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What Does Philosophy Have to Offer Education, and Who Should Be Offering It?

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ABSTRACT. In this review essay Stanton Wortham explores how philosophy of education should both turn inward, engaging with concepts and arguments developed in academic philosophy, and outward, encouraging educational publics to apply philosophical approaches to educational policy and practice. He develops this argument with reference to two recent ambitious projects: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, edited by Harvey Siegel, and the two-volume yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE), titled *Why Do We Educate?* edited by Gary Fenstermacher (series editor), David Coulter and John Wiens (volume 1), and Mark Smylie (volume 2). These two projects initially appear to be opposed, with the *Handbook* emphasizing elite philosophy and the *Yearbook* emphasizing public engagement. Wortham argues that each project is in fact more complex, and that they are in some respects complementary. He concludes by making a case against a simple hierarchy of basic and applied knowledge and calling for a more heterogeneous philosophy of education.

The works under review in this essay — the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, edited by Harvey Siegel, and the National Society for the Study of Education's two-volume yearbook, *Why Do We Educate?* edited by Gary Fenstermacher — present a broad range of work in the field of philosophy of education.<sup>1</sup> Each of these substantial projects hopes to reposition the field. The twenty-eight-chapter *Handbook* is comprehensive, with sections on aims, reasoning, ethics, knowledge, and politics. About two-thirds of the authors are what Siegel calls “general philosophers,” who work “in departments of philosophy and publish ... in mainstream philosophy journals” (*OPE*, 4), and most of the rest are well-known philosophers of education. All of the authors contributing to this volume avoid or explain technical terminology, and the chapters in this collection are thus clearly written and mostly compelling. The *Handbook* will be of interest to many general philosophers and to almost all philosophers of education, as well as to scholars in education who are comfortable with theory. Like most serious philosophical work, it will probably not appeal broadly to educational researchers, policymakers, practitioners, or the general public. The two-volume *NSSE Yearbook*, on the other hand, is aimed directly at these four groups. About half of the twenty-one chapters in the first volume are written by philosophers of education, a few are written by general philosophers, and the rest are written by educational researchers. The chapters introduce philosophical questions about the purposes of education and connect these to educational policy and practice. The first volume will be useful to philosophers of education and of interest to academically inclined practitioners, policymakers, and citizens. The second volume contains about 100 short pieces or excerpts — mostly in nonacademic genres — from a range of artists, entertainers, businesspeople, scientists, educators, politicians, clergy, journalists, and scholars. These selections raise interesting questions about the ends of education and take various positions. This volume will interest anyone who wants to be provoked by and to reflect on heterogeneous claims about educational purposes.

Philosophy of education, as Siegel defines it, “is that branch of philosophy that addresses philosophical questions concerning the nature, aims and problems of education.... [It] look[s] both inward to the parent discipline of philosophy and outward to educational practice” (*OPE*, 3). This distinction can be applied to the books under review here, as well: The *Handbook* looks inward, while the *Yearbook* looks outward. Siegel notes that many of the most important general philosophers from Plato through the middle of the twentieth century wrote about topics in the philosophy of education as part of their broader philosophical work, but he claims that philosophy of education has in recent decades been “abandoned” by general philosophers for “contingent historical” reasons — which he unfortunately does not elaborate, because it would be useful to understand the abandonment. Siegel notes that this deprives philosophy of education of talented potential contributors and, I would add, hurts its standing within the academy. The *Handbook’s* primary goal is

restoration of philosophy of education to its rightful place in the world of general philosophy, by playing some role in furthering the recent rekindling of interest among general philosophers in philosophy of education: in their taking seriously philosophical problems concerning education, and in putting the latter on their philosophical agendas. (*OPE*, 7)

The *Handbook*, then, looks inward toward the “parent” discipline of philosophy, trying to garner attention and respect from general philosophers and trying to enlist them in studying educational issues. In contrast, the *Yearbook* looks outward, trying to catalyze public conversations about the ends of education. The series editor Gary Fenstermacher and his fellow volume editors argue that “too many public discussions of education are dominated by too few ideas” (*RC*, 1) and that we need a more “robust, inclusive and incisive conversation about education and schooling” (*VC*, 2). The first volume is “designed to aid persons to contribute to the conversation” (*RC*, 2) by modeling more

philosophically informed discussion about the ends of education. The second volume presents pieces in the ongoing conversation that is already taking place, both demonstrating that interesting claims about the aims of education are being made and providing points of entry for readers to join that conversation.

It appears, then, that the two projects offer different answers to the questions in my title. The *Handbook* argues that general philosophers have professional expertise that can be productively applied to educational topics and phenomena. The results will include insights and arguments that may be of use to educational researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the public — perhaps in the same way as the results of basic scientific research are often useful in the long run — but professionals should work through the substantive issues before engaging nonphilosophers about possible applications. The *Yearbook* argues that philosophers of education should use what they already know to engage educational researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the public in richer conversations about the ends of education. This seems at first glance to stand in opposition to the approach of the *Handbook*: instead of turning inward toward the discipline of philosophy, philosophers of education should be turning outward toward educational stakeholders; instead of focusing on the elite group of general philosophers, the *Yearbook* hopes to deepen an ongoing popular conversation about education. On the other hand, one might argue that the two projects are not opposed but complementary. What exactly is the *Yearbook* bringing to the broader public conversation about education? Perhaps it is contributing knowledge and techniques that have been developed by general philosophers in professional publications such as the *Handbook*. This essay explores whether the two projects are opposed or complementary. In the first two sections I argue that neither project is as univocal as it initially seems, and I suggest that philosophy of education should turn both inward and outward. In the final section I argue for a heterogeneous philosophy of education.

## Turning Toward the Academy

In his introduction to the *Handbook*, Siegel argues that “the pursuit of philosophical questions concerning education is partly dependent upon investigations of the more familiar core areas of philosophy” (*OPE*, 4). He also uses the term “depend on” when illustrating what he means by this — for example, questions about curriculum depend on general philosophical issues explored in epistemology and questions of learning depend on investigations in epistemology and the philosophy of mind. He does add adverbs such as “routinely,” “typically,” or “often” to these claims, so it would take further investigation to determine precisely what Siegel means by “dependence” here. But the metaphor of general philosophy as “core” also implies that investigations in the philosophy of education must draw on concepts, arguments, and insights from general philosophy, while the reverse is not true. The *Handbook* appears to set up a hierarchical relation between general philosophy and philosophy of education. In what follows I explore where the chapters in the *Handbook* stand with respect to this apparently hierarchical relation. Only a few offer explicit arguments on the topic, but all of the chapters position themselves and their intended audiences in relevant ways.

*Handbook* authors do three types of positioning on this issue. About a quarter of the chapters (spread across the various sections) describe contemporary work on a topic in general philosophy, then explain how this can illuminate issues of concern to philosophers of education, educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. These chapters presuppose that general philosophy forms a “core” that can be applied to educational topics. Many of these chapters are useful, explaining contemporary philosophical insights and describing interesting applications. Emily Robertson explores how knowledge can be warranted despite the fact that knowers are always sociopolitically located. She applies established distinctions and arguments from general philosophy and provides insight for those who study how education helps students

develop warranted knowledge. Richard Feldman defines the key aspects of arguments and explores how one might teach students to appreciate and critique them better. Like Robertson's, his chapter is not intended to make original contributions to general philosophy itself. In fact, he argues that important issues "sometimes get lost in the [general] philosophical debates about the nature and goals of argument" (*OPE*, 68). The *Handbook* provides Feldman an opportunity to step back and look at the fundamentals, presumably because those in education need a less technical overview. His chapter contains philosophical arguments in which he makes useful distinctions and provides systematic support for claims, but he does this in the service of explaining established terrain to outsiders. Writing in a similar way about another domain, Michael Slote reviews arguments that justice should be conceptualized in terms of care and relation instead of decontextualized autonomy. He cites arguments from general philosophy and elaborates their implications for education. Other chapters also bring concepts and arguments from general philosophy to bear on educational issues. Robert Audi applies philosophical theories to the question of how science educators can be neutral toward religion; Richard Grandy draws on epistemology and philosophy of science to explore whether teachers should emphasize established scientific theories or explore students' own conceptions of nature; and Lawrence Blum develops a philosophical account of prejudice in order to explore how one might educate against it. All of these chapters offer clear reviews of general philosophical work and demonstrate its relevance to education.

Almost half of the *Handbook* authors position themselves in a different way: they develop arguments about topics in the philosophy of education, without presupposing that general philosophy has something in particular to add. Some of these authors are general philosophers and others are philosophers of education. All employ concepts and ways of thinking that are recognizably philosophical — they carefully examine

alternative positions, diligently look for tacit assumptions, and systematically attend to grounds for belief — and almost all draw on work in general philosophy. Eamonn Callan and Dylan Arena address the question of whether, if the ends are worthy, indoctrination is justifiable. They argue that the creation of closed-mindedness, even in the service of indoctrinating young people into true belief, is inappropriate. Rob Reich argues that children themselves should have more say in how they are educated, and he describes tensions between the legitimate educational interests of parents, children, and the state. Harry Brighouse outlines the primary aims of education and shows the difficulty of adjudicating conflicts among them. Meira Levinson carefully describes ten goals that underlie “multicultural education” and outlines incompatibilities among mutually exclusive versions. Amy Gutmann argues for a particular version of multicultural education, one that creates “equal citizenship,” mutual toleration, and appropriate recognition of groups. Both Catherine Elgin and Martha Nussbaum argue for the importance of the arts and humanities in a society increasingly concerned with technical expertise and rapid returns from education. All these chapters, and several others, draw on work in general philosophy as well as work in the philosophy of education to develop well-reasoned arguments about important educational issues.

The remaining quarter of the *Handbook* chapters show how questions in the philosophy of education play a crucial role in general philosophy. These chapters undermine the alleged hierarchy, claiming that philosophy of education is “intertwined” with general philosophy and that some educational issues are so “deep” that investigation of them is required to answer general philosophical questions. Several chapters in this group are among the most provocative in the volume. Stefaan Cuypers claims explicitly that there are “essential,” “intrinsic” connections between general philosophy and the philosophy of education. He argues that general philosophical accounts of free will must explore “education for authenticity,” the process through

which autonomous wills emerge in nondeterministic, noncoercive education. Philip Kitcher also argues explicitly that key issues in general philosophy depend on philosophy of education. He illustrates this with an argument about tensions between liberal educational ideals and the demands of an economic system that presupposes an alternative vision of human flourishing. Amelie Rorty argues that imaginative thinking is essential to practical rationality, and she explores whether and how this can be taught. Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith analyze a type of teaching central to general philosophy, Socratic teaching. Elijah Millgram explores moral education in order to develop an argument about the dependence of moral standards on moral communities and the shifts in moral communities over time.

There is no conceptual conflict between the three types of positioning done by *Handbook* authors, and one could argue that some chapters adopt more than one position. Several chapters in the first group show convincingly that philosophers of education and educational researchers could benefit from ideas and approaches developed in general philosophy. At the same time, as illustrated in the second group, philosophers from whatever subfield can and should continue to do systematic work exploring educational questions. Neither of these approaches contradicts the claim made by the third group of authors, that some core issues in general philosophy require engagement with educational questions. Siegel himself agrees that all three approaches are valuable. He laments the separation between general philosophy and philosophy of education, and he envisions mutually beneficial interconnections between the two fields. He does want general philosophers to have more interest in and influence over the philosophy of education. But he also argues that “the pursuit of fundamental questions in more or less all the core areas of philosophy often leads naturally to and is sometimes enhanced by sustained attention to questions about education” (*OPE*, 5) and that educational questions are “intertwined” with many general philosophical issues. This



envisions general philosophy as an enterprise essentially engaged with educational questions because it cannot answer core questions about knowledge, ethics, and sociality without addressing how humans do and should develop cognitively, ethically, and socially — and these developmental processes cannot be elucidated without examining education in a broad sense. The *Handbook* thus offers two answers to the question of how general philosophy should relate to philosophy of education: one assumes a hierarchy between the two, with “core” knowledge from the “parent discipline” moving only in one direction, downstream to the applied field, while the other envisions a more complex mutual dependence that enriches both. General philosophers have important knowledge and practices to offer philosophers of education, educational researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public, but the discipline can also benefit from engaging with educational topics and perhaps educational practices.

#### Turning Toward Educational Publics

The two-volume NSSE *Yearbook* turns outward, hoping to engage educational researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public in conversation about the ends of education. But what kind of public conversation do the volumes envision, and what do philosophers have to contribute? The titles for the two volumes begin the same way — *Why Do We Educate?* — but end differently. The first volume, which has a “more traditional scholarly character” (Fenstermacher in *VC*, 3), is titled *Renewing the Conversation*, while the second is called *Voices from the Conversation*. The editors imagine different tasks for the two volumes and a different status for the authors in each. The first volume, edited by David Coulter and John Wiens, has the potential to influence the public conversation about the ends of education, while the second, edited by Mark Smylie, presents excerpts from that conversation as it exists. As Fenstermacher, the series editor, says, the first “volume is intended to advance” the conversation while the second merely “samples” it (*VC*, 3). The first volume is intended to act upon the reader

— it is “designed to aid persons to contribute to the conversation” (Fenstermacher in *RC*, 2) — while the second volume does not have this capacity. The editors hope that readers, having been prepared by the first volume to participate in a philosophically invigorated public conversation about the ends of education, will interact more effectively with voices such as those presented in the second volume.

This section explores what the editors mean by “the conversation” — who is talking, about what, following what norms, and for what purposes. The volumes’ explicit and tacit answers to these questions reveal how they think the philosophy of education can and should shape public discussions of educational policy and practice. To begin addressing the questions, we should explore why the editors feel that conversation about educational ends needs renewal. Smylie, editor of the second volume, claims that “our society faces unforeseen changes and unprecedented challenges” (*VC*, 7) and that we have lost “anchoring principles.” Fenstermacher argues that current public discussions of education are narrow and of low quality and that we need a more “robust, inclusive and incisive conversation about education and schooling” (*VC*, 2). While it is true that contemporary discussions of educational policy too often focus on raising test scores and increasing economic competitiveness, to the exclusion of other educational ends, the editors do not argue convincingly that “the conversation” needs to be renewed now more than in other times and places. In many historical eras Americans have felt that some problem needed urgently to be solved (such as incorporating former slaves into social and political life, assimilating immigrants, or defeating Communism), that education was crucial to solving this problem, and that the educational apparatus was failing to act as it should. *Voices from the Conversation* contains a 1963 essay by James Baldwin in which he argued that “we are living through a very dangerous time” and that education is the key to navigating it successfully (*VC*, 17). That volume also contains an essay by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in which he pointed out that “public opinion in almost every country is dissatisfied

with the prevailing system of education” (VC, 228). Serious dissatisfaction with education occurs in many times and places. I am sympathetic to the editors’ belief that public discussions of educational ends should be made broader and deeper, but I am convinced neither that we face unprecedented educational challenges at this sociohistorical moment nor that public discussions of education have degenerated to unusually low levels.

Optimists among us might argue that the editors and others concerned about improving public discussions of education have an unusual opportunity at this sociohistorical moment, however. Three U.S. Presidents in a row have treated education as a crucial aspect of government policy, and the public has also shown interest in education. The volume editors are correct that the resulting discussions of education have been narrower than most philosophers would like, but this is nonetheless a moment at which philosophically informed discussions of educational ends could perhaps influence public policy — if philosophers could somehow help educational publics reflect in a more philosophically informed way. The prospects for this have increased recently because of a shift in higher education away from an exclusive focus on decontextualized research as the core mission of the university and toward practical engagement with the world. University administrators and faculty in the arts and sciences are increasingly reaching out to colleagues in education and related areas, hoping to include practical or service content in their courses, to build partnerships with communities, and to focus their work in part on improving education, public health, and social welfare. Although the editors do not frame it this way, their project aligns with the argument that we should try to deepen public conversations about education at a time when such conversations are more likely to have an impact.

The first volume is intended to spark a renewed conversation. The volume contains twenty-one essays, about half of which are authored by scholars well-known to philosophers of education, including Kwame Anthony Appiah, Seyla Benhabib, Harry Brighouse, Eamonn Callan, Kieran Egan, Gary Fenstermacher, Nel Noddings, Martha Nussbaum, and Diane Ravitch. Several chapters from other authors are also compelling — notably an essay on divergent conceptions of childhood by Joseph Dunne, and one on misguided economic conceptualizations of development by Randall Nielsen and Janice Kinghorn. A few of the essays are reprinted from earlier publications, but most were written for this volume. Virtually all the authors in this first volume — the one positioned to influence “the conversation” — are academics. This presupposes that academics are well positioned to renew the conversation. The editors of this volume, Coulter and Wiens, certainly do not intend to be elitist. They begin their introduction by describing the admirable accounts of educational ends provided by ordinary people, and one of their editorial aims is to “expand the conversation” such that we all listen more to ordinary people’s thoughts about education. But the structure of the two volumes nonetheless assumes that academics have insights — instantiated in the first volume’s essays — that can renew and enrich the conversation. As Smylie suggests in his prologue to the second volume, academics can catalyze the “more fundamental conversation” that we need (*VC*, 7). A reader might conclude that the editors’ prescription is for policymakers, practitioners, and the public to begin conversing more like philosophers of education, thinking “about the perennial questions surrounding the nature of the good life” (Ken Osborne, *RC*, 37). This would assume a hierarchical relation between philosophy of education and educational policymakers, practitioners, and the public, with knowledge moving downstream from academics to educational publics. This is in some respects what the editors propose, but their vision turns out to be more complex.

We should be able to infer what the editors believe a renewed and enriched conversation would entail by attending to the essays themselves. The first volume can presumably renew the conversation because the authors say or do something that could positively influence policymakers, practitioners, and the public. One way it might do this is through the structure of the volume itself. Perhaps the volume exemplifies something about how the renewed conversation should go, with different sections representing different phases of the imagined conversation or covering key topics that must be engaged in a productive conversation. Neither the structure nor the content of the first volume reflects such an overarching account, however. In some ways the first few essays are a bit broader, and the last few divide up the life stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The largest section of essays covers a diverse set of topics in this order: culture, imagination, science, math, spirituality, economics, the body, indigenous perspectives, and technology. Most readers would probably appreciate a bit more structure, but the editors' approach is better than constraining such a complex issue as the ends of education within one allegedly universal set of categories. With respect to topic, then, "the conversation," as the editors envision it, seems to be heterogeneous.

The volume might also exemplify an ideal "conversation" at the level of individual essays, if most essays contained some content or method that characterizes a productive approach to the ends of education. But this is not the case either. Many of the essays make interesting arguments, but only a few are systematic in a way that might provide a model for scholarly conversation. Four of the essays across the two volumes do offer taxonomies that might help to organize our thinking about the ends of education. In the first of these, Brighthouse argues that education should help people "to lead flourishing lives in multiple dimensions" (RC, 59) and that a flourishing life often involves the seven dimensions of money, family, work, friends/community, health,

freedom, and values. In the second, Fenstermacher argues that most discussions of educational ends focus on the reasonable but insufficient goals of academic achievement and educational equity. He suggests that we should also educate for reasonableness, agency, relationship, and morality. The third, Smylie's prologue to the second volume, divides the possible ends of education into the development of the individual, the development of the society (economically or through increasing social justice), the advancement of humanity, and the cultivation of democratic values and processes. Finally, the fourth of these, Mike Rose's contribution to the second volume, narrates Rose's own educational journey and describes several ends: broadening knowledge of the world, providing a way to understand human behavior, offering a set of tools to think with, providing skills to act in the world, offering the pleasure of competently using knowledge, and having a sense of the self as capable. Each of these partly overlapping taxonomies is plausible, and they might provide the beginnings of a more systematic conceptualization of the ends of education. But the conversation as it stands in the *Yearbook* leaves it to the reader to compare or integrate them.

There is one topic that recurs across most of the contributions: "democracy." Of the first nine substantive chapters in *Renewing the Conversation*, six are on democracy or citizenship or both, and the editors say explicitly that democracy was a central editorial concern. For example, Fenstermacher summarizes the goal of the volumes as encouraging "a more expansive, robust and inclusive dialogue about education in democratic societies" (RC, 2). Smylie singles out the cultivation of democratic values and processes as one of the few basic ends of education (on the same level as developing the individual and developing the society) "because we consider this ... purpose so important and so fundamental" (VC, 11). He also asserts that this heavy emphasis on democracy reflects the "voice" of the two volumes: "This is a time when we need to be particularly mindful of the very important relationship between education and

democratic ideals and processes" (*VC*, 11). In their conclusion to the first volume, Wiens and Coulter even claim that "democracy and education can be considered as two sides of the same coin" (*RC*, 298). People in nondemocratic societies educate, however, so it seems that the ends of education do not necessarily include democratic ideals and processes — unless education in nondemocratic societies cannot reasonably be called "education," or unless democracy is an end toward which educational processes naturally tend. Acts targeted to participation in the political system are also a small fraction of what people do in their lives, so it does not seem that a political system in the narrow sense can be integral to all core educational ideals and processes. The editors' enthusiasm for democracy seems to envision it as something broader than a mere political system, as a process of sociality that is perhaps central to all societies. "The conversation," then, should be democratic, but it is not fully clear what the editors mean by this.

What should a "renewed" conversation about education look like? And what role should philosophers of education play in it — should they lead it, or are they on equal footing with everyone else? We can gain insight into these issues by examining projected interlocutors' tacit positioning. Like all language use, the *Yearbook* essays identify authors and readers as recognizable types of social actors. The chapters presuppose several types of interlocutory roles, and these represent various visions of what a renewed conversation should look like. A few of the essays in the first volume presuppose two didactic, opposed interlocutory roles. Ravitch, for instance, distinguishes between education that forms students to fit society and education that empowers individuals to direct themselves — casting aspersions on the former and defending the latter. One might object to her substantive argument, but I am not doing so here. I focus on the interactional positions projected by her essay. She presupposes two camps, one associated with each of the positions she identifies. She is in one camp,

and less admirable others are in the other camp. Her essay thus presupposes a familiar type of interaction: two antagonists, each perhaps hoping to convince the other of his or her point of view but prepared to oppose the other if necessary. This resembles the interactional format enacted on contemporary political talk shows, in which “balance” means having one representative from each partisan camp and a series of didactic expositions articulating opposed views. A few other essays in the volume project similar oppositions. Ken Osborne distinguishes between “schooling” and “education,” decrying the former and championing the latter. Ian Winchester makes a distinction between the lawlike regularities of science and the hermeneutic richness of individual experience, though he does not aim to replace one with the other. Most of the essays in the second volume, perhaps because of their shortness, also presuppose this sort of interaction — taking a relatively predictable position, or raising a familiar dichotomy and criticizing the other side; nonetheless, many of these contributions tell interesting stories and are engaging to read. It is useful to hear about education from a broad range of well-known figures, ranging from Barack Obama to Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, Bill Cosby, Ann Landers, Bill Gates, Geoffrey Canada, Laura Bush, Vivian Paley, Colin Powell, Christiane Amanpour, David Brooks, Eleanor Roosevelt, the John Birch Society, and many others.

Taking and defending a clear position opposed to others’ can lead to useful conversation in some cases. The editors do not seem to favor this vision of an ideal “renewed conversation,” however. Wiens and Coulter say in their conclusion to the first volume that the authors offer their arguments “tentatively” and with “courageous humility.” In fact this describes only some of the essays, but it shows the editors’ belief that a productive conversation about educational ends should not be primarily didactic. And most essays in the first volume presuppose a different type of relation among interlocutors. Appiah, for instance, refuses to choose between universalism and



particularism. He argues that we must simultaneously keep in view both our common humanity and our fundamental differences. He also refuses to choose between the need for action and the power of reflection, arguing that the challenge of ethically living together with others requires both material acts and conceptual reflection. The interlocutory roles projected in Appiah's argument are not opposed didactic positions. Instead, those drawn to universalist or particularist, idealist or materialist views are asked to consider how apparently contradictory positions can each be true in some respects. Appiah does not immediately invite interlocutors to take his side or oppose him. He asks them to reconsider the assumptions they have habitually made and to join him in exploring the tensions and potential elaborations that might allow them to reconcile competing but powerful intuitions. He takes a position, but only after a more complex process of examining assumptions and exploring alternatives.

Dunne adopts a similar approach in his essay, exploring divergent conceptions of childhood: the "privative," which presents children as lacking mature capacities, and the "privileged," which presents children as having unique capacities that they (unfortunately) lose as they develop. Dunne does not fully accept or reject either of these positions, but instead locates them sociohistorically and explores how aspects of each might be layered into a view that could advance contemporary thinking about education. Benhabib, in a well-known piece on the headscarf controversy in France, moves beyond the two typical reactions to the controversy: that the state was oppressing Muslim girls by unjustly preventing them from exercising their minority beliefs when it banned headscarves, or that the state was liberating the girls by allowing them to move beyond their patriarchal home culture. She shows how girls used the freedom of expression fostered by the French state to embrace a traditional symbol and thus articulated their own voice — one that was distinct from their "traditional" societies (in which women would not have been able to speak for themselves in public like this) but

one that was also distinct from mainstream French culture (which avoids the mixing of political voice and religious belief).

Other essays in the first volume also project interactions in which interlocutors work together to uncover hidden assumptions in widely held positions and to explore alternatives. Noddings argues, for example, that spirituality should not be avoided as an educational topic and explores how formal education could include critical reflection on this crucial dimension of human experience. Nussbaum rejects essentializing versions of identity politics and describes how we might educate “world citizens” who empathize with but do not reify “others.” Nielsen and Kinghorn show how economic “development,” as a model for state-to-state relations between the North and South, fails to account for how economic and educational processes are embedded within culturally specific social and political relations. These essays all project a conversation in which authors work with interlocutors to examine implausible assumptions that lie behind familiar points of view and to explore alternatives that might be more productive.

I argue that this type of interactional organization captures something important about “the conversation” as the editors imagine it. The authors who write this way project a privileged status for themselves, because they are the ones able to uncover others’ tacit (and sometimes invalid) assumptions and they are the ones able to model a more incisive examination of assumptions and a more productive search for alternatives. But the authors are not didactic, and they do not adopt an omniscient voice in which they are able to foresee all relevant alternatives. Instead, after pointing out the shortcomings of common assumptions, most authors invite readers into a conversation about alternatives. These projected interactional roles remind me of the Socratic elenchus in the early Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates first showed interlocutors the implausibility of their habitual answers to important questions and then explored alternative accounts with them. These Socratic conversations are not nihilist — Socrates

and most interlocutors assumed that we share standards and therefore are able to judge some arguments as better than others — but they are aporetic and thus presuppose that ongoing conversation is required to address fundamental questions. The Socratic elenchus captures the interactional roles presupposed in the majority of the essays: academics have the capacity and the responsibility to show people how their taken-for-granted assumptions about educational ends have some undesirable consequences, and academics should help guide open-ended conversations about these and alternative approaches to fundamental educational questions, but people must engage in the conversations themselves and cannot simply be told what to believe.

In at least one crucial respect, then, the *Yearbook* is compatible with the *Handbook*: both presuppose that philosophers have some expert knowledge that will allow them to formulate better arguments that might enrich public conversations about education. The *Yearbook* aims to apply such knowledge, however, not to foster disciplinary research. And the *Yearbook* suggests that educational publics will make crucial contributions to the resulting conversations. Philosophers may catalyze or midwife these contributions, at least in some cases, but educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, as well as citizens will provide essential content. Thus the *Yearbook* turns both inward and outward, drawing on philosophy but using it for a conversation that extends beyond the discipline.

### Heterogeneous Stances in the Philosophy of Education

First impressions of the *Handbook* and the *Yearbook* are partly misleading. The *Handbook* does not merely represent an elitist vision in which knowledge flows downstream from general philosophers to philosophers of education, and thence perhaps to educational publics. It does turn inward toward the discipline, and many chapters in the *Handbook* show how philosophers of education could productively draw on general philosophers' arguments and enlist them to help address educational

questions. This could surely help philosophers of education do substantive work that might contribute to policy and practice. But the *Handbook* also argues that general philosophers sometimes need to engage with educational issues in order to do the core work of the discipline, and this leaves open the possibility that general philosophers might even engage with educational research, policy, and practice as another way of enriching their thought. On the other side, the *Yearbook* does not simply represent a populist vision in which philosophers help articulate the wisdom of the masses by participating in the public's ongoing conversation about education. It does turn outward toward educational publics, illustrating how philosophers could productively engage with public conversations about education and showing how ongoing public conversations already include many provocative ideas and some interesting arguments about the ends of education. But the first volume of the *Yearbook* also presupposes that philosophers have expertise that can help clarify and deepen public conversations. This is compatible with the *Handbook's* vision in some ways, as professional philosophers will provide some expert knowledge and practices that can catalyze "the conversation."

The two projects differ significantly in spirit, however. The *Handbook's* turn toward the discipline yields more compelling arguments, but it usually presupposes that knowledge flows downstream from philosophers to educational publics. For both of these reasons (rigor and elitism), some who like the *Handbook* will not like the *Yearbook*, and vice versa. It is nonetheless useful to read these projects together because the hybrid positions sketched in the preceding paragraph might be combined into a broader vision for philosophy of education. On such a view, knowledge does not simply flow downstream from academic experts to educational publics because even general philosophers can learn new things about their core interests from engaging with educational processes and educational practices. Philosophers have some superior knowledge and skills that could improve public theories and practices. Publics also have

the right and some relevant knowledge to participate in conversations about educational means and ends, but they could use expert help sometimes. This would seem to position philosophy of education as a broker, contributing to disciplinary knowledge but also facilitating engagement between disciplinary ideas and relevant publics.

I argue that we should do that in *various* ways. Philosophers of education should not have only one stance in their role at the intersection of disciplinary philosophy and educational research, policy, and practice. Sometimes colleagues and publics respond well to a didactic stance, in which a philosopher articulates and defends a position opposed to commonly held views. Philosophers of education can do this by, for example, exposing the assumptions about knowledge contained in educational “standards” and arguing for an alternative view of human flourishing. Sometimes colleagues and publics benefit from Socratic questioning, from having an interlocutor expose their faulty assumptions and work with them toward more plausible answers to complex educational questions. Philosophers of education can do this by, for example, showing people both the benefits and the limits of decontextualized knowledge and exploring the question of how knowledge, reasoning skills, and cognitive dispositions are all required for full cognitive functioning. Bakhtinian polyphony provides a third alternative. Mikhail Bakhtin described how novelists such as Fyodor Dostoevsky struggle not to take a final position and encourage multiple voices to engage in unfinalizable dialogue. Interlocutors espousing a Rabelaisian philosophy revel in multiplicity and heterogeneity, deliberately flouting convention and eschewing closure. The *Handbook* and the *Yearbook* do not contain many examples of such an approach, but we certainly have colleagues who revel in the incompleteness of all complex arguments. Philosophers of education could be Bakhtinian, trying to keep alive multiple voices on essentially contestable educational issues and fostering engagement among contradictory positions. Jürgen Habermas offers a fourth alternative with his more

sober, rationalistic ideal speech situation in which people aim for consensus. This, too, has its place, and educators could help create spaces in which stakeholders have the opportunity to examine the merits of each other's arguments and to work toward a mutually acceptable view of issues. I have my personal favorites among these four stances, but I believe that philosophers of education could productively adopt each of them in different circumstances. Depending on the stance we choose, we will use different tools from our philosophical repertoires, and we will position ourselves differently with respect to the discipline and with respect to educational publics.

Philosophers of education could also productively engage in various ways with fields beyond philosophy. We could (and some already do) usefully engage with scientific research — not just to analyze it philosophically, but to take on the role of a scientist and accept some scientific conclusions, grafting a scientific disposition onto a philosophical one. Such a stance could allow philosophers to make and examine educational claims in productive ways. In his *Handbook* chapter, D.C. Phillips argues convincingly that both general philosophers and philosophers of education should be more familiar with empirical research in education because philosophical arguments about educational questions sometimes depend on empirical claims. If philosophers and researchers paid more attention to each other's work, researchers would "think about their work with greater clarity and [philosophers would] be led down interesting philosophical paths" (Phillips in *OPE*, 402). As another alternative, philosophers of education could (and some already do) work to solve problems of educational practice or policy, perhaps partnering with practitioners and contributing philosophical skills to solve educational problems or to seize educational opportunities in schools and communities. Engagement with practice or policy, in a situation where concrete actions must be taken, often forces an academic to reflect on familiar ideas in new ways. I would not want philosophers simply to become practitioners, such that they lose their

distinctive knowledge and skills, but doing practical work and relating the experiences to one's philosophy can enrich both. As a third alternative, philosophers of education might (and some already do) communicate philosophy through contemporary electronic media. One essay in *Voices from the Conversation*, by the Liberal Democrats Online Policy Consultation Group, includes online responses posted on a website. Might blogs, wikis, tweets, samples, and other forms of online publication and social networking facilitate conversation about education? Could alternative modes of representation — such as film, for example — open up new possibilities for academic work? Given the divergent affordances of these media, we cannot simply transfer academic conversation into them. It might nonetheless be useful to deploy some philosophical resources in communication genres other than traditional philosophical ones.

These different stances — didactic, Socratic, Bakhtinian, Habermasian, and engagement in empirical research, educational practice, or alternative media — are of course heterogeneous, and various combinations and alternatives are possible. But they cannot all be reduced to one type of stance or one type of activity, and I argue that we should not try to pick one best stance for all philosophers of education. Different philosophers should position themselves differently, and individual philosophers should adopt different stances at different times. Sometimes knowledge and skills can usefully flow downstream to educational researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, through didactic or Socratic interventions, for example. Philosophers have made distinctions, reframed questions, and posed alternatives that have been and could be useful for more applied fields, and philosophers of education can productively deploy these resources or communicate useful results downstream. But resources can productively move upstream as well. As Cuypers and Kitcher argue in their *Handbook* chapters, core problems in general philosophy sometimes require reflection on educational questions. Philosophers of education tend to engage with both philosophical

and practical questions, and they might be useful brokers for engaging philosophy more deeply with practice. In general, then, philosophers' knowledge and skills can be productively deployed in various settings and various ways, and resources from other domains of research and practice can sometimes be useful for doing philosophy. As a field located on the boundary, philosophy of education has an opportunity to broker such exchanges and to create useful hybrids. We may be marginal, but in cases where boundary crossing is valued, marginality can be an asset. I suggest that we embrace heterogeneity.

1. Harvey Siegel, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David L. Coulter and John R. Wiens, eds., *Renewing the Conversation*, vol. 1 of *Why Do We Educate?* series ed. Gary D. Fenstermacher (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); and Mark A. Smylie, ed., *Voices from the Conversation*, vol. 2 of *Why Do We Educate?* series ed. Gary D. Fenstermacher (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). These works will be cited in the text as *OPE*, *RC*, and *VC*, respectively, for all subsequent references.