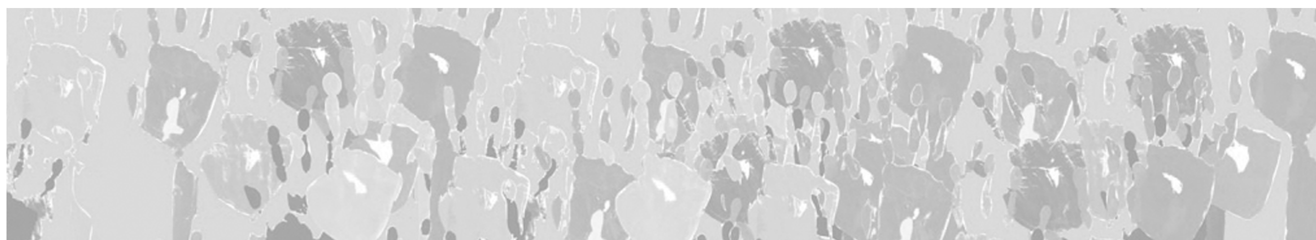
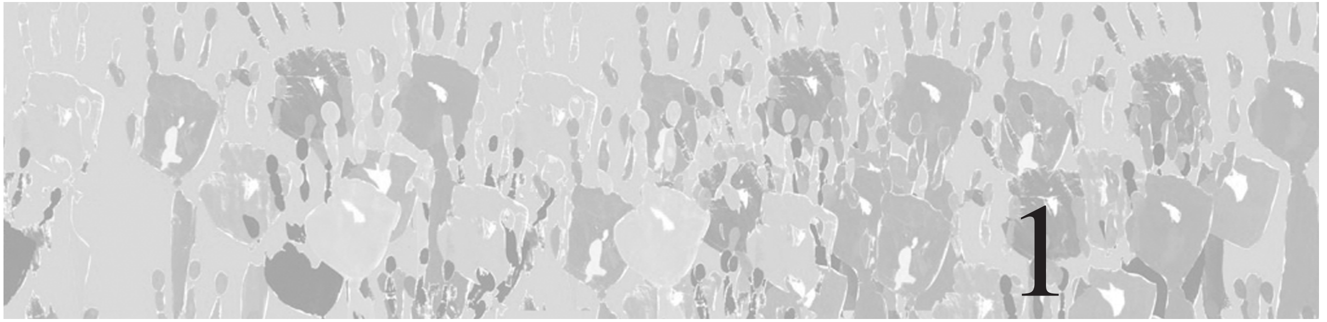
SECTION I

Educational Philosophy and Theory





1

What is Philosophy of Education?

D.C. Phillips

As any parent of a 3- or 4-year-old child knows, 'What is …?' questions are extremely troublesome, in large measure because it is rarely clear what answer would satisfy the questioner. Indeed, the common experience is that the youngster is satisfied by nothing, since any answer that is given is likely to be followed by a series of further questions. The situation is even worse if the questioner (this time an adult) is interrogating a philosopher, as it is virtually certain that the first answer that is received – and very possibly the later ones as well – will be unsatisfactory. For the philosopher's instinct, when asked 'What is X?', is not to discourse about the nature of X, but to begin by analyzing the question itself. The questioner is sometimes bamboozled, then, to have the simple-seeming query answered by 'Well, it is not clear what you are asking for, when you ask what is X'. Warming up, the philosopher may point out that the questioner might be seeking a verbal definition of X, alternatively could be after a fuller description of X that would allow cases of X to be identified, or perhaps would be satisfied merely by being given an example of X; some questioners might be searching for the 'essence' of X, or wish to find out what X *ought* to be, or why X is worth bothering about at all.

It might be thought that the situation could not possibly deteriorate any further – but when the 'what is?' question that is directed to a philosopher contains the word 'philosophy' itself, all hope of receiving a quick, simple and direct answer has to be abandoned, for the philosopher will suggest that the question cannot be

answered until the meaning of 'philosophy' has been clarified – and the nature of philosophy is 'essentially contested'. And of course this is a very reasonable position to take, and certainly is the one that will be the starting point for the present chapter.

What follows, then, is the slow, complex and indirect answer given by a philosopher to the apparently simple question: 'What is philosophy of education?' And, as indicated, the discussion must start with the nature of philosophy itself – for it should be obvious that individuals holding different conceptions of what constitutes philosophy will give quite different accounts of philosophy of education, and sadly there do indeed exist a number of divergent views about this underlying matter.

Before proceeding, several preliminary issues need to be resolved. First, the dictionary definition is of no help whatsoever. My copy of *Webster's II New Riverside* is particularly circular, defining 'philosophize' as 'to speculate or reason like a philosopher,' the problem being that when one turns to 'philosopher' the entry is 'an expert or student in philosophy.' This is followed by a secondly and equally uninformative definition, 'someone who thinks deeply', which is untenable for two reasons. First, almost everyone thinks deeply about at least some issues, and yet it seems strange to say that everyone is a philosopher; and secondly, not everyone who aspires to think deeply (including the philosopher) actually succeeds in doing so – and it also seems strange to say that a philosopher who labours unsuccessfully is on that occasion *not* being a philosopher.

It is important to stress that I am not disputing the fact that many (although certainly not all) philosophers of education think deeply; it is simply that this characteristic cannot be the basis of a definition that purports to demarcate philosophy of education from other activities. Nor is it being denied that there is an enormous number of complex educational issues that it is important to think deeply about. Hopefully the discussion that follows – and indeed this whole book – will make clear the particular contribution that can be made by deep philosophical reflection.

I should make explicit what was left implicit in the discussion above: namely, that there are two broad usages of the word 'philosophy' and its cognates – and these should not be confused. The first of these is the vapid non-technical usage according to which anyone who thinks abstractly about an issue or pursuit that is valued within a society may be called a philosopher; this is what the lexicographers for *Webster's* had in mind when they crafted the account I cited earlier. I recall having heard the (late) brilliant coach of my local professional American football team being called a philosopher (presumably because of the depth of his analyses of the game); and I have heard the term used to describe certain TV personalities who give lifestyle advice to those who are less fortunate than themselves. Other examples of this usage of the term can be found by browsing in the 'Philosophy' section of your nearest mega-bookstore. I will not pursue this any further here (but see Phillips, 1985), for it is my purpose in this present discussion to illuminate – at least in a preliminary way that will be built upon in

subsequent chapters – the second, more technical usage of 'philosophy' (and relatedly of course 'philosophy of education'); this is the sense of the term that would apply to work done in university departments of philosophy or programs in philosophy of education (although I do not want to suggest that this type of philosophy is pursued only in universities and colleges). And, as hinted earlier, this will be a difficult task enough, for in this world of technical philosophy there are strong differences of opinion about what it is that philosophy can achieve and about appropriate standards of rigor and the like; Lucas captured this aspect of philosophy well when he wrote 'Someone once remarked sarcastically that if all the philosophers in the world were stretched end to end they would still not reach an agreement' (Lucas, 1969, p. 3).

A second preliminary matter that needs to be disposed of before we proceed concerns another approach that might be taken to the task of defining philosophy (and perforce, philosophy of education), but which turns out to be as frustrating as consulting the dictionary (although, as will become evident below, I will adopt a variant of this strategy myself). 'Philosophy is what philosophers do', it might be suggested, 'so let us simply take a few examples of philosophers at work and base our account on what we see there.' The problem with this approach is easy to detect: How does one go about selecting whom to study? How will you decide who counts as being a philosopher? Elsewhere I have called this the foxtrot problem: suppose you ask what the foxtrot is, and are told it is a ballroom dance and if you want to learn more about it you should watch someone actually doing it. But unless you already know what the dance is, how are you going to select whom to watch, and when? And it is not satisfactory to ask the dancers whether they (it takes two to foxtrot) are doing the foxtrot, for they may claim to be doing so but may be in error. Similarly, many people may claim to be doing philosophy, or philosophy of education, but isn't it possible that they are mistaken? (Maybe they are guilty of wishful thinking.)

Although this may seem rather fanciful, it actually is an important issue. If you were to hear the football coach (mentioned earlier) referred to as a philosopher, and as a result were to base your conception of the field on his ruminations about gridiron, you would have quite a different view of the field than if you were to base your conception on, say, the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein or Karl Popper. But even if you realized that there were the two senses of the term 'philosophy' and 'philosopher', and restricted yourself to the technical sense (according to which both Wittgenstein and Popper were philosophers, and the coach was not) the problem still does not abate. For there are remarkably different traditions in technical philosophy – one emanating by and large from the Continent, but by no means restricted to that geographical locale (see Smeyers, 1994), and another having evolved more or less in the English-speaking world, but also not restricted to there; philosophers working in either of these traditions often have little (if any) tolerance of work done in the other – so that one's choice of a philosopher to emulate will not be universally endorsed. (This can be illustrated by reference to the nomination of Jacques Derrida, the prominent French 'deconstructionist'

philosopher, for an honorary degree at Cambridge in 1992. This proved to be so controversial, that after a period of heated public debate in which his philosophy was derided as a sham and as an 'anti-philosophy' philosophy, by opponents, and praised as groundbreaking by supporters, the entire faculty of the university had to vote on the matter. The honour was approved by just a small margin. Indeed all the philosophers at Cambridge, stretched end to end, could not reach an agreement!)

By way of illustration, here is a description of work within a philosophical tradition that I would probably not point to if you asked me to provide an exemplar of (technical) philosophy – not so much because I do not consider it philosophy (its concern with language and concepts, with critique of assumptions, and so on, seem to me to clearly place it within the domain of philosophy), but because it is a tradition I am not at home in, and because the way in which these concerns are pursued strikes me as sometimes being problematic:

> As a general trend, poststructuralism highlights the centrality of language to human activity and culture – its materiality, its linguisticality, and its pervasive ideological nature. Poststructuralism emphasizes the self-undermining and self-deconstructing character of discourse … . Above all, it provides new practices of 'reading' – both texts and text analogues – and new and experimental forms of 'writing'. [It] … offers a range of *theories* (of the text), *critiques* (of institutions), *new concepts*, and *new forms of analysis* (of power) … . (Peters and Burbules, 2004, p. 5)

Despite the force of the discussion above (which, incidentally, is itself an example of a philosopher's mind at work), this chapter needs to start somewhere. So in the following I focus on the technical sense of the term 'philosophy' and its cognates, and I give my personal account of what philosophical work entails – but it is an account that I can (and will) support with references to the technical literature. (It will be obvious that I am firmly based in the broad English-speaking tradition mentioned above – although I would probably have voted, with reservations, for Derrida being given that honorary degree. Other views about the nature of philosophy and philosophy of education, no doubt, will be found lurking behind some of the other chapters in this volume.) So, with preliminaries behind us, it is time to throw as much light as possible on philosophy, and philosophy of education.

BRIEF INTRODUCTORY EXAMPLES

Because discussions of the different intellectual traditions within the domain of philosophy run the risk of becoming quite rarified, it seems a counsel of wisdom to start with some concrete examples (all of which shall be educationally relevant, and all of which I will eventually clarify enough to assure the reader that I have dodged the 'foxtrot problem'). While they will of necessity be developed only briefly (some will be dealt with in a more satisfactory way in subsequent chapters), they will be adequate enough for me to draw upon by way of illustration

of the points that I will make later on about the scope of the philosophical terrain. And the reader should be warned that at least one of these examples will appear at first to be quite puzzling – but, after all, we are entering a puzzling domain.

Constructivism

Many curriculum experts, especially in the fields of science and mathematics education, together with individuals involved in teacher training and along with large numbers of teachers themselves, subscribe to a perspective on learning and teaching that they call *constructivism*. The so-called 'radical constructivism' promulgated by Ernst von Glasersfeld has been particularly influential (Glasersfeld, 1995, 2007), but it is pertinent to note that the education journals of the last two decades contain a staggering number – many thousands – of citations pertaining to the broad constructivist perspective that includes his work but much else besides. The problem that has arisen over time is this: no clear account has emerged of the essentials of this position, and it was difficult to determine what an individual was committed to in virtue of being identified as "a constructivist." Indeed, the situation was such that 'there is a very broad and loose sense in which all of us these days are constructivists' (Phillips, 1995, reprinted in Curren, 2007, p. 399).

The common element in all forms of constructivism is that knowledge is not found or discovered but rather is made or constructed by humans; however, this formulation papers over a number of complex issues, and it has been interpreted in different ways by different groups of constructivists. An important early statement that appears to embody this position was published by Immanuel Kant (1781), but it is noteworthy that he wrote a long, abstract book in his attempt to deal with some of these embedded complexities:

> But though all of our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge … supplies from itself. (Kant, 1959, p. 29)

Some interesting issues arise here: If much (all?) of our knowledge is built up from our own faculty or capacity for knowledge-construction, is it credible to believe that what we construct is in some way isomorphic or in correspondence with the 'reality' that exists in the universe outside of ourselves? Furthermore, if the knowledge that each of us possesses has been built by ourselves, is there any assurance that the knowledge I have constructed is identical with, or compatible with, the knowledge that you have constructed? And is there any guarantee that the knowledge a student constructs is the same as the knowledge the teacher has constructed? Perhaps everyone in a classroom (teacher and each of the individual students) inhabits a world constructed by themselves, with no genuine contact possible with the worlds of others – a scenario that constructivist teachers apparently take quite seriously, but which several philosophers have shown to be an untenable holdover from seventeenth-century epistemology (theory of knowledge).

In addition to the issues above, the recent lively discourse over modern forms of constructivism allowed several quite different theses to become entangled, leading to a great deal of confusion until some analytic work by philosophers came to the rescue. (The following account is based upon Phillips, 1995/2007; 2000.) In the first place, when it is said that humans construct their own knowledge, one or other or both of two quite different processes might be the focus of attention:

1. The individual learner or knower constructing his or her cognitive understandings of the material being learned or of the stimuli being received; for the purposes of discussion, this has been labeled the 'individual psychology' focus of constructivism.
2. The construction of the publicly available disciplines or bodies of knowledge – such things as physics, biology, history, and economics; these are human constructions to the development of which many individuals have contributed throughout the course of human intellectual history. This has been labeled the 'public disciplines' focus.

This distinction paves the way for further clarification, for it becomes apparent that in discussions of each of these quite different processes there have been scholars who stressed the role of individual constructive activity, while there have been others who stressed that the activity of individuals is influenced by social or communal forces. (There has been a confusing tendency to treat individual construction of understanding in individualistic terms, and construction of bodies of knowledge in social–communal terms.) Consider, as an example, the 'individual psychology' focus. The great developmental psychologist Jean Piaget was (among other things) interested in how individual learners develop logical principles and construct bodies of knowledge about their environment; almost all of his attention was on the young, individual inquirer and what was happening within his or her cognitive apparatus – his model often seemed to be the young inquirer engaged in a solitary struggle to achieve understanding. The social psychologist Lev Vygotsky was also interested in how individuals construct their understanding of the world around them, but he stressed the role played by social mechanisms in fostering this individual learning. Turning to the second broad focus – the development of the public disciplines – a similar distinction can be drawn, for there have been some scholars who focused on the contributions of individual inquirers while others have focused on the social construction of knowledge, i.e., upon the social or communal processes and forces that have shaped the public disciplines.

One of several consequences of accepting these distinctions is that it is clear now that the frequently used expression – 'the social construction of knowledge' – is misleading if left unmodified, for there are scholars in both the 'individual psychology' and 'public disciplines' camps who stress the importance of social processes.

Explaining human actions: behaviour versus states of mind

The Harvard psychologist B.F. Skinner (1904–1990) was something of a 'Renaissance man'; in addition to being one of the two or three major figures in

the development of the position known as 'behaviourism' during the twentieth century, he was a gifted author (see his novel *Walden Two*, first published in 1948 [Skinner, 1962], and his multi-volume autobiography), a fearsome controversialist, an iconoclast with respect to the nature of scientific inquiry, and he had a capacity for seeing the deeper social and theoretical implications of his orientation towards psychology.

Skinner's behaviourist psychology was inspired in part by the (apparent) headway psychologists were making in the study of animal behaviour, where of course only observational and experimental methods were feasible (animals cannot be interviewed!); but in addition his work was shaped by his strongly held views about the nature of science, which in turn had been shaped by the logical positivist philosophy that was influential in the USA and elsewhere at the time he was a graduate student. (Most of the central figures in the development of logical positivism originally came from backgrounds in the sciences or mathematics or logic.) This philosophical position was hostile towards metaphysics, on the grounds that if a concept could not be defined in observational or behavioural terms then it was meaningless. Thus, for example, in the view of logical positivists the metaphysical concept 'soul' is meaningless, for it cannot be defined observationally – which means that there is no evidence available to settle a dispute between a person who claims all humans (and only humans) have a soul, and on the other hand a person who believes that there is no such entity; put another way, there is no way in which truth can be distinguished from error in metaphysics. The logical positivists would acknowledge that metaphysical terms like 'soul' may have an 'emotive' meaning, but they have no substantive meaning – they are meaningless noises.

Skinner applied this perspective to the study of human behaviour, especially to inquiries directed at discovering the causes of what people do; he argued that a science of behaviour was possible, if it were based on observing both the behaviour itself and the conditions under which it occurs (such things as the reinforcing or dampening effect of the consequences of behaviour). Such a science would entail moving beyond 'pre-scientific' ways of explaining behaviour in terms of unseen (and un-seeable) internal states or events such as desires or feelings; he had harsh things to say about these supposed 'psychic inner causes' that were attributable to the actions of a psychic or mental inner agent that each of us harbours (and which he called 'autonomous man'; see Skinner, 1972, Ch. 9). In his classic book *Science and Human Behaviour* (1953) he wrote:

> The inner man is regarded as driving the body very much as the man at the steering wheel drives a car. The inner man wills an action, the outer executes it. The inner loses his appetite, the outer stops eating … . The inner has the impulse which the outer obeys … . The inner man is sometimes personified clearly, as when delinquent behaviour is attributed to a 'disordered personality,' or he may be dealt with in fragments, as when behaviour is attributed to mental processes, faculties, and traits. (Skinner, 1953, p. 29)

The 'experimental analysis of behaviour' now makes it possible for us to abandon these unproductive ways of explaining human behaviour that are carry-overs

from the past; we can move (as the title of one of his later books puts it) 'beyond freedom and dignity' (beyond, that is, using these concepts in an explanation of human behaviours). The following is typical of his analyses:

> Man's struggle for freedom is not due to a will to be free, but to certain behavioural processes characteristic of the human organism, the chief effect of which is the avoidance of or escape from so-called aversive features of the environment. (Skinner, 1972, p. 42)

Behaviourism has had a pronounced impact on educational practice. It is of course common for teachers and parents to reinforce such things as giving correct responses to questions, and the following of commands or directives – the reinforcing agent (reward) may be praise, special classroom privileges, the awarding of 'gold stars', the receiving of an 'A' grade; and the attempt also is made to extinguish or at least lower the frequency of disruptive or uncooperative behaviour, by the use of negative reinforcement or punishment. The programmed instruction and teaching machines of some decades ago worked on Skinnerian principles, in that correct responses to questions were acknowledged and praised virtually instantly. Many elements of behaviourism are still to be found in the work of some contemporary educational researchers, who 'operationally define' their concepts (that is, define them in observable terms), and who use so-called 'objective measures' that they believe do not rely on making judgments about the subjective beliefs and commitments of those who are being studied.

'Education according to nature,' and the progressive movement

On a hot summer day in 1749, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was walking to visit the philosopher Diderot (who was in detention), when, in a newspaper he was browsing through to pass the time on the way, he came across the announcement of an essay competition being held by the Dijon Academy. The topic: 'Has the progress of the sciences and arts done more to corrupt morals or improve them?' Rousseau was overcome; he 'beheld another universe', and descended into 'a state of agitation bordering on delirium' (Rousseau, 1781/1953, p. 328). In a letter to a correspondent he said he collapsed under a tree, and wept uncontrollably. For it had suddenly become clear to him that – contrary to popular opinion – progress in these fields contributes nothing to human virtue or happiness, but was a source of corruption or distortion. He realized that the arts and sciences served to mask or suppress man's natural proclivities instead of allowing them to follow the path to unhindered expression, an insight that he modeled with his romantic abandonment to his (natural) emotions under that tree! To his surprise he won the first prize, and became famous – and with this recognition there started 'the long chain of my misfortunes' (Rousseau, 1953, p. 326). He was – at least as he depicted himself in his autobiography – the epitome of a tragic, Romantic hero. Little did he know that one of the several books and essays in which he developed this summer insight would come to be regarded as a masterpiece of philosophy of education, that because of it he would be known as the

'liberator of the child,' and that the book would be burned by the public hangman and banned in many places in Europe.

The book in question, *Emile, or On Education* (1762), was a novel that depicted episodes in the life of the hero from his infancy until he reached manhood and started a family. The theme is announced in the memorable opening sentences:

> God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil. He forces one soil to yield the products of another, one tree to bear another's fruit. He confuses and confounds time, place, and natural conditions. He mutilates his dog, his horse, and his slave. He destroys and defaces all things; he loves all that is deformed and monstrous; he will have nothing as nature made it, not even man himself, who must learn his paces like a saddle horse, and be shaped to his master's taste like the trees in his garden. (Rousseau, 1955, p. 5)

Because society harbours the arts and the sciences, as well as social conventions and the like, and because these things swamp or distort the child's natural tendencies, the educator has a forced choice – either the man can be educated (that is, the person as he naturally is), or the citizen (the man who lives in, and is shaped by, his society). Rousseau wrote that 'harmony becomes impossible. Forced to combat either nature or society, you must make your choice … you cannot train both.' (Rousseau, 1955, p. 7)

Emile's parents allow the child to be taken by a tutor (who of course has the wisdom of Rousseau himself) to the family's country estate, where unencumbered by the forces of civilized society, his natural tendencies are allowed to express themselves. Emile learns to read when he desires to learn (he has a party invitation to read, for example) – and because he wants to acquire this skill, it comes easily; he learns other subjects when the local environment triggers an appropriate interest; he acquires a moral code by suffering the natural consequences of his actions (if he lies, people on the estate start to mistrust him); and he acquires some religious understanding not by reading the Good Book but by studying the 'book of nature' (and also via a lengthy conversation with a 'Savoyard Priest' he meets while rambling through the countryside). It was the de-emphasis on Scripture, and on the formal teachings of the Church, that was in part responsible for the suppression of the novel in many places. In short, Emile learns from *things*, not from books – indeed, the only book available for him to read for several years is (on reflection, no surprise) *Robinson Crusoe*; this is, of course, the account of a resourceful man alone on an island learning to thrive without the trappings of civilization – or so it might seem.

Later in the novel Emile meets his soul mate, Sophy, whose education Rousseau also sketches; compared to Rousseau's forward-looking account of Emile's education, the path he lays down for Sophy is truly astounding. The sense can be conveyed in just a few words: '… it follows that woman is specially made for man's delight … she ought to make herself pleasing in his eyes and not provoke him to anger; her strength is in her charms … .' (p. 322)

In Rousseau's time there were some disastrous attempts to use *Emile* as an educational blueprint, but the author was disdainful – the novel was intended to

be a graphic presentation of the principles that should be at work in education, and clearly was not a practical handbook. But over many decades the idea of 'education according to nature' flourished and became one of the central themes of the progressive education movement of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rousseau's ideas influenced the educational philosophy of the great American philosopher and educationist John Dewey; and left their imprint on the famous British 'free school' *Summerhill*. The founder and principal of this school, A.S. Neill, claimed in 1960 that he had never read Rousseau; but nevertheless he was working and reading and discussing education in contexts where Rousseau's ideas were well-known – intellectual influence can be real but indirect. The following passage reveals clearly enough Neill's use of Rousseau's ideas, even if he did not get them directly from J-J. himself:

> When my first wife and I began the school, we had one main idea: *to make the school fit the child* – instead of making the child fit the school … . We set out to make a school in which we should allow children freedom to be themselves. In order to do this, we had to renounce all discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, all religious training. (Neill, 1960, p. 4)

DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

With the background now in place, the discussion can return to the long-delayed main issue: What is philosophy, and – in the light of answers to that question – what is philosophy of education? There are a number of different ways of describing the work of philosophers, and these can be illustrated by reference to the three examples discussed above. And just as several *different* but not *incompatible* descriptions can be given of some event (a political rally, for example) because they focus on different aspects, so it is with the descriptions or accounts of philosophy given below.

(1) The discussion should start with what probably was the most puzzling example, namely the second; for B.F. Skinner was a major psychologist, and although he was a Harvard man (and therefore well-rounded) he nevertheless did not hold an appointment in the Philosophy Department. So why does he appear as an example? Simply because there is an important conception of philosophy according to which he was, indeed, doing philosophy in at least the two books of his that were cited above.

Consider a group of scholars doing research or otherwise practicing within their specialized field – perhaps they are economists, or physicists, or historians, or teachers of mathematics, or artists. The bulk of the scholarly interactions between them, that in some cases may lead to breakthroughs or discoveries that enhance that field, may be considered as 'level one' or 'object-level' discourse. Thus, the discourse of physicists at this level might contain references to temperature, pressure, Brownian motion, molecules, velocity of light, simultaneity of events, the ether, universal gravitation, and so on; and to the laws or theories that link some of these things; and to experiments or observations involving

these and other physical entities and quantities. Philosophers who work in these domains – philosophers of science, of economics, of mathematics, of history, and so on – are not making substantive contributions to the discourse at the object level between the practitioners of that field (for, to stick with the same example, philosophers of physics are philosophers, not physicists); instead, to use rather fanciful language, they are at a 'higher' or more abstract level, and are gazing down at the level one or object-level discourse between the practitioners, and are raising questions or problems about this discourse. In brief, they are working at a *meta-level*, and are raising *meta-questions* about the object level of the domain they are studying. Thus, philosophers of physics might discuss such questions as

'What do physicists mean, in their object-level discourse, when they say two events are simultaneous – and how do they ascertain this?'
'In studying the gravitational forces existing between two astronomical entities, what assumptions are being made about the nature of the space between these objects? Is it assumed that this space is Euclidean?'
'Is the so-called string theory that is advocated by some physicists in any conceivable way testable? And if not, is it a metaphysical theory rather than a scientific one?'
'Even in their most abstract theories, physicists postulate the existence of entities of various kinds; in what sense (or senses) can it be supposed that such entities are "real", or are they just "convenient fictions"?'

This account of philosophers working at a meta-level applies to many, but perhaps not to all; certainly most philosophy departments these days (at least in the English-speaking world) have some members who are philosophers of science, or of mathematics, or of social science, and so on, who analyze, clarify, or otherwise ruminate upon discourse at the object-level in their respective fields. The crucial point that needs to be stressed, however, is that some leading scholars/researchers in these disciplines – like Skinner, for example – also on occasion ascend from the object-level to the meta-level, and look 'down' and reflect on the very same kinds of issues that philosophers cogitate about. (In fact, it might be the case that it is *because* these individuals can distance themselves somewhat from the object-level in order to reflect upon it, that they *are* 'leading scholars' in their fields.) In physics, it seems incontrovertible that Newton and Einstein sometimes operated at a meta-level. In a sense, then, at the meta-level the distinction between 'philosophers of field X' and 'practitioners or researchers in field X' tends to fade. In this context it is interesting to note that Blackwell's *A Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (Newton-Smith, 2000) – a reputable reference book in philosophy – contains essays on the scientists Bohr, Darwin, Einstein, Galileo, Leibniz, Mach, Newton, and Whewell, and many others are referenced in the index.

So, to return to Skinner: it should now be obvious that I am suggesting he was raising meta-questions about the field of 'explanation of human behaviour'. Looking down on this field, he was convinced that he saw behaviour being investigated in terms of metaphysical entities like 'interests', 'desires', 'inner drives', 'autonomy', and so forth, and he was pointing out that there was no apparent way

to confirm or disconfirm accounts that were given in terms of such unobservables. Skinner was doing meta-psychology, and at the same time he was doing philosophy. And, in the opinion of this author, he was doing it all very creditably – although I judge him in the end to have been quite wrong. (For what it is worth, I should point out that the Blackwell volume on philosophy of science mentioned above contains a brief positive comment about one aspect of Skinner's negative position on the issue of intentions being used for prediction and explanation of behaviour – so he *must* have been doing philosophy!)

There is a little more to say about Skinner, and the discussion will return to him in due course. Before moving on, however, it might be as well to restate as pithily as possible the two points about philosophy that have been made above – first, much philosophical activity takes place at the meta-level, where issues are raised (and sometimes dealt with) about the object-level; and secondly, a few scholars in a field from time to time adopt a vantage point where they, too, focus on meta-issues about their field – and to the extent that they do this, they can be regarded as doing philosophy.

(2) There is a completely different way of thinking about philosophy, one that focuses upon the type of work that is done (whether at the meta-level or not). The account above left this issue vague. (To say that I have a perch from which I can look down and ask questions or make comments about what my neighbours are doing in their backyards, is – perhaps – to say that I am making meta-comments, but it is completely uninformative about *what kind of questions* or comments I am generating.)

The distinguished moral philosopher William Frankena (a former president of the American Philosophical Association, who also had a strong interest in philosophy of education), identified three types of activity one or more of which philosophers have traditionally pursued:

> Looking back over its history, it appears that philosophy has done three sorts of things. It has sought to work out a conception of the universe as a whole in all of its aspects, and of man's place in it. In this endeavour it has been synthetic … . [Also] philosophers have sought to afford some wisdom in the conduct of human affairs. That is, they have tried to provide … a guide to action … by discovering and formulating goals, norms or standards … . [Third] philosophers have often been engaged in a less exciting but still essential kind of enquiry – analysis or criticism. This includes a critical evaluation of the assumptions and methods used by philosophers, as well as by scientists and common sense people … . (Frankena, in Lucas, 1969, p. 287)

These three activities may be labelled speculative/metaphysical (I have taken the liberty here of adding the second term to Frankena's label), normative, and analytical. And of course they are not entirely discrete. To consider a simple case, if you are going to be normative and provide a guide for action for your friends, this guide will need to be backed-up by something, for those who are receiving guidance no doubt will be anxious to know what gives *you* the right to tell them how to live; often the guidance you (as a philosopher) will provide is derived in some way from, and is warranted or justified by, the analytic or speculative/metaphysical work that you have done. It is worth pointing to the parallel here

with parenting: for of course parents are frequently normative when dealing with their children, not only putting forward guidelines but also insisting that these be followed. And at least some parents have warrants or groundings for their normative demands – these are not mere whims, but gain support from such things as the parents' depth of experience of life, from their years of study and reflection, or from their social and religious convictions.

Frankena's typology can be illustrated by reference to the cases presented earlier. The first of those, concerning constructivism, was intended to demonstrate that careful analytic work can contribute to the work of scholars or researchers or practitioners by making clear that the important if not revolutionary position that they were pursuing was in fact an amalgam of several quite different positions that needed to be distinguished and treated separately. (Whether or not this example also illustrates Frankena's point that analytic work is 'less exciting' I will leave to the reader to decide.)

Turning to Rousseau, it is apparent that *Emile* is packed with normative advice about what to do and what not to do in child-rearing, and about what the aims of the educational process ought to be. Thus: do not interfere with or suppress the natural tendencies of the child; only teach something when the child is ready to learn it; do not make book-learning the dominant mode of education for a youngster; let the child primarily learn from 'things'; do not treat the acquisition of moral knowledge differently from the acquisition of other types of knowledge; and so forth. And what justified or warranted or served as the grounding for this advice? Simply, it was Rousseau's speculative/metaphysical theory that 'what is natural is good' – the theory so beautifully summarized in his novel's opening lines. But it is also noteworthy that Rousseau was not a rigorous thinker, in the sense that careful analytic work, avoidance of contradictions, and so forth, was not the way he approached the development of his ideas – this one in particular. Thus, the pioneer of modern analytic philosophy of education, C.D. Hardie, in a monograph first published in 1941, had a 'field day' teasing apart the various things that might have been meant by 'education according to nature', and showing that each of these was indefensible (see Hardie, 1941/1962, Ch. 1).

Skinner's work also had strong normative elements. He had decided views about the nature of scientific investigation – views that, apparently, were derived from the analyses of the logical positivists; and he stressed time and again that when studying humans or animals, the only focus was what was observable, namely behaviour and its consequences. This position was grounded in his analytic work, wherein he showed (at least to his own satisfaction), that explanation of behaviour in terms of inner processes and entities was meaningless.

An interesting philosophical meta-question arises here about Skinner's vehement rejection of metaphysics, with its associated claim that certain commonly referred to entities were in fact non-existent and that explanations that made reference to them were at best vacuous and at worse meaningless. Was this far-reaching position *itself* a type of metaphysical theory? And whether or not he was doing metaphysics, he certainly was being speculative in Frankena's sense of the term.

In his novel *Walden Two* he gave an account of a utopian society that was organized entirely on behaviourist psychological principles. He showed how a society that ran on these principles would allow individual citizens to pursue goals of their own choosing, and the format of the novel allowed him to answer sceptical questions asked by an 'outsider'. (If Rousseau is to count as a philosopher because of *Emile*, in addition to his other writings, then Skinner must also count because of *Walden Two* – not to mention his other work!)

(3) Finally, there is a way of describing philosophy that will be familiar to anyone who has ever glanced at the catalogue of an academic publisher, or at a listing of courses in a university Department of Philosophy; in general it cuts across or is orthogonal to the tripartite division of philosophical activities described in the section above, although there is some overlap with both it and with the depiction of philosophy given in Section (1). The focus here is not *the type of activity* (metaphysical/speculative, normative, or analytical), or the *level* (meta-level versus object-level), but *the domain* in which these philosophical activities are being pursued – are questions or issues about knowledge the focus, or morality and ethics, or beauty, or citizenship and individual and group rights in a pluralistic society … . The well-regarded Blackwell reference series 'Companions to Philosophy' is organized in this way. There are separate volumes on, among others, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of religion, feminist philosophy, and cognitive science.

Once again the three examples discussed earlier can provide some enlightenment. First, constructivism is a (confused) set of views about human knowledge – the main concern of which is the ways in which it is built up, but many constructivists also address the issue of whether the beliefs that are constructed (by whatever means) are appropriately classified as being 'true'. (To use the word 'knowledge' is to imply that the beliefs in question *are* true.) So probably the best way to classify philosophical (and analytic) discussions of constructivism is under the rubric of *epistemology*. Secondly, the ambit of Skinner's work was so broad that different parts of it can be classified in different ways. His views on how research should be pursued in psychology clearly fit under *philosophy of science* (and even more precisely the sub-field of *philosophy of social and behavioural science*), and his attacks on mental entities such as the 'autonomous man' and the 'inner homunculus' fit squarely with topics discussed within the field of *philosophy of mind*, and even within *metaphysics*. Finally, *Emile* – with its devastating analysis of the source of social problems, with its negative evaluation of the impact of progress in the sciences on life in modern societies, and with its suggested solutions – is recognized to be an important work in *political philosophy*.

AN IMPORTANT QUALIFICATION

Before turning – at last! – to philosophy of education, it is important to stress once again that the three ways of describing the nature of philosophy that were

discussed above are not mutually exclusive. (More than one way of describing a field can be valid.) Thus, a philosopher of science might be doing meta-level work in that domain, but he or she might also (and at the very same moment) be doing analytic work – the point of which is to clarify some issues about, say, how knowledge claims are warranted or supported within this field (which is an epistemological issue); and the philosopher might hope that on the basis of this analysis some normative advice could be given to practicing scientists about their knowledge-testing procedures. With only slight hyperbole it might be said that the philosopher is like a hunter, who – armed with a variety of skills – refuses to be fenced in by arbitrary boundaries, but roams at will, seeking challenging game wherever the spoor may lead!

SO, WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION?

In the light of the preceding accounts of the nature of philosophy, it seems natural to conclude that philosophy of education is a domain of activity roughly comparable to philosophy of science or political philosophy. (Clearly the editors of Blackwell's philosophical companions, referred to above, have this view, for they recently added 'philosophy of education' to their series; see Curren, 2003.) But this does not seem adequate; the field of education is so broad and complex, and is intertwined with so many other aspects of society, and is of such fundamental social importance, that the direction philosophical work can take is almost limitless. My (speculative) suggestion is that as a field philosophy of education is on a par in complexity not with any one branch of philosophy, but with the *whole field* of philosophy.

Thus, within the domain of philosophy of education the whole range of activities outlined in the course of this chapter can be found. Some philosophers of education – and some educational researchers, curriculum theorists and others – ask meta-questions and pursue meta-issues (arising from the object-level interactions and discourse between educational researchers, or between teachers and principals, or between a teacher and a group of learners); some do normative work (about the aims of education, about how children ought to be treated, about the kind of just society we ought to be striving to bring about – using education as the means); some pursue issues that are epistemological (what knowledge should be taught in schools, and how much of the justification or warrants for this knowledge should be taught; is there a place in the curriculum for bodies of belief that are not well-established enough to be regarded as knowledge; are the warrants that researchers in, say, educational psychology offer for their purported discoveries in fact adequate); some work on issues that also are central in political philosophy (what rights to an education do children possess; if the interests of the developing child come into conflict with the rights of the parents to 'control' the education of their children – assuming there is such a right – then whose rights and interests should prevail; can a child develop personal autonomy and at the same time become incorporated into a community of faith); and yet other

philosophers of education focus on ethical issues (classroom interactions between teacher and students, and between students themselves; treatment of individuals who are 'research subjects').

In the opening paragraph several different possibilities were identified that might lie behind the question 'What is philosophy of education?' If a dictionary-type definition was being sought, then the following is probably circular enough to satisfy everyone: 'Philosophy of education is a field where philosophical inquiry is pursued that focuses upon issues arising within the domain of education.' If what was wanted was an account of what (collectively) philosophers of education do, then the summary in the paragraph above is my best shot. If what was desired was an example of a philosopher of education at work, then (hesitantly) I offer this whole chapter. But, finally, perhaps the concern lying behind the 'What is?' question was 'Why does philosophy of education (as so-described) matter?' To ask this is tantamount to asking why it is important – to be reflective about our practices, to avoid inconsistencies in our beliefs, to be aware of what we are committed to as a consequence of holding the principles we claim to hold, and to expand our horizon of possibilities by considering alternative goals and ideals that might never have occurred to us were it not for the work of some philosopher of education. If none of these reasons is persuasive, then I am afraid you have purchased the wrong book!

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