

***Education and Philosophy – An Introduction* by A. Allen and R. Goddard (Pp. 1-232) (Pbk). London: Sage Publications (2017). ISBN 978-1-4462-7316-6**

First and foremost it must be stated that Allen and Goddard's *Education and Philosophy – An Introduction* is an interesting book and a worthwhile read. However, the authors admit that they would not be unhappy if they should cause some doubt and uncertainty in their readers when it comes to the state of education as assessed by means of historical and current philosophical thought. Indeed, if one is willing to adopt the book's bleak and pessimistic outlook as a sufficient condition to evoke this doubt and uncertainty then the authors have certainly accomplished their intended goal. Hence, despite this being an interesting book, it is a rather depressive read. However, no one should object to calling a bleak situation just that: a bleak situation. But such a claim needs justification and the position upon which such a claim is founded needs to withstand scrutiny. The authors, who are both without formal philosophical training, appear to attempt this by providing a mostly descriptive, historical timeline, tracing the philosophical engagement with education over roughly 2,500 years while the critical engagement is mostly based upon secondary sources.

In what follows I try to re-direct the gaze beyond the doubt-evoking state of education. Instead I advocate the focus upon the logical coherence upon which the authors' verdict appears to be based by concentrating upon a small number of issues.

First of all, there appears to be a methodological ambiguity. It is admittedly difficult to squeeze the philosophical thought of more than 2,500 years into a book of roughly 200 pages. The task does not get any easier if one tries to concentrate upon educationally relevant aspects of philosophy and that in an introductory manner only. The underlying problem of such a historical timeline is that choices have to be made. The selection of which philosopher to include and which aspects of a selected philosopher's oeuvre are to be mentioned will presumably yield a massive impact upon the result of any such selective account. However, these choices, or the reasons behind these choices, are not an aspect that the authors care to share with their reader.

The second issue is the *situated-ness* of the authors' position. The book locates education in a context with *mass schooling* (page 3) and the question is raised as to

whether it 'can be returned to – or newly grounded upon – principles that serve the ends of a democratic society'. In the last 2000 years Planet Earth's population has increased by factor 60 to a now staggering six billion. If education is supposed to be an equal good, then it is un-avoidable that, by the sheer increase in numbers, education becomes available to ever increasing masses. In that respect there is no need for the chosen, probably a bit too derogatory attributive quantifier of education nowadays being a *mass education*, somehow placing *mass education* on a par with intensive factory farming. When living in a democratic society, one that treasures diversity while trying to maintain equality of chances, then a steady increase in the masses of learners cannot be avoided and does not deserve to be deprecated. But that is exactly the issue here: by developing the idea of a functional *mass schooling*, the authors develop their vision of a new educational ethos that serves a democratic society.

The authors' do not develop their concerns explicitly. But if one assumes that the despicable thing about the earlier-mentioned *mass education* is not the fact that it is for the masses, but that it serves a functional aim of replicating existing power structures by turning learners into future workers for a capitalist society, then it becomes possible to re-contextualise the quoted extracts. What appears to be at stake here is not the quantitative aspect (the masses) of education, but the qualitative aim of education; i.e., the value that education is supposed to serve. However, and that is a problem that has bothered philosophy ever since antiquity, when it comes to value-conflicts, what sort of foundation would/could one have to favour one over the other? The authors have made their choice in the form of educational values that serve a democratic society. Nevertheless, the reason for their choice remains undisclosed and unsupported by argument. The reader is presumably supposed to take the authors' word for it, which is – philosophically speaking – an untenable and arbitrary position.

The third issue surrounds this lack of critical engagement, this time regarding the authors' investigative perspective. The book offers a mostly descriptive run through 2,500 years of philosophical engagement with education, while painting a picture that current education is lost in functional servitude and that philosophy cannot do much to help. All this, while a glance back in time reveals that it was not really any better back then, that education always served a function for society.

As I said, the *situated-ness* of the authors' perspective is not an expressed concern throughout the book. That is the authors' choice and it has to be respected. However, this omission prevents any philosophical engagement with the supposedly historically bleak, and still bleak, state of education. This is a shame as a critical and reflective gaze upon one's own perspective can yield astonishing results. By way of pointing towards what appears to be the missed opportunity to *do some philosophy* within this introductory text, instead of merely *writing about philosophy*, I will develop this a bit further. To get a handle on the issue it is probably best to differentiate between *doing education* and *reflecting upon why one educates*. *Doing education* concerns the joy/disappointment of the instructive relationship as it is experienced by instructor and instructed. *Reflection upon why one educates* is a second-order engagement: looking for the reason why someone enters into such an instructive relationship. By means of this reflective search for reasons (e.g.: *education does this because...*) education itself loses its context as a lived relationship and becomes a mere function to serve a presupposed purpose. And of course, education has always served a purpose. That is hardly anything new or surprising. At least it did not surprise Socrates as he stood accused of misleading the youth of Athens, i.e., of not fulfilling his educational function correctly. The crux here is that any reflective gaze trying to reveal the *because* of education will invariably reveal the functional character of education, while neglecting the situational aspect of the instructive relationship between two people. In that respect it appears as if the authors' bleak portrayal of the historic and current state of education is – at least partially – owed to the functional perspective they uncritically apply. A functional perspective, it may be added, that the authors do not seem to have any problem with when it come to their own proposal for an educational ethos of serving a democratic society. It is in this respect that one has to remain critical about the authors' claim to have provided 'a measure of conceptual clarification' regarding educational issues (page 200).

The book nevertheless remains a worthwhile read, providing an overview of some educational-relevant philosophy as it developed throughout time, but unfortunately, the book cannot provide the required depth in philosophical terms.

Dr. Tom Feldges, University of Hull

Email: T.Feldges@hull.ac.uk