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## A Few Words On Education

### Abstract

This paper intends to point at the significance of secular thought in education. A wide range of definitions is attached to secularity/secularism. These can be reduced to a few and all of them can be summarized as 'thinking and believing without dogma'. In the history of philosophy Xenophanes deserves to be mentioned as the first philosopher who advocated a secular religious belief on anthropological ground. Aristotle's 'zoon politikon' paved the way for an ethico-social organization based on a philosophical analysis showing the limits of administrative power. Kant's ethics is secular in that it rests on good will, a capacity inherent in all human beings.

No matter what their religious systems are, societies not alien to philosophy succeed in establishing educational institutions founded on freedom of speech on all social problems. Societies living under authoritarian dogmas cannot have the liberty to choose secular organization of education.

### Key Terms

Secularity, Education, Belief, Ethic.

## Eğitim Üzerine Birkaç Söz

### Özet

Bu yazı seküler düşüncenin eğitimdeki önemine işaret etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sekülerite/sekülerizm tanımları geniş ve kapsamlıdır. Bunlar birkaç tanıma indirilebilir ve hepsi 'dogma olmaksızın düşünmek ve inanmak' olarak özetlenebilir. Felsefe tarihinde Ksenofanes antropolojik dayanakta seküler inanç öneren ilk filozof olarak anılabilir. Aristoteles'in 'zoon politikon'u, felsefi çözümlenmeye dayanan bir etiksel-sosyal organizasyonun yolunu açtı ve yönetsel gücün sınırlarını gösterdi. Kant'ın etiği sekülerdir, çünkü bütün insanlarda bulunan bir yetenek olarak iyiyi istemeyi temele koyar.

Din sistemleri ne olursa olsun, felsefeye yabancılaşmayan toplumlar, bütün sosyal sorunlar hakkında konuşma özgürlüğüne dayanan eğitim kurumları

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oluşturmada başarılı olurlar. Otoriter dogmalar altında yaşayan toplumlar, eğitimin seküler organizasyonunu seçme özgürlüğüne sahip olamazlar.

### **Anahtar Terimler**

Sekülerite, Eğitim, İnanç, Etik.

### **The Philosophical Essence of Education**

Education can be defined as the sum total, from birth to death, of the acquirements of the 'human, the educable being'. It is generally thought that the headlines of the answer to the question 'what is man?' point to his/her being as rational, lawful, free, unity of opposites etc. Notwithstanding the truth of these definitions, the essential phenomenon to be singled out is education which must be accepted as the fundament and determinant of all the factors that 'make' the human being as such. There is no 'uneducated' human being; there are people who were unable to receive education, because the human being is unique by its faculty of self-regulation and self-reflection without any forceful outside impact or input. The human being can educate itself, has an inborn capacity for the conception of the world, and by virtue of this capacity is also able to put common sense to effect.

The human being, possessing multiple possibilities, is open to be educated, but must receive it; otherwise, inborn capacities such as speech cannot be developed. The question as to which determinant principle or principles the success or failure in education depends, is important to show the perspectives of people concerning this phenomenon. This important fact is not limited to the phenomenon of education; it has a lifetime importance. At the same time it reveals the most basic principle of being independent and self-regulating. This principle is secularity.

### **The Vitality of the Secular Attitude**

The secular attitude first appeared in Ionia (our region at the Aegean shores including Efes/Ephesus, Selçuk and Kuşadası) by a philosopher known by the name Xenophanes, who later migrated to Italy (1). To the people around he was saying, "why do you need so many gods, have one god but pay attention to your own world" and was thus founding a 2500 years old Western tradition of secular thought. The secular philosophy of the Sophists, encompassing all fields of human knowledge and action, was the logical consequence and conclusion of this development.

The contemporary definition of secularity is: To acquire the knowledge of the world without dogma. 'Laicism', which has become, in many languages, a coining word to civilization, is not secularity but may be its sub-definition; because secularity does not reject dogma; it only shows the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the world without postulating a dogma. Nevertheless, secularity contains a meaning which administratively differentiates 'religious and worldly affairs' (dogma and everyday matters).

The idea of political administration appeared, as a way of life or manner of living, in Aristotle's understanding of 'zoon politikon'. He defined the human being primarily as a living creature capable of political action (2). This means that only such a being is able to obtain the knowledge of the highest order of things, because for Aristotle to have the 'knowledge of administering' is at the same time to have the method (techne) at hand: the human being, in order to be human, is bound to be social and the highest order of knowledge is the knowledge of 'sociability'. 'The First Teacher' not only saw that the path to the highest order of knowledge is through reality, but he also accepted that to be bound to reality is the first and most basic principle of life. This means a return, a reflection of 'secular' thought upon itself and its acceptance as the principle of life. To be bound to reality is accepted as equivalent to secularity.

### **Rethinking Episteme**

Analysing human thought may reveal that it has a structure of a threefold curl. The first curl is the direct, immediate act towards the object. This means that it co-exists with the world (with reality). Whatever its original source may be, the place from where knowledge comes to the fore is reason; it is 'a matter of reason'. Within this frame of reality the human being takes in mind the representation of reality and there determines its structural character by certain categories (or modes/ shapes). This second act also takes into itself the field belonging directly to reality. The third curl is the reflection on the existence, the knowledge and the value of the acquired knowledge. The place arrived at is the place of philosophical reflection, also called 'higher thought'. Whatever lacks a science lacks also philosophy. And whatever lacks secularity lacks science as well.

Science is a way of life growing on the basis of secular thinking. The process from the stone age to the age of space travel is a result of this way of life. In this connection science is an activity characteristic of societies which are conscious of the necessity to stand by it in order to be together with it and which are also conscious that it secures their standing. Science, dependent on nature, presents its results to humanity for humanity. In secular societies science is the name for vital activity which manifests itself everywhere, -through the streets, buildings and machinery.

Secular thought brings forth its opposite. This is a situation of strife, but a deceptive world put against the real world cannot stand long by opposing secular thought. New worlds construed without secular thought cannot bear to carry their opposites within themselves; they present their own truisms as the single and unique reality. The only truths for these worlds, which are easily construed without effort and which abound in deceptive promises, are their own ideological and theological realities. At the bottom of all these lie superstitions, fictive expressions, mere opinions, fables from the worlds beyond, parcels in heaven distributed for saving souls, submission, obedience, torments of hell, infinite happiness in the gardens of Eden, and, perhaps the most important of all, social systems which are ready to sacrifice, to a single person or to a 'chosen few', the rest of the people, that is, everybody for everybody's sake. But a keen eye shall discern that in such worlds no essential values are valid except making money in some way, that a lie is the worthy word, that adultery and usury and the gang

methods of creating drug addiction are the most valuable economic means. These put together keep such worlds going.

### **Societies With and Without Philosophies**

The explanation of the complex phenomenon of education by general laws, principles, definitions, restrictions are methods characteristically employed by societies which 'do not have a philosophy'. The observed criterium in such societies is a memorized idea of continuity, which effects in reality its opposite, aimlessness. In societies without philosophy education is kept off everyday life, with the result that concepts lose their proper definitions. When the integrating analyses of philosophy and the connection of concepts with life are put out of doors, education is reduced to a 'teaching process' which starts and ends with circular definitions. This is tantamount to brainwashing and injection of 'desired behavior', a favourite dictum of many books on education. This dictum is an inappropriate understanding of education; it is a one-sided, coercive attitude as well. Therewith the human 'being' is kicked out of education and nothing is made for erudition. Man thus becomes a being versed in deceiving him/her self, a being which believes in his/her own lies.

### **Nature, Human Nature and Knowledge**

The connection of the human being, a 'being for itself', to 'nature', also a 'being for itself', can be epistemologically held separate, but ontologically they constitute a unity, a whole. The human being is dependent on nature for survival, but 'to be itself' (to come into existence) must separate itself from nature. This, in essence, is the phenomenon named as education. Such a separation is possible by getting acquainted to one's self, by recognizing limits, by being conscious that one is a part of nature and exists by protecting and taking care of nature. What seems here to be paradoxical is in essence philosophy proper,- two separate beings existing together. Education secures the foundations of this togetherness. Here education as 'episteme' separates itself from epistemology; the comprehensive character of being one as a whole makes the human, on the way to 'being human', a cultural being of Mind conscious of historicalness. This is the situation of 'being for itself', the *intentio obliqua*. It is the situation to exist by nature without creating a schism.

### **Daily Life, Education and Science**

The system, 'everything for the human being- the human being for education-knowledge for secularity', seems to be the key for the solution of many problems arising between education and philosophy. When Plato's dictum that 'nothingness is not there' was transformed, 25 centuries later, in Husserl's mind, to the question, 'tell me something which does not exist', it became clear that the existence of consciousness, a subject of speculation for thousands of years, was possible without an object, but was, at the same time, meaningless (3). This scheme is also valid when read *vice versa*, that is, in societies living without the impact of secularity scientific knowledge is not possible

and without the latter education is not possible. In societies which lack this idea of education the human being is incapable to realize existence but lives under the illusion that it has already realized it. This illusion converts the human being to a slave unable to conceive its slavery, living, in fact, aimless. This is a system in which societies are deceived, side by side by ungrounded beliefs, by a false idea of science which has lost concrete ground but is connoted by 'universality'. With this illusion the youth are 'educated' by superstitions, and all values and consciousness of being one's self are tramped underfoot. Exaggerated universalism bars the way to the understanding and proper evaluation of particulars, just as the reverse leads to arbitrary and irresponsible behaviour.

### **Boundaries of Knowledge and Transgressions**

Knowledge is a phenomenon arising out of human relations and existing only for the human being. The boundary of knowledge, is drawn by 'nature as we conceive it', a fact clearly shown by Kant (4). In societies living without philosophy 'knowledge' is mixed with everything alien to itself and mere knowing is perceived as knowledge. In such a situation all kinds of fictive talk take the place of 'nature as such'. This is contrary to our primary act of knowing a thing as it is. The result turns out to breed a society torn off from the real world, a schizoid society unable to differentiate what is correct from what is erratic. The 'boundary' observed in secular societies does not exist for non-secular societies, where everybody believes to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Naturally, in such societies falsehood never exists within the frame of what is already known. This is the panorama of de-philosophized life. From time to time such a negative attitude can also be seen in societies having philosophies, but this attitude still has a positive aspect in that philosophy is considered as a 'search for truth'. History provides many examples of such attitudes. Some are dispersed in world-views, such as in ancient Chinese traditions of Taoism and Confucianism, but they are excellent material for philosophical analysis.

### **Rationality in Education**

In societies without philosophy education is understood as a progress (a pseudo progress) through which educational paradigmas under the hegemony of 'natural' sciences are *de facto* accepted. The seemingly most certain criterium of such an idea is progress, or, more clearly, progress of the 'scientist mind'. The aim of human existence is forced to coincide with this understanding. Generally, world-views influenced by positivist-pragmatist philosophy are taken as apt examples. But what is forgotten in this exemplification is that such philosophic views are practicable only in societies akin to philosophic thought, whereas societies which connect their lives to the real world only by the mediation of fabulous other worlds, succumb to irrationality. In such a construed irrational world everything is given beforehand, an easy and harmonious life is promised and all human responsibilities are carried to shelves of otherworldliness. The types often met in such societies are scientists who are not aware of what science is, economists who are not aware of economics but talk, for example, about economy and sport, and specialists on terror who are not aware of the roots of

terror, etc. In such situations emotional consolation devoid of philosophical thinking is sought for in contradistinction to the hard but somber philosophical inquiry. However, for societies with philosophical orientation, importance is given to taking the responsibility of all history from the point where one is standing.

### **Proposals Concerning Philosophical Aims For Integrity of Education**

In societies capable of philosophical inquiry there are two essential aims for education: 1. To show ways of gaining one's own existence, 2. To help learn to give value to human life as a being capable of giving value. Man's existence is a coming to existence from a situation of non-action, from a mere 'there is' to a situation of challenge. If this self-conception is made by inner effort and not by outer coercion, the aim can be reached. Education is to help one ask questions such as 'who am I and where do I stand?' This can be possible by clearing the way to all existent worlds. For the human being capable of creating values, to let nature to have a new phenomenon which it by itself does not possess, and again, to let it gain 'for oneself', is not an arbitrary adventure. The distinction is not between the acquired, non-transferable rights and the transferable rights. The real distinction is between to be or not to be conscious of how and under which conditions the acquired/possessed, non-transferable rights can be transferred. To teach someone and to be taught by someone to be conscious of this distinction is education.

### **Notes and References**

(1) It may seem anachronistic to say that Xenophanes was the first philosophical anthropologist, but if we consider that one of the basic tenets of this philosophical discipline (regardless of various and/or conflicting theories) is to show the worldly/humane essence of religious transcendence, then he may well be qualified as the first daring spirit declaring that if oxen had gods, they would reflect them as oxen (H. Diels, frg. B 15, B 16). This is a philosophical attitude to explain religious belief. Xenophanes' second contention was not in an explanatory tone; he proposed a single god (H. Diels, frg. B 23-26). We interpret this as an intellectual attempt to replace plurality with singularity. Of the two fragments mentioned above, the second does not follow the first; it is not a logical consequence. If we change the order of the fragments, it is obvious that a logical sequence cannot again be found. However, a historical consequence can be seen. Xenophanes is not saying something quite out of tune of the Milesian world-view. His predecessors thought within the problematic of the 'Many and the One'. Naturally he did not mean that plurality of gods finds its origin in a single god; he simply proposed that living under the aegis of one god having plural qualities or powers may be more reasonable than living among many gods that sometimes contradict each other. We think that his approach to religious belief is secular and not dogmatic. Secularity has an intellectual core: co-existence of various traditions of belief in one society. It also involves the idea of a personal god with the important function of representing individual conscience. This idea flourishes in a secular society and is restricted and sometimes banned in a non-secular social organization. But individual conscience cannot be conceived without a social existence; it is also socialized conscience. This phenomenon is at the root of all secular socialization.

(2) Aristotle's *Politics* is a thorough explanation of this central definition. His other definition of man as *zoon logon ehon* (living being possessing speech) is wider but a connection of the two definitions build up a whole: social order depends on orderly speech and orderly speech depends on social order.

(3) I have no intention to trace Husserl's phenomenology as far back as Plato's theory of forms. I merely intend to make a point on the transformation of a problem. Trying to find the roots of a certain view may be part of certain types of research, but undue insistence may end up by an anachronism.

(4) Kant devoted the first part of *The Critique of Pure Reason* ('Transcendental Aesthetic') to the acquisition of knowledge by the combination of sensual perception, forms of intuition and formation of concepts. The transcendental subject, the field of objectivity which transcends empirical subjects and leads all minds to accept *a priori* truths, "dictates its laws to nature". This does not mean that 'nature in itself' does not have laws. It only shows that without the employment of the elements of our faculty of knowledge, we cannot know these laws. Therefore, the boundary of knowledge is *shown* by nature and we must say 'as we conceive it', not as it is 'in itself'. Above, we tried to emphasize this epistemological distinction and ontological complementarity.