

The Individual and the World

1. Mind as Purely Individual

We have been concerned with the influences which have effected a division between work and leisure, knowing and doing, man and nature. These influences have resulted in splitting up the subject matter of education into separate studies. They have also found formulation in various philosophies which have opposed to each other body and mind, theoretical knowledge and practice, physical mechanism and ideal purpose. Upon the philosophical side, these various dualisms culminate in a sharp demarcation of individual minds from the world, and hence from one another. While the connection of this philosophical position with educational procedure is not so obvious as is that of the points considered in the last three chapters, there are certain educational considerations which correspond to it; such as the antithesis supposed to exist between subject matter (the counterpart of the world) and method (the counterpart of mind); such as the tendency to treat interest as something purely private, without intrinsic connection with the material studied. Aside from incidental educational bearings, it will be shown in this chapter that the dualistic philosophy of mind and the world implies an erroneous conception of the relationship between knowledge and social interests, and between individuality or freedom, and social control and authority. The identification of the mind with the individual self and of the latter with a private psychic consciousness is comparatively modern. In both the Greek and medieval periods, the rule was to regard the individual as a channel through which a universal and divine intelligence operated. The individual was in no true sense the knower; the knower was the "Reason" which operated through him. The individual interfered at his peril, and only to the detriment of the truth. In the degree in which the individual rather than reason "knew," conceit, error, and opinion were substituted for true knowledge. In Greek life, observation was acute and alert; and thinking was free almost to the point of irresponsible speculations. Accordingly the consequences of the theory were only such as were consequent upon the lack of an experimental method. Without such a method individuals could not engage in knowing, and be checked up by the results of the inquiries of others. Without such liability to test by others, the minds of men could not be intellectually responsible; results were to be accepted because of their aesthetic consistency, agreeable quality, or the prestige of their authors. In the barbarian period, individuals were in a still more humble attitude to truth; important knowledge was supposed to be divinely revealed, and nothing remained for the minds of individuals except to work it over after it had been received on authority. Aside from the more consciously philosophic aspects of these movements, it never occurs to any one to identify mind and the personal self wherever beliefs are transmitted by custom.

In the medieval period there was a religious individualism. The deepest concern of life was the salvation of the individual soul. In the later Middle Ages, this latent individualism found conscious formulation in the nominalistic philosophies, which treated the structure of knowledge as something built up within the individual through his own acts, and mental states. With the rise of economic and political individualism after the sixteenth century, and with the development of Protestantism, the times were ripe for an emphasis upon the rights and duties of the individual in achieving knowledge for himself. This led to the view that knowledge is won wholly through personal and private experiences. As a consequence, mind, the source and possessor of knowledge, was thought of as wholly individual. Thus upon the educational side, we find educational reformers, like Montaigne, Bacon, Locke, henceforth vehemently

denouncing all learning which is acquired on hearsay, and asserting that even if beliefs happen to be true, they do not constitute knowledge unless they have grown up in and been tested by personal experience. The reaction against authority in all spheres of life, and the intensity of the struggle, against great odds, for freedom of action and inquiry, led to such an emphasis upon personal observations and ideas as in effect to isolate mind, and set it apart from the world to be known.

This isolation is reflected in the great development of that branch of philosophy known as epistemology - the theory of knowledge. The identification of mind with the self, and the setting up of the self as something independent and self-sufficient, created such a gulf between the knowing mind and the world that it became a question how knowledge was possible at all. Given a subject - the knower - and an object - the thing to be known - wholly separate from one another, it is necessary to frame a theory to explain how they get into connection with each other so that valid knowledge may result. This problem, with the allied one of the possibility of the world acting upon the mind and the mind acting upon the world, became almost the exclusive preoccupation of philosophic thought.

The theories that we cannot know the world as it really is but only the impressions made upon the mind, or that there is no world beyond the individual mind, or that knowledge is only a certain association of the mind's own states, were products of this preoccupation. We are not directly concerned with their truth; but the fact that such desperate solutions were widely accepted is evidence of the extent to which mind had been set over the world of realities. The increasing use of the term "consciousness" as an equivalent for mind, in the supposition that there is an inner world of conscious states and processes, independent of any relationship to nature and society, an inner world more truly and immediately known than anything else, is evidence of the same fact. In short, practical individualism, or struggle for greater freedom of thought in action, was translated into philosophic subjectivism.

2. Individual Mind as the Agent of Reorganization

It should be obvious that this philosophic movement misconceived the significance of the practical movement. Instead of being its transcript, it was a perversion. Men were not actually engaged in the absurdity of striving to be free from connection with nature and one another. They were striving for greater freedom in nature and society. They wanted greater power to initiate changes in the world of things and fellow beings; greater scope of movement and consequently greater freedom in observations and ideas implied in movement. They wanted not isolation from the world, but a more intimate connection with it. They wanted to form their beliefs about it at first hand, instead of through tradition. They wanted closer union with their fellows so that they might influence one another more effectively and might combine their respective actions for mutual aims.

So far as their beliefs were concerned, they felt that a great deal which passed for knowledge was merely the accumulated opinions of the past, much of it absurd and its correct portions not understood when accepted on authority. Men must observe for themselves, and form their own theories and personally test them. Such a method was the only alternative to the imposition of dogma as truth, a procedure which reduced mind to the formal act of acquiescing in truth. Such is the meaning of what is sometimes called the substitution of inductive experimental methods of knowing for deductive. In some sense, men had always used an inductive method in dealing with their immediate practical concerns. Architecture, agriculture, manufacture, etc., had to be based upon observation of the activities of natural objects, and ideas about such affairs had to be checked, to some extent, by results. But even in such things there was an undue reliance upon mere custom, followed blindly rather than understandingly. And this observational-experimental method was restricted to these "practical" matters, and a sharp distinction maintained between practice and theoretical knowledge or truth. (See Ch. XX.) The rise of free cities, the development of travel, exploration, and commerce, the evolution of new methods of producing commodities and doing business, threw men definitely upon their own resources. The reformers of science like Galileo, Descartes, and their successors, carried analogous methods into ascertaining the facts about nature. An interest in discovery took the place of an interest in systematizing and "proving" received beliefs.

A just philosophic interpretation of these movements would, indeed, have emphasized the rights and responsibilities of the individual in gaining knowledge and personally testing beliefs, no matter by what authorities they were vouched for. But it would not have isolated the individual from the world, and consequently isolated individuals - in theory - from one another. It would have perceived that such disconnection, such rupture of continuity, denied in advance the possibility of success in their endeavors. As matter of fact every individual has grown up, and always must grow up, in a social medium. His responses grow intelligent, or gain meaning, simply because he lives and acts in a medium of accepted meanings and values. (See ante, p. 30.) Through social intercourse, through sharing in the activities embodying beliefs, he gradually acquires a mind of his own. The conception of mind as a purely isolated possession of the self is at the very antipodes of the truth. The self achieves mind in the degree in which knowledge of things is incarnate in the life about him; the self is not a separate mind building up knowledge anew on its own account.

Yet there is a valid distinction between knowledge which is objective and impersonal, and thinking which is subjective and personal. In one sense, knowledge is that which we take for granted. It is that which is settled, disposed of, established, under control. What we fully know, we do not need to think about. In common phrase, it is certain, assured. And this does not mean a mere feeling of certainty. It denotes not a sentiment, but a practical attitude, a readiness to act without reserve or quibble. Of course we may be mistaken. What is taken for knowledge - for fact and truth - at a given time may not be such. But everything which is assumed without question, which is taken for granted in our intercourse with one another and nature is what, at the given time, is called knowledge. Thinking on the contrary, starts, as we have seen, from doubt or uncertainty. It marks an inquiring, hunting, searching attitude, instead of one of mastery and possession. Through its critical process true knowledge is revised and extended, and our convictions as to the state of things reorganized. Clearly the last few centuries have been typically a period of revision and reorganization of beliefs. Men did not really throw away all transmitted beliefs concerning the realities of existence, and start afresh upon the basis of their private, exclusive sensations and ideas. They could not have done so if they had wished to, and if it had been possible general imbecility would have been the only outcome. Men set out from what had passed as knowledge, and critically investigated the grounds upon which it rested; they noted exceptions; they used new mechanical appliances to bring to light data inconsistent with what had been believed; they used their imaginations to conceive a world different from that in which their forefathers had put their trust. The work was a piecemeal, a retail, business. One problem was tackled at a time. The net results of all the revisions amounted, however, to a revolution of prior conceptions of the world. What occurred was a reorganization of prior intellectual habitudes, infinitely more efficient than a cutting loose from all connections would have been.

This state of affairs suggests a definition of the role of the individual, or the self, in knowledge; namely, the redirection, or reconstruction of accepted beliefs. Every new idea, every conception of things differing from that authorized by current belief, must have its origin in an individual. New ideas are doubtless always sprouting, but a society governed by custom does not encourage their development. On the contrary, it tends to suppress them, just because they are deviations from what is current. The man who looks at things differently from others is in such a community a suspect character; for him to persist is generally fatal. Even when social censorship of beliefs is not so strict, social conditions may fail to provide the appliances which are requisite if new ideas are to be adequately elaborated; or they may fail to provide any material support and reward to those who entertain them. Hence they remain mere fancies, romantic castles in the air, or aimless speculations. The freedom of observation and imagination involved in the modern scientific revolution were not easily secured; they had to be fought for; many suffered for their intellectual independence. But, upon the whole, modern European society first permitted, and then, in some fields at least, deliberately encouraged the individual reactions which deviate from what custom prescribes. Discovery, research, inquiry in new lines, inventions, finally came to be either the social fashion, or in some degree tolerable. However, as we have already noted, philosophic theories of knowledge were not content to conceive mind in the individual as the pivot upon which reconstruction of beliefs turned, thus maintaining the continuity of the individual with the world of nature and fellow men. They regarded the individual mind as a separate entity, complete in each person, and isolated from nature and hence from other minds. Thus a legitimate intellectual individualism, the attitude of critical revision of former beliefs which is indispensable to progress, was explicitly formulated as a moral and social individualism. When the activities of mind set out from customary beliefs and strive to effect transformations of them which will in turn win general conviction, there is no opposition between the individual and the social. The intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination,

judgment, and invention are simply the agencies of social progress, just as conformity to habit is the agency of social conservation. But when knowledge is regarded as originating and developing within an individual, the ties which bind the mental life of one to that of his fellows are ignored and denied.

When the social quality of individualized mental operations is denied, it becomes a problem to find connections which will unite an individual with his fellows. Moral individualism is set up by the conscious separation of different centers of life. It has its roots in the notion that the consciousness of each person is wholly private, a self-inclosed continent, intrinsically independent of the ideas, wishes, purposes of everybody else. But when men act, they act in a common and public world. This is the problem to which the theory of isolated and independent conscious minds gave rise: Given feelings, ideas, desires, which have nothing to do with one another, how can actions proceeding from them be controlled in a social or public interest? Given an egoistic consciousness, how can action which has regard for others take place?

Moral philosophies which have started from such premises have developed four typical ways of dealing with the question. (i) One method represents the survival of the older authoritative position, with such concessions and compromises as the progress of events has made absolutely inevitable. The deviations and departures characterizing an individual are still looked upon with suspicion; in principle they are evidences of the disturbances, revolts, and corruptions inhering in an individual apart from external authoritative guidance. In fact, as distinct from principle, intellectual individualism is tolerated in certain technical regions - in subjects like mathematics and physics and astronomy, and in the technical inventions resulting therefrom. But the applicability of a similar method to morals, social, legal, and political matters, is denied. In such matters, dogma is still to be supreme; certain eternal truths made known by revelation, intuition, or the wisdom of our forefathers set unpassable limits to individual observation and speculation. The evils from which society suffers are set down to the efforts of misguided individuals to transgress these boundaries. Between the physical and the moral sciences, lie intermediate sciences of life, where the territory is only grudgingly yielded to freedom of inquiry under the pressure of accomplished fact. Although past history has demonstrated that the possibilities of human good are widened and made more secure by trusting to a responsibility built up within the very process of inquiry, the "authority" theory sets apart a sacred domain of truth which must be protected from the inroads of variation of beliefs. Educationally, emphasis may not be put on eternal truth, but it is put on the authority of book and teacher, and individual variation is discouraged.

(ii) Another method is sometimes termed rationalism or abstract intellectualism. A formal logical faculty is set up in distinction from tradition and history and all concrete subject matter. This faculty of reason is endowed with power to influence conduct directly. Since it deals wholly with general and impersonal forms, when different persons act in accord with logical findings, their activities will be externally consistent. There is no doubt of the services rendered by this philosophy. It was a powerful factor in the negative and dissolving criticism of doctrines having nothing but tradition and class interest behind them; it accustomed men to freedom of discussion and to the notion that beliefs had to be submitted to criteria of reasonableness. It undermined the power of prejudice, superstition, and brute force, by habituating men to reliance upon argument, discussion, and persuasion. It made for clarity and order of exposition. But its influence was greater in destruction of old falsities than in the construction of new ties and associations among men. Its formal and empty nature, due to conceiving reason as something complete in itself apart from subject matter, its hostile attitude toward historical institutions, its disregard of the influence of habit, instinct, and emotion, as operative factors in life, left it impotent in the suggestion of specific aims and methods. Bare logic, however important in arranging and criticizing existing subject matter, cannot spin new subject matter out of itself. In education, the correlative is trust in general ready-made rules and principles to secure agreement, irrespective of seeing to it that the pupil's ideas really agree with one another.

(iii) While this rationalistic philosophy was developing in France, English thought appealed to the intelligent self-interest of individuals in order to secure outer unity in the acts which issued from isolated streams of consciousness. Legal arrangements, especially penal administration, and governmental regulations, were to be such as to prevent the acts which proceeded from regard for one's own private sensations from interfering with the feelings of others. Education was to instill in individuals a sense that non-interference with others and some degree of positive regard for their

welfare were necessary for security in the pursuit of one's own happiness. Chief emphasis was put, however, upon trade as a means of bringing the conduct of one into harmony with that of others. In commerce, each aims at the satisfaction of his own wants, but can gain his own profit only by furnishing some commodity or service to another. Thus in aiming at the increase of his own private pleasurable states of consciousness, he contributes to the consciousness of others. Again there is no doubt that this view expressed and furthered a heightened perception of the values of conscious life, and a recognition that institutional arrangements are ultimately to be judged by the contributions which they make to intensifying and enlarging the scope of conscious experience. It also did much to rescue work, industry, and mechanical devices from the contempt in which they had been held in communities founded upon the control of a leisure class. In both ways, this philosophy promoted a wider and more democratic social concern. But it was tainted by the narrowness of its fundamental premise: the doctrine that every individual acts only from regard for his own pleasures and pains, and that so-called generous and sympathetic acts are only indirect ways of procuring and assuring one's own comfort. In other words, it made explicit the consequences inhering in any doctrine which makes mental life a self-inclosed thing, instead of an attempt to redirect and readapt common concerns. It made union among men a matter of calculation of externals. It lent itself to the contemptuous assertions of Carlyle that it was a doctrine of anarchy plus a constable, and recognized only a "cash nexus" among men. The educational equivalents of this doctrine in the uses made of pleasurable rewards and painful penalties are only too obvious. (iv) Typical German philosophy followed another path. It started from what was essentially the rationalistic philosophy of Descartes and his French successors. But while French thought upon the whole developed the idea of reason in opposition to the religious conception of a divine mind residing in individuals, German thought (as in Hegel) made a synthesis of the two. Reason is absolute. Nature is incarnate reason. History is reason in its progressive unfolding in man. An individual becomes rational only as he absorbs into himself the content of rationality in nature and in social institutions. For an absolute reason is not, like the reason of rationalism, purely formal and empty; as absolute it must include all content within itself. Thus the real problem is not that of controlling individual freedom so that some measure of social order and concord may result, but of achieving individual freedom through developing individual convictions in accord with the universal law found in the organization of the state as objective Reason. While this philosophy is usually termed absolute or objective idealism, it might better be termed, for educational purposes at least, institutional idealism. (See ante, p. 59.) It idealized historical institutions by conceiving them as incarnations of an immanent absolute mind. There can be no doubt that this philosophy was a powerful influence in rescuing philosophy in the beginning of the nineteenth century from the isolated individualism into which it had fallen in France and England. It served also to make the organization of the state more constructively interested in matters of public concern. It left less to chance, less to mere individual logical conviction, less to the workings of private self-interest. It brought intelligence to bear upon the conduct of affairs; it accentuated the need of nationally organized education in the interests of the corporate state. It sanctioned and promoted freedom of inquiry in all technical details of natural and historical phenomena. But in all ultimate moral matters, it tended to reinstate the principle of authority. It made for efficiency of organization more than did any of the types of philosophy previously mentioned, but it made no provision for free experimental modification of this organization. Political democracy, with its belief in the right of individual desire and purpose to take part in readapting even the fundamental constitution of society, was foreign to it.

3. Educational Equivalents

It is not necessary to consider in detail the educational counterparts of the various defects found in these various types of philosophy. It suffices to say that in general the school has been the institution which exhibited with greatest clearness the assumed antithesis between purely individualistic methods of learning and social action, and between freedom and social control. The antithesis is reflected in the absence of a social atmosphere and motive for learning, and the consequent separation, in the conduct of the school, between method of instruction and methods of government; and in the slight opportunity afforded individual variations. When learning is a phase of active undertakings which involve mutual exchange, social control enters into the very process of learning. When the social factor is absent, learning becomes a carrying over of some presented material into a purely individual consciousness, and there is no inherent reason why it should give a more socialized direction to mental and emotional disposition. There is tendency on the part of both the upholders and the opponents of freedom in school to identify it with absence of social direction,

or, sometimes, with merely physical unconstraint of movement. But the essence of the demand for freedom is the need of conditions which will enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group interest, and to partake of its activities in such ways that social guidance shall be a matter of his own mental attitude, and not a mere authoritative dictation of his acts. Because what is often called discipline and "government" has to do with the external side of conduct alone, a similar meaning is attached, by reaction, to freedom. But when it is perceived that each idea signifies the quality of mind expressed in action, the supposed opposition between them falls away. Freedom means essentially the part played by thinking - which is personal - in learning: - it means intellectual initiative, independence in observation, judicious invention, foresight of consequences, and ingenuity of adaptation to them.

But because these are the mental phase of behavior, the needed play of individuality - or freedom - cannot be separated from opportunity for free play of physical movements. Enforced physical quietude may be unfavorable to realization of a problem, to undertaking the observations needed to define it, and to performance of the experiments which test the ideas suggested. Much has been said about the importance of "self-activity" in education, but the conception has too frequently been restricted to something merely internal - something excluding the free use of sensory and motor organs. Those who are at the stage of learning from symbols, or who are engaged in elaborating the implications of a problem or idea preliminary to more carefully thought-out activity, may need little perceptible overt activity. But the whole cycle of self-activity demands an opportunity for investigation and experimentation, for trying out one's ideas upon things, discovering what can be done with materials and appliances. And this is incompatible with closely restricted physical activity. Individual activity has sometimes been taken as meaning leaving a pupil to work by himself or alone. Relief from need of attending to what any one else is doing is truly required to secure calm and concentration. Children, like grown persons, require a judicious amount of being let alone. But the time, place, and amount of such separate work is a matter of detail, not of principle. There is no inherent opposition between working with others and working as an individual. On the contrary, certain capacities of an individual are not brought out except under the stimulus of associating with others. That a child must work alone and not engage in group activities in order to be free and let his individuality develop, is a notion which measures individuality by spatial distance and makes a physical thing of it.

Individuality as a factor to be respected in education has a double meaning. In the first place, one is mentally an individual only as he has his own purpose and problem, and does his own thinking. The phrase "think for one's self" is a pleonasm. Unless one does it for one's self, it isn't thinking. Only by a pupil's own observations, reflections, framing and testing of suggestions can what he already knows be amplified and rectified. Thinking is as much an individual matter as is the digestion of food. In the second place, there are variations of point of view, of appeal of objects, and of mode of attack, from person to person. When these variations are suppressed in the alleged interests of uniformity, and an attempt is made to have a single mold of method of study and recitation, mental confusion and artificiality inevitably result. Originality is gradually destroyed, confidence in one's own quality of mental operation is undermined, and a docile subjection to the opinion of others is inculcated, or else ideas run wild. The harm is greater now than when the whole community was governed by customary beliefs, because the contrast between methods of learning in school and those relied upon outside the school is greater. That systematic advance in scientific discovery began when individuals were allowed, and then encouraged, to utilize their own peculiarities of response to subject matter, no one will deny. If it is said in objection, that pupils in school are not capable of any such originality, and hence must be confined to appropriating and reproducing things already known by the better informed, the reply is twofold. (i) We are concerned with originality of attitude which is equivalent to the unforced response of one's own individuality, not with originality as measured by product. No one expects the young to make original discoveries of just the same facts and principles as are embodied in the sciences of nature and man. But it is not unreasonable to expect that learning may take place under such conditions that from the standpoint of the learner there is genuine discovery. While immature students will not make discoveries from the standpoint of advanced students, they make them from their own standpoint, whenever there is genuine learning. (ii) In the normal process of becoming acquainted with subject matter already known to others, even young pupils react in unexpected ways. There is something fresh, something not capable of being fully anticipated by even the most experienced teacher, in the ways they go at the topic, and in the particular ways in which things strike them. Too often all this is brushed aside as irrelevant; pupils are deliberately held to rehearsing material in the exact form in which the older person conceives it. The result is that what is instinctively original in individuality, that

which marks off one from another, goes unused and undirected. Teaching then ceases to be an educative process for the teacher. At most he learns simply to improve his existing technique; he does not get new points of view; he fails to experience any intellectual companionship. Hence both teaching and learning tend to become conventional and mechanical with all the nervous strain on both sides therein implied.

As maturity increases and as the student has a greater background of familiarity upon which a new topic is projected, the scope of more or less random physical experimentation is reduced. Activity is defined or specialized in certain channels. To the eyes of others, the student may be in a position of complete physical quietude, because his energies are confined to nerve channels and to the connected apparatus of the eyes and vocal organs. But because this attitude is evidence of intense mental concentration on the part of the trained person, it does not follow that it should be set up as a model for students who still have to find their intellectual way about. And even with the adult, it does not cover the whole circuit of mental energy. It marks an intermediate period, capable of being lengthened with increased mastery of a subject, but always coming between an earlier period of more general and conspicuous organic action and a later time of putting to use what has been apprehended.

When, however, education takes cognizance of the union of mind and body in acquiring knowledge, we are not obliged to insist upon the need of obvious, or external, freedom. It is enough to identify the freedom which is involved in teaching and studying with the thinking by which what a person already knows and believes is enlarged and refined. If attention is centered upon the conditions which have to be met in order to secure a situation favorable to effective thinking, freedom will take care of itself. The individual who has a question which being really a question to him instigates his curiosity, which feeds his eagerness for information that will help him cope with it, and who has at command an equipment which will permit these interests to take effect, is intellectually free. Whatever initiative and imaginative vision he possesses will be called into play and control his impulses and habits. His own purposes will direct his actions. Otherwise, his seeming attention, his docility, his memorizings and reproductions, will partake of intellectual servility. Such a condition of intellectual subjection is needed for fitting the masses into a society where the many are not expected to have aims or ideas of their own, but to take orders from the few set in authority. It is not adapted to a society which intends to be democratic.

Summary

True individualism is a product of the relaxation of the grip of the authority of custom and traditions as standards of belief. Aside from sporadic instances, like the height of Greek thought, it is a comparatively modern manifestation. Not but that there have always been individual diversities, but that a society dominated by conservative custom represses them or at least does not utilize them and promote them. For various reasons, however, the new individualism was interpreted philosophically not as meaning development of agencies for revising and transforming previously accepted beliefs, but as an assertion that each individual's mind was complete in isolation from everything else. In the theoretical phase of philosophy, this produced the epistemological problem: the question as to the possibility of any cognitive relationship of the individual to the world. In its practical phase, it generated the problem of the possibility of a purely individual consciousness acting on behalf of general or social interests, - the problem of social direction. While the philosophies which have been elaborated to deal with these questions have not affected education directly, the assumptions underlying them have found expression in the separation frequently made between study and government and between freedom of individuality and control by others. Regarding freedom, the important thing to bear in mind is that it designates a mental attitude rather than external unconstraint of movements, but that this quality of mind cannot develop without a fair leeway of movements in exploration, experimentation, application, etc. A society based on custom will utilize individual variations only up to a limit of conformity with usage; uniformity is the chief ideal within each class. A progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures.



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