

EDUCATION AND INDOCTRINATION

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In educational discussion, the accusation of indoctrination crops up more often with regard to religious education than any other discipline. This paper attempts an analysis of such charges with a view to assessing their validity. A brief analysis of the criteria demanded for the correct use of the terms education and indoctrination is required for this purpose. Each of these concepts is of a normative character, in that each demands that certain requirements are fulfilled before they can be properly applied. An elucidation of these criteria will not only throw some light on the concepts themselves, but will enable us to evaluate the charge against religious education with a greater degree of clarity. Such an analysis seems to suggest that the charge of indoctrination in this case is not well founded.

A number of educational philosophers have recently re-examined the whole question of indoctrination in education (1, 3, 4, 6). In these discussions the attitude towards religious education has been, if not one of open hostility, at least one of suspicion. Such suspicion is not altogether new, nor is it confined to educational philosophers. Many people today regard religious education with, to say the least, a jaundiced eye, and in discussions accusations of indoctrination are never too far away.

The question is a rather crucial one for educators in our Western European society, particularly for those in the maintained schools in England and in most schools in Ireland, where religious education is regarded as part and parcel of the curriculum. That it is so regarded is not in any sense peculiar, if we take into account the historical position of Christianity in European development. Many educators, indeed, feel that not to include religious education would be to ignore a basic ingredient of our collective past.

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the concepts of 'education' and 'indoctrination', and in the light of this to face the charge that religious education belongs to the latter category.

EDUCATION

The word 'education' is basically normative in character. It is not the name of something that happens. If we do use it to describe something that happens, then we are using it analogically. Thus, for example, if we say that education takes place in schools we are referring to the fact that at least some of the activities which go on in schools may be described as educational, in that the end product of these activities is a person, or

group of persons, whom we might want to call 'educated'.

Gilbert Ryle's (5) distinction in *The concept of mind* between 'task' and 'achievement' words may illustrate this point. A 'task' word, e.g. 'looking for' indicates a process which may continue in existence over a period of time and which may be completed successfully or unsuccessfully, may be performed well or badly. An 'achievement' word, on the other hand, indicates the successful completion of a task, e.g. 'finding'. It does not take time to find, and one cannot find unsuccessfully. One may, of course, find only some of what one is seeking, in other words, achievements are subject to at least some form of gradation.

In the context of education, 'teaching,' 'instructing,' 'explaining,' etc., are 'task' words indicating processes which go on over a period of time and are aimed at certain achievements. 'Educated,' however, is an achievement word indicating that a certain qualitative level of achievement has been attained. The processes aimed at the achievement may be called educational only by reference to this end.

One further point emerges from Ryle's distinction. It was pointed out that while one may not find unsuccessfully, one may find only some of what one is seeking. Now if we regard 'education' as an achievement word, we may say that it is quite in order to speak of various levels of educational achievement, e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary. In each case we refer to the fact that a certain amount of what is sought has been found. We would not expect the level of achievement to be identical at each stage. The point may be put as follows. We may well have some absolute norm in mind when we talk of education (e.g. the perfection of man's potentialities), and each stage in the educational process has its core of meaning only in reference to this norm. The concept of education, thus, is not only a normative one, indicating some standard to be attained, it is also analogical, indicating that at any one time a person may have reached a certain stage in his journey towards this standard.*

Returning to our discussion of the normative aspect of 'education,' we may point out that, normally, when we say X is educated, we regard this as implying that X is in some way the better for being so. His being so is regarded as good or worthwhile. Moreover, we would all agree, presumably, that to be educated is better than not to be so. It is in this sense that 'education' is a normative term. It refers to the fact that,

*These two characteristics of the term educated enable discussions of various different levels of education to proceed without demanding that those at lower levels achieve what is beyond their abilities. Each term, being analogical in character, indicates that an achievement appropriate to a particular level has been attained.

whatever else 'education' may mean, it is in some way valuable

As I am primarily concerned here with the problem of indoctrination in a cognitive area (that of beliefs), what follows will be restricted to the elaboration of the norms and criteria appropriate to such a discussion. However, I believe, that, with appropriate adjustments, what I have to say could equally well be applied to other areas. If one takes into account the reference above to the analogical character of 'education,' what I have to say about 'understanding,' 'rationality,' 'perspective,' etc., may be understood analogically, and thus applied without distortion in areas beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

Our next task is to indicate some criteria which might be useful in characterizing the type of cognitive achievement in question. These criteria flow naturally from the normative character of education and may, indeed, be considered as the norms to be achieved in this area. We do not, for example, want to call someone 'educated' simply because he can recite the list of Derby winners, nor do we consider someone 'educated' if he can tell us how to play bingo. We do not do so because we do not consider these forms of knowledge to be of value. Thus, we restrict the use of the word education to those areas of knowledge which we consider to be of value. This we may call a criterion which decides the nature of the content of education.*

It is not sufficient, however, that the content criterion be satisfied. Just as we would not call the Derby expert educated, so also we would not want to consider a person educated simply because he was able to list all the main events of the history of France. Likewise, a person who is aware of all the events in Ulster since 1688, and who can record them in detail, is not on that account educated. He may have failed to reach an understanding of these events such that he can relate them to the current unrest, and thereby understand the situation. In other words, the mere transmission of what is valuable, while it might be a necessary ingredient in education, is not sufficient for education.

In addition to the amassing of information, 'education' may be viewed in two ways, from the point of view of the educator and from the point of view of the student.

Following on these two criteria we have a third. This third criterion

*It must be noted at this point that this criterion does *not* enable us to say what is of value, and why it is so. Such an inquiry would have to proceed in two directions: deciding what is valuable intrinsically to all men (this would demand a theory of man) and also deciding what may be of value to some men in some areas, e.g., in the West of Ireland one might expect the educational system to include elements which might not be included in an industrialized city.

deals with the methods by which we transmit what we consider to be of value, in such a way as to achieve the degree of cognitive perspective required. In this context, also, the term 'education' indicates a normative aspect of the methods to be used. In our methods it is not sufficient to aim at successful teaching, i.e., successful transmission, the methods themselves must be judged by a criterion other than success. It is along lines such as these, for example, that we might want to exclude punishment from educational situations. Our aim as educators is to produce a quality of learning, a certain level of cognitive achievement and perspective, and it is highly doubtful if punishment, corporal punishment in particular, will be of assistance in this aim. Similarly, other methods employing force, moral or physical, may be objected to on these grounds.

The point at issue in all such cases is that the methods involved do not measure up to the requirements laid down in the first two criteria. In particular they offend against the criterion of understanding, by placing the emphasis on success. Such an emphasis conflicts with the demands of rationality, i.e., it ignores, or relegates to second place, the critical sifting of evidence without which understanding cannot be achieved.

I do not wish to suggest that all traces of rationality are excluded by the methods condemned, rather I wish to point out that the achievement of understanding is not the primary aim of such methods, whereas it should be the aim of a genuine educational method. A genuine educational method, guided by the demands of the first two criteria, will aim at a critical and comprehensive survey of all available data with a view towards attaining truth, where possible. In cases where truth is not readily available (e.g. literary criticism), education demands the acceptance of only those beliefs and opinions which maintain an openness to truth, and which do not require a barrier of falsehoods for their support.

Thus our three criteria may be summarized as follows. First of all, the content must be of a certain type, i.e., it must be concerned with an area of knowledge we consider to be of value. Secondly, the cognitive quality of the learning must be of a certain level, it must, that is, carry with it a certain cognitive perspective. And thirdly, the methods used must be such that they do not violate the condition necessary for such cognitive achievements. Abuses in educational practice stem frequently from violations of some, or all, of these criteria. In the following section we shall be concerned with one such abuse: indoctrination.

INDOCTRINATION

The above sketch of the criteria needed for the use of the term

'education' has laid considerable stress on the normative character of the term. In the same way we might do well to consider the term 'indoctrination' as a normative term. Just as 'education' draws our attention to various aspects of a situation or person which we approve and admire, so 'indoctrination' carries with it suggestions that all is not well. This has not always been the case, but at least since the last world war with its fascist excesses and with the equally deplorable propaganda from other quarters since then, the term 'indoctrination' has become a term of abuse. That indoctrination might be occurring in our schools is something which might make us all a bit uneasy, but this is just what some people maintain inevitably goes on in religious education classes. Thus let us try to map out briefly the significance of the term, and then evaluate the charges.

In the previous section mention was made of the use of punishment and force in educational contexts. At that point it was claimed that those methods were inappropriate to education because they violate the conditions laid down in the criteria. Punishment and force are both normally used to get the unwilling student to learn.* In this way they demand a conflict of wills between teacher and student, with the teacher seeking, by punishment, to get the student to learn. This, however, is not the case with indoctrination. Indoctrination involves no conflict of wills, and it is precisely on this account that it is so dangerous, and so difficult to accomplish. Whereas the student who is forced to learn is aware that he is being forced, the student who is indoctrinated is not so aware. If he were aware of it, the indoctrination would not be successful.

What makes indoctrination so different is that it is concerned with the acquisition of beliefs. It is from the very nature of belief that the difficulties begin to arise. The acquisition of a belief requires the acceptance of it willingly (or at least not unwillingly) by the person concerned. It is impossible to believe something against one's will. 'For the concept of belief more is required than that a person should utter certain words in a certain way. He should be able to offer some sort of reason, however bad, for his belief, and it should be intelligible' (7).

A few remarks on the nature of belief will, I hope, make this point somewhat clearer. What follows will be of vital significance in the next section dealing with religious education.

The word 'belief' is used today in at least two clearly distinguishable ways. The first of these is characterized by a generality bordering on vagueness, the second is much narrower in scope. Firstly, 'belief' is used

*Even teachers who approve of such methods when dealing with unwilling students, would not normally use them in dealing with students who appear to be unable to learn.

to describe almost any cognitive state regardless of the epistemological status or origin of its content. Thus, we may use the word in the following way: 'X believes that JFK was shot in Dallas,' 'X believes $2+2=4$,' or 'X believes that the fire is hot,' or 'X believes that Dickens was a bad novelist,' or 'X believes that Mao Tse Tung is dead.' It is apparently perfectly good usage to deal with the words 'belief' and 'believes' in such contexts. Philosophers indeed have begun to follow the normal usage(s) and to quote such examples when discussing the concept of belief. However, the case is not as simple as it may seem. In only some of the above cases is it possible for us to substitute the word 'knows' for the word 'believes', in all the others we are forced to substitute some less precise word. Thus we may say 'X knows that Kennedy was shot in Dallas,' 'X knows that $2+2=4$ ' and 'X knows that the fire is hot.' In those cases the grounds advanced might be as follows: in the first case X has collected evidence, including film strips, medical reports, etc., in the second case X may be a competent mathematician fully aware of the meaning of 2, 4, + and =, in the third case X may appeal to direct experience, and to the usage of the English word 'hot' to cover such experiences. Thus in all of these cases the conclusion drawn is drawn on the basis of well-marshalled and clearly defined evidence. All are truth claims.

However, in the cases of Dickens and Mao Tse Tung the issues are not so clear. When X says that he believes Dickens to be a bad novelist he is not making a truth claim, but issuing a value judgment. Thus it is not appropriate to say 'X knows Dickens is a bad novelist.' We can only say such things as 'It is X's opinion that Dickens is a bad novelist' or 'It is X's considered view that Dickens is a bad novelist.' In this case there will not only be serious dispute about the judgment, but also about the evidence and the mode of presentation of the evidence. Likewise, in the case of 'X believes Mao Tse Tung to be dead,' there is no possibility of his being able to say he knows Mao to be dead. Either, he is making an inspired guess or he has heard learned commentators discussing the possibility, in the latter case, he is relying on authority in making his statement. (Naturally, it will eventually be possible to say 'I know Mao to be dead'.)

Thus it is clear that the generalized use of the word belief blurs the boundaries of a wide area of cognitive claims. A notable feature of this vague usage is that it enables philosophers advancing this wide usage to further complicate the issue by insisting that anyone who says 'I know X' is committed to believing the proposition 'that X.' This may indeed fit in

with English usage, but it destroys the clear distinction between 'I know X' and 'I believe X'

The narrower usage of 'belief' (and this is the sense in which I intend to use it) does not allow it to stand as a vague generic term for cognitive states. Whereas some cognitive states (e.g. true knowledge) demand that the subject seeks for himself and understands the relation of evidence and conclusion, belief, in the narrow sense, does not require such intrinsic evidence, but, rather, extrinsic evidence such as the testimony of others. When X believes, in this sense, one cannot substitute the word 'knows,' although at some future date this may well be possible (e.g., if X examines the case fully).

'Belief,' in the narrower sense, refers to a cognitive state of mind. It refers to a state of mind (of the person, if you like) which is dependent upon the acceptance by the believer of the belief on the evidence or authority of another. The key word here is 'acceptance.' It involves the believer's willing agreement to the belief in question. Thus, I take it, is what Wilson means in the passage quoted above. As regards the believer being able to give at least a bad reason for his belief, this, I take it, refers to the fact that the believer accepts the belief in the first place because some evidence (however silly) was presented to him by way of supporting the belief.*

Beliefs, in this sense, cannot be forced upon a person, they must be implanted by providing the believer with some grounds for their acceptance. It may be noted in passing here, that one can 'believe' falsely but one cannot 'know' falsely. If what one claimed to know turned out to be false, then one just did not know at all. If what one believes turns out to be false, one may continue to believe it.

These comments, I hope, show that indoctrination, unlike force, cannot succeed by riding roughshod over the will. The indoctrinator must gain acceptance for his beliefs by argument and persuasion. He must at least seem to be presenting a case. He will, of course, present his case to suit his aims.

At this point it might be objected that education, too, often issues in beliefs, not knowledge, and secondly that indoctrination seems impossible because the nature of beliefs demands the giving of reasons, and thus fulfils the rationality criterion. That education often issues in beliefs, not knowledge, is certainly true. However, it is the aim of education, in the cognitive domain, to arrive at true knowledge where this is possible.

*The bad reasons may seem good to the believer. They are only bad to the critic who feels they do not substantiate the belief.

Where this is not possible, education demands a full and undistorted presentation of the evidence for a case and it is precisely in its distortion of the evidence that indoctrination offends. The objection regarding the impossibility of indoctrination may be countered by pointing out that the degree of openness and the availability of evidence can be easily limited to suit the case of an indoctrinator. All he need do is to present his own case well, then present garbled versions of opposing views in an easily refutable fashion. Thus he gives the appearance of openness, while in fact 'doctoring' the evidence. The indoctrinator thus uses rationality to suit his own ends by allowing fraudulent discussions to take place. Note that it is not the content of the beliefs which is in question here, rather it is the mode of presentation. The same set of beliefs might be advanced in two ways, one perfectly acceptable, the other totally geared for indoctrination.

The essential feature of indoctrination which emerges then is that it deliberately violates the criteria of rational discussion with a view to achieving a favourable outcome for the position being advanced. The mere exclusion of full rationality in itself is not sufficient. The exclusion must be deliberate and it must be done in a relevant context. Thus, for example, some teachers may accidentally exclude rationality through ignorance of the full case. Also some teachers may exclude certain discussions with certain age groups on the grounds that the pupils are 'not able' for the issues involved.*

Indoctrination, like teaching, is an intentional performance and it is carried out by a teacher with a definite aim in view. The aims of the teacher will enable him to jettison success in the interests of truth, if such is ever required. The aim of the indoctrinator, however, allows him to reject truth in the interests of success if he sees fit. Thus we might suggest the following definition of indoctrination: the attempt to insinuate into the experience of the individual any belief, or set of beliefs, to the exclusion of others, in such a way as to prevent these beliefs being adequately evaluated by the individual concerned (2).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the first section it was argued that the content of education is governed

*It follows from the analogical aspect of education that different qualitative goals will be aimed at at different levels of education. Thus at some levels the discussion will be more thorough than at others. The long term result of this procedure does raise the question of indoctrination.

by a value criterion. It was stated that we transmit what we do because we consider it to be of value. It is precisely on these grounds that many educators feel that the teaching of religion should have a place in our schools. It is, after all, rather difficult to understand our own social and cultural heritage without taking account of the role of Christianity in the formation of that heritage.

Today, however, many who accept this view are seeking ways to teach religion without even risking a charge of indoctrination. It is maintained by some that it is not the function of the schools to teach anyone religion, and that a set of courses designed to show the place of various religious beliefs in the development of our society would be much more to the point. In this area the study of comparative religion draws perhaps the greatest number of supporters. Such a position, however, merely evades the issues in question (8). Whatever the merits and demerits of such comparative courses, they in no way amount to religious education in the sense required for our present purposes. The problem facing us here is this: is it possible to teach a religion without automatically involving indoctrination processes? Can such teaching avoid this charge?

At this point the religious educator may say that, since it has been argued that the content alone is never sufficient grounds for a charge of indoctrination, any such charge levelled against religious education is quite meaningless. While it might be granted that some religious educators actively engage in indoctrination, there is nothing intrinsic to such education which might make indoctrination inevitable. In the light of the arguments already presented, this line of argument seems quite valid. However, it is precisely at this point that those who make the charge bring in a special plea. They maintain that religious beliefs are unique in some special sense and direct their arguments against the very nature of such beliefs. The argument seems to be that, while beliefs in other areas may be questioned and proved true or false, religious beliefs are not of this type. Not only are religious beliefs not of this type, but we do not even know how to verify them, because we do not know what they really are about. Wilson, for example, says 'Thus I cannot be so confident about the position of religious beliefs *vis-a-vis* indoctrination, because I am not at all clear (who is?) exactly what religious beliefs are supposed to be' (7). Hirst makes the same point 'If, in fact, as seems to be the case at present, there are no agreed public tests whereby true and false can be distinguished in religious claims, then we can hardly maintain that we have here a domain of religious knowledge and truth' (3).

It has been argued that content alone is not a sufficient criterion for an

accusation of indoctrination, but now the argument has taken on a new dimension. If the above views are accepted unconditionally, then religious educators face the charge of teaching highly dubious and unverifiable opinions and beliefs. Not only are the beliefs dubious, but they exert an important influence on the quality of our moral, political and social behaviour. A serious charge indeed.

However, an even more serious additional charge has yet to be added. It might seem that the above charge could be avoided by the simple tactic of allowing the student to decide for himself whether to accept or reject any set of beliefs. This might be done by conducting these classes in an atmosphere of critical and free discussion, governed by all the rules of fair and just presentation. This possibility is excluded, however, by those who make the charges. They maintain that, since religious educators normally belong to a particular religious group and so naturally seek to gain favourable acceptance of their views, to the exclusion of others, thus the doors are closed to rational and free discussion. Thus, for example, it is claimed that a Catholic teacher, anxious to get his students to adhere to Catholicism, will present a strong case for this set of beliefs and weak critical cases for opposing viewpoints. The essence of this argument seems to be that a teacher cannot teach such a set of unverifiable beliefs, from a particular viewpoint, aiming at a favourable outcome, without indoctrinating in the process. Thus, it would appear that religious educators are doomed to indoctrination.

Objections may be raised against this line of argument from two directions. Firstly, one always has a suspicion that many of these charges are based upon the actual school teaching of some religious educators. It may be granted that some of these teachers do in fact indoctrinate pupils, however, simply because this may in fact be the case, it does not follow that it must be the case. The charges made depend for their validity on showing not that some teachers do indoctrinate, but on showing that religious teachers cannot avoid indoctrination. Secondly, we may appeal to the definition of indoctrination. From this it may be clearly seen that, to be classified as indoctrination, a teaching process must deliberately involve the exclusion of some evidence, or the 'editing' of some relevant data. Thus the charges advanced depend upon showing that religious beliefs are such that they inevitably involve religious teachers in such 'editing' and perversion of evidence.

However, at no point has it emerged that there is a *necessary* connection between the nature of religious beliefs and the need to edit evidence. What has emerged is that many of those teaching such beliefs, being convinced

believers, tend to edit evidence to suit their case. This, however, may occur in any area and is not peculiar to religious education. Further, such a charge does not involve any consequences for the nature of beliefs, it merely indicates that there are some disreputable or misguided teachers.

No evidence has emerged which suggests any direct link between religious belief and indoctrination. There is no evidence which points to the necessity to exclude openness to rational discussion in religious education classes. Such critical discussion would naturally be restricted by the unavailability of truth criteria, yet this need not restrict their impartiality. Religious teachers may not find the prospect of such discussions very attractive, but the point is that such discussions are a real possibility in religious education classes. The aim of such classes would be to present the data in as clear and coherent a manner as possible, keeping an openness to truth right through the discussion.

It is quite possible and, indeed, highly desirable that certain critical standards be maintained in the teaching of religion, just as in the teaching of any subject. What is required in this case is that the teacher should look to the quality of his presentation, in order to ensure that a balanced viewpoint is emerging. It is not necessary for the teacher to say 'we are right and all the others wrong', he can best make his case by being fair, critical and constructive in his approach, not only to his own viewpoint, but to all opposing views also.

The attainment of these standards in any area of education is by no means an easy task. The point to be noted, however, is that it is possible to reach these standards in the area of religious education. The case for the charge of indoctrination seems to rest on the belief that these standards cannot be reached in this area. The above analysis, I believe, indicates the mistaken nature of such a charge. It may not be easy, or indeed attractive to religious educators to aim at the standard of openness required, but there is nothing in the nature of the case which precludes the attainment of these standards.

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