

A READER'S VIEW OF HARRY PRIME

This article is based on a review of Matthew Lipman's philosophical novel *Harry Prime* (1987), and its subject is about philosophical education of children and youth. This review is written out of my concern for contemporary society and my interest in religion, art, science, language, history, and mathematics and their connection to modern society.

It seems to me that the novel *Harry Prime* should not be considered philosophical as much as logical, that is, concerned with what conclusions can be drawn from given premises, and while logic is an important branch of philosophy it is not philosophy per se. Even if one looks to premises, which premises are to be recognized as philosophical premises? Philosophical premises are not given simply because they are givens, they are chosen by us, because of the sort of thinking we are interested in, and these premises seem to us to be the basic items of that sort of thinking, that is, the foundation we need for our reasoning, but to which we can give no reason. In mathematics we call these items, axioms, definitions and postulates; in philosophy we call them ideas, concepts and categories.

I admit that there are discussions of such matters as science, art, religion, education, and mind in Matthew Lipman's book, and while this makes the book look like it is not all logic, it is never-the-less applied logic. While a novel on applied logic is not bad in itself, a philosophical novel should be more than a novel on pure and applied logic. If we look at the classical Greek philosopher Aristotle, from whom the introduction to philosophy in *Harry Prime* has been made, one sees Aristotle treating ethics, metaphysics, and politics (you name it), and he treats them as matters in their own right. He discusses their contents, that is, not only which conclusions can be inferred from given premises, but also which premises can be accepted within the different branches of philosophy. The premises discussed in Aristotle are the ideas, concepts and categories which are the foundation of philosophical reasoning. It should be noted that no philosopher of ancient Greece and no philosopher since, agrees totally with these premises, that is, there were and are always discrepancies (large and small) among philosophers concerning the fundamentals of philosophy and, therefore, of their conclusions.

There is of course discrepancies between different philosophers not only of the fundamentals of philosophy but about which realms of existence, that is, should nature or culture form the topic, from which the philosophic fundamentals are to be chosen. In my opinion, everything important in our experience can be treated philosophically, whether or not it is philosophy. The nature of the issue only determines the way in which we treat it. For example, we might treat it as an ethical issue, and by that I mean not only as logic applied to ethical subjects but a philosophical evaluation using ethical premises, ideas, concepts and categories. The reason I have continued to repeat these things is that I feel that Matthew Lipman thinks that logic applied to ethics is the only thing there is to say about the ethics as a branch of philosophy. But this is not true. One cannot distinguish between good and evil only by means of logical rules. It is not wrong to apply logical rules to ethical matters, but it is not enough to make a genuine ethical philosophy. Logic is about truth and untruth, ethics is about good and evil. One cannot say that everything true is good and everything false is bad. The place logic is helpfully applied to ethics is in evaluating conclusions, that is, if you say life is good, you must infer that any action which rescues life or is against killing is good. But who says that life is always good? There have been philosophers in the past as well as today that infer that life is not good under every circumstance. Therefore, logic is not enough to decide good and evil in ethical philosophy.

Now to turn to Matthew Lipman's book Harry Prime. If looked at from the point of view of the value of life, the problem of saluting the flag and its potential conflict with the position of idolatry as forbidden in the bible is a pretty petty problem. Lipman uses two chapters on that problem (Chapters 9 and 10). I think that the problem of free or restrictive abortions, of active or passive euthanasia, war or peace concerning the commandment: **Thou shalt not kill**, is more an ethical subject to discuss for 16-17 year olds than questions of idolatry.

Imagination and dreams do not follow the rules of logic, Lipman states on page 28. This is because logic of association is quite another thing from logical association. If you are awake you can restrain your thoughts to follow logical rules, but if you dream or daydream using your imagination freely, you can make illogical associations. As a matter of fact, the logic of association is not necessarily logical in the restricted philosophical sense of the word. Association, and therefore the art of mnemonics is mixing logical and illogical trends. And so is phantasy the source of all creativity. To create a new philosophy requires a good portion of phantasy, to educate children and youth in philosophy also requires teachers to use their phantasy in the process of teaching.

To state what I mean I will quote something from the late Italian Gianni Rodari's book Grammar of Phantasy (Grammatica della fantasia):

When the school marks the texts of children, the attention directs unfortunately mainly towards orthography, grammar, and syntax, which has nothing to do with genuine linguistics and only cause, that the complexity of content is neglected. The truth is, that you in school read texts to mark and classify them, but not to understand them. The gold strains out in the sieve of correctness, while the rocks remain.

I would not go so far as Gianni Rodari to state, that orthography grammar and syntax and not genuine linguistics, but I would rather say, that it is only a linguistic tool, which is to be used to convey the meaning of a text. In other words, these linguistic tools make it possible for the reader to get the right meaning out of the text. In the same way logic is a philosophical tool, which is to be used to get the right philosophical conclusions out of the stated philosophical fundamentals. In linguistics, semantics the science of meaning applied to words and sentences to understand the content; maybe we should talk about the semantics of philosophy as well when we talk about philosophic content.

Following this argument, we could say that in ancient Greece the philosophic branches of logic, ethics, metaphysics and aesthetics which centered about pairs: true-false, good-evil, beautiful-ugly, and the spiritual realm of existence (metaphysics) provided a kind of semantic context. Now we have the philosophy of nature, knowledge (epistemology), and science. We have analytic, idealistical, and dialectical philosophies. We have philosophy of language and politics. Additionally, there are branches of philosophy and movements within philosophy which are beyond these and also beyond the scope of this review.

Harry Prime deals with some similar paired issues. In Chapters 9 and 10, there is a conflict between religion and social convention. In Chapter 13, there is a conflict between science and religion as each relates to cosmology. In considering the positions presented in the text, it seems to me that possibility #3 is a real possibility: the world didn't have a beginning and was created by God. This possibility doesn't necessarily contradict itself. The astronomer Fred Hoyle formed the **Steady State** theory of the universe. He didn't deny that the universe was expanding; he said that elementary particles like the proton and electron were constantly created in a huge area of emptiness

between stars and galaxies, so their content of material would remain constant, although the universe expands. Therefore, it is not necessary to assume that the world didn't have a beginning but never-the-less God created it. In that theory, God is constantly creating the universe. There is only a contraction if one demands that creation means that the universe was created at a certain time, and after that there is no creation but only development and change of an already created universe.

On the other hand, the possibility that the world didn't have a beginning doesn't have many followers today as almost all scientist assume the universe was created by the so called Big Bang. That leaves only two possibilities: you can assume that the world was created by God, or that the Big Bang happened all by itself.

Returning to some questions relating to logic, I wonder why Matthew Lipman didn't allow the characters in the book to substitute the subject and predicates in the premises and conclusion with capital letters like Aristotle did. For example: if all X are Y, and all Y are Z, than all X are Z. And then back to examples again with using words. If *Harry Prime* is written as an introduction to philosophy for 16-17 year old youths, then they must be familiar with the substitution of letters for numbers from the mathematical branch labelled algebra. I see no difficulty in introducing these youth to the practice of substituting letters for words as is done in the branch of philosophy called logic. In symbolic logic not only are predicates and subjects of premises and conclusions substituted for symbols so are: no, and, or, implies, implies mutually (that is, implies in both directions). Symbolic logic was used to sustain mathematical proofs, and it is connected with the so called Venn diagrams as used in *Harry Prime* (pp. 32 and 132). But there has been a creation of new types of logic within the last hundred years, for example, model logic and intuitionistic logic. If *Harry Prime* is to be an introduction to applied logic, it should be an introduction to these types of logic as well.

Bridge to Infinity: The Human Side of Mathematics by Michael Guillen (1983) is introduced as it relates to the above argument. Guillen treats the subject of mathematical ideas, concepts and categories which include the fundamentals of symbolic logic and set theory. Russel's Paradox and Godel's theorem which show that self-reference can lead to contradiction and inconsistency are also discussed. This idea was already known by the ancient Greeks who demonstrated the point in the Creatan liar story: if the Creatan says that all Creatans lie; it is logically impossible to decide if that Creatan spoke the truth, which implies that he is lying, or lies which implies that he speaks the truth. The assumption of Aristotle that a statement is either true or false, tertium non datur, must be off set by the possibility of a truism: a statement whose truth cannot be proven (and falsities: a false statement which cannot be proven false).

Therefore, intuition might help one get to the truth in cases where it cannot logically be proven. Of course one must stick to the facts (that is the sort of truth you believe in) but you will never know (at least until some new knowledge turns up--which at the moment, using your intuition, you do not have). In Chapter 16, Jennifer Starr accuses Sam da Silva of stealing her wallet because she knows her wallet is gone and that Sam needs the money. By logic it is proven that Sam couldn't have stolen the wallet as the wallet was found between the water fountain and the wall and Sam did not leave the room. However, Mike Morawski is known to be a practical joker, and "that is the sort of thing he would do." He could have done it. And the fact that the wallet was found with all its contents is another proof, that no thief has removed the wallet to the place were it was found. This suggest a practical joker might have been the culprit. Therefore, Lisa's intuition in this case, where there is no logical solution, is better than nothing. And from the above mentioned book by Guillen, one can learn that we use logic to prove things, but logic itself cannot prove itself. That would be a self-referential proof and therefore inconsistent, then the consequence of Aristotelian logic is a paradox.

So *Harry Prime* is mainly an introduction to pure logic and logic applied to other topics. Only about a tenth of the book is about the fundamentals of philosophy.

Additionally, the logic is narrowly Aristotelian logic.

I feel that philosophy education of children must be about such topics as power and powerlessness, language (semantics), will and determinism, conscience, consciousness, phantasy and reality, identity, justice, intuition, superstition, suffering and so on in addition to logic. The presentation of the logic should benefit from recent logical discoveries.

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