

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

The theme that has been designated for discussion at the present moment is “The Philosophy of Education”. It goes without saying that it is human nature that requires to be educated. We are not going to educate the angels in heaven, or the sub-human species. What we call the progressive evolutionary process of education is directly pertinent to human nature and human constitution. Therefore, it is not easy to know what kind of method has to be adopted in imparting education to human beings, unless we have an in-depth knowledge of the human being himself.

The great pathfinders along these lines these days have been the psychologists, and more properly, the psychoanalysts. The study of the human being has to precede doing anything in regard to the development and improvement of human nature. What is a human being? What is it made of? For all practical purposes, it looks that the way in which we think determines our very empirical existence, and our life is nothing but the life of our mind. As we think, so we are; but what do we think? What are the thoughts that occur to our minds? There is a clear-cut answer on the surface, based on the operations of the conscious level of the mind.

Now, in this waking condition, we are supposed to be conscious at a particular level of the operation of the psyche. But the psychologists have gone deeper into the nature of

these operations and discovered that human nature is not just conscious thinking. There is something deeper, buried potentially and invisibly in the very substance of human nature, which determines the operations of the mind in the waking condition.

This observation of the psychologists denies freedom of choice. There is always determinism—that is to say, even the so-called free will that the mind is supposed to be exercising in the waking condition is a determined pressure exerted from a deeper level of the personality. By discovery, they have found out that there are at least two subliminal layers beneath the conscious level. If these levels are ignored, we would be forgetting the essential nature of a human being, and just pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp.

The disturbances, the anxieties, and the fears that we are facing in our life are to be taken into consideration, whatever be the degree and the quality of the educational depth of a human being. A most learned person, a professor and a PhD degree holder cannot be free from fears and anxieties which arise not from the learning that he has acquired, but from that which is buried inside himself. There is something which tells him that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”.

The instincts are impulses arising from the potentials of nature, of which the human being also is constituted. Nature is, to some extent, irrational; or if we do not want to dub it with that word, we may call it super-rational, but it is not rational in the sense of the logic of the human mind. We have to take into consideration these realities of life and not go by the intellectual arguments of a determined psyche, which is under the pressure of forces which are beyond its control. The unconscious depths of our personality are the final authorities passing judgements on what we are and what we are expected to do.

The psychologists tell us that many of the reasoned arguments that we produce for justifying any action or thought are only rationalisations of instincts which are accepted blindly, without any reason behind them. We

reason and argue and establish and substantiate what we already believe by instinct. This is an astonishing discovery by the psychoanalysts, making out that if these deeper apparatus of human nature are not taken into consideration, all learning is a waste. We will be only whitewashing the walls of a dilapidated building, and it cannot stand merely because of the beauty that is foisted upon it by external operations.

Now, today's subject is the philosophy of education. Philosophy has been defined as the art of finding the causes of effects, or rather, the ultimate causes of any phenomenon. The phenomenon of man, the phenomenon of human nature, the phenomenon of human activity, is the effect produced by certain causes whose operations and nature have to be studied deeply. An in-depth study of the ultimate causes of any kind of event is generally considered to be the philosophy thereof.

"Where comes philosophy here?" may be a question. We are concerned with the methodology of teaching, the psychology of imparting knowledge. Where is the philosophy behind it? It is philosophy in the sense that the deepest roots of human nature have to be taken as the guiding factors in preparing a syllabus for studies and the nature of the curriculum, whether in schools or in colleges.

The total individual is the subject of study in the educational process. The *total* individual is the word that we have to underline. It is not the intellect that we are trying to train in education, though mostly these days, education has become an intellectual exercise. That is why it does not provide enough strength in a person to face the world after the education is over. We come out of college and are faced with the realities of life and find that the world is before us, red in tooth and claw, and our education has not helped us. That is, life has not been transformed; it has not been touched. This substance of human nature has been ignored in the eagerness to impart knowledge of a descriptive nature.

In this connection, I am reminded of an ancient story which occurs in the Chhandogya Upanishad. The great sage Narada approaches the divine Master Sanatkumara and implores, “Bhagavan, teach me.”

The Master says, “What do you already know?”

Narada is a master of all the arts and sciences. “I am master of every art, every science, known or unknown, in earth and heaven, but Bhagavan, I do not know myself. Teach me.”

The great Master said, “All this learning is only descriptive, informative, a veneer, a name—just a word only. You have not touched the substance of things. Informative knowledge of a thing is not equal to possession of that thing.”

We may know the structure of the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens, and space and time, but we cannot be masters of space and time. They are far away, removed from us, as if nothing has been done at all.

To know informatively the spatio-temporal characteristics, through sensory knowledge of anything, is to go blindfolded into the nature of things. We cannot know anything if the thing is distant, and unconnected, and unrelated to the student of knowledge. Knowledge is a process of imbibing the substantiality of the thing that is to be known. We become larger in our being, by being educated. We do not collect a load of information like a bundle carried by an ass, and say we are educated. The essentiality of the object of knowledge enters into the essentiality of our own soul, so that we become richer in our being; the dimension of our existence expands.

The thing that is before us, the object of study, the world as a whole, stands outside us deliberately and refuses to come into the grip of our mind and our understanding. It has been so, and it is so now, and it shall be ever in that condition.

Knowledge, truly speaking, which is real education, is the art of entering into the very substance of the object of knowledge. This is to say, the soul of the thing has to be *enrapport* with the soul of the student. I have to be that which I want to know; then, the enrichment in knowledge takes place. The existence of the object of knowledge has to be included and it has to coalesce with the substance and the soul of the learner. Only when two souls meet, there is a real education. There is enhancement of personality. There is refinement of conduct. All this takes place automatically. If knowledge stands outside the learner, it will be like a shirt that we put on, but the shirt is not the person. The person is different from the drapings with which one covers oneself.

“Suffice it to say that, Narada, all that you have learned is good enough, as an information, but you have not touched the core of things.”

“What is the core? Tell me, Bhagavan,” said Narada.

The great psychologist that he was, Sanatkumara took the mind of Narada gradually, like a very good professor, a psychologist, and a wonderful teacher, stage by stage from the lowest experience possible to the higher and higher levels, from the stage of pure nomenclature of things, or descriptive knowledge as we call it, to the physical nature of the objects of knowledge, the society in which these things are involved, the natural conditions by which they are determined, and the cosmical substance of which these are actually part and parcel. All these are taken into consideration.

Finally, what the great Master said was, “Unless you know everything, you can know nothing. The universe is made in such a way that everything is inter-related, vitally connected. There is an organismic relationship of parts in the structure of the whole cosmos. Though the universe appears to be too large for us to comprehend, the largeness, the wholeness, the integration mentioned has its own degrees.

“We are whole beings—yourself, myself, and everybody, though we are finite individuals by ourselves. The finitude that seems to be limiting our personality does not preclude our being conscious of ourselves as a totality by itself. We feel we are complete; nobody feels that he or she is a fraction of something. The limitations imposed by the factor of finitude only add to the further difficulty of there being other finite centres which limit the freedom of the one single finite. This is the reason why the finite individual tries to expand itself into the false infinite, as they call it, by accumulating more and more particulars, coming in contact with a larger and larger number of finitudes, making friends, becoming a king or a minister, or a president, or a ruler, by which process one is falsely made to imagine that the finitude has been expanded into an infinitude.

“The total of finites is not the Infinite. Many foolish people sitting together do not constitute one wise person; therefore, this idea that the co-relating of oneself with large multitudes and becoming an emperor of the earth is the way to increase the dimension of finitude in the direction of infinitude is pretentious, and an exercise in futility.

“Therefore, Narada, the plenum of existence is the only satisfying principle. The plenum is that which is complete. That which is complete is that outside which nothing can operate, because the very existence or the presence of something external to oneself is a limiting factor, and the plenum would stand defeated.”

Wonderfully, in an astonishing manner, the great Master says, “In this state of completeness of experience, one has not got to open the eyes to see anything. There is no need to hear anything through the ears. There is no necessity to exercise the intellect to understand anything, because that which is to be seen, that which is to be heard, and that which is to be understood through reason has entered into the very being of the person who is endeavouring to know. The being has become a larger being.” Finite is the knowledge and experience of that person who depends upon things which

are seen with the eyes, heard with the ears, or understood by the mind. The mind, or the intellect, is a limiting adjunct; therefore, it cannot provide us with intuitive knowledge of completeness.

An educational philosopher should bear in mind all these factors of the substance of human personality. The teacher teaches the student in his or her completeness. The total student is taken up for consideration and teaching by the good teacher; also, the teacher should be so elevated in knowledge that he should be able to come down to the level of the student while teaching. There must be a common platform between the teacher's mind and the student's mind. That is to say, nothing that cannot be absorbed into the mind of the student should be imparted.

For that purpose, the higher being of the teacher may have to stoop down temporarily, for the purpose of enlightening the student, to the level of the student; and when rising above the lower to the higher, the teacher takes the student's mind together with him or her, so that when education is completed, the teacher and the taught become one.

The judge is not a frightening imposer of punishment on the client. He is a distributor of impartial justice, wherein is a higher integration of the judge, the client, and the parties. So is the teacher. The teacher sometimes looks like a judge in a court, sometimes like a father or a mother, and a friend of all. The teacher is a friend and benefactor, and a parent, and a loving guide and mentor to the student. The student feels happy by looking at the face of the teacher. Obedience automatically follows. The teacher need not impose obedience on the student by threat. Anything that is high will attract the lower, automatically. We need not have to put exertion on our mind to know that the sun is rising. The sun does not speak, but he speaks in a different way altogether, calling the attention of everybody. So, even though the psychologists have gone, to some extent, deep into the nature of the educa-

tional process, they stopped with the unconscious level. They have not gone deeper into it.

Psychoanalysts wrongly define religion as an illusory comfort-giving process invented by the fears of the human individual, but they forget how an invented illusion can give comfort, because comfort that is so provided by the illusion of religious processes would also be an illusion, and the word 'comfort' should not be used. "The concept of God is the concept of a rectifying medium to the anxieties and the frightening limitations of human nature," is what the psychoanalysts say, but they forget how this happens. Why does the idea of God satisfy a person? If the idea is an illusion born of the fears of human nature, then the concept of God, which is itself an illusion, cannot bring any satisfaction. So, there is a flaw in the arguments of the psychoanalysts. They have not gone deep into their own arguments.

Religion does not mean worship of a Transcendental Being, necessarily. It is a worship of that which is above you. All longing is actually an aspiration for that which is above us. Whatever that be which is above us, that is our divinity; that is our deity; that is our object of affection. We love only that which seems to be above us, which completes our finite nature. That is our god. We cannot say that the concept of God is far removed from the existence of God. It is not true, because the concept satisfies the aspirant in a manner which establishes an inward relationship between thought process and reality. There has been a lot of argument in the field of philosophy whether thought can, or cannot, touch reality. It is understood that thought cannot contact reality, because reality is not a psychological being. Its existence is ontological; yet, the existence of that which is above oneself cannot be outside oneself.

That which is above us is our own nature, which is lifted above the lower level of ourselves. The Bhagavad Gita tells us, *uddhared atmanatmanam*: "You have to lift your self by your self," which is to say, we have a higher dimension of our own selves which has to lift the lower self that we are, and

imbibe the whole being of the lower self into itself, so that when we reach that which is above us, we become more complete.

Finally, it is the realisation of the Infinite that is the search for knowledge. It is highly spiritual. The educational process is a spiritual process; it is spiritual, but not in the sense of a fundamentalist religion. It is not an "ism" that we are meaning. This art of teaching, this educational process, is purely scientific. It is logically acceptable. But, if we consider knowledge as merely an accumulation of information, we will be in the same condition as Narada who was dubbed "a master of words".

We can see our learned men in the world. Socrates has said, "Knowledge is virtue; knowledge is power; knowledge is happiness." Let each learned person touch his or her heart and decide how much virtue has arisen in one's own self by the knowledge. How much power is there? How much happiness? Is the learned person a happy person? Is the learned person endowed with some kind of authority or power, or is the learned person a righteous person? If none of these is possible, then we can know to what extent the knowledge has gone.

Remember always that knowledge is virtue; knowledge is righteousness; knowledge is goodness; knowledge is beautiful; knowledge is power. You will wonder: "What power have we got? We are professors in the university, but we have no power." No, because you are not professors at all. Being a mere professor is no good; you must be a possessor of knowledge. Why do you call yourself a professor? Say you are a possessor of knowledge. See if this is possible.

Thus, a lofty theme is placed before us for further consideration in all educational circles, and I would confidently say that the educational department of an administration should receive the highest regard and respect and consideration by the administrators. It should not be considered as a number two, or a redundant department, because it is the man-making department. It is here that the

person is made. It is the art of the preparation of the future individual of the nation, of the community, of the world, so the educational department is the most important of all departments; but it is unfortunate to note that this has not been considered as an important issue, and all the teachers are grieving. The professors are unhappy; Vice Chancellors run away. They do not want to sit on their seat because of the turmoil, in the midst of which they are placed. They say, "We do not want to continue this service because there is a total misrepresentation of the very art of education." It has become mercenary to the core, a give-and-take policy, a business, rather than an educational career. It has come down to the most earthly materialistic level of utter selfishness, and is far removed from the noble cause that is to decide the process of learning.

The *Guru-sishya* relationship is the most well-conceived relation that we have, right from the beginning of time. Today, the teacher is not a Guru, and the student is not a *sishya*, so they are torn apart. This gulf should be bridged by great effort of understanding on both sides. Who is responsible, finally? Everyone is responsible. You and I—all are responsible for the welfare of the nation and the world, because these layers of inclusiveness are not standing apart from one another. World events determine even the family life of an individual. We cannot live cozily in our little house under the impression that "anything can happen in the world—what does it matter?" It is not so. An earthquake can disturb everybody.

The operations in human history throughout the world determine even the smallest experiences of an individual, because the world is a whole. This aspect of wholeness in the approach to anything should be taken into consideration. All effort is a wholesome effort. It is the rising of the soul to the surface of consciousness, and it is only when the soul rises to action that it becomes successful action. If it is only the upper part of the mind, the intellect so called, and the psychic instincts that are responsible for working, they will not succeed. When the soul acts, it must succeed, because in

every act of the soul it touches the bottom of the Soul of the universe, and it shall succeed.

This is a great truth before us which we have forgotten. This truth has to be revived and brought into the forefront of our experience and learning. It has to become our real treasure. That is the comfort that we can truly expect.