whole book. The writing is clear; it proceeds with precision and logic. The selections from Buber's *I and Thou* provide the reader with enough beautiful poetic prose to counterbalance the heavy-footed (perhaps arid) writings of Chapter 3. Although the questions posed above are not directly answered there is enough information that can be gathered with regard to them. The methodological options presented here are analytic, normative, speculative and existential. It is, of course, understood that no one employs one method to the complete exclusion of the others.

Chapter 3 is concerned with The Philosophy of Learning. Here, Buford distinguishes the problems of epistemology from the philosophy of learning by emphasizing the "process of coming to know" (p. 223). The stress is on the "acquisition of knowledge," or "making knowledge claims about the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and understandings" (p. 223). The pertinent questions discussed are: What is the origin of learning? What is the role of the mind in learning? What is the role of the learner in learning? What are the limitations of learning? What is the role of society in learning?

The main weakness in this chapter is the omission of selections on the nature of mind. Since the role of mind in learning is basic, the nature of mind must be inquired into to answer the question of philosophy of learning. It involves questions such as: Is the mind a substance, an act, a relation, a function or a behavioral quality? What are its particular features, its working operations? What does mind mean? Or, how

is it used, in what context? The use of the word *mind* in this chapter is vague and confusing to say the least.

Chapter 3 is the heaviest reading in the entire book. I am afraid students will find it forbidding.

In Chapter 4, Buford repeats the theme of culture "in the throes of change and conflict" (p. 415). He declares that "if we want to exercise rational guidance and control over our society, our educational goals must be outlined in a rational manner and defended with acceptable evidence" (p. 415). It is sadly disappointing to note that there is nothing "new" in this chapter, nothing to help the reader envision a cultural posture invigorating enough to be able to meet new problems on their own terms, that is, in the present societal context from which they arise and must be understood. It may be mentioned in passing that this chapter (and other parts of the book) is reminiscent of Theodore Brameld's *Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Dryden, 1955). It appears to be a "warmed-over" Brameld.

My main objection to the book is that it does not contribute to the solution of the problem of education at hand which is, in my opinion, the analysis of certain concepts employed in educational discourse. The language of education is in a quagmire, to say the least. Its concepts need to be rendered more precise and emptied of private meanings. Buford's book, while it has passed the stage of presenting different world views, is still confined to the telling stage. It tells what the analytic, the speculative, and the normative approaches are. But the approach fails to engage the student in the actual philosophic act itself, in locating and finding assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices of philosophic positions, noting their fallacious argumentations, and observing logical inadequacies, which is Buford's avowed intention for his book. To say that one intends to make students "think philosophically" and then proceed to talk about what the philosophic way of analyzing problems is, is not a fulfillment of the intention. Since no mention is made on how the aim is to be achieved, the editor leads us to believe that reading about and knowing what certain authors say about philosophic problems of education are sufficient conditions to initiate one into the process of thinking philosophically. But this is simply not so. The two activities are different enough to warrant the employment of two different types of discourse. Buford's book, in short, is "talk about" philosophy of education.

Perhaps, philosophy of education now needs to concentrate more on the writing of monographs on certain concepts, on limited problems rather than embrace the whole problem of man's survival and existence, "to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire."

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