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Preface

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Preface

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This issue of *Paideusi*s highlights the lives and works of eleven philosophers working in Canada since the 1960s who have addressed central issues in contemporary education and influenced their consideration not just in Canada but in United States, Great Britain, and throughout the wider world.

It may be asked why younger scholars and students should bother to attend to the life contexts for these bodies of work. Why not let the works speak for themselves? A simple answer is that speakers must find audiences—otherwise their works remain inert, gathering dust among the archives. Audiences have real lives and pressing concerns, and for the most part select intellectual inputs, no matter how abstract they may be formulated, that answer to their needs. Contemporary philosophers speak directly and vitally to their audiences when they address issues audiences can recognize as their own.

All audiences share a common humanity and, once they can read a statement of ideas as an expression of a human being like themselves, the ideas become more accessible. Thinkers from the past, even the very recent past, will have a different diction and scope of allusion, and so their works can come more alive when understood as arising from real lives confronting real problems. Stylistic dictates constrain philosophers from revealing such connections between their abstract works and their concrete lives, so these intellectual self-portraits provide an auxiliary within their bodies of work useful for providing such understanding.

It may be thought that philosophy confronts the permanent existential problems of our human existence: Is there some underlying structure for reality? What can we know and how can we know it? What is the best way to live? What obligations do we bear to others? What are our common obligations to our communities? And similarly it may be considered that questions in philosophy of education are likewise eternal: How can adults assist in the development of young people so that they can live in the best ways, come to terms with reality, seek knowledge, and develop discernment and sound judgment? What are the limits of experience and self-directed learning, beyond which teaching is necessary? How can teaching be conducted to respect the autonomy of learners?

These questions may appear to be as abstract and removed from the contingencies of life as the theorems of geometry, and certainly most philosophers approach them without direct reference to the circumstances of their own lives and times. But it would be a serious mistake to think of the discourses of philosophy as taking place in an eternal world. Can we really grasp the works of Galileo without reference to Church doctrine, of Machiavelli without regard for 16th century Florence, of Locke outside the context of the Glorious Revolution, of Adam Smith without reference to mercantilism, or to take a contemporary example, of Rawls without regard for the challenges of the liberal welfare state? Newton's science set a new problem of knowledge for Locke and Darwin's for Dewey. The so-called perennial questions of philosophy, considered up close, are not really timeless: they are re-formulated in each era in accord with the issues and opportunities of the time. In one sense, we can compare Plato's theories of knowledge, society, and education with those of Rousseau and Dewey. But we must also

recognize that these thinkers were addressing different questions and providing answers directly relevant for different audiences with different concerns.

In his foreword to a book of self-portraits of philosophers of education that I organized in 2008,[1] Israel Scheffler praised the essays for being

> …of especial importance in the communication of large ideas, which take on special vibrancy when presented not as abstract messages alone but as products of minds, motivations, and feelings. The melding is, furthermore, urgent in our era of rampant and galloping technology, threatening to overtake every sector of life, inclusive of education. Technology is certainly essential, important and here to stay, representing the necessary transformation of our world by thought. But that thought is . . . powered by aspiration, and also sensitized by our emotions, responsive to dreams and memories, and disciplined by our moral sentiments.

He added

> [I]t would be a catastrophe to view philosophical analysis as an enemy of the human traits we share. Like the arts, it grows from human soil and at its best brings forth its latent powers, beneficent uses, and unexpected glories. . . . What is urgently required is to develop lines of thought and investigation that are consecutive, building on what has been done before, and strengthening the structural continuities of our field.

Permit me to say a few words about Canada and Canadian philosophy of education. When I joined the philosophy department of the University of Alberta in 1970, on leave from Stanford, I was struck by the eclectic mix of intellectual influences in Canadian teaching and scholarship. The Canadian universities were expanding, and as Canadian graduate schools were not training a sufficient number of Ph.D.s to staff the growing faculties, Canada had to draw on foreign Ph.D.s. Thus, Canadian scholarship of the time was as interesting blend of American, British, and European influences in addition to those reflecting a distinctly Canadian experience and perspective.

The authors of this volume began their professional lives in Canada at around that time, and not surprisingly, reflect this blend of backgrounds and influences. Beck was raised in a remote sheep farm in Western Australia and did his primary schooling by correspondence; Boyd was born in a remote part of Kansas and attended a one-room schoolhouse before attending graduate school at Harvard and studying with Israel Scheffler, John Rawls, and Lawrence Kohlberg; Misgeld was raised in Germany, studied with Hans Gadamer, discussed philosophy with Heidegger, and was active in the project of Jurgen Habermas; Entwistle was born in England and, like Hare, Stewart, and Cochrane, studied with R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst in London.

These Canadian authors, apart from Misgeld, worked within the force-field created in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Anglo-American philosophy of education through the combined efforts of Scheffler, Peters, Hirst, and B.O. Smith at Illinois who was Coombs' mentor. Even those who did not study directly with these progenitors of the new philosophy of education were greatly influenced by their work and extended it in new directions: for example, Hare to the concept of "open-mindedness", Stewart to "advising", and Coombs to "equality". Boyd and Beck, among others, in turn, have taught a generation of Canadian scholars including Bogdan and Hare. One cannot read these essays and fail to be impressed by the passion and erudition all these authors have brought to educational studies, and by how philosophy of education was able in these years to attract, train, and nourish their careers.

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[1] Leonard Waks, ed. *Leaders in Philosophy of Education, Intellectual Self-Portraits*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008. Bruce Haynes has edited a parallel volume to that book and this issue of *Paideusis*, featuring intellectual self-portraits of philosophers of education in Australia and New Zealand. It appears as *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47.1 (2009). Haynes has gathered a number of additional self-portraits from his region on the website of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA).

Several of these authors, however, speak to the decline of philosophy and other foundation disciplines in contemporary colleges of education and teacher training programs. This decline is all part of today's program of state control of education, and accompanies the devaluation of teachers, and more generally, of learning, in today's liberal state. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is a scandal.

It would be pleasing to think that this decline is merely intellectual, and can, thus, be reversed by the creative efforts of the best younger scholars. But the story of the "new philosophy of education" teaches a different lesson: it was only when policy elites in the U.S and the U.K. came up against the really deplorable condition of educational scholarship in the 1950s that they made a concerted, sustained effort to attract scholars like Scheffler and Peters, and their counterparts in history and sociology, to education faculties.

There are many talented young philosophers of education today in Canada.[2] Whether they can provide the leadership to create a renewed philosophy of education for our times when their senior colleagues are not being replaced upon retirement, when their programs are cut back severely, when undergraduate teaching in the field is disappearing and they are forced to divert their energies to teaching outside of philosophy remains to be seen. It will hardly be their fault if our field shrivels up and finds itself a generation from now in the same sad shape it was in 1950.

That said, these younger scholars bear some responsibility for sustaining the intellectual vitality of the field. They can only do this by (quoting Scheffler) "develop[ing] lines of thought and investigation that are consecutive, building on what has been done before, and strengthening the structural continuities of our field." In their explorations, they would be well-advised to carry forward the Canadian heritage left to them by the philosophers whose lives are highlighted here.

[2] Among them, Andrea English (Mount St. Vincent University), David Waddington (Concordia University), Heesoon Bai (Simon Fraser University), Dianne Geruluk (University of Calgary), Ann Chinnery (Simon Fraser University), and Claudia Ruitenberg (University of British Columbia).