

Why the Philosophy of Education?

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## Abstract

It is customary for those working in education to refer to research undertaken in other fields to solve the problems they face. Education is not a closed discipline that is untouched and unaffected by the findings made in neighboring fields of inquiry. Rather, studies in psychology and sociology contribute to the advancement of teaching and learning. Given how subjects outside education are aiding the quality of learning, the trend of borrowing and making extensive use of research conducted outside the parameters of education is bound to continue. Interdisciplinary research is not, in other words, a temporary phase that will sooner or later fade away. Though very few involved in education question the value of incorporating the insights offered by such fields as psychology and history, many have serious doubts concerning the importance of philosophy to education. In fact, it is not at all unusual for teachers to conceive philosophy as an impractical, speculative pursuit that has no important bearing on what happens inside the classroom. Philosophy, however, has an important role to play in education. It is not a trivial pursuit that can be discarded as frivolous and pretentious by those seeking to expand the minds of those under their tutelage. As this study hopes to show, it can help unveil some of the deep, inbuilt assumptions teaching practices, curricular aims, and learning activities make about the metaphysical nature of human beings.

*Keywords:* philosophy ; education ; metaphysics ; human nature

## Introduction

Interdisciplinary research is a feature that is shared by many disciplines today. To promote understanding, researchers utilize the knowledge gained by those working outside their field of expertise. Studies pursued in a particular subject seek illumination and guidance by incorporating the academic output brought by work conducted by specialists in entirely different subjects. Those working in literary criticism,

for example, study the philosophical works on hermeneutics to help them engage in textual exegesis that is valid and objective. Historians study archeological findings and scrutinize classic literary texts to gain a more reliable picture of the past. Education too shares the interdisciplinary nature of research. That is, researchers in education appeal to the theoretical insights and the empirical discoveries made in other disciplines to help address and solve the problems they are interested in. For instance, many refer to the psychological studies on memory because they may help teachers create the optimal conditions for the retention of knowledge and facts. Others examine works in sociology, for they help educationalists better understand how social norms and conventions affect the ways in which students perceive and behave in the world. In recent years, to mention another example, educational studies have made use of advanced statistics and probability to quantify results in a logically precise manner so that hypotheses concerning learning can be confirmed or refuted more rigorously. As researchers explore the terrain of pedagogy and learning in the future, they will continue to expand the horizons of what they understand by making extensive use of what is revealed by those working in other disciplines.

Though very few in the field of education doubt the importance of studies done in such fields as psychology and mathematics, many question the overall relevance of philosophy for education. Philosophy is commonly conceived as an esoteric and abstract subject, where philosophers speculate on matters that have nothing to contribute to classroom teaching. Skeptics contend that philosophical analyses of God, time, and the afterlife have nothing useful to teach educators facing a class of students with mixed abilities and talents. Teachers need, above all else, tasks that meaningfully engage students and instructional strategies that facilitate learning, not philosophical conjectures that are devoid of practical implications. Education, it is commonly argued, is a practical subject that concerns itself with what can be applied in concrete classroom situations. Given the enormous amount of facts to impart and the endless number of students who engage in off-task behavior, there is very little room for philosophical theorizing that is empty of useful techniques that teachers can implement.

It is, however, quite disconcerting that many involved in education fail to see any value in a subject unless it can be put to practical use. The value of philosophy, to be sure, cannot be measured in terms of its practical

effects alone. Teachers would to a large extent be disappointed if they were to assess the utility of philosophy in terms of the practical bearing it has on classroom teaching. For the most part, it doesn't yield pedagogical rules of thumb that can be immediately used to teach the history of the French Revolution, to spark students' interest in algebra, or to show the relevance of studying the lives of renowned artists like Monet and Picasso. As skeptics critical of the philosophical enterprise are inclined to maintain, philosophy is not, generally speaking, a subject that can put to immediate, direct, and practical use in the classroom.

This doesn't, however, imply that it cannot contribute to the advancement of education. Its overall utility is of a very different kind. What then is the use of philosophy in education? First, it can, as Pring (2004) suggests, help clear the muddle in educational thought by clarifying some of the central concepts and categories that often appear in discourse on learning. The philosophical investigation into the difference between 'teaching' and 'indoctrination' can, for example, help teachers discern modes of teaching that are edifying and beneficial from those that are counter-productive and morally dubious for molding learners to be passive recipients of knowledge deemed worthy of unquestioning acceptance. Having a clear distinction between indoctrination and teaching, teachers can assess whether their ordinary ways of conducting their lessons are respectful of their students' dignity and autonomy. Moreover, many curricular aims extol the importance of instilling critical thinking skills to students. A close philosophical study of the concept 'skill', however, does show that it is quite misleading to view critical reflection as a skill. Though one can become a skilled typist or photographer without much understanding of the mechanical inner workings of typewriters and cameras, one cannot think critically about history or science without a deep understanding of the subject. Current courses on critical thinking can drastically change if teachers and textbook writers realize that critical thought cannot be separated from, and thought to exist independently of, content (Hirst and Peters, 1970). Besides subjecting educational discourse to philosophical analysis, philosophers can address and answer the philosophical issues education raises. Morality has always been the province of philosophy, where questions concerning what is and isn't morally justifiable have evoked a wide range of philosophical views. And as Simpson and Jackson (1984) point out, both teaching and learning give rise to a host of vexing moral issues that interest philosophers. For instance, in

many educational contexts, it is quite customary for teachers to impart the value of nationalism. Students are taught the importance of devoting their lives to the overall good of the country and of supporting the political leadership without raising awkward questions. The morality of nationalism is a philosophical issue in education that elicits strong views. While some contend that nationalism is a viable outlook given how our lives depend on work, education, and medical care provided by the government, others argue that students need to acquire a less insular and a more cosmopolitan vision that understands people of different nationalities as members of one common large family. Or take sex education: Many schools encourage their students to take contraceptive pills to prevent teenage pregnancy without actually questioning the moral legitimacy of having sex outside marriage or a stable relationship. Parents and students with strong religious views are astounded or horrified by the rather casual stance schools have on sexual intercourse, bemoaning what they consider to be the moral depravity of contemporary hookup culture.

Besides tackling the ethical dilemmas people face in education, philosophy can help teachers and others committed to education to deepen their understanding of the fundamental nature of teaching and learning by unearthing the basic philosophical assumptions that guide educational practice. This is an immensely valuable undertaking, since teachers' understanding of the very nature of education can broaden if they become aware of the philosophical underpinnings that undergird what they do. To state the matter differently, philosophical analysis can, in principle, elucidate the very nature of education by unveiling the tacit philosophical presuppositions that shape and influence everyday pedagogical practice. A clearer and less ambiguous awareness of education is made possible by making what is implicit, explicit, or making what remains hidden and opaque more lucid and transparent. Another rationale for exposing the philosophy that drives education is that it can unearth philosophical views that are unsound or problematic. Authors of science textbooks often glorify the achievements of modern science, expounding the theoretical breakthroughs and how they have helped better our lives. Yet out of their great reverence for science, some present science as the only route to knowledge, sidelining the achievements of the humanities. However, as Stenmark (2001) argues, scientism – the philosophical view that regards science as the sole road to truth – is not an unproblematic understanding of the nature of science and the problems it faces can be brought to light

once the philosophical assumptions are identified. In addition, teachers can become aware of any inconsistencies that exist between their beliefs and their teaching practices once the philosophical assumptions are revealed. Teachers who believe that there are moral absolutes might rethink the approach they adopt in moral education when they realize that it is, unbeknownst to them, rooted in a relativistic understanding of values. Moreover, it often becomes easier to identify what implications educational theories have for teaching when their philosophical assumptions are made explicit. As Roberts explains (2019), the theory of multiple intelligence, for example, philosophically characterizes each and every individual as unique and special, with great potential for cognitive growth. This central point about human uniqueness suggests that teachers, in order to be effective, must cater for individual differences by varying their mode of instruction and the content they choose to impart. A one-size-fit-all curriculum or a lockstep approach to teaching will simply fail to deliver materials in an effective manner.

It is important to realize that virtually every system of education rests on definite philosophical views. Whether practitioners involved in education like it or not, there is no pedagogy without inbuilt philosophical presuppositions, or an approach to teaching that doesn't adopt a theoretical framework that is by nature deeply philosophical. Some of the assumptions are epistemological by nature. As philosophers working in education point out, most textbooks used by students present items of knowledge – dates, definitions, explanations, modes of reasoning, theories, etc. – as indubitable, incorrigible facts that must be accepted without questioning their truth. Knowledge, in other words, is not for the most part presented as provisional, open to revision or falsification as researchers gather more reliable evidence and data. Rightly or wrongly, this philosophical view of knowledge is a widely shared dogma among textbook writers and students, for the most part, passively absorb it as unassailable truth. Furthermore, standard pedagogical practice has inherent ethical views which have been identified by philosophers. Values clarification is an approach in moral education, whereby students are encouraged to become aware of the values they actually hold by expressing their opinions on a range of moral issues such as whether abortion, capital punishment, or euthanasia are ethically permissible. Teachers are forbidden to evaluate the views their students express because every opinion is thought to be a subjective stance or preference that is neither true nor false. As Beckwith and Koukl

(1998) maintain, this approach presupposes a form of moral relativism because it assumes that one cannot justifiably claim that certain moral opinions are simply wrong. Moral beliefs are on a par with our personal preferences in such areas as music and food. The moral approval of abortion, cannibalism, or infanticide is tantamount to our liking for oysters, champagne, and pizza.

Alongside epistemological and moral assumptions, education is built on very definite metaphysical views of human nature and identity. These views are metaphysical partly because their truth, generally speaking, cannot be corroborated by close observation or controlled experiments. That is to say, they transcend the ambit of what can be verified by sense-experience and common sense. The view, for example, that humans are made in the image of God cannot be ascertained empirically. One would be hard pressed if asked to determine our divine imprint by gathering publicly observable data. And often these philosophical views entail values concerning what is ultimately good and meaningful in human life. The view that conceives humans as made in God's image implies that genuine, lasting happiness can only be achieved if we orient our lives to God. Again, the truth of this vision cannot be settled by appealing to a neutral point of reference that is agreeable to both theists and atheists. And the question whether humans are more than atoms in motion cannot be answered by manipulating symbols, numbers, and equations that appear in formal disciplines like math and logic. Our complex and fascinating nature as human beings is not susceptible to clear cut answers as a result of abstract computations. The metaphysical understanding of human nature may seem to have little relation to education. Metaphysics, after all, is a deeply speculative discipline that pursues theoretical questions that are abstract while the issues teachers face behind classroom doors are by and large related to concrete, pedagogical practice. Yet metaphysics is intertwined with education and their relationship cannot be severed. This point will be illustrated by examining the philosophical assumptions that shape the various facets of education.

## 1 Punishments and Rewards

Society is populated with institutions and members of institutions are obligated to follow very particular practices and conventions that are regarded as binding. Public servants who work in city councils and ward

offices are expected to dress formally and work quietly at their desks without engaging in much collaborative teamwork. Churches as religious institutions have distinct social mores that priests and pastors are expected to follow. During mass, priests give sermons to their congregation, referring to passages from holy scripture and appealing to well-established religious tenets. Moreover, doctors and nurses working in hospitals adhere to very particular practices that help distinguish them from janitors and secretaries. Nurses regularly visit patients to administer drugs and inject medicine and console patients who experience emotional and physical pain. Being a social institution, schools too share many common practices followed by teachers and students. It is, for example, customary for teachers to stand in front of class and deliver lectures while writing points of importance on the blackboard. Students typically spend countless hours reading texts of various kinds and these materials are accompanied by a set of questions that determine the readers' level of comprehension. Another common practice is the imposition of punishments and rewards. As we shall see, the very act of punishing and rewarding student behavior presupposes a distinct metaphysical view of human nature.

From the way students should dress and eat in the cafeteria to how they should address their teachers and submit their assignments, schools have rules and regulations which they expect students to follow. These rules are established by those in authority without consulting or negotiating with students and are imposed from day one to help create a safe and orderly environment where learning can take place. It is generally assumed that students won't behave responsibly towards their peers and teachers if they are no regulations concerning what they can and cannot do. Everything and anything students do at school, therefore, is under strict surveillance. Their behavior is monitored closely by those in authority. When students breach the rules, they usually experience some form of punishment. A minor offence might result in extra homework or a progress report sent to their home but a serious infraction of school rules can lead to more severe measures like afterschool detention or being expelled from school. It is commonly thought that punishments function as a deterrence. Not wanting to experience the unpleasant consequences that punishment brings, many students are prevented from cheating on tests and plagiarizing essays. Students reason that it is better to receive a mediocre grade than to be harshly reprimanded in front of peers when

caught. Punishment is a means used by teachers, counsellors, and administrators to help students realize that learning is not possible unless they abide by rules that are mandated by those with power and authority.

Schools not only try to mold what students do and say through punishments. They encourage particular forms of behavior, ways of thinking, and character traits with different kinds of rewards. Some are verbal in nature: Teachers often praise students for giving right answers and compliment those who contribute to class discussion. Grades are another important means of promoting what schools regard as praiseworthy thoughts and actions. Both letter and number grades are given to almost everything students do and many are thought to be motivated to work hard when they receive positive evaluation. Sometimes there is fierce competition for earning good grades among students because teachers adopt norm-referenced assessments, where individual performances are compared with others in the same class and ranked from top to bottom. Trophies and medals are also commonly awarded to students who excel in athletics and teachers stick stickers on worksheets and reports that demonstrate hard, dedicated work. Arguably, rewards are given as an incentive so that students will read more books, write more cogently, collaborate with their peers in a more constructive manner, and memorize the meaning of terms more effectively. Conversely, students' motivation to engage in academic work is thought to attenuate if schools cease to distribute rewards. Brownie points, medals, and verbal appraisals are thought to induce the type of behavior and the way of thinking that are valued by schools.

In the metaphysical study of human nature, one of the central questions philosophers are concerned with is whether human beings are free or not. Determinists are convinced that everything we do and say is predetermined by factors – genetic makeup, family upbringing, social environment, etc. – over which we have very little control. We are, to use an analogy, like cogs in a machine or hands of a clock, simply preprogrammed to function in ways stipulated by ironclad, irreversible laws. Though we ordinarily think that we freely choose to marry a particular person, to change our career path, and to move to a different city to raise our children, all these choices are, unbeknown to us, shaped by variables outside our power to control and manipulate to suit our interests or needs. In other words, we had no choice but to marry the person we did and choose the job we did, passively and blindly following a predetermined

path shaped by a fate known only to God. The educational practice of punishing and rewarding students, however, presupposes that human beings are not analogous to rocks and leaves and other inanimate objects that are devoid of freedom. Schools punish students and hold them responsible for misbehaving because they freely chose to adopt their course of action. They decided to cheat when taking a quiz or write graffiti on the blackboard and were not coerced to behave in the way they did. Schools wouldn't impose penalties on students for misbehaving if they couldn't avoid doing what they did or if they were somehow propelled to decide and act upon the way they did. Not unlike criminals who are not generally held accountable for crimes if they suffer from severe schizophrenia or other psychological pathologies, students who suffer from some form of mental deficiency that leads them to behave in ways they cannot control are usually not held responsible for their actions. Rather, they are often sent to see a counselor or psychiatrist to receive professional, medical help so that in the future, their actions can in fact reflect their personal values and beliefs. The very fact that students are ordinarily punished with detentions and extra homework for violating school rules suggest that they are moral agents who are capable of acting on their own volition. Otherwise, we rightly believe the punishments to be an unfair, ethically unjustifiable response to norms they simply cannot abide. That is, punishment presupposes the capacity to act in ways that reflect the agents' values and ideas concerning what is good and bad.

The same point about free will can, to a large extent, be said about rewards schools regularly administer to students. Students are in general awarded prizes because they choose out of their free will to behave in ways that are thought to be commendable by the school. They are, that is to say, awarded, praised and honored because they have the choice to abuse their freedom by engaging in behavior that is thought to be immoral, wrong, or unpraiseworthy. If students study hard to excel in math, they are praised for devoting their time to academics. As far as the school is concerned, they could have abused their time and effort by engaging in activities that are considered trivial or unworthy. They wouldn't be honored with praise if they had no choice but to pursue what the school considered as academic excellence. Students, to mention another example, who do volunteer work to help the homeless or who excel in long-distance running won't be praised for their work if they are genetically forced to do what they do. To use an example outside the educational context, we

wouldn't admire the lives of saints and martyrs if we found out that they were genetically preprogrammed to offer their lives to a religious cause. Saints are venerated for overcoming temptation and defeating sin because they could have decided to turn their back to God and lead a depraved life. Student action is worthy of rewards if their action is based on a choice that is voluntarily made in light of alternative choices. The giving of rewards, in other words, doesn't make much sense unless students have the will to choose what they do.

In summary, the common practice of bestowing rewards and punishments philosophically presupposes that students are free agents with the power to determine their course of action. If they are, as determinists argue, subject to uncontrollable forces and powers that determine their destiny, then it makes very little sense to morally appraise or condemn what they do and say at school. As Hasker (1983) writes, "It is very plausible to suppose that our belief that persons are responsible for their actions... can only be correct if it is also true that they are free in acting as they do" (p. 31).

## 2 Human Nature

A fundamental philosophical puzzle that has been the subject of endless controversy concerns human nature. Philosophers differ remarkably in how they conceive the essence of our humanity. And those who share similar views base their assessment on different reasons. Some who hold a dim and pessimistic understanding of human nature defend their outlook by referring to theological sources. The orthodox Christian teaching on our nature is rather bleak. Because our inner selves are tainted by original sin, we seek to satisfy our egocentric interests, ignoring God's call to serve the poor and trust in his redeemable love and grace. Our inner being is fundamentally distorted and is in need of serious help because we are convinced that we can lead perfectly happy, meaningful lives without depending on and trusting in God. There are others whose view is slightly more positive on historical grounds. Secular humanists who have faith in human reason for defeating superstition, spreading enlightenment, and curing the ills of society, argue that science, the embodiment of human rationality, has helped advance technology, medicine, and education since its origin in the Scientific Revolution. Prior to the advent of science, our lives were controlled by the shackles of primitive magic, irrational

superstition, and dogmatic religion. Science has been instrumental for improving the quality of our lives and replacing religion with rationality and it will, they believe, continue its triumphant march of progress, enriching the lives of many in the future. Secular humanists tend to have faith and trust in our ability to overcome the problems we have with science. There are other philosophers whose understanding cannot be categorized as either positive or negative. Their attitude towards human nature defies clear categorizations. Rousseau and his followers, for example, argue that people are by nature good; they are predisposed to help people in need and share what they have to those who don't. But their innate goodness is gradually weakened by the corrosive effects of society. As Lawton and Gordon (2002) write, "Children are born naturally good, but become infected by the evils of society unless measures are taken to keep the child away from them" (p. 94). People are socially conditioned to become less altruistic and more self-centered because society is saturated by a competitive ethos where people must work harder than their colleagues to get promoted, produce cheaper products than rival companies to earn more profits, and score higher on standardized tests than their classmates to enter a better university. Our propensity to do what is good is not totally absent. It still lies dormant, waiting to be cultivated.

As Jarvis (2006) argues, in the field of education, there are many theories of learning that vie for the teachers' attention. Whether it is the theory of multiple intelligence or experimental learning, they all attempt to answer the question how learners can best learn the material they are taught. And while some emphasize the importance of hands-on learning experiences where students actually conduct scientific experiments instead of learning about science, others influenced by studies in cognitive science underscore the importance of regularly retrieving information that needs to be stored in one's long-term memory. Theories of learning also describe and justify the role teachers should adopt in class. Teacher-centered approaches that value the transmission of knowledge exhort teachers to play a central role, giving detailed lectures that are rich in information. Many approaches to learning also assume very particular views about the essence of being human. A more thorough understanding of these approaches can be achieved if these hidden presuppositions are brought to light. In what follows, we will examine two learning theories and the view of human nature they are based upon.

The first theory is behaviorism which draws its insights from research done in psychology. According to behaviorism, knowledge and understanding are first acquired through repetitive, overt practice that extends over an extended period of time. Acquiring knowledge is akin to acquiring a habit: we internalize a piece of information or a skill through constant, repetitive practice. If we want to master a dialogue in a foreign language or the multiplication table in math or the chemical elements that are found in the periodic table, there is no better way than to orally repeat the content to be learned over and over again, imitating the model provided by the teacher. But mere repetition is not enough. Behaviorists argue that what teachers want students to learn – correct pronunciation, right interpretation, accurate recollection of a formula, etc. – will be internalized if what learners say or do in response to classroom instruction is positively reinforced with rewards and praise. Since it is difficult to jettison errors and mistakes once they are ingrained, teachers are advised to provide a series of negative reinforcements to prevent students from acquiring erroneous information or poor skills through repetitive practice. Thus, in language classrooms that adhere to behaviorist principles, students typically engage in drilling exercising, orally repeating words, phrases, and sentences after the teacher. Students' oral output is praised by the teacher when correct, and immediately corrected when wrong. Behaviorism assumes the students' mind to be malleable. It can be molded and shaped in different ways depending on the type of extensive practice and reinforcements. The mind is not rigidly preprogrammed to grow in particular ways, impervious to the influences from the environment. The knowledge and skills they acquire are determined by the classroom environment or by the teacher who exercises rigid control over how and what students learn. An ideologue can instill political propaganda and hatred towards people belonging to a particular race or class by drilling and praising the beliefs she endorses. A religious zealot might use the same tactics to implant beliefs that conceive believers outside their faith as dangerous and beyond redemption. Of course, behaviorist principles can be used to shape students in constructive ways. Teachers can and do conduct lessons informed by the tenets of behaviorism and create speakers fluent in a foreign language, students gifted in math and chemistry, and learners who are avid readers of quality literature. Behaviorism doesn't imply a positive or negative conception towards human nature because we can be conditioned to become a villain or a saint, gifted or incompetent learners,

morally upright or depraved individuals depending on how we are shaped by the environment. That is, humans are neither good nor bad because what they end up becoming depends on the triggering effects of the environment. Depending on how the instructional strategies prescribed by behaviorism are implemented, we can be designed to satisfy either positive or negative ends.

Cooperative learning is another approach to learning that is becoming more popular in many educational contexts. Those who uphold cooperative learning argue that school learning is too individualized. Students are set work that requires them to work alone, without sharing what they know and can do with their peers. The tasks are, they maintain, also competitive by nature. Students view others as rivals, seeking to outperform their work by reading more quickly and answering more questions correctly. This individualistic and competitive nature of much school work, it is argued, can be remedied by incorporating cooperative learning which takes a whole new approach to education. In cooperative learning, students ordinarily work together in groups to complete the same task. In order to successfully complete their work, members of the group must each fulfill their designated role and do what they are required to do. The successful completion of such tasks cannot be achieved unless learners take responsibility and fulfill their assigned roles. If someone fails to contribute, then the task is incomplete or unfinished. Projects of various kinds often require the basic principles of cooperative learning. Students as a group, for example, might be assigned to conduct research on a particular theme so that they can present their findings to a public audience. Each member of the group is assigned a particular task – searching the internet, collating data, editing drafts, presenting the findings orally, etc. – and its successful presentation rests on the members' willingness to complete responsibly their designated work. If a member fails to fulfill their allocated role, then the group suffers as a whole since its presentation will be deficient in some shape or form. Cooperative learning is based on a more positive understanding of human nature. First, it assumes that students are willing to help each other during the process of learning. If someone is struggling writing a report or finding the relevant data, then other members of the group will, it is assumed, help so that the group as a whole will be able to produce a joint product they can all be proud of. A member's problem becomes a problem to be shared and dealt with as a group. Second, members, to achieve the joint goal, must depend on the competence and

the ability of each other. Members of the group must rely on what others are capable of doing and what they know about the issue at hand in order to meet the objective. This element of trust that binds members together won't grow within the group unless members perceive others as trustworthy and competent fellow travelers embarked on the same quest for knowledge and understanding. If this trust is lacking, then cooperative learning breaks down as a mode of learning.

To conclude, approaches to learning that can be found in schools are built upon different conceptions of human nature. While some conceive our propensities and dispositions in a favorable light, others adopt a more neutral or negative stance. It is, therefore, misleading to assume that the modes of learning don't entail particular views on human nature. The philosopher qua philosopher can help elucidate these views given her knowledge of, and her experience practicing, philosophical inquiry. Education, contrary to popular understanding, is not a philosophically neutral enterprise.

### 3 Rights

Alongside politics and religion, education is an area that is never devoid of heated exchanges over controversial issues. The teaching of evolution in biology classes and the reading of novels written by renowned authors with biased views on gender and race spark intense discussions. Debates can sometimes become acrimonious and ugly, where people dogmatically assert their own views without justifying their position and resort to misleading caricatures and stereotypes when describing what their opponents think. On the whole, however, contestants try to support the truth or plausibility of what they believe by providing empirical evidence. Those committed to progressive education, for example, might stress the need for smaller classes by referring to studies that show how learning improves when learners study in groups with no more than fifteen members. Traditionalists might also justify the importance of factual knowledge with studies demonstrating how readers' background knowledge aids the decoding process when reading texts. Besides buttressing claims empirically, it is not uncommon for those involved in educational debates to support their claims with reasons that are by nature philosophical. And the philosopher can in principle contribute to the discussion by pointing out the philosophical underpinnings that go

unnoticed by the participants. This point will be illustrated by examining the problem of inequality in education.

Inequity in education is a problem many schools face (Ayers et al, 2018). According to many critics of contemporary education, students are singled out for preferential treatment because of the tracking system. Tracking is a system most schools adopt where students are streamed to different programs of study depending on their previous academic output. Those who excel in the core subjects of math, science, and English enter programs that are specifically designed for attending university in the future. The quality of education is rigorous, where experienced teachers with high expectations set difficult tasks that demand students to think creatively and critically. By and large, those who enter such programs are usually from well-to-do families, where parents with professional jobs have the wealth to purchase books and hire private tutors for their children. In contrast, those who lack competence in studying end up in vocational programs which are designed for blue color jobs. The program consists mainly of nonacademic subjects like typing and plumbing where students engage in mechanical tasks that are repetitive by nature. On the whole, students enrolled in vocational programs are from the unprivileged sectors of society, where parents engage in long hours of manual, backbreaking labor for very little pay and job security. What students experience in the classroom differs even when they are enrolled in the same academic program. This is in part because the program itself is usually made up of different levels, and those in advanced classes are, in comparison to the lower levels, taught by better qualified teachers, given academically challenging work, and surrounded by peers who are keen on learning. The inequity in education deepens when we start comparing schools. Elite private schools are usually located in quiet and safe residential areas. Their libraries contain many interesting and informative books that pique students' interest and classrooms are equipped with high-tech computers and screens to air movies. Public schools that serve the poor, on the other hand, are usually located in areas rife with drugs and gang related crime and violence. There is a high turnover rate of teachers, because they cannot bear facing overcrowded classes filled with students who have a deep antipathy towards learning. Schools in poverty-stricken areas lack the basic facilities and resources such as laboratory equipment, photocopy machines, musical instruments, and books that can promote learning.

Those critical of the tracking system such as Oakes (1985) insist that it

should be abolished on the grounds that every student deserves a high-quality, first-rate education. Every student, it is argued, has the right to be enrolled in schools with small classes all taught by highly-qualified teachers who follow a rich and meaningful curriculum. Their right to earn a quality education cannot be taken away simply because they didn't academically succeed in the past. Those who are more supportive of the status quo typically respond to such criticisms by arguing that the right to a rich and meaningful education is not something that can be bestowed equally on all students. Studying at academically advanced programs and schools is a special right reserved only for those students who excel in academic work. These students are given preferential treatment because their academic success was the result of working harder and longer than those who didn't succeed academically despite every student being given the same opportunity to excel. The tracking system is just and fair since it helps adjudicate those who put in more hours reading and writing at their desk from those who didn't. Critics of the tracking system respond by arguing that it is simply wrong to assume that students are all given the same opportunity to succeed in academics. Before even entering schools, students from privileged backgrounds are at an advantage because they are brought up in families that value reading, reared by parents who have a rich vocabulary, and nurtured in an environment that is free of hunger and poverty. Conversely, students from underprivileged classes have to struggle with issues – hunger, discrimination, abuse, etc. – that hinder learning. Those opposed to meritocracy believe passionately that the poor and rich do not start their life in education at the same starting point. Students from wealthy families are way ahead of the learning game even before it starts.

This exchange concerning the problem of inequity in education is framed in terms of rights. Critics of meritocracy in education contend that every student has the right as a human to earn the kind of education that is currently available only to those who excel academically. Supporters of meritocracy rejoin, arguing that the right cannot be extended to every student because it is a privilege granted to those who demonstrate their academic ability. Now, philosophy can help illuminate the nature of this dialogue because the critical analysis of human rights – what they are, how they can be exploited, why they need to be protected, etc. – is a fundamental issue in the metaphysical study of human beings. Unlike inanimate objects, people, philosophers argue, have entitlements that allow

them to act in certain ways or to be treated in certain ways. Because the dignity of each individual must be protected, these rights cannot be exploited and those who do are subject to the law. One of the central tasks of philosophy in this area is to articulate the basic rights that should be granted to every human. Some argue that people have the right to vote and select the candidate who will promote the political ends they favor. In the political domain, people are also granted the right to voice dissent by writing articles or participating in demonstrations. We are not, in other words, politically obligated to comply to authority if we think it is dysfunctional or corrupt. Moreover, many philosophers believe strongly that people have the right to meaningful, useful work, where they can engage in creative activities that are fulfilling. But as is common in much of philosophy, philosophers disagree over what rights humans are entitled to. While some, for example, believe that everyone has the right to buy land and own private property, many think otherwise, arguing that humans need to learn to mend and take care of nature, not to possess it and use it as a means to satisfy their often self-centered ends. Another issue within the philosophical study of rights is whether people who hold positions of power and authority are entitled to rights that are not conferred on ordinary citizens. Supporters of an existing hierarchy between humans argue in favor of the divine rights of kings and queens while those who espouse egalitarianism strongly condemn any type of biased favoritism. Because the examination of rights is within the province of philosophy, arguments that refer to special privileges can be analyzed and criticized by the philosopher. They can bring to bear their knowledge and understanding of rights to help advance the discussion.

As we have seen, arguments that are exchanged to defend or refute a particular view in education often hinge on reasons that are philosophical. The philosopher can help uncover these philosophical beliefs that guide the discussion so that the participants gain a more thorough understanding of what they are actually discussing.

## 4 Emancipatory Teaching

Philosophers since the days of Socrates and Plato have been intrigued by the question of what end, if there is one, humans should strive to attain. Hedonists argue that the sole end of human lives is to seek pleasure and avoid pain. People are advised to immerse themselves in activities such as

eating, drinking, and exercising that bring physical pleasure. Followers of Platonism contend that humans should free themselves from desire and follow a contemplative life, reverting their thoughts from their trivial self-centered concerns to the platonic forms that reside in a supernatural domain. In Stoic philosophy, the ultimate end of human life is to reach a spiritual state where we remain detached to the everyday goings-on that take place in this world and attain a calm and steady state of mind that is not emotionally affected by the experiences we go through. Existential thinking, on the other hand, is critical of philosophies of any kind that posit an overarching end that can give guidance and meaning to everyone. One of the central themes that runs through existentialism is that humans must create their own ends without relying on ready-made answers ordained by religions and philosophies.

The question regarding the meaning of human existence is not an issue that concerns only philosophers. In fact, approaches to teaching found in schools often accept definite answers to the question, a point that will be illustrated below when examining emancipatory learning.

In education, there are many approaches teachers are advised to adopt in the classroom. Through close studies of children, Piaget and his followers have identified the different cognitive stages all children go through. According to their findings, teachers, to be effective in the classroom, must tailor their instruction to the specific cognitive level or stage their learners are in. Instruction that relies heavily on abstract concepts simply won't work if the students can only think concretely. Furthermore, those who champion a knowledge-based approach to teaching argue that teachers must impart knowledge to help enrich and expand their students' minds. Teachers who follow this pedagogy can be seen establishing and building their students' basic and foundational knowledge of the subject. They do so by inculcating knowledge that is regarded as vital and perennial by specialists in the subject.

Another very common approach that has exerted a lot of influence on a large number of educators is emancipatory teaching. This view of teaching rests on the central conviction that the society we live in is in a horrendous state. We don't unfortunately live in a socio-political utopia, a paradise flowing in milk and honey where everyone leads meaningful, fulfilling lives without any worry. The reality cannot be more different. Countless people are experiencing much pain and suffering because society is riddled with various forms of oppression injustice, and

discrimination. In the business and corporate sector, a handful of company presidents and executives reap immense financial rewards by paying minimum wages to workers who have very little job security. Thousands upon thousands of women experience discrimination daily. Highly qualified women are often given menial jobs and lack the power and rights to bring changes to their workplace. Unemployment is also a huge problem in many societies. Many end up on the streets begging because they were mercilessly sacked with very short notice. Those without work are often labelled lazy and dirty, ostracized as a despicable burden to society, despite being victims of an unjust social system that fails to create enough work. The growth in the suicide rate is a problem many societies face without any workable solution in sight. Partly because people cannot find any purpose in a society that is saturated with vice and greed many seek to escape from their unendurable suffering by putting an end to their lives. Those who endorse emancipatory teaching think that teachers must first and foremost face and understand the problems that affect the lives of many.

Of course, teachers can simply decide to ignore the problems besieging society, contending that it is the job of politicians, economists, and sociologists to seek and find their solutions. Yet those who embrace emancipatory teaching believe that teachers cannot abdicate their responsibility as educators to first raise their students' awareness of the dire state of society. Classrooms have, historically speaking, been apolitical, a safe haven for pursuing issues and themes that have very little to do with social justice. Advocates of emancipatory teaching think that education cannot just be about writing poems about flowers, reading sonnets on love, and watching documentary films on the birth of planets and stars, however important they may be. Students must have a firm grasp and understanding of the misery and pain the oppressed members of society experience. Furthermore, the various methods the oppressors or those who are in power use to maintain the status quo must also be brought to their awareness. Society is not founded on egalitarian principles. It is deeply hierarchical in nature. There is a class of people at the top who wield most of the power and seek to maintain their privilege by imposing measures to suppress those who belong at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. Education is used to serve the elite. Textbooks in social studies and history that portray society in an unfavorable light are not selected for use in the classroom and those that underscore the positive features and turn a

blind eye to the ills of society are used instead. The higher echelons of society attempt to preserve the status quo by controlling the mass media. Capitalists and business entrepreneurs, who have a lot to gain from a society driven by consumerism, promote their financial ends by airing TV programs and commercials that equate happiness with material wealth. Passively absorbing these seductive images, viewers are led to believe that the desire to purchase more luxury goods must be satiated in order to experience lasting contentment. The world of politics is also the source of much oppression. Politicians with a strong will to power are more interested in securing their position of power and authority than serving the needs of the people. Not an insignificant number of politicians establish personal networks with influential bureaucrats and business leaders behind closed doors so that they can help pass laws and ordain policies that will benefit the business sector in exchange for receiving financial rewards. For advocates of emancipatory learning, the countless measures the oppressors use to subjugate the masses and preserve an apartheid system must be brought to light.

Students need to acquire a well-grounded understanding of oppression and its various causes, but not because their knowledge of social oppression will appear on a standardized test or because it might help them secure a stable job in the future. Their awareness is paramount because, as Stanley (1992) maintains, one of the basic purposes of emancipatory learning is to turn students into agents who are willing to transform society into a more humane place for the oppressed by acting upon what they learn at school. Students cannot become agents for social change unless they become cognizant of the problems that need to be eradicated. Active measures to end unemployment and to help the LGBT community earn more legal rights won't be forthcoming unless students realize that the economic system is structured in ways that produce people without jobs and that not everybody has the rights that are naturally granted to heterosexuals. Political action, in other words, presupposes socio-political awareness.

Emancipatory learning with other approaches to teaching espouses a very particular conception of the purpose of human lives. Rooted in Marxist philosophy, it is deeply critical of how society is structured and managed, and seeks to empower students with the necessary knowledge and skills so that they can build a society that is more just, equal, and democratic. The purpose of human lives consists of eradicating the

obstacles that thwart human fulfillment and happiness by, among other things, closing the gap between the rich and poor and distributing more power and rights to the marginalized members of society. It seeks to create people who embrace the plight of the oppressed and take political action with like-minded people to better society. Human beings are masters of their fate on earth and are the makers of history. They are not pawns used by God to realize the aim he has for history. People mustn't depend on a supernatural being to help establish a harmonious and democratic social order. Nor will problems miraculously disappear by staring at them quietly. They can only realize their socio-political vision by relying on themselves. And the Marxist vision also implies that humans must side with the poor, the weak, and the powerless. Their interest and aspiration and hope must become the source for fighting for social justice. Any form of individualism – where the purpose of living is to satisfy one's personal desires, needs, and ambitions – is an illusionary metaphysics that cannot promise true meaning and direction. The ultimate purpose of human life is to take on board the pain and suffering experienced by others and take action to eliminate the causes that are responsible for their distress. Any other purpose is shallow and myopic. It will only give a fleeting sense of accomplishment, even when it is realized.

To conclude, emancipatory teaching is an influential theory in pedagogy that is founded upon a very particular understanding of the purpose of human life. Human beings must commit themselves to a socio-political cause that aims to make society more egalitarian and humane without relying on religious creeds and dogmas. The goal of human existence remains unrealized insofar as there are people who need to be emancipated from the shackles of oppression.

## 5 Positivism

A perennial philosophical problem in metaphysics concerns our identity or what we ultimately are. Broadly speaking, there are two schools of thought that give radically different answers to this philosophical conundrum. Materialists, on the one hand, believe that humans are nothing more than physical matter. Humans are made of muscles, tissues, bones, and nerves. Our muscles and bones in turn consist of a staggering number of cells with their nuclei and chromosomes. Cells are not the ultimate constituents of matter because they too are made from extremely small

molecules. And molecules are nothing over and beyond the conglomeration of atoms and their subatomic particles. Our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, dreams, and intentions may not seem to possess qualities such as weight, color, and shape that are shared by physical objects. But they too are merely composed of neurons and synapses found in the brain and hormones and enzymes swirling in the bloodstream. Our mental experiences are matter in disguise. Human identity is reducible to matter in motion. Those who call themselves dualists are very critical of the materialistic portrayal of human identity. They strongly believe that a physical description and analysis of our being doesn't give an exhaustive and complete account of who we really are. Though they don't deny that we are in part physical beings, dualists believe that our whole identity cannot be reduced to matter alone. There is within us a nonmaterial soul or spirit, a spiritual presence not amenable to empirical detection, that makes us something more than the physical collection of atoms travelling through space. There is, for dualists, a fundamental and qualitative difference between human beings and physical objects like pots, carpets, and broomsticks. The materialist picture of human identity fails to pinpoint this ontological difference by treating humans and inanimate objects as the same.

The field of education seems utterly unrelated to the metaphysical inquiry of human identity. Yet research in education can have very definite inbuilt assumptions about who we ultimately are as human beings. This point becomes apparent if we consider the positivist paradigm in educational research. Education as a field of inquiry is often criticized for making very little theoretical progress. Questions to do with human learning that were raised by thinkers in the distant past are still addressed today. Researchers to this day are still struggling with the same issues despite a lot of time and effort being put into them over the years. Many bemoan the fact that we still don't exactly know what truly motivates students, how students can retain knowledge effectively, and what assessment measures best gauge learners' level of competence. Researchers who accept positivism as a research program in education believe that clear and definite answers to pedagogical questions are possible if studies emulate the methods adopted by natural scientists. Physics and chemistry have made enormous theoretical progress, solving many challenging problems about natural phenomena, partly because scientists have employed the method of proposing testable hypotheses

which are then subjected to a series of rigorous empirical tests that all attempt to determine their truth. This approach of critically examining testable conjectures has proved to be immensely successful in discovering reliable, objective knowledge about the natural world that has withstood the test of time. Positivists are convinced that educational research will make advances if researchers adopt this method and focus on questions that can be tested empirically. Questions, for positivists, that are not amenable to empirical investigation should be discarded as insoluble, unimportant, or irrelevant. There is a strong tendency for positivists to insist that research, to become scientific, must deal with publicly observable states of affairs, for they can be counted, measured, and tabulated. Classroom research inspired by positivism, therefore, is keen on analyzing such observable states of affairs like the number of times teachers pose questions during a particular lesson or the amount of time teachers give students to answer questions they orally pose because they can be ascertained empirically. Those who take the tenets of positivism seriously question the validity of much qualitative research because they often refer to the subjects' personal impressions and feelings which are difficult to verify in a reliable manner. Positivists are hopeful that research into education will yield valuable knowledge for classroom practitioners once it adopts the canons of scientific thinking.

Positivists not only revere the natural sciences as the paragon of rationality that education must ape, but they often view science as the sole path to knowledge, the one and only avenue to truth. Other means to arrive at the truth are treated with extreme caution. Literature and the visual arts, given the positivistic credo, don't engender knowledge about the natural or social world because they rarely assert testable claims that can be verified. Paintings and poems don't typically make precise empirical predictions that can be ascertained by experiments. Followers of positivism are also deeply skeptical of the existence of anything that falls outside the purview of science. Because science is regarded as the final arbiter of what exists and doesn't exist, anything that cannot in principle be verified empirically lacks reality. The existence of metaphysical entities that philosophers posit – substance, absolute being, will to power, noumenon, etc. – is seriously questioned by positivists because their reality cannot be corroborated by our sensory-experiences or by means of laboratory experiments. The highly abstract constructs that philosophers posit cannot be ascertained by microscopes and beakers. Positivism is

moreover deeply critical of theological inquiry because the central concepts found in theological discourse such as God, the holy trinity, and heaven don't refer to publicly observable states of affairs. One cannot, that is, send a rocket into space to verify the presence of God or a heavenly realm populated by the deceased. Similarly, the reality of a spirit or soul is doubted by many positivists because alongside concepts like God or will to power, its existence lies outside the scope of science. Though the human spirit is a reality that is supposed to exist within the human body, its existence, unlike the liver or the pancreas, cannot be corroborated by science. Scientists cannot conduct medical experiments to test whether the soul exists because it is not something that is identifiable by empirical means. One cannot conduct a surgery to locate the spirit hidden behind human tissue, for it is not a physical organ that has a specific physiological function like secreting bile or forming insulin. Nor can its existence be confirmed by measuring the physical effects of different dietary habits, exercise, or sleep. Because science determines what there is and isn't in this world, for positivists human beings are nothing more than physical matter that simply disintegrates after death. We might like to think that we are more than a collection of atoms and molecules, but this is a metaphysical illusion brought by human hubris. For positivists, there is no spiritual reality within us that differentiates our existence from other sentient creatures like whales and monkeys. The differences that separate us from other species – our higher cognitive intelligence, a richer emotional life, a more elaborative means to communicate, etc. – are differences of degree, not kind. And we don't have a soul locked up inside our body that sets us apart from inanimate objects. Like stones and pebbles, we are ultimately made of the same building blocks of matter.

Thus, it is misleading to think that educational research doesn't assume the truth of specific metaphysical theories about human identity. Positivism is a very influential paradigm of educational research and it presupposes a materialistic theory of human identity, conceiving humans as nothing more than an assemblage of matter. The human soul, according to positivism, is a ghostly and ephemeral reality, a superstitious vestige from a time that didn't know much science.

## 6 Different or the Same ?

One of the contested questions in metaphysics is whether humans are

fundamentally different or similar. Theories that stress how people are fundamentally the same offer different reasons for their position. Philosophers influenced by Christian thought argue that despite obvious physical differences such as height and weight people are deep down very alike because they were, as holy scripture asserts, all made in the image of or in the likeness of God. The Imago Dei separates us from other species because our nature which resembles God is not a feature shared by elephants and mollusks. Yet the Imago Dei cancels out the superficial differences that separate humans from one another. We are all alike in sharing the divine imprint. It is what unifies and brings us together. Philosophers with strong Christian views also point out how God's unconditional love or agape towards humans reveals the extent to which we are the same. Humans are all alike for being the recipient of God's care and love. His agape has no boundaries as it envelops every human being, regardless of their intelligence, race, gender, or personality. God loves ruthless political despots as much as the saints who serve the downtrodden. There are, on the other hand, metaphysical views that underscore the differences between humans. For example, philosophers who take the central teachings of historicism seriously tend to pay particular attention to what divides humans. Historicism maintains that people's values, beliefs, tastes, and personalities are all shaped thoroughly by the socio-historical context in which they happen to exist. Humans are historical beings through and through in that they uncritically accept the political and religious beliefs that define the historical milieu and unconsciously absorb the trends and fashions of the day. It is exceedingly difficult if not impossible for people to step outside the flow of history and shield themselves from its effect. And because no two historical periods are identical, people are bound to differ in manifold ways. A warrior from the Greco-Roman world had political beliefs at variance with a Benedictine monk from the Middle Ages. The aesthetic sensibility of a painter from the Renaissance wouldn't be shared by an artist who came under the influence of abstract art. History separates people, for each epoch in the historical trajectory is a unique environment for creating distinct humans who don't resemble people from the past and the future.

There are theories of teaching in education that assume the truth about human differences or similarities. The metaphysical issue of whether humans are at the very core the same or different is not an esoteric and arcane matter that doesn't affect classroom practice. In fact, two influential

theories concerned with the question of what students should learn presuppose very different views on human differences.

One of the central concerns in education is the content that should be delivered to students. The selection of content raises many vexing issues since we cannot teach everything that is known in each curricular subject. Because the amount of well-corroborated knowledge in each subject is vast, educators must become selective and choose what students really need to learn. In the field of curricula design, there are two theories which differ markedly in what they regard as vital knowledge for learning. Proponents of the theory of multiculturalism typically argue that students must above all become knowledgeable about the history, culture, and art of a diverse range of people. They are very critical of curriculums that focus heavily on the history or cultural contributions of groups with power and authority. When studying European history, for example, the past is usually seen through the lens of white middle class men, not through the prism of the marginalized members of society. Textbooks document how members of privileged groups construed and responded to the events they experienced. And history usually highlights the feats and foibles of renowned politicians, military generals, and kings while paying very little attention on how the oppressed members of society experienced life and what they thought about the events that took place. Advocates of multiculturalism in history teaching argue that human diversity must be celebrated by not only viewing the past through lens shared by marginalized groups, but by focusing more on the everyday lives led by ordinary citizens. The past is said to appear richer and more multifaceted when seen through multiple vantage points. The study of Western art, to mention another example, is extremely jaundiced for exposing students to masterpieces created mostly by men from the aristocracy. Consequently, they remain ignorant of the contributions made by women of color who produced works of great originality and power. Again, this inherent bias in art education must be rectified because students need to become more aware of artwork produced by people from different racial and cultural backgrounds, to become mindful of unconventional art forms that depart from the canons of Western art.

Perennialism is another approach to curriculum design that adopts a very different view towards what should be imparted to students. Those who embrace this theory contend that students must first and foremost become acquainted with the classical, canonical works that can be found in

almost any academic discipline. In literature, instead of spending time analyzing works produced by second-rate writers, students should scrutinize the works of Shakespeare and Milton, for their plays and poems have everlasting value for every keen learner, regardless of their sex or ethnicity. And the canonical texts have perennial value that transcends the time and place in which they were written because the themes and issues they raise - the meaning of life, the nature of love, the existence of God, etc. – are what every living human being grapples with. The themes are forever relevant because people cannot ordinarily lead their lives without pondering the meaning of their lives or speculating about what awaits them after death. If they have never struggled with questions raised by these texts, they can join in the conversation from the past and deepen their humanity by reflecting on ideas people are bound to think about. Furthermore, when studying music, students should be introduced to the classical works of Beethoven and Brahms, not Madonna and Michael Jackson, because their symphonies and sonatas have received the accolade of masterpieces, mesmerizing and inspiring countless people from all over the world. Their musical value is universal and timeless, transcending both time and space. An overture by Berlioz or a complex orchestral work by Stravinsky is a work of creative genius, not a work that merely embodies a passing trend in the history of musical expression. Whether it is literature or music, education at its best must introduce learners to works of universal, lasting value, not works that only have fleeting, limited value and meaning.

Both multiculturalism and perennialism are founded upon different philosophical views about human identity. Multiculturalism assumes that humans are fundamentally different. What people experience and how they interpret their experience often depend on which class or race they belong to. A wealthy aristocrat's life experience and his overall outlook on life are radically different to the outlook shared by factory workers working under appalling conditions. Teachers are responsible for inviting students to learn the perspectives and visions shared by people of different backgrounds. By doing so, education serves the useful purpose of rejoicing the rich and diverse nature of human beings. Human diversity won't be celebrated if students' understanding of the historical past is limited to events experienced and construed by the rich, the powerful, and the famous. Moreover, multiculturalism stresses the importance of initiating students to a wide range of cultural contributions from people of different

classes, races, and nationalities. The teaching of literature and the arts must depart from studying the works by the privileged members of society and incorporate the stories and artefacts created by gays, lesbians, proletariats, indigenous people, and others. Their works convey a way of seeing and understanding the world not shared by those who are not on the receiving end of oppression and discrimination. By studying a rich cultural and artistic tapestry weaved by threads belonging to people from different groups, students will come to tolerate and appreciate human differences instead of viewing them as a barrier for mutual understanding. In contrast to multiculturalism, perennialism philosophically presupposes that humans are the same. Students can understand and appreciate the literary works written by writers of the distant past because the themes they raise are themes every human being is bound to confront. Students of today can gain much from pondering the words of Homer or Dante because such towering figures in literature articulate the concerns, the worries, and the frustrations that life brings. Though separated in time, it is this shared concern that binds people as a whole. People are similar; for ancient warriors in Sparta and the slaves of Mesopotamia reflected on the possibility of the afterlife and the whole point of living just as those reared in a scientifically and technologically advanced society do today. And the answers offered by poets and novelists to the questions they raise are valuable and insightful, not to be dismissed as archaic and ancient, because their enduring truth continues to reverberate to this day. Contemporary readers value the answers to questions that were first entertained hundreds and thousands of years ago precisely because our nature as human beings hasn't fundamentally altered. People, both past and present, believe in the power of love to overcome hatred, the value of friendship to heal pain, and the solace hope offers in times when we are despondent. If there is no basic commonality that bridges who we are from who we were in the past, the answers to existential queries proposed by our forebears will just belong in the dustbin of history as interesting relics that can only interest the keen historian.

The content students should learn at school is one of the basic issues in education. Those who uphold the principles of multiculturalism argue that students should be exposed to a diverse range of beliefs and views. It presupposes that humans are by nature different and it seeks to construct a curriculum that reflects these differences. Advocates of perennialism, on the other hand, argue in favor of a curriculum that centers on the learning

of canonical texts with universal value or acquaint every learner “with the best that has been thought and said” (Smith, p. 18, 2016). Their underlying philosophy views humans as similar in essence. Again, theories in pedagogy are not entirely divorced from philosophical assumptions.

## Conclusion

It is not entirely unusual for teachers, school administrators, curriculum specialists, and writers of textbooks to dismiss philosophy as so much useless, airy-fairy theorizing that has very little practical bearing on classroom practice. But contrary to this pervasive misconception, philosophy does have a useful role to play in education. Because education often rests on definite metaphysical views about human beings, it can uncover these views so that people involved in education have a clearer and more perceptive understanding of the nature of teaching. This study tried to demonstrate the metaphysical underpinnings of a wide range of aspects in education. It was, for instance, argued that the standard classroom practice of imposing punishments presuppose that students are free agents who must be held accountable for their action. Learning tasks that teachers set are also often built on philosophical foundations. Cooperative learning is premised on a positive outlook on human nature, for it requires students to view others in the group as competent and trustworthy. Furthermore, arguments put forward in educational debates refer to reasons that are philosophical. Preferential treatment of students, for example, are often criticized for denying the right, a concept analyzed in philosophy, everyone has for a quality education. Approaches to teaching are not immune of philosophical influence either. They often tacitly embrace the ends that should guide people’s lives. Emancipatory learning, being inspired by Marxist philosophy, regards the liberation of the oppressed members of society as the true end of human existence. Educational research is another area that is under the influence of philosophy. Positivism and other research paradigms hinge on very definite views about human nature. In addition, theories of curriculum planning accept particular answers to the question of whether humans are fundamentally similar or different. Multiculturalism celebrates human diversity and aims to create a curriculum that entails this quality. As these examples attest, philosophy cannot be divorced from education. From learning theories to curricular aims, education in its entirety is saturated

with philosophical principles and beliefs. And philosophers can employ their tools of analysis to reveal these principles for everyone to examine.

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