

## Introduction

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During a meeting on the future of the humanities at my university, faculty members were discussing a campus initiative, “Humanities in a Globalizing Context.” One of my colleagues in the Philosophy Department opined that philosophy had no geography and, therefore, no ‘globalizing’ context. The implication, whether or not intended by the speaker, was that philosophy (as queen of the disciplines) transcends time and space in a way not to be enjoyed by the practitioners of the lesser arts, such as History, English, Romance Languages, and (how the heck did it even get represented at this meeting?) Anthropology. The timeline for our specific project did not allow for any discussion of this point, which seemed to render some of us temporarily speechless anyway. But I came away from that meeting wanting to invite that young scholar to Miami for the 2003 Philosophy of Education Meetings, if for no other reason than to demonstrate the possibilities, the dynamism, the futurescape represented by the Society and the field itself.

The conference and the collection that follows herein make the point forcefully that philosophers of education are capable, as we were challenged by President Haroutunian-Gordon, of doing the work of philosophy posed by a questioning of “Cultural Diversity.” Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon was, in her way, prescient by bringing us to Miami for the annual meetings, by inviting a cultural anthropologist to make the Kneller Address, and by convening the meeting close upon the heels of the start of war in Iraq. Of course that last was neither by design nor desire, but was a sign that as philosophers and as educators, the Society’s membership was bound to be challenged again and again to respond from whatever geographic, political, and intellectual spaces the membership calls home.

What is the role of philosophers of education at a time of war and political ferment? Even to approach that question requires a recognition that the Philosophy of Education Society is not a U.S. institution; a perusal of these contents will show large participation from Canada, as well as from Australia, Cyprus, Israel, and Japan. These pages will not reflect the political debates that went on both in the sessions themselves and on the streets of Miami Beach, but there are echoes of both long-running themes found in *Yearbooks* past and new reflections on those themes. There are essays that directly address cultural conflict as well as those that reflect conflicts in the field itself. There are essays that speak directly to teachers and other educationists and others that address a more professionally oriented readership. There are essays that could only make sense in the contemporary context of education in the U.S. and others that are more dispersed in terms of time and space. “What is the role of philosophers of education at a time of war and political ferment?” was not the question posed by the call for papers; yet, even in the fall of 2002 authors referenced both the specific coming conflict in Iraq and the broader issues of the politics surrounding U.S. foreign policy. By the time the papers were collected in April, the question was not prospective any longer.

I would not wish to suggest that this collection of essays provides a definitive answer to that, or any other, question (except perhaps what was on the minds of some philosophers of education in late 2002). Rather I would suggest that each author was responding to some question that s/he found compelling whether or not s/he chose to address the non-limiting theme of the conference or issues in the world outside of PES. I would also like to suggest that in this collection of papers, there are essays that ask the kind of Gadamerian “genuine questions” that Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon invokes as a primary route to the education for tolerance. These essays provide opportunities for productive ‘listening’, both in the responses that follow and in discussions and writing to come in the field. So, the mentions of authors or papers in the paragraphs that follow are meant simply as pointers to the many excellent thinkers and writers that have been, are, and will be affiliated with the Philosophy of Education Society.

#### DEMOCRATIC LONGINGS

Long-time readers of Haroutunian-Gordon might be excused to find themselves a bit intrigued at seeing her use her Society presidency as a platform to invite exchange about cultural diversity. Her work on interpretive discussion in the classroom has drawn on a rich tradition, and the Presidential Essay continues to valorize those sources while putting that work in focus around the possible contributions of philosophy and philosophy of education to applying democracy as a remedy for social inequities. She begins and ends with a quote from John Dewey that raises the themes that resonate throughout the essay – what it means to live “conjoint, communicated” experiences and how democratic education might contribute to the breaking down of barriers to those experiences. Haroutunian-Gordon suggests listening, not simply as an indication of respect but as a philosophically necessary tool in communication across difference. She reminds us that the philosopher’s legitimacy as a force in democracy does not rest solely on traditionally recognized skills of argumentation. Instead, philosophers also rely on the capacity to be open or tolerant, that is, to realize the epistemological goals of listening – as she goes on to elaborate through the examples from the *Theaetetus*.

Of course, although ‘democracy’ was not used directly in the call for papers, this collection is full of essays that continue discussions and break new ground on the very possibilities of democratic education. Levisohn’s featured essay is in investigation into the epistemological problems of ‘patriotic’ education. For him, the empirical question of ‘what is dominant’ in history complements a normative question of ‘what is best’ for both the educator and for the historian. The normative commitments implied in the question are a necessary antidote to pessimism masquerading as neutrality. This normativity, per Levisohn, serves as a stimulus to inquiry that has a place in the classroom.

Levisohn’s argument in the American context links with essays by Benporath, Kunzman, and Glass that challenge the limits of patriotism, tolerance, citizenship, and conflict in the context of democratic desire. Although Benporath and Glass take a more confrontational view of patriotism and citizenship than does Levisohn, ultimately they share the optimistic (although not cheerful) inclination toward those

democratic possibilities. Glass says directly that conflict is the meat and marrow of democratic life: “[O]ur very survival as a democracy may depend on alternative understandings of morality and our duties as citizens . . . [P]luralism and diversity are fundamental to the moral domain and critical to a just democracy, and thus public education has a special responsibility to prepare citizens to engage the moral and political conflicts that are central to democratic life.”

Benporath, too, judges the essence of democratic perspectives on education to be bound up with a positive approach to the problems of difference; “Democratic educational theories . . . [and] their emphasis on civic equality, recognition of differences, and ‘reciprocity beyond borders’” is more relevant “in times of war.” Benporath uses Israeli civic education as an example of the ways in which citizenship can be invoked to limit the possibilities of democracy. Instead she advocates focusing on democratic aims and employing radical means of realizing the aims by “opposing the mainstream conception of citizenship” that circulates in wartime.

Kunzman does not center his discussion on current events, but he is making a response to the political problems posed in Benporath and Glass through a specific ethical lens. He points us in the direction of viewing the ‘citizen’ produced in the multicultural classroom not purely from the frame of the demands of democracy, but from the frame of the whole person. His essay draws us back to Haroutunian-Gordon’s press for listening as a means for tolerance, with a clear challenge to the idea that tolerance is sufficient for full citizenship. “There is no common good with mere tolerance.” A ‘genuine moral tolerance’ is necessary but limited if the goal is ‘the common good of the just community. This requires mutual understanding and respect.’ Of course Haroutunian-Gordon is clear that that mutuality and respect is reached through the kind of listening that she advocates.

#### TEXTUAL HEALING

This kind of normatively-driven listening may pose an interesting question through essays, like David Carr’s, that focus on narrative. The activity or attitude suggested by Carr’s essay is perhaps more ‘reading’ than listening as he pushes us further along a path toward “proper understanding” of narratives of mythic and religious significance. Like Kunzman, Carr seems to reject mere tolerance as relevant to our educational missions. Susan Laird, in her responding essay also harks to Kunzman, but by way of suggesting that any so-called “proper understanding” of these texts in the violent and diverse world in which we live must be leavened by “moral education that respects human bodies as well as diversely acculturated souls.” Deborah Kerdeman is also concerned with the challenges of understanding; in her essay she proposes listening critically to self as well as to others. “Literature is ‘brought home’ when it interrupts our complacency and exposes self-deceptions we would otherwise deny. This kind of understanding does not entail regulating how we respond to a text so that we can interpret it. Understanding occurs because we are seized by a text, pulled up short by its meaning and transformed.”

Laird does credit Carr with a needed challenge to philosophy of education’s secularist tendencies. Other writers highlight the religious in their accounts of

cultural diversity, suggesting that the religious is not displaced in the field. Dana Howard jumps into the ‘difference in democratic education’ discussion by asking “whether a liberal state that fosters autonomy can also accommodate communities that value group solidarity and adherence to traditions over autonomous action” – in the case of Israel and the ultra-orthodox. Howard makes the case that the particular traditions of debate and dissension in interpretation among the Haredi pose a counter to the supposition that orthodoxy precludes the productive conflicts that Glass and others insist are constitutive of democratic life. In the U.S. context, Jeffrey Milligan challenges the metaphor of the wall of separation of church and state. His analysis comports with Haroutunian-Gordon’s (via Dewey) insistence on ‘conjoint, communicated experience’ in democracy. Milligan wants to preserve the doctrine of separation in a metaphoric (and literal) form that allows for better access to one’s neighbors – the better to listen and engage in mutual projects.

#### TALK(ING) TO THE HAND –AND BEYOND

The third featured essay, by Haithe Anderson, balances the kind of optimism brought to the ‘problem’ of difference by many of the authors in this book with a questioning attitude toward the limitations of theory – in particular, multicultural theories. She cautions, “Theoretical multiculturalism, in this view, cannot provide an accurate account of multiplicity as it really is; all it will ever do is provide context-specific descriptions and interpretations that are limited and biased (as opposed to timeless and universal). Multiculturalism, in this view, is nothing more or less than a conversation of and about social practice and its assertions can only be justified by reference to provincial commitments, not by reference to some higher or purer epistemic authority.”

This view of the limitations of theory and the relation of local and universal knowledges constituted part of the grounding for the specially-invited Kneller address. Richard Shweder braved the cross-disciplinary rapids to give his cultural reading of the challenges of apprehending, understanding, and tolerating real, divisive differences in beliefs and practices. The respondents (myself included) were stimulated to challenge him back – in ways that did, I think, open up discussions acknowledging the intellectual openness of the membership.

The conflicts, the barriers to understanding, the moral/intellectual commitments, and the devotion to argumentation that are part and parcel of philosophy, educational theorizing, and the human condition in our age – all these are present in the exchange between Shweder and his interlocutors. Haroutunian-Gordon’s choice of the Kneller Lecturer this year posed precisely the challenge articulated in the prologue to her own essay. And, for the most part, the interlocutors, although unaware of the coming presidential challenge, did opt for questioning and listening. Haroutunian-Gordon suggests that the answer to my question – What is the role of philosophers of education at a time of war and ferment? – is precisely contained in her invitations to Professor Shweder and the two panels of respondents. To wit:

Gadamer may be right— living, like it or not, brings us to question. If we get clear about our questions, and philosophers can help us do that, then we may come to feel desire to find the answers. If we are seeking resolution of a genuine question,

we may find ourselves seeking help from others in order to do so. And so we become “conjoined” — we consider the perspective of the other in order to reflect upon our beliefs and possible courses of action. Perhaps, as occurred in the case of Theaetetus, the perspective of the other may challenge our beliefs. Recognizing the indispensability of the other’s perspective for the growth of our own thinking should go some way toward lessening our ambivalence toward difference—much as Sarat and Shweder would seem to welcome. [this is the last para of SHG’s paper]

#### CODA

This very short introduction was not meant to distract readers from the delights to be found by browsing the volume for any number of themes, authors, and exchanges that are well worth mentioning. Omissions of mention are many; there are many excellent essays that connect to the essays mentioned and many that lead down alternative pathways. Neither did I seek to emulate my marvelous predecessors in this chair who crafted essays that assayed the field in the year of the book. I hope instead to have whetted readers’ appetites to do their own investigations of the connections and discontinuities among and between these essays and authors. I hope to encourage readers to think about the specific theme called for this year as well as other themes — like rationality, reasonableness, liberalism, democracy, critical thinking, feminist theory, pedagogical practice, pragmatism, aporia, ethical education, post-modernism — that animate our field and find many lovely expressions in the present volume. Finally, I hope that readers will see this volume as an opportunity to listen, to argue, to challenge, to question and to communicate conjointly within and without the Philosophy of Education Society.