A FRAME FOR DISCUSSION

Is there a relationship between how we understand education and how we think about the nature of knowledge and/or the world? The three books under review here, Child Psychology and Childhood Education, The Closing of the American Mind, and The Trial of Socrates, all argue in their own way that there is a strong relationship between the way we understand the world and our view of education. Yet these three books are also about very different subjects: developmental psychology, how the university has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students (the subtitle of Bloom's book) and the role of Socrates in Athenian democracy. Additionally, the authors present their arguments as psychologist, philosopher and historian/commentator respectively. They are reviewed together because it is felt that these works might provide a new perspective on one of the current debates in education, namely, what should the curriculum of the schools be?

The challenge of examining works by a psychologist, philosopher, and historian/commentator is to get the authors to talk to each other. By this I mean that the authors lack a common vocabulary and thus address the same topic with different languages. While all of the authors attempt to state their underlying principles, when one tries to get two or more authors to speak to each other (over time, space and discipline), a careful reader will be taken by the disparity between what one author makes clear and what the reader needs made clear if s/he is going to understand how the arguments relate to each other.

THREE DIFFERENT LOOKS AT THE WORLD AND EDUCATION

Kohlberg's Child Psychology and Childhood Education has as its stated purpose "to review and integrate findings in all areas of child development or to review various programs in early education from the general philosophy of educational practice" within the cognitive-developmental paradigm (p.ix). To this end, Kohlberg and colleagues first provide an historical sketch of the cognitive-developmental paradigm. The history begins with the work of John Dewey and James Mark Baldwin. It goes on to elaborate Jean Piaget's and Lev Vygotsky's places in developmental psychology and the interactivist tradition. Kohlberg continues with a discussion of his own work with regard to the developmental aims of education, the development of moral judgement, play and constructive work among other topics.

Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind states that his work is written from the perspective of a liberal arts teacher (p.19). Bloom sees the task of the teacher as guided by an understanding of human nature (p.20). Bloom spends the rest of the book defining human nature, examining how the current culture has given us a "wrong headed" understanding of ourselves (Human nature), and what the university and philosophy can do to change this understanding.

Stone's The Trial of Socrates addresses a different question: How could Socrates, the defender of democracy, be put to death by the very democracy he defended? In answering this question, Stone implicitly and explicitly defines human nature and the nature of knowledge by focusing on the relationship between person and society.

FINDING A COMMON GROUND

At the risk of over simplification, Kohlberg sees humans as interactive in their relationship to knowledge. He believes that knowledge is constructed for both children and adults. Bloom sees knowledge as ideal but corruptable, and some persons (but not all) as able to develop their sensibilities and intelligence to the point

where they can maintain and lead the society. Stone views humans as shapers of knowledge as well as shaped by the knowledge they generate, while not sliding into a complete relativist position regarding the nature of humans and knowledge. Read from one perspective, the three authors are each arguing about the meaning and place relativism. Bloom is clearly a Platonic idealist. Kohlberg takes a position somewhat like Dewey in arguing for public criteria for knowledge. Stone sides with Kohlberg while focusing his inquiry on the criteria within a public debate.

In his chapter, "The Young Child as a Philosopher," Kohlberg states:

> To say that a child is a philosopher is to say children are interested in the basic terms or categories of experience; to say that the child **develops** as a philosopher is to say that children's original basic terms are different from our own. We are forced to reflect that we are philosophers, too, that our conceptions of reality, truth, and goodness are basic to understanding our minds (Kohlberg, 1987, p. 15).

This perspective is at odds with Bloom's ideas about the nature of philosophy. In his chapter "The Student and the University," Bloom says that the college years are "civilization's only chance" to educate the young person to those opportunities "available to him as a human being" (Bloom, 1987, p. 336). If Bloom's students are to become philosophers in the sense of Kohlberg's meaning of philosopher, it will only happen under Bloom's tutalage. Stone argues that the polis itself is the educator, and will teach us or guide us as philosophers. That is the argument at the basis of his claim that Socrates failed the Athenian polis rather than the other way around.

WHAT SHOULD THE CURRICULUM OF OUR SCHOOLS TEACH?

Each of the books under review here would argue for a different curriculum. Bloom on one side, Kohlberg and Stone on another. Bloom clearly believes that the curriculum should be defined by the majority culture, and that culture is a non-relativist Western culture. Kohlberg sees the curriculum defined by our conceptions of reality, truth and goodness which in turn define our basic understanding of our mind. Stone takes a stand supporting the public development of criteria on the nature of knowledge and the "good" society. Though he does not discuss a curriculum, he clearly believes that curriculum as well as other social issues should be shaped by public discussion and with criteria developed and challenged publicly.

These three books, because they are about much more than the nature of schools or curriculum offerings, provide a context in which to rethink how our basic assumptions, philosophical orientations, and political understandings affect the examinations of education. While there are other fruitful ways of looking at these works, they individually and together invite our attention.

Richard Morehouse