

HERBERT SPENCER AND THE “CARDINAL PRINCIPLES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION” (1918)

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The focus of this small contribution to (the dearth of) studies in the history of philosophy of American education falls upon the backside of the cultural upheaval between 1880 and 1920. The general purpose is to relate aspects of Herbert Spencer’s philosophy of education to pedagogical principles in the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, a document of the National Education Association’s Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, published in 1918.

An attempt is made to implement this purpose by analyzing the educational principles in the NEA report, by clarifying Spencer’s educational principles in relationship to the report, and by explaining Spencer’s philosophical principles and relating them to the CRSE document. In addition to similarities between specific Spencerian principles and the 1918 report, especially noted is the ideological proximity of the “spirit” of Spencer’s evolutionary naturalism and empiricism (or positivism) to the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education.

INTRODUCTION

In 1893 the Committee of Ten, the first of a series of National Education Association committees considering secondary school problems, published its report (National Education Association 1893) on what American public education ought to be, including specific directions it ought to take. Twenty-five years later, in 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE), also an NEA-appointed group, promulgated the “Cardinal Principles” for American secondary schools (CRSE 1918). The contrast between these two documents amounts to no less than a revolution in American educational thought; it is reflected in the title of Cremin’s masterpiece in the history of American education, *The Transformation of the School* (Cremin 1964).

An analysis of the *Committee of Ten Report* and the transitions wrought thereafter do not fall within the scope of this paper, the primary purpose of which is to attempt to discover some possible philosophical foundations of the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*¹ in order to better understand the kind of education proposed. For these foundations, we will survey some basic reflections of the British philosopher Herbert Spencer. An allied purpose lies in trying to clarify the inevitability of a philosophical substratum for all educational theory and practice.

In pursuing these goals, we will analyze briefly the *Cardinal Principles*, compare some of Spencer's ideas on education with those of the CRSE, and attempt to relate selected philosophical principles of Spencer to the 1918 document. What this has to do with the nature and function of the philosophy of education will be discussed in the conclusion.

CARDINAL PRINCIPLES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION (1918)

Lest the reader, for various reasons, consider the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* another insignificant educational blurb among thousands, a few citations may serve to illustrate its importance in the history of American education, especially for the development of the "new education." Among the more emphatic general statements are the following three: one writer says that "probably no publication in the history of education ever surpassed this little five-cent thirty-two page booklet in importance" (Wesley 1957, 75); another contends that this document "... set the tone and expressed the ideas current in all subsequent quasi-official statements on secondary educational policy down to the life-adjustment movement" (Hofstadter 1963, 337); and a third calls the document "... one of the most important statements ever made about secondary education" (Krug 1964, 397).

Those are strong words indeed; although some may consider them quite gratuitous, there is no dearth of actual evidence of the real impact of the *Cardinal Principles* upon American educational theory and practice. Butts and Cremin, two of the foremost historians of American educational and cultural history, maintain in their co-authored book, *A History of Education in American Culture*, that "... nearly all of the important statements on secondary education from the *Seven Cardinal Principles* to the present time have emphasized some variation of the same theme" (Butts and Cremin 1953, 592). Cremin elucidates the matter still further in an article in the *Teachers College Record*:

The effects of the *Cardinal Principles* have been legion. Indeed, it does not seem amiss to argue that most of the important and influential movements in the field since 1918 have simply been footnotes to the classic itself. ... the statement has for close to four decades provided the orientation and terminology for the development of secondary education (Cremin 1954-55, 295-308).²

For a direct indication of the carryover of the thinking in the 1918 proposal, we can turn to the 1961 statement of the Educational Policies Commission entitled *The Central*

Purpose of American Education. That group referred to the role of the school in inculcating the fundamental processes: "... an obligation stressed in the 1918 and 1938 statements of educational purpose" (Educational Policies Commission 1961, 5). Also stressed here were such "other traditional objectives" as health, worthy home membership, vocational competence, effective citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character. The 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* had not been forgotten.

Preceding a brief analysis of some of the major tenets of this report and pertinent conclusions, a few remarks concerning its origin and purpose seem to be in order. The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education was formed by the National Education Association in 1913 and "was the direct outgrowth of the work of the committee on the articulation of high school and college which submitted its report to the NEA in 1911" (CRSE 1918).³ A number of complex social and intellectual factors seemingly prompted this "reorganization;" among them are the general impact of industrialism and immigration on American society, the popularity of pragmatic philosophy, and a strongly pessimistic view of traditional education reflected in a concomitant desire for new educational aims based on social efficiency effecting an influx of so-called practical subjects.

The high school curriculum had become the topic of the day by 1912, perhaps prompted partially by the apogee of the traditional high school curriculum attained about 1910 (Hofstadter 1963, 341-42). Kingsley, in an address to the NEA about 1913, discussed the work of the CRSE, denoting its task as an attempt "... to formulate the general aims of secondary education..." (Kingsley 1914, 483). The Commission's thinking about education and the curriculum is foreshadowed in his remark that each subject committee, in formulating the aims prevailing in its own area, was "... to make these aims specific and to express them in terms of the effect to be produced upon the boy or girl either in the power to execute or in the ability to appreciate rather than in terms of subject-matter to be mastered." Furthermore, "... the Commission is to think in terms of boys and girls rather than in terms of subject-matter. Thus, subject-matter becomes the means to the end rather than the end itself" (Kingsley 1914, 483).⁴

Four key concepts highlight the content of the *Cardinal Principles*: change, reorganization, activities, and growth. The first major heading is "The Need for Reorganization." Secondary education must be reorganized due to changes in its constituent elements: 1) social changes in economics, politics, and technology, resulting in enhanced leisure time and a relative disintegration of family life; 2) changes in the school population seen in an increased quantity and variety of students; and 3) changes in educational theory such as those concerning individual differences, subject values, teaching methods, the application of knowledge, and the continuity of child development. An important point here is the focus on the life activities of students, viewing them apparently as the sole criterion for ascertaining worthwhile subject matter and effective teaching methods. According to the CRSE, "subject values and teaching methods must be tested in terms of the laws of learning and the application of knowledge to the *activities* of life, rather than primarily in terms of the demands of any subjects as a

logically organized science” (emphasis added) (CRSE 1918, 8). Activities are highlighted again in the second section, “The Goal of Education in a Democracy.” We are informed that “... the purpose of democracy is to organize society so that each member may develop his personality primarily through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members and of society as a whole” (CRSE 1918, 9).

Consequently, the general aim of education and the broad aim of democracy are the same: the complete self-development of the individual for social living. So, individual activities in the light of social welfare provide the key to the reconstruction of education and the basis for determining the “Main Objectives of Education” (Section III). The CRSE is very explicit concerning the mode of procedure in formulating these objectives for democratic education: “... it is necessary to analyze the activities of the individual” (CRSE 1918, 9). The objectives themselves (iterated above) are the seven which have done so much to give the document its popular reputation. Each is discussed briefly in Section IV, entitled “The Role of Secondary Education in Achieving These Objectives.” Thus far we have noted the keen interest in the ideas of change, reorganization, and activities, all of which help found the rationale for the seven “Cardinal Principles” themselves. A few words about the specific principles, based on the text in Section IV, will serve to clarify each a bit; then we will turn to some related ideas in the document, especially that of growth.

The objective “health” is sufficiently clear: the writers point to the need for instruction in matters of health and for the inculcation of health habits; an adequate physical plant to facilitate an effective program of physical activities also is emphasized. The “fundamental processes” each student must master include reading, writing, arithmetical computation, and the elements of oral and written expression. In this regard, the union of theory and practice is significant: “... instruction and practice go hand in hand, but ... only so much theory should be taught at any one time as will show results in practice” (CRSE 1918, 12). Utility, then, is a vital feature of providing for these “fundamental processes.” Another of the objectives, “worthy home membership,” applies to both boys and girls. It can be gained through a study of literature and fine arts as well as such courses as home economics; and it must be geared to present, not merely future, home responsibilities.

“Vocation,” the next specific educational goal, also is founded on the principle of utility: the person must be equipped to earn a livelihood and serve society. “Civic education” refers to gaining certain basic knowledge and practicing good citizenship through group projects in social studies. “Worthy use of leisure” is to be attained through the fine arts, and social and recreational activities. “Ethical character” is the last in the list of the CRSE’s seven objectives; it signifies a sense of responsibility and initiative, “the spirit of service and the principles of true democracy [which] should permeate the entire school” (CRSE 1918, 15). This is to be achieved through student activities. We must note again the reformulation of educational aims and the necessity of founding them on activities integral to the daily lives of students. The new goals are to be derived from observed student activities and implemented in the school by means of student self-activity then and there. In other words, activities are transplanted from

life into the school and are to be carried on by students under the guidance of competent teachers.

The need to interrelate these seven objectives so that they permeate the entirety of secondary education is stressed in Section V, “Interrelation of the Objectives in Secondary Education.” This vision of unity and continuity is central in several remaining sections of the document dealing with the articulation of the three levels of education: elementary, secondary, and higher. This continuity seems related to the intention that elementary school students (ages 6-12) be admitted to the secondary school (for ages 12-18) on the basis of chronological and social maturity, if for no other reason than that college is for all to nearly the same extent as is secondary education (CRSE 1918, 19-20). Far more significant is the fact that the same *kind* of education must be provided at each level: it must be structured upon life activities and carried on through the practice of those activities within a sheltered atmosphere.

Little has been said of growth, the fourth of the key concepts brought to the reader’s attention above. Section VII, called “Education as a Process of Growth,” is devoted to the place of that idea in education: “... education must be conceived as a process of growth. Only when so conceived and so conducted can it become a preparation for life; insofar as this principle has been ignored, formalism and sterility have resulted” (CRSE 1918, 17). This seems to have implications for the general end of education – perhaps signifying, in a sense, that it has no end other than the process itself. Preparation for life can be had only in living. The preparation, as such, is not a real goal at all since it is the *living* that counts, and this automatically conduces to preparation for the future. This seems to be consistent with the aims described above in light of their relationship to activity.

Two final points should be made: 1) the secondary school should be “comprehensive,” that is, “embracing all curriculums in one unified organization” (CRSE 1918, 24) in order to implement the democratic, socializing functions of education, and in order to facilitate the specializing and unifying work of the school; and 2) the school should be student-centered. The latter point is evident from what already has been said. Very explicitly the Commission decreed that “... the content and teaching methods of every study should be adapted to the capacities, interests, and needs of the pupils concerned” (CRSE 1918, 22).

The writer’s interpretation, found in another study, will be cited to summarize this document. This will be followed by a critique, leading us to the next section of the paper. In the CRSE report, we find that

... environmental changes demand the reorganization of education. Basically this signifies a radical reconstruction of the curriculum. The ‘new curriculum’ can be designed to meet the times only if founded on the activities (and thus the needs) of the students, and only when comprised of those very activities. The curriculum is no longer pre-constructed by school officials in terms of some universal concepts of the nature of man and reality, but it is formed by the students, at least

insofar as it is determined by their daily activities. Everyone, of course, recognizes the fact that curricula will vary with the circumstances of various parts of the country and with variations of the operations of democracy and the requisites of good citizenship. An activity curriculum releases the process of growth within the individual. The work of the teacher lies in guiding the activities of students in such a way as to permit them to grow. So the success of future generations in American democracy lies in an education understood by understanding ‘change,’ ‘reorganization,’ ‘activities,’ and ‘growth’ (Collins 1965, 160-61).⁵

A major difficulty in the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, as this writer sees it, lies in what is *not* said. In respect to the four fundamental concepts promoted (change, reorganization, activities, and growth), would it not be appropriate to ask what, fundamentally, is change? What does “growth” mean? Are there different kinds of growth? If so, can a hierarchy be established? Why activity-centered learning? What kinds of activities? The recommendations do not provide sufficient meaning regarding these questions. For example, the authors hint at the reason for founding the curriculum and methods of teaching on student activities: the replacement of the cultivation of *general mental discipline* through an intellectual heritage by cultivation of *specific abilities* through practical application. Nevertheless, one still wonders about the general learning theory that founds this view. Again, the CRSE has described to some extent the seven objectives, and yet one is left speechless if asked precisely what constitutes “*worthy* home membership,” and “*worthy* use of leisure” – and why? Neither can one find in the document the qualities of “good citizenship” and “ethical character.” The latter is said to feature responsibility and initiative – but responsibility and initiative to think how and what, and to do what, and why?

It appears that all these difficulties are inseparable from the deeper questions of the nature and purpose of the human person, one’s vision of the world, and ultimately the question of the existence and nature of a Supreme Being. From this viewpoint, unless these issues are confronted, we have an insufficient basis to evaluate the given objectives because we remain unable to ascertain their real meaning. Various procedures might be utilized to assist us in a search for a broader perspective and rationale underlying the *Cardinal Principles*. We have chosen to investigate, at least in a cursory manner, some apparently relevant principles of the nineteenth-century British philosopher Herbert Spencer.

SPENCER AND THE “CARDINAL PRINCIPLES”

The purpose of this section is to briefly state and analyze some philosophical-educational principles of Spencer, and to attempt to ascertain possible affinity between them and the 1918 CRSE report. Any positive correlation will presumably abet our comprehension of the *Cardinal Principles*, rendering a more realistic evaluation and application of the educational ideals therein.⁶ First, we will cite a few authorities who

have detected distinct similarities between the thought of Spencer on education and that embodied in the NEA document; secondly, objectives of education and some related principles in the Englishman's educational essays will be discussed briefly and related to the CRSE documents; and thirdly, a few of his philosophical ideas will be analyzed, and implications sought for the 1918 statement.

Although Herbert Spencer penned a series of educational treatises (now collected in one volume) (Spencer 1928)⁷ which are relevant to his philosophical views, he does not appear to have systematically applied the latter to the former as have Plato, John Dewey, and Martin Buber, for example. Similarities between the man's essays on education and the *Cardinal Principles* have been noted by several authorities. Among them are Dupuis and Craig, who collaborated in *American Education: Its Origins and Issues*, and stated that

At the time Spencer proposed these objectives for the schools the humanistic curriculum, limited chiefly to 'intellectual activities,' was still the only one found in schools.... But forty years after Spencer's death nearly every elementary and high school of any size in the U.S. had incorporated all these areas in the curriculum (Dupuis and Craig 1963, 248).

More specifically, these authors note that

... the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, in the well-known *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, published in 1918, incorporated Spencer's objectives in the seven basic purposes of secondary education.... Also, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association has utilized Spencer's thought in its statement of educational objectives (Dupuis and Craig 1963, 249).⁸

The reader undoubtedly wonders at this point what Spencer actually set down as objectives of education. His most general end of education is preparation for complete living; specific ends include the sequence of activities which must be provided in order to effect true knowledge. As a result, his answer to the question "What knowledge is of most worth?" lies in a sequence of activities arranged in order of importance (those most basic to life itself being given precedence). He sets forth the following sequence of activities: 1) those directly bearing upon self-preservation; 2) those indirectly ministering to self-preservation by securing the necessities of life; 3) those geared to the rearing and disciplining of offspring; 4) those involved in the maintenance of satisfactory social and political relations; and 5) those filling the leisure part of life (Spencer 1928, 8-9).

Douglass, in his text *Modern Secondary Education*, compares the educational objectives of Spencer and the CRSE (Douglass 1938, 229). This comparison is worth reproducing in part:

Spencer

Self-preservation

Rearing and disciplining of offspring

Economic viability

Social and political relations

Leisure

CRSE

Health

Command of fundamental processes

Worthy home membership

Vocation

Civic education

Worthy use of leisure

Ethical character

Spencer obviously omitted a specific objective corresponding to the CRSE's "command of fundamental processes;" however, this objective (activity) he would certainly include under "economic viability" as well as others. He also omits explicit reference to "ethical character," and yet he certainly reserves a place for it in his general goal of "complete living." Perhaps one could legitimately consider it (ethical character) to permeate all his goals, since they are activities, which inevitably manifest character. Even though the degree of importance given to these objectives differs somewhat according to the two sides (for example, the lesser significance attributed to leisure activities by Spencer), we are led to the conclusion that there is essentially no difference of opinion between Spencer and the NEA Commission regarding the basic functions of the school. In this regard, two other similarities should be noticed: 1) the mode of deriving objectives of education is identical: analysis of the daily activities of individuals; and 2) emphasis on preparation for the present as leading automatically to future adjustment is apparent in both.

Before going on to Spencerian philosophy as a possible foundation for the *Cardinal Principles*, a few parallels between Spencer and the CRSE regarding educational tenets other than objectives should be noticed. Among them are the following.

- 1) Spencer – Children learn through utilization of their powers, which are manifested through activities.
CRSE – Persons learn through experience, living, activity involving physical interaction with the environment.
- 2) Spencer – No one has authority to force anything upon another; the real teacher is nature, and her laws of evolution must be understood.
CRSE – Children learn through their activities in the environment, the human teacher apparently being merely the guide of these activities.
- 3) Spencer – Understanding nature and her laws, and guiding students' living in that light inevitably effects adjustment and happiness.
CRSE – Guiding meaningful activities here and now provides automatically for the release of the growth process, which necessarily means future learning and adjustment.

- 4) Spencer – The curriculum must be comprised of life activities refined and constructed on the basis of the hierarchy of their significance.
 CRSE – The school must be life – democratic life – in order to prepare citizens for democracy.

One undoubtedly could find more similarities between the strictly educational ideals of Spencer and the framers of the 1918 NEA document. However, we will proceed to a brief analysis of Spencer's evolutionary naturalism in the hope of contributing to the clarification of the *Cardinal Principles* in this new light.

The intellectual and social climate always contribute inestimably to the development of various theories. The advances in the physical sciences, the refinement and popularity of the theory of evolution, along with the skeptical, empirical views of John Stuart Mill prompted in no small way the Synthetic Philosophy of Herbert Spencer (Fuller and McMurrin 1940, 406). The leader of a relatively new movement in philosophy, Spencer attempted to develop a system of completely coordinated knowledge. This was his general purpose and “in this sense his system is synthetic. It is a scheme in which everything is to find its place and is to be seen as a resultant of a single principle” (Sorley 1951, 267-69). That principle, of course, is evolution; the English philosopher spent practically a whole lifetime seeking the ramifications of the evolutionary theory (Tsanoff 1953, 571). According to another commentator, two Spencerian features enjoy especial prominence: 1) elaboration of a cosmic philosophy in terms of a generalization of the idea of evolution; and 2) limitation of knowledge to the field of experience and to the content of science. The same writer denotes the two main divisions of his philosophy as his 1) agnostic realism and 2) evolutionary survey of nature and man (Perry 1926, 26).⁹ We find slight variations of interpretation among other authorities (Elliot 1917, 79-ff.);¹⁰ however, it appears reasonable to consider Spencer's version of evolution as his central tenet.¹¹ He seems to have formed his basic theory first and then employed inductive techniques to supply the consequences for his premises.¹²

Among the specific Spencerian principles to be considered and related to the Cardinal Principles are the following: 1) the origin of man, 2) the nature of the human mind and the meaning of “reason,” 3) the nature of knowledge (especially the relationship between philosophy and science), 4) the Ultimate Unknowable, and 5) the criterion of good and evil.

First, regarding a natural starting point, the origin of man, Spencer considers two hypotheses: special creation and evolution. He wastes little time on the first, as we could expect from what has been said above: “... the hypothesis of special creation turns out to be worthless – worthless by its derivation; worthless in its intrinsic incoherence; worthless as absolutely without evidence; worthless as not supplying an intellectual need; worthless as not satisfying a moral want. We must therefore consider it as counting for nothing” (Spencer 1888, 345). On the other hand, “... the hypothesis of evolution commends itself to us, by its derivation, by its coherence, and its analogies, by its direct evidence, by its implications” (Spencer 1888, 355). One consequence of this view is the fundamental continuity between man and brute; this idea will be elaborated

under the next point (the human mind) and will be related to the *Cardinal Principles*. Another consequence, the denial of God the Creator, represents the abrogation of a basic tenet of many traditional religions; this bears on his view of knowledge and will be treated further relative to that topic.

Secondly, we will turn briefly to Spencer's view of mind and reason. The components of the mind are twofold: 1) feelings, defined as "any portion of consciousness which occupies a place sufficiently large to give it a perceivable individuality," and 2) relations between feelings (which occupy an appreciable part of consciousness) (Spencer 1870, 164). Mind evolves, according to our author, from confused sentiency to an ever-increasing multiformity in the aggregation of feelings and in their distinctness of structure, thereby conforming to the laws of evolution in general.¹³ Perhaps the most significant point here is that "... the commonly-assumed hiatus between Reason and Instinct has no existence" (Spencer 1870, 453). All intelligent activity represents an adjustment of internal changes and external co-existences, and the most eminent form of psychical activity (reason) arises gradually out of the most crude form (instinct). The two (reason and instinct) are "the same" in that they differ not qualitatively, but only quantitatively (the former being more heterogeneous and complex). In other words, there is no essential distinction between brute instinct and human reason. Spencer is worth quoting on this point:

... everyone is bound to admit that as the rationality of an infant is no higher than that of a dog, if so high; and as, from the rationality of the infant to that of the man the progress is through gradations which are infinitesimal; there is also a series of infinitesimal gradations through which brute rationality may pass into human rationality (Spencer 1870, 461).

That the process of evolution explains, for Spencer, the development of the human mind is evident. More subtle is the conclusion that mind is a function rather than a faculty; it is not a power, but is simply marked by constantly improving adjustments of inner to outer relations. That, plus the comparison made above between man and brute, indicate clearly that "knowing" for Spencer is directly connected at every instant with sensing.¹⁴

As for these Spencerian views and the CRSE, we find the notion and spirit of universal change as prevalent and strong in the latter as in the former. The experience-centered and activity-centered approach to learning permeating the *Cardinal Principles* certainly could be founded on Spencer's description of the human mind. You can know only what you can sense, and you can sense only through direct physical activity with things in the environment of daily life – thus the necessity of centering the curriculum on the student's personal activities.

The third of Spencer's philosophical principles to be touched upon here, the nature of knowledge, centers around his attempt to unify knowledge, and leads into his discussion of the relationship between philosophy and science. Very significantly, there

is only one *kind* of knowledge, although there are three *levels*: un-unified, partially-unified (science), and completely unified (philosophy). Analogous to the difference between human reason and brute instinct, we find the distinction between philosophy and science one not of kind but only of degree; in the former (philosophy) we possess the highest degree of generality. As a result, all knowledge is scientific; in its highest (most general) form it is called philosophy. Therefore, knowable reality is confined to the material and sensible, underscoring the notions of change and relativity. Spencer puts it this way:

The range of intelligence we find to be limited to the relative. Though persistently conscious of a Power manifested to us, we have abandoned as futile the attempt to learn anything respecting the nature of that Power; and so have shut out Philosophy from much of the domain supposed to belong to it. The domain left is that occupied by Science (Spencer 1958, 138).

Learning only through personal experience and activities is again an educational consequence. All learning must be initiated and verified through observation, experimentation, activity. This is by no means inimical to the thought of the *Cardinal Principles*. (And yet one cannot be led immediately to the conclusion that no other mode of philosophizing would be relevant to this view of the learning process).

Fourthly, we will consider the Spencerian doctrine of the Ultimate Unknowable. It can be approached by means of the question of the origin of the universe. The universe, says Spencer, must have originated in one of three ways: 1) self-existence (atheistic), 2) self-creation (pantheistic), or 3) creation by external agency (theistic). The author finds the last two hypotheses useless and states that they may be reduced to the first, self-existence; "... and whether that assumption be made nakedly, or under complicated disguises, it is equally vicious, equally unthinkable" (Spencer 1958, 49). The conclusion: we cannot know the origin of the universe. Spencer's objection to the theistic view lies in the impossibility of our having an actual concept (a concept of an object readily representable in its totality)¹⁵ of creation from nothing.

Regarding a related question, the ultimate nature of the universe, Spencer consistently confirms his agnosticism. He avers that "... we cannot think at all about the impressions which the external world produces on us, without thinking of them as caused, without inevitably committing ourselves to the hypothesis of a First Cause" (Spencer 1958, 51). However, this First Cause is by definition infinite, independent, unchangeable, and thus *absolute*. Spencer affirms that these ideas are obviously symbolic conceptions (illegitimate because they in no way can be represented in consciousness so as to seem all present together) and, furthermore, that they invoke mutual contradiction (Spencer 1958, 50-56).

The kind of agnosticism espoused here is best summed up in this and the immediately following citations: "Religions diametrically opposed in their overt dogmas are yet perfectly at one in the tacit conviction that the existence of the world, with all it

contains and all which surrounds it, is a mystery ever pressing for interpretation” (Spencer 1958, 57). The ultimate nature of the universe is an absolute mystery; we can know *that* it is, but not *what* it is: “... the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable. Yet in the denial of our ability to learn what the Absolute is, there lies the implication that it is” (Spencer 1958, 60, 99). Because “... in its ultimate essence nothing can be known” (Spencer 1958, 80), we apparently are left with the relativity of all truth. We can think of things only through relation, difference, and likeness; thus, empirical means are required in order to “keep in touch” with them in their evolving dynamism.

Again, do we find any educational proposals in the *Cardinal Principles* that are somehow consistent with these philosophical tenets? Certainly, Spencer’s position that the nature of a First Cause can in no way be known invalidates the traditional discipline of theology; the CRSE view does not lead us to think that they would reject this since no mention whatsoever is made of religion in the curriculum. Similarly, the universality desired for the comprehensive high school negates the possibility of considering private religiously-oriented schools, again perfectly consistent with the Britisher’s viewpoint. The relativity of all truth, an inherent postulate of Spencerian theory, is reflected in the relativistic attitude of the CRSE toward the curriculum (to be constructed by observing human activities, which are certainly relative to circumstances, personality, needs, etc.) and toward the end of education (growth, which is constant, ongoing, and changing in accord with the degree of maturity already attained by the individual student).

The fifth and final of Spencer’s philosophical theories to be considered here is his criterion of good and evil. His ethical doctrine is developed through the application of his principles of evolutionary naturalism to human conduct. Morality has to do primarily (if not exclusively) with adjustments of acts to ends; the good lies in improving adjustment of acts to ends and thus the prolongation of life (the “supreme end”) (Spencer 1892, 5-ff.). As human beings become better and better able to adjust to their environment (self, offspring, and all other beings), the world is directed inevitably toward the final stage of equilibrium, a permanently peaceful society.¹⁶ A very significant issue is, by what criteria may conduct be judged? Our philosopher provides a precise answer: human wants. Any item is judged to be good or bad depending upon how well or how poorly it is adapted to fulfilling these desires. With regard to the other in one’s environment, Spencer maintains that “... the words good and bad have come to be specially associated with acts which further the complete living of others and acts which obstruct their complete living” (Spencer 1892, 24). Ultimately, the criterion seems to be pleasure and pain; what makes one feel good represents sound adjustment, preservation of life, and enhancement of happiness. Our author confirms this:

There is no escape from the admission that in calling good the conduct which subserves life, and bad the conduct which hinders or destroys it, and in so implying that life is a blessing and not a curse, we are inevitably asserting that conduct is good or bad according as its total effects are pleasurable or painful (Spencer 1892, 28).

Spencer resolves the egoism-altruism dilemma by noting that egoism precedes altruism; unless one cares for himself, he cannot care for others. However, egoism is not absolute: “Our conclusion *must* be that general happiness is to be achieved mainly through the adequate pursuit of their own happiness by individuals; while, reciprocally, the happiness of individuals is to be achieved in part by their pursuit of the general happiness” (Spencer 1892, 238). This attention to “general happiness” appears to be related to the emphasis on socialization found in the CRSE statement. In that document we do not find the pleasure-pain criterion of morality. Nevertheless, the vagueness and ambiguity of (the CRSE’s) “ethical character” (meaning to assume initiative and responsibility) is sufficient to permit it. Furthermore, the adjustment concept permeating the concept of the curriculum, methods, and end of education, according to the CRSE, does agree partially with Spencer’s view of morality (which seems inseparable in a sense from moral or character education), and definitely leaves room for (without demanding) his view that the good is that which is pleasurable.

The extent to which those who constructed the *Cardinal Principles* of 1918 were familiar with, or even aware of, the Synthetic Philosophy of Herbert Spencer is likely not known with any degree of certitude. Whether they actually utilized that philosophy in the framing of this document is perhaps less clear. Nevertheless, in addition to direct resemblances between Spencer’s educational essays and the CRSE document, we have discovered a fundamental consistency between various aspects of the Englishman’s philosophical thought and the 1918 theory of education. The following examples justify the latter part of this statement.

Cardinal Principles

1. Emphasis on change: in the social milieu, in school population, in educational theory
2. Activity as the sole method of learning
3. No religion in the curriculum
4. No private religious high schools; all to be “comprehensive” (public) schools
5. Only basis for ethical character as

Spencer’s Philosophy

1. Great importance attached to constant, radical change in accord with the evolutionary pattern of natural development (seemingly a “central philosophical intuition” for the author)
2. Naturalistic and materialistic view of human mind and reason, and his position that there is only one kind of knowing: the scientific
3. Religion not a subject for study because no possibility of “actual concepts” in this arena (founded on his theory of knowledge, and distinction between actual and symbolic concepts)
4. Religion not a real discipline and so no consideration of it (for curriculum much less as foundation for entire school)
5. Specifies “adjustment” as ethical end;

end of education: responsibility and initiative	pleasure as criterion for good
6. Growth itself as end of education	6. Relativity of all truth (save evolution itself and final state of equilibrium)

CONCLUSION

That this study represents doing philosophy of education seems evident if we look upon the work of that discipline as applying principles of philosophy (for example, those regarding the ultimate nature of man and of truth) to issues in education (for example, aims, curricula, and teaching methods). One can approach philosophy of education from either of two viewpoints: 1) from the viewpoint of *philosophy*, as when you read and study philosophy, and inquire into what educational consequences, if any, follow; or 2) from the viewpoint of *education*, as when you observe educational practice and/or read the theory of education, and ask what philosophical positions justify these tenets. However, regardless of which procedure is assumed, we must realize that the same or similar philosophical postures can result in somewhat varying educational theories and practices, and that a particular educational theory and practice can be supported by differing philosophical postulates. In view of these observations, it becomes clear that the Spencerian principles linked to the CRSE statement are not necessarily relevant in any exclusive manner. Other similar and some very different thinking also may be apropos. However, it is evident that Spencer's ideas have a unique and special relevance to the *Cardinal Principles*, and it is hoped that the idea of education depicted by the Committee on the Reorganization of Secondary Education has been clarified to some extent through the analysis and application of Spencer's thought.

NOTES

1. This report has been named after the highly publicized "Seven Cardinal Principles": health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation, civic education, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character. They are formulated as the objectives of American public secondary education and occupy a central place in the document.

2. Lawrence A. Cremin, 1954-55, "The revolution in American secondary education, 1893-1918," *Teachers College Record*, LVI, 295-308. For similar statements the reader can consult these additional sources:

Franklin Bobbitt, 1921, "The actual objectives of the present-day high school," *School Review*, XXIX, 256;

Thomas H. Briggs, 1951, "The secondary school curriculum: yesterday, today, tomorrow," *Teachers College Record* LII, 409;

John A. Clement, 1923, "The business of scientific curriculum making in secondary education," *Educational Administration and Supervision* IX, 358;

Francis P. Donnelly, S.J., 1919, "A federal revolution in the high school," *Catholic World* CIX, 331;

Aubrey A. Douglass, 1940, *The American school system* (New York: Farrar and Rinehard, Inc.), 557;

E.A. Fitzpatrick, 1956, "American education (1891-1956)," *American School Board Journal* CXXXII, 46-54.

H.M. Jones, F. Keppel, and R. Ulich, 1954, "On the conflict between the 'liberal arts' and the 'schools of education,'" *American Council of Learned Societies Newsletter* V, 23.

3. The cited portion of this statement was written by Clarence D. Kingsley, Chairman of The Commission, in the "Preface" to the completed report.

4. The reader can consult this same article for an elaboration of seven problems faced by the Commission, comprised of a twenty-six member reviewing committee (as distinct from the subject committee), sixteen of whom were committee chairmen and ten of whom were members at large.

5. For a detailed comparison between the *Cardinal Principles* and the *Committee of Ten Report* of 1893, see pp.161-63 of this study.

6. One might also be quite right in assuming that an application of philosophical views to education likewise helps us understand and appreciate the real meaning of the philosophy.

7. His four essays include the following:

1) "What knowledge is of most worth?" *Westminster Review*, July, 1859:

2) "Intellectual education," *North British Review*, May, 1854;

3) "Moral education," *British Quarterly Review*, April, 1858;

4) "Physical education," *British Quarterly Review*, April, 1859.

One writer relates Spencer's writing on education to the rest of his doctrine by calling it "... a little island lost in an immense ocean of ideas": cf. Gabriel Compayre, 1907, *Herbert Spencer and scientific education*, tr. Maria E. Findlay (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co.), 4. Another commentator terms his educational views "... a corollary of his philosophy": cf. Pierre Marique, 1939, *History of Christian Education* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 102.

8. In the same vein the co-authors inform us that "another very influential organization in American education," the National Association of Secondary School Principals, restate Spencer's thought in terms of "The Imperative Needs of Youth," 251, and that "later publications concerned with educational goals have not veered from these Spencerian ideals to any significant degree," 252.

9. Spencer's own major philosophical writings can be found in his ten-volume series, initiated in 1862 with *First principles* and concluded in 1891-92 with *Principles of ethics*. Other volumes cover biology, psychology, and sociology.

10. For example, Elliot observes that two fundamental principles are the theory of evolution and liberty. See Hugh Elliot, *Herbert Spencer*, 1917 (New York: Henry Holt), 79-ff. See also Henry Holt and Co., 1938), 57. [Revised editions – 1945, 1955; third edition – 1955]

11. Thonnard's interpretation is relevant here: for Spencer "all the knowable is explainable by evolution; the latter in being applicable to metaphysics and to religion, permits us to prove the existence of the Unknowable" (Thonnard 1955, 89-90). For a more detailed analysis of Spencer's principle of evolution (in sixteen specific points), the reader can consult his own "Preface" in Collins 1889, pp. viii-xi.

12. Although this may sound contradictory, and certainly demands more and deeper explanation than can be provided here, it appears most apt in describing Spencer's actual mode of procedure: on the basis of his "central intuition," he investigated the aspects of reality which substantiated his preconceived principle. (For the specifics of his tripartite method, the reader can consult Elliot (1917, 82-ff.).

13. He terms it "... a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" (Spencer 1870, 189).

14. In other words, the distinction between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge is "meaningless and harmful." He iterates that "reason can do no more than reconcile the testimonies of Perception with one another" (Spencer 1872, 435).

15. Actual concepts are distinguished from symbolic concepts (that is, concepts which do not represent reality adequately and completely, but merely symbolize it). Apparently, actual concepts would be those gained through use of the scientific method, symbolic concepts those attained in other (invalid) manners.

16. Although evolution is a prime consideration here, neither time nor space permits us to elaborate on it.

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