

REJOINDER

by

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Judging from his reply Professor Miller seems to believe more in open education, as defined in my article, than in allowing freedom in education. He feels that certain skills and knowledge are necessary for everyone to learn and that, therefore, we have not only the right, but also the responsibility, to require that everyone learn them. I do believe that it is important, though perhaps not necessary, to learn certain skills and knowledge if one is to live happily in our culture. However, I would also suggest that an individual given the freedom to decide what he learns does not resist learning them eventually as much as Professor Miller seems to fear, especially when shown their importance in a noncoercive manner. To be sure there is a lot of resistance and inability at present, but a good deal of this is a result of requirement, pressure, and expectation.

Perhaps Professor Miller and I are not as far apart as it may seem at first. There is the important distinction between influence and control that may help explain where we do agree. I believe that an individual does have the right, and sometimes even the responsibility, to seek to influence another's decision, for example by argument or by stimulating interests. However, I also believe that the actual decision should be made essentially by the individual who is most affected by the resulting action. Behavior modification theory teaches us that the line between influence and control is fine, but to me it is very important to try to draw it. I would make "deliberate provision for musical experience for the child," as would Professor Miller. I would provide opportunities for hearing music, for seeing musicians perform, and for developing some knowledge of music — and I would expose my interest and my belief in the importance, or nonimportance of music. I would also endeavor, however, to ensure that the child not simply mimic my judgment and feelings, but that he make up his own mind and heart. Perhaps the distinction can be made as separating guidance that stimulates interest and guidance that manipulates.

On the other hand, it seems that Professor Miller and I do disagree. I do not fear "whims" as he seems to. Whatever the interest may be, to me it is important to satisfy it if for no other reason than to work through it. I would, therefore, not guide interests in the directions I considered more important against the will of the child, though I would include and even argue for possibilities that I felt were important. Unlike Professor Miller I do not feel we have a right to determine a child's "frame of reference," even though we do have a responsibility to present and argue for certain frames of reference. I do not feel that the child must justify to us his reasons for his choices, rather we must justify our suggestions for choices he might make. Professor Miller seems much more ready than I to label a child's choices as whimsical.

I do agree that this philosophy of freedom in education is a moral philosophy that determines how one ought to behave in relationships — excer-

cising freedom but not license. And I admit that living this moral philosophy in relation to a child imposes it upon that child — at least until that child develops the power to fight back if he then desires. The only justification I can see for calling such a moral philosophy “freedom” when such imposition exists is that this philosophy seeks to *maximize* freedom for all concerned, even though it does not, because it cannot, provide for absolute freedom of action for anyone.

Controlling an individual to prevent license, however, is not the same as controlling him until he makes “wise” decisions. True, as I stated in the article, no one I know believes that infants and toddlers understand enough to prevent themselves from sometimes making decisions that are very endangering to life and limb. Here the question is perhaps not one of kind but of degree of dependency. How much “knowledge which enables discriminating choice among possibilities” is necessary before we allow the child to make his own choices? Professor Miller and I agree that there should be protection of infants and toddlers even against their expressed will. And we agree that this should evolve to independent decision-making in later childhood and adulthood where outside protection is only provided when desired by the individual being protected. I, however, would probably provide for a much faster evolution to independence than would Professor Miller. Knowledge is needed to make choices that will lead to the results desired, but so is experience in decision-making. Professor Miller seems to focus on ensuring *wise* decision-making, perhaps at the expense of experience in decision-making. To me the “results desired” should be those desired by the individual himself. We should only protect an individual against his expressed will when we firmly believe he cannot understand the consequences of his action. Our moral responsibility is to help an individual towards his own goals, not to choose his goals for him. All in all, I am afraid that Professor Miller would impose his standards of “wise” in a way I would consider morally un-justifiable. In so doing he would also rob the individual of important experiences in decision-making that help teach one how to make decisions.

Let me make just one last point. Professor Miller seems to see his fight with a child’s interests, when he seeks to impose his notions of what that child’s interests should be, as a fight with others in the child’s past who have previously influenced that child. I see it more as a fight with the child himself. I do not deny that past influences help determine present interests, but so do present influences. Why not be content with influence? Why must we ensure that the child does not disagree with our judgment of what is important? It seems to me that influence is enough power for even the “informed and generous” teacher.

Education may be the “intentional cultivation of children” and the making of “choices for students,” but I do not believe that it should be. I am also not interested in just being an “entertainer” or a “babysitter,” but I believe that a concerned influence, stopping short of control, better meets my “moral responsibility” than does making choices for students.