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*EDUCATIONAL THEORY* IN THE FIFTIES:  
THE BEGINNING OF A CONVERSATION

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THE BEGINNING

The first issue of *Educational Theory*, dated May 1, 1951, arrived in the mail of the members of the John Dewey Society, one of the journal's two sponsoring organizations. The College of Education at the University of Illinois was the other. The price for a year's subscription was \$3.00, which was reduced to \$2.00 for anyone who paid the \$3.50 annual dues of the John Dewey Society.

The Editor-in-Chief of the journal was Archibald W. Anderson, a historian of Education at the University of Illinois. Four people served on the Editorial Board, two from the University of Illinois and two from the John Dewey Society. The eleven-member Executive Board of the John Dewey Society and the Dean of the Executive Committee and Policy Committee of the College of Education were also listed inside. This first issue contained eight articles, three reviews, a page of editor's notes, and a full-page advertisement from the World Book Company. The paper and the print were of good quality, giving the journal a decent professional appearance.

On the front cover, the words "Educational Theory" were followed by an ellipsis, indicating perhaps a discussion in process. The cubist-like design etched out on the classroom-green and cream colored cover was anchored by a winged symbol much like the one that the Nike Corporation would adopt a couple of decades later. The combination of conservative colors and futuristic design gave just a hint of a deeper tension — the concern to combine new and perhaps controversial forms of inquiry within the somber traditions of academic respectability. It was a tension that the journal would never completely outlive.

THE FOUNDING

William Heard Kilpatrick had the lead article in the first volume, entitled "Crucial Issues in Current Educational Theory." Kilpatrick's essay was followed by one by Anderson, entitled "The Task of Educational Theory," that explained the mission of the journal. Although the two essays do not explicitly refer to each other, Anderson gives Kilpatrick considerable credit for inspiring movements in the field that led to the establishment of the journal. However, there is an important difference in emphasis between them. Kilpatrick wanted to define educational theory in terms of its relation to practice and to larger political and social issues. Anderson believed that educational theory must "play a part in the development of the science of education strictly analogous to the part played by theory in the development of the natural sciences"; and to illustrate his point he drew on the

history of physics. Thus, without explicitly crossing swords, two of the missions of the journal were articulated: (1) to advance the development of educational theory in itself and (2) to address the wider problems of schools, politics, and society.

It was not just the content of the two essays that set the ambiguity that the journal was destined to live with throughout the next five decades, but the style as well. Kilpatrick's essay, although short on specifics, was long on rhetoric and exhortation. He listed twenty-five issues that he thought the journal should examine. Most were expressed as rhetorical questions, the answers to which were in little doubt. Hence: "Shall we continue to teach as if the traditional past had the last word on the teaching-learning process? Or shall we seek also help from the modern study of psychology and of mental hygiene (or psychiatry)?" and "Is the ordinary practice of giving examinations which can best be passed by memorizing ('cramming') likely to thwart and hinder the best education of the learner?" and, "Is it desirable for the morale of teachers that at every level of instruction teachers shall share in making all school or college policies that affect them and their work?"<sup>1</sup> Surely, these are all important questions, but the fact that Kilpatrick had already answered them many times, at least to his own satisfaction, suggested that he viewed the journal largely as an organ for his own agenda and for that of other like-minded progressive educators. In his concluding paragraph Kilpatrick warned that civilization is "seriously threatened by the lack of a sufficient and common outlook on life" and it was the task of education to face this problem and, by implication, to bring about the unity that civilization needs to survive.<sup>2</sup>

Kilpatrick's apocalyptic tone is absent from Anderson's inaugural essay which provides an informative history of events leading to the formation of the journal, and sketches his vision of the role for educational theory, both as a field and as a journal. The essay begins with a statement of purpose:

The general purposes of this journal are to foster the continuing development of educational theory and to encourage wide and effective discussion of theoretical problems within the educational profession. In order to achieve these purposes, the journal will be devoted to publishing scholarly articles and studies in the foundations of education, and in related disciplines outside of the field of education, which contribute to the advancement of educational theory.<sup>3</sup>

Anderson was seeking to avoid the controversy that had surrounded journals such as the defunct *The Social Frontier* and *Progressive Education*, the latter publication

1. William Heard Kilpatrick, "Crucial Issues in Current Educational Theory," *Educational Theory* 1, no. 1 (May 1951): 1-8.

2. *Ibid.*, 8.

3. Archibald W. Anderson, "The Task of Educational Theory," *Educational Theory* 2, no. 1 (May 1951): 9-21.

4. *Ibid.*, 10.

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also sponsored by the John Dewey Society. The editorial boards of these different journals overlapped considerably with one another. Indeed, Anderson himself served as the Associate Editor of *Progressive Education* while acting as Editor-in-Chief of *Educational Theory*. Thus part of the problem was to establish a distinctive identity for *Educational Theory*. In order to understand the road that Anderson was taking, it is useful to place both of those journals within a larger political, social, and educational context.

*THE SOCIAL FRONTIER AND PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION*

*The Social Frontier* was a child of the Depression. Its origins can be traced, along with those of the John Dewey Society, to the Discussion Group formed in 1927 by professors of the social foundations of education who met at Teachers College, Columbia University. Chaired by Kilpatrick, the aim of the group was "to study and discuss pressing social and educational problems and strategies proposed for meeting those problems."<sup>4</sup> The activities of the group led to the establishment of *The Social Frontier* in 1934 and to the formation of the John Dewey Society in 1935. It became, as Anderson says, quoting Harold Rugg, "the fighting spearhead and the only organ of the social liberals in American Education."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, *The Social Frontier* was more than just the voice of the liberal educator, as Anderson had described it. Although this was probably the dominant voice, the journal opened its pages to a number of Marxist writers, and in some instances Marxism set the terms of the debate. In the 1930s progressives such as John Childs and George Counts developed a class analysis to explain the difficulties of American education, arguing that the great disparities in wealth and the self-interested policies of the business establishment accounted for many of the problems the country was facing.

These progressives argued that teachers would find their most natural allies among the working class, surely a radical idea at a time when teachers' unions were just beginning to grope their way through a hostile environment. Many of the writers for *The Social Frontier*, such as Counts, Childs, and Theodore Brameld, formed an alliance with people outside of education, such as the philosopher Sidney Hook and the historians Charles Beard and Merle Curti, to advance what they called "democratic collectivism."

In 1935 one of the more controversial issues appeared. In it Brameld published an article, "Karl Marx and the American Teacher," in which he sympathetically explicated Marxism and its possible role in education while an editorial in the same issue proposed that it was part of the teacher's professional responsibility to dispel the myth that Americans live in a classless society and to reveal the vast difference in wealth and its significance for American society.<sup>6</sup> The editors held that there was a fundamental difference between those who created the wealth and those who

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5. *Ibid.*, 11.

6. Theodore Brameld, "Karl Marx and the American Teacher," *The Social Frontier* (November 1935).

owned it and that, since teachers were creators of wealth, they should align themselves with the working class.

This flirtation with Marxism was never any more than a brief encounter and the next year Harold Rugg offered an American alternative to Marxism, claiming that even the working class "hold the outlook and loyalties of owners of property."<sup>7</sup> Of course Rugg had begged the question. At least as the Marxist framed it, the issue was not about perceptions, but about material conditions. False consciousness was always a possibility. Nevertheless, the debate illustrates the extent to which *The Social Frontier* was interwoven with the ongoing affairs of the American left.

Yet *The Social Frontier* was not immune from political pressure. While some progressive educators may have dipped one toe in Marxism, many had a complete foot immersed in capitalist philanthropy. Indeed Rugg sat on the commission of the famous Eight-Year Study that was supported handsomely by the Rockefeller-based General Education Board and less handsomely by the Carnegie Foundation.

In 1937 Counts along with two other editors were replaced. *The Social Frontier* constantly struggled to stay afloat financially throughout the course of its existence and an appeal was made to the Progressive Education Association (PEA) to take over the journal. After a number of refusals, the PEA accepted the journal, stipulating, according to Cremin, that "the name be changed to *Frontiers of Democracy* and that a new board of editors be constituted to remove the taint of radicalism."<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 1940, *The Social Frontier* became *Frontiers of Democracy*.

Just three years later, however, the PEA voted to discontinue its publication. The journal had by that time accrued a debt of nearly \$2,500. The response to this abrupt decision on the part of the original contributors to *The Social Frontier* was acrimonious. Rugg charged the Directors of the PEA with abandoning its "historic pioneering function." "Their program," Rugg charged, "commits us to spreading out over old ground rather than pushing forward into new territory, especially onto the...frontier on which new educational trails must now be blazed."<sup>9</sup>

If the PEA feared radicalism in 1937, this fear would come back to haunt it after the war and in the Red Scare of the late 1940s and 1950s. At that time it came under attack for undermining American education and its members were berated for advancing racial integration, the United Nations, and the idea of one world. Progressive education also became associated with life adjustment education and was thus criticized for neglecting science and mathematics, subjects that many justified as necessary to fight the Cold War.

After the Second World War, *Progressive Education*, the organ of the PEA (which changed its name to the American Educational Fellowship) began to take an aggressive stance toward civil rights and global peace. There had always been

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7. *The Social Frontier* (February 1936): 141.

8. Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the Schools* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 232-33.

9. Harold Rugg, "We Accept in Principle but in Practice: Is this Leadership?" *Frontiers of Democracy* (15 December 1943): 73 (emphasis in original).

members of the Association who had been concerned with issues of race. However, the brief flirtation with Marxism notwithstanding, most progressives writing on the issue shared with Rugg a benign interest-theory view of American politics (in which democracy is the result of the pressures exerted by competing interest groups) coupled with a vaguely progressive understanding of American history. This was probably still the case in the late 1940s when race and peace education became more prominent aspects of the progressive story. In a 1948 issue the editors revisited themes of *The Social Frontier*, under the leadership of John J. DeBoer of the University of Illinois. Writing about the prosperity of the 1920s and the wasted lives of the depression, the editors wrote,

During the "thirties" some American educators became sufficiently concerned to voice their anger at this tragedy through the pages of one journal, *The Social Frontier*. . . . Yet as the depression waned and the nation became preoccupied with winning World War II, even their voices softened to a whisper.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

In the early 1950s, partly as a result of the end of the war and the continuing growth of urban America, a reform initiative called the life adjustment movement gained a considerable toehold in schools of education. The major concern of the life adjustment educator was for those youngsters, still a significant majority at the time, who would not be going to college, or be employed in a skilled occupation. The life adjustment curriculum stressed home and family life, physical fitness, and civic competence. In other words it was long on life skills and, at least in the eyes of its critics, short on academic ones.

The reaction to the life adjustment curriculum accelerated dramatically in the early 1950s and emphasized the importance of academic subjects and rigor. The reaction often failed to distinguish between two different features of the movement: (1) the emphasis on psychological adjustment and (2) progressive pedagogy. Although it is conceptually possible to separate the two, the reaction went after both of them.

Among the most visible critics of the life adjustment movement was Arthur Bestor, a professor in the History Department at the University of Illinois. Bestor published two important books, *Educational Wastelands* (1953), and later, *The Restoration of Learning* (1955), in which he argued for the importance of the traditional academic disciplines to the past and continuing development of the human species.<sup>11</sup> His curriculum proposals emphasized the importance of science, math, and modern language, and he argued that the curriculum should comprise only a few disciplines that should be studied by both elementary and secondary students.

Students were to be sorted by standardized achievement and intelligence tests into various categories and then allowed to progress through the curriculum at a pace appropriate for students in each category. He believed that for most students a high

10. *Progressive Education* 25, no. 4 (February 1948): 40.

11. Arthur E. Bestor, *Educational Wasteland: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1953) and Arthur E. Bestor, *The Restoration of Learning* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1955).

school diploma would be the appropriate terminal degree. However, for those few exceptional students who should go on to college, the competition would be severe and even the cost of their tuition would depend on their grade point average. If the schools "failed to do their part," he wrote at the height of the Cold War and the Red Scare, "the nation is threatened with the loss of intellectual strength and, as a direct consequence, the loss of industrial prosperity and military security."<sup>12</sup>

Bestor was not merely a prominent national figure; he was a prominent local one as well. His campus speeches were reported on faithfully in the student newspaper, the *Daily Illini*, and prominent professors in the College as well as the Dean of Education responded to his attacks on the education and training of teachers.

Indeed, open warfare between Bestor and the College was in effect and the target of one of Bestor's criticisms was a 1951 report that the Dean of the College, W.B. Spalding and two professors, H.C. Hand and C.W. Sanford, had edited, entitled "The School and National Security." Yet Bestor would not even allow educators to hide behind the cloak of national security. In his book he summarized criticisms that were earlier voiced in his talks and lectures within the University:

"The first task of the social studies," the report began, is to "reduce the tensions and meet the needs of children and youth." Absent is any idea that the nation is in danger and that it may require of its future citizens some very hard thinking, not about personal problems first, but about the means of national security.<sup>13</sup>

Bestor was a powerful and persuasive writer and his criticism of progressive education was relentless: "It is a curiously ostrich-like way of meeting life needs to de-emphasize foreign language during a period of world war and post-war global tension, and to de-emphasize mathematics at precisely the time when the nation's security has come to depend on Einstein's equation,  $E = MC^2$ ."<sup>14</sup>

Bestor's attacks on education in general and on the work of his colleagues in the University's College of Education did not take place in a vacuum. The Red Scare and the various state replicas of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had arrived in Illinois and President Stoddard, the man who had headed the reconstruction of Japanese education after the War, was besieged by charges against individual professors.

This was the political climate at the University of Illinois when the Dean of its College of Education decided to join with the John Dewey Society and sponsor the new journal *Educational Theory*. The two lead articles mentioned earlier, the first by Kilpatrick and the second by Anderson, expressed two responses to this environment: the first, to continue to amplify the progressive's voice under guise of a respectable academic cover; the second, to package educational theory as a first cousin to that most respected of disciplines — physics. Yet if the political climate was treacherous, the financial climate was only a little less so.

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12. *Ibid.*, 13.

13. *Ibid.*, 99.

14. *Ibid.*, 58.

## THE FINANCIAL CLIMATE

Exactly seven years after the final issue of the *Frontiers of Democracy* and seven years before the last issue of *Progressive Education*, *Educational Theory* made its appearance on the scholarly scene. Like the other journals, *Educational Theory* faced substantial financial difficulty, particularly during the latter half of the 1950s. Indeed, *Educational Theory's* financial woes were directly related to those suffered by *Progressive Education*. Under the journal's original memorandum of agreement, the College of Education at the University of Illinois was to contribute \$1,000 to *Educational Theory*, while the John Dewey Society was to contribute \$500. When the Dewey Society assumed responsibility for the publishing of *Progressive Education* in 1955, it was already having problems in meeting its financial obligation to *Educational Theory*. By the end of the decade, the Dewey Society was \$2,000 behind in its support.

These strains were further exacerbated by a variety of other problems that plagued the journal during the same period. The publishing company that had originally been responsible for the printing of *Educational Theory* was a constant source of frustration for Anderson. Not only was the company consistently behind the printing schedule, but it defaulted on its contract a year before it was to expire. In addition, the journal experienced great difficulty in retaining a reliable business manager, at one point going through three different managers in a single year. On top of this, Anderson himself had to step down for a brief period as editor as a result of a case of eyestrain.

The journal's position was assisted to some extent by the Philosophy of Education Society (PES), which joined the College of Education and the Dewey Society in 1953 as a sponsoring organization. Yet PES's initial contribution to the journal amounted to a meager \$100. And while PES later increased its contribution to \$500, largely in response to the shortfall created by the Dewey Society, it was clear by 1957 that some additional source of support would have to be found if *Educational Theory* was to survive.

At various points throughout the decade, a number of funding opportunities were explored. For example, in 1955 Dean Donald Cottrell of Ohio State University approached Anderson on behalf of the National Society of College Teachers of Education (NSCTE) about possible sponsorship of *Educational Theory*. Anderson questioned whether a journal such as *Educational Theory* would be appropriate for the Society: "Dean Cottrell's reply was that the feeling of the Executive Committee of the NSCTE is that the point at which the interest of all the members of the organization converge is upon the improvement and development of sound educational theory."<sup>15</sup> A short time later, Hobart Burns of Rutgers University inquired with Anderson about the possibility of establishing a second Philosophy of Education journal. After some consultation, discussion turned to the question of whether Rutgers might sponsor *Educational Theory*.

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15. Papers of Archibald Anderson, University of Illinois Archives.



None of these possibilities ultimately materialized. However, the College of Education at Illinois, pleased with the reputation *Educational Theory* had attained, was willing to take on greater financial responsibility for the journal. During the academic year 1956-57, the College of Education was experiencing fiscal difficulties of its own. Due to increased student enrollment, the University was constrained by a budgetary freeze and could devote no additional support to the growth and improvement of existing programs. By the end of the decade, however, the College of Education had doubled its subsidy of *Educational Theory* to \$3,000.

While this funding increase no doubt resulted in greater financial security, it brought with it a new set of bureaucratic problems. The new memorandum of agreement which was drawn up in order to mark the University's increased financial contribution to the journal left some ambiguity as to the University's responsibility to provide additional editorial resources, which it had provided in the past. Subsequent University audits of the journal eventually became so intrusive that Anderson complained to the Dean of the College of Education of harassment.

#### THEORY ON THE GROUND

If the differences embodied in Anderson's and Kilpatrick's respective approaches to educational theory represent one of the major fault lines separating many of the journal's articles throughout the 1950s, closer examination of the pages of *Educational Theory* reveals even further divides and disagreements over just what was to count as contributing to the advancement of educational theory. Indeed, the range of article types that can be found in the journal is in many ways wide enough to resist any easy classificatory scheme or strict thematization. What follows is thus but a survey of some of the early articles and the different ways in which they illustrate definitions-in-use of educational theory.

One form that this theorizing took on, right from the beginning, was the familiar discussion of various theoretical movements or "isms" and their relation to the field of education. Many of these articles dealt with "isms" that were native to educational inquiry, such as "progressivism," "reconstructionism," and "experimentalism." But there were also discussions of more general philosophical movements such as "transcendental realism," "pragmatism," "logical positivism," and something called "cultural relationism." One of the more interesting articles of this type was a collaborative essay on existentialism and education, written in 1952 by Brameld and a group of graduate students in educational philosophy at NYU (among whom were included, for example, Maxine Green and Robert Ennis).<sup>16</sup> The article, focusing chiefly upon the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre, is critical of existentialists' lack of argumentative rigor and their preoccupation with dread, subjectivity, and anxiety. However, the essay is able to make only tenuous connections with educational issues.

Alongside such articles were those that attempted to relate some particular philosopher's perspective to education — a kind of "so-and-so says" approach to

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16. Theodore Brameld, et al., "Existentialism and Education," *Educational Theory* 2, no. 2 (April 1952).



educational theory. The majority of such essays were devoted to the thought of John Dewey. One might be surprised to learn, however, that Dewey receives hardly any mention at all in the first issue, and indeed — though Dewey is discussed in passing in a number of articles — he appears only twice in the title of any of the essays in 1951. In later volumes, too, articles that attempt simply to explicate some feature of Dewey's philosophy appear, on average, only once or twice per year. Running a distant second to Dewey were articles on Charles Peirce and G.W.F. Hegel. Still other essays treated such thinkers as Aquinas, Josiah Royce, Edmund Burke, Charles Fourier, John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold, and Martin Buber. Oftentimes such essays were designed to resuscitate the thought of philosophical or educational figures who had fallen into obscurity — one of the best examples of which is Kenneth Winetrou's 1956 essay on Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller.<sup>17</sup>

Also important in defining educational theory were those articles that discussed the relation between education and other disciplines. A great many of these discussions attempted to clarify the nature of the relation between philosophy and education; and their point was frequently to show that the philosophy of education constituted an autonomous field of study that could not simply be reduced either to education or to philosophy.

In recent years, perhaps due to its growing connection to PES, *Educational Theory* has become increasingly associated with the field of philosophy of education. However, the above-mentioned articles notwithstanding, in the early years the association with philosophy was less clear-cut and articles were published that related various other disciplines to the field of education. One finds essays, for example, that attempt to differentiate between sociology and education, or between the sociology of education and educational sociology.<sup>18</sup> Other articles discuss the relation between education and fields such as economics, literature, and psychology. Many of these essays, particularly those that dealt with the relation between education and psychology, varied in terms of their relevance to education. Some seem to bear only a tenuous relation to education, as in the case of such essays as "The Adolescent Feeling of Psychological Isolation" or "An Analysis of Horney's Concept of the Real Self."<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, one can see in some of these early essays precursors to contemporary points of view. In Oscar Oppenheimer's "Freedom and Mental Health," for example, one finds a view of freedom and the right to develop that possesses a strong affinity with views put forth by current writers such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.<sup>20</sup>

17. Kenneth Winetrou, "Aspects of F.C.S. Schiller's Concept of Truth," *Educational Theory* 6, no. 2 (April 1956).

18. Florian Znaniecki, "The Scientific Function of Sociology of Education," *Educational Theory* 1, no. 2 (April 1951).

19. Rex M. Collier and Helen Palmer Lawrence, "The Adolescent Feeling of Psychological Isolation," *Educational Theory* 1, no. 2 (August 1951) and Irving Robbins, "An Analysis of Horney's Concept of the Real Self," *Educational Theory* 3, no. 3 (July 1958).

20. Oscar Oppenheimer, "Freedom and Mental Health," *Educational Theory* 2, no. 4 (October 1952): 234.

Another common type of essay addressed some particular issue and attempted to spell out its implications for education. Some of these articles were devoted to abstract analyses of certain basic philosophical or educational concepts. Among the most frequently treated were concepts such as "freedom," "liberty," and "democracy." One also finds philosophical treatments of concepts such as "ontology," "causation," "nature," and "the Good." In some of these early essays — such as Richard Dettering's "Philosophical Semantics and Education" and Henry J. Perkinson's "Needs and the Curriculum" — one can see what appears to be the first application of ordinary language philosophy or linguistic analysis to educational topics.<sup>21</sup>

Other essays of this general type focused more concretely on specific issues of educational policy. A number of articles throughout the decade took up questions pertaining to academic freedom, pedagogy, and various aspects of educational administration. In one such article, Willard Spalding, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Illinois, attempted to outline a new, full-blown theory of teacher training by overturning what he regarded as the conventional understanding of the relation between qualities and entities upon which traditional theories had been based.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the traditional view — which Spalding characterized as having derived from Aristotle — held that entities were primary and qualities secondary, Spalding argued for the primacy of qualities to entities. This new approach, he maintained, allowed for new ways of understanding human nature, society, the environment, and the nature of teaching.

Another subject that received frequent attention was the relation between religion and education. Essays can be found covering a wide range of religious traditions, from Islam and Judaism to various denominations of Christianity. Many of these articles are clearly germane to contemporary discussions about vouchers and other schools choice programs. The year 1953, in particular, saw the publication of several interesting essays addressed to the question of religion and public education, such as Irwin Widen's "Should Parochial Schools Receive Public Funds?" Samuel Burkhard's "Religion and Public Education," and Oliver Martin's "The Problem of Religious Courses in a State University."<sup>23</sup>

In some cases, various groups or individuals offered discussion of these issues in the form of concrete proposals or statements. The Philosophy of Education Society, for example, issued statements concerning the question of academic freedom and "the Distinctive Nature of the Discipline of the Philosophy of Education"; Frank

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21. Richard W. Dettering, "Philosophical Semantics and Education," *Educational Theory* 8, no. 3 (July 1958): 143-49 and Henry J. Perkinson, "Needs and the Curriculum," *Educational Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 1959): 235-38.

22. Willard B. Spalding, "Theories about Training Teachers," *Educational Theory* 1, no. 3 (November 1951): 175-85.

23. Irwin Widen, "Should Parochial Schools Receive Public Funds?" *Educational Theory* 3, no. 4 (October 1953); Samuel Burkhard, "Religion and Public Education," *Educational Theory* 3, no. 1 (January 1953); and Oliver Martin, "The Problem of Religious Courses in a State University," *Educational Theory* 3, no. 1 (January 1953).

Wegener elaborated a proposal for establishing schools within schools; and Stuart C. Dodd submitted a rather eccentric article entitled "A Statement of Human Wants," in which he attempts to sketch a common core of aspirations to which both the "Communist" and "Western" camps might both agree.<sup>24</sup>

Occasionally, the pages of *Educational Theory* became a forum for the discussion of more popular educational events and issues. The publication of Bestor's *Educational Wastelands* received two highly critical reviews in the January 1954 issue. In essays appearing back-to-back, William Clark Trow and Harold Hand dissect Bestor's book and accuse him not only of unfairly attacking American public education but also, at least in some instances, of willfully misleading his readers.<sup>25</sup>

While this very cursory survey of topics, approaches, and themes may give one a feel for the kind of discussion of educational issues that *Educational Theory* was trying to promote, an examination of the voices that remained silent or muted in this discussion perhaps helps to tell us something equally important about how theorizing about education was understood throughout the decade. One of the issues in which this silence is most notable is that of race. The 1950s were clearly a decade — particularly in light of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision — during which the importance of questions of race and education became more generally recognized. While other journals such as *Progressive Education* devoted specific articles to the *Brown* decision during this time — and indeed *Frontiers of Democracy*, more than a decade earlier, featured numerous articles by Kilpatrick, Margaret Mead, and others decrying discrimination and segregation — race is scarcely mentioned in the pages of *Educational Theory* at all.<sup>26</sup> This is of course all the more baffling given the overlap between the contributors and editorial boards of *Educational Theory* and these other journals.

With regard to the issue of gender, on the other hand, at least some of the articles in *Educational Theory* were perhaps all-too-representative of their time. The April 1959 issue, for example, featured an essay by Louis William Norris bearing the title, "How to Educate a Man," the burden of which was to show that "Education of a man should be so structured...as to perfect the diverse potentials of his manliness."<sup>27</sup> Norris is quite clear that education for men ought to be different from that of women. He writes,

24. The Philosophy of Education Society, "The Right to Intellectual Freedom," *Educational Theory* 3, no. 2 (April 1953): 185-86; A Committee of the Philosophy of Education Society, "The Distinctive Nature of the Discipline of the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* 4, no. 1 (January 1954): 1-3; Frank C. Wegener, "A Proposal: A School Within a School," *Educational Theory* 2, no. 1 (January 1952): 14-30; and Stuart C. Dodd, "A Statement of Human Wants," *Educational Theory* 3, no. 2 (April 1953): 179-81.

25. William Clark Trow, "Academic Utopia," *Educational Theory* 4, no. 1 (January 1954): 4-16 and Harold C. Hand, "A Scholar's Documentation," *Educational Theory* 4, no. 1 (January 1954): 16-27.

26. Rubin Gotesky, "The Supreme Court Decision on Segregation," *Progressive Education* 32, no. 6 (November 1955); William Heard Kilpatrick, "An Immoral Cultural Lag: Our War Treatment of Negroes," *Frontiers of Democracy* 8, no. 67 (February 1942); and Margaret Mead, "The Student of Race Problems Can Say..." *Frontiers of Democracy* 6, no. 53 (15 April 1940).

27. Louis William Norris, "How to Educate a Man," *Educational Theory* 9, no. 2 (April 1959): 117.

All the realms of learning are open to women now, and nearly every vocation that capitalizes on any particular realm of knowledge or skill permits their entry. But they will probably never excel in some fields. A woman will do better to seek her unique contributions to her generation, than to demand of herself that she match the attainments of men with similar ones. All this means that courses in economics could have a different flavor for women.<sup>28</sup>

And even when Norris makes gestures in the direction of equity, his remarks bear deep traces of what today is defined as sexism:

A woman, of course, needs always to consider her duty to help others express their deepest powers. Especially is this true in relation to her husband. Yet, men have the advantage of tradition and a natural aggressiveness which have long made their way. If a woman must fight too vigorously for her opportunities, she may become resentful, mannish, or frustrated. The better part of valor, nay, the wisdom of economy in effort, requires a man to work for such conditions as permit women full use of their powers.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, discussion of the issues of inequality and class, while receiving some treatment in *Educational Theory*, was relatively oblique throughout the 1950s. A number of articles touched on various aspects of the relation between economics and education, but most of these were strikingly theoretical in tone. Perhaps one exception can be seen in an early essay by W.B. Brookover, which concludes that the American

educational system has not arrested the apparent trend toward the stratification of our society. To the extent that stratification is contrary to the actual goals rather than verbalized values of ours society, this demands a general re-examination of the function of education.<sup>30</sup>

#### SILENCE AND DISAPPEARANCE: THE BENNE ISSUE

Silences can appear to exist without an overt silencer, without people who officially enforce the rules, but where everyone observes the rules of silence, victim and victimized alike. This was the case with homosexuality, where norms of deviancy were rarely challenged, either by those inside or by those outside the academic community.

We want to suggest that there is something about the very conception of theory that governed the discourse in the journal during the 1950s that served, behind the backs of almost everyone and along with overt political forces, to erase sources of potential opposition to established conceptions of normality. We take a case in which members of the journal had an obvious interest, a case that differs from those of highly visible professors accused of communist activity, around which some members of the liberal community could mobilize. We take a case in which there was no one to mobilize and where the very idea of normal behavior was so powerful that very few could break out of the mold to defend it openly and aggressively. We take a case where the victim himself understood that his own best chance of survival was to buy into the prevailing definition and find a way to deny that it fit him. And, we take a case in which the very organ of scholarly communication that the victim had a part in establishing could not provide any official response, even as individuals

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28. *Ibid.*, 124.

29. *Ibid.*, 125.

30. W.B. Brookover, "The Implications of Social Class Analysis for a Social Theory of Education," *Educational Theory* 1, no. 2 (August 1951): 97-105.

connected to it helped in whatever decent way they could. This is the case of Kenneth Benne (one of Feinberg's graduate advisors at Boston University) and the disappearance of his name from the masthead of *Educational Theory* in 1953.

Benne came to the University of Illinois after the War with remarkable recommendations from the most prominent people in the field. John Dewey wrote that he "has one of the most gifted minds in philosophy that I have come across."<sup>31</sup> W.H. Kilpatrick called him "the most brilliant student who studied under me at teachers college."<sup>32</sup> J.H. Randell, the distinguished philosopher at Columbia, wrote, "Mr. Benne is one of the very best graduate students of philosophy I have ever known."<sup>33</sup> John Childs called him "the most promising of all the younger men in the field of philosophy of education."<sup>34</sup> Finally, the historian Merle Curti called him "the most outstanding of all the young men in the field of education that I know."<sup>35</sup> In justifying the appointment, the Dean of the College of Education wrote, "Professor Benne is perhaps the most distinguished scholar who has been brought to the faculty of the College of Education in the past 25 years."

In 1953 Benne was pressured to resign from the University and thus to relinquish his role as one of the University's representatives on the editorial board of the journal. While the details are murky, his removal was tied to a homosexual encounter that took place off campus. Given the climate of hysteria and recrimination that prevailed in the early and middle 1950s, and the effects exposure would have had on Benne's career, the journal's silence about Benne's removal is quite understandable. Moreover, the 126 page FBI report compiled on Benne, which we obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, notes (without comment) that many of his colleagues attested to his good character.

Although the University of Illinois was led by the liberal George Stoddard, an eminent psychologist, he was under intense pressure to purge the University of Left-wing professors. Stoddard himself, later fired by a reactionary Board of Trustees, was not immune from such pressure, although some of the purges went on behind closed doors. Thus, for example, a young composer, musicologist, pianist, and a brother-in-law of Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson, Norman Cazden, had been verbally promised tenure, but his contract was not renewed. His dismissal was a result of attacks by the Broyles Committee, a body of the Illinois Legislature that was attacking the University for harboring Red professors. The dismissal of Cazden, who did not get another academic job for 16 years, was a reaction to attacks by the Committee, and took place behind the scenes "in offices and on pieces of paper."<sup>36</sup>

31. University of Illinois Archives, letter, 20 March 1943.

32. Archives, 27 March 1943.

33. Archives, 29 March 1943.

34. Archives, 2 April 1943.

35. Archives, letter, 2 April 1941.

36. Personal interview with Courtney Cazden.

But to see just how the Benne incident played out is to see something important about the role of theory in education and about the limitations of both Kilpatrick and Anderson's conception of educational theory — the belief that theory solved problems or informed practice. However, in Benne's situation something else was needed — a theory that challenged traditional conceptions of normality and the marginalization that went with these conceptions. Just how deep and pervasive these conceptions were can be seen in an exchange of letters between Benne and Stoddard, neither of whom were able to challenge the identity constructs that trapped them.

In a letter to Stoddard asking for his help in attaining another position, Benne writes, "After the initial shock...to my self-esteem...I have reassessed as self-objectively as possible my value to the teaching profession. I have concluded that I am worth rehabilitating in the profession, if such rehabilitation is at all possible."<sup>37</sup>

He goes on to say that he was seeing a psychologist and was convinced that he "was not basically a homosexual, whatever that classification means. My basic problem is my tendency to suppress hostile feelings and aggressive behavior and to be over-compliant to the wills of others with whom I am associated. I am making some progress on this problem."<sup>38</sup> It is clear from Benne's letter that he received considerable support from people in the College, and he mentions specifically Dean Spalding, along with B.O. Smith and W.O. Stanley, both Professors in his own area.

Stoddard, picking up on the theme of rehabilitation, wrote back an encouraging letter:

As a psychologist I have long been aware of the enormous deviations in personality and attitudes that go uncorrelated with personal and professional success....In short, I can think of no reason why you should not be completely rehabilitated and ready to take over an important assignment in your professional career.<sup>39</sup>

Stoddard then assures Benne that it would be all right to give his name as a reference.

The subtext of these letters is that Benne was asking Stoddard not to hurt him should a prospective employer contact him, and by telling Stoddard that he was seeing a psychologist, Benne was providing Stoddard with information to assure him that he was dealing with his "problem." Benne's message was that he was worth rehabilitating, he had already begun the process, and, most important of all, he "was not basically a homosexual."

Given the context of the times, there is an inherent graciousness about Benne's letter, especially in his willingness to assess himself in light of his contribution to the profession. And, there is a decency about Stoddard's response, and his assurance that he would not hurt Benne's efforts to get another job. It is also likely that Benne's colleagues and the Dean helped Benne find a new job at Boston University where he was appointed to a named Chair in Human Relations and was made Director of the Boston University Human Relations Center. Benne's career flourished in Boston.

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37. Archives, Letter Benne to Stoddard, 22 April 1953.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Stoddard to Benne, 1 June 1953.

When he retired from Boston University two former governors were in attendance at a very large affair in his honor and he was praised for his work both in human relations and in philosophy of education. During the latter years of his life, after moving with his partner to Washington D.C., Benne became more open about his homosexuality and brought his partner to the annual meetings of the Philosophy of Education Society.

Benne's situation highlights the limitations of theory when it is simply interpreted as informing practice or solving problems. Theory should also have a role to play in breaking out of traditional categories of understanding and helping to see ourselves and others in a different light. When Benne denies his homosexuality and writes of his "rehabilitation," he is unwittingly reproducing the definition of homosexuality as a disease that needs to be cured. When Stoddard replies that he "can think of no reason why you should not be completely rehabilitated and ready to take over an important assignment in your professional career," he is allowing that diagnosis is the first step to cure, but he, like Benne, is trapped by the unchallenged understanding that homosexuality is a disease to be cured.<sup>40</sup> When the journal remains silent about the deletion of Benne's name, as if it were just another rotation in personnel which conceivably could have been at Benne's own request — it is indicating the way in which debates about homosexuality were off the theory agenda.

The irony in this is that Benne himself was a pragmatist and a communitarian. He identified democracy with consensus-building. Yet in this sad episode, Benne and other decent people, including Stoddard and his supporters in the College and on the journal, were trapped by a consensus of sorts, by the collective assumption about the character flaw of a homosexual identity. In one brief passage in his letter to Stoddard, Benne comes close to challenging the prevailing assumption when he writes that his regular meetings with a psychiatrist have convinced him that "I am not basically a homosexual, *whatever that classification means* (italics ours)." Yet this was no time to theorize about the fluidity of identity, about the problems of the idea of an "essential" self, or about imbedded assumptions of normativity within our discursive frameworks.

#### DOES THEORY PROGRESS?

It is sometimes difficult to understand the subtle advances that are made in the realm of theory, or the way in which a change in how theory is understood can make a difference in the way in which our lives are led. Yet if we look at the Benne episode in the context of the theoretical tools that were available then and now, we can get some idea about how the kind of theory that is available does make a difference to us.

It should be recalled that the dominant theoretical framework of the social sciences during the 1950s was a form of consensus theory, functionalism, or the idea that different standpoints could be made to converge around commonly agreed-upon

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40. Ibid.



practices useful to maintaining the "social and cultural lives of human collectivities."<sup>41</sup> This conception often meant that there was a strong, although sometimes implicit, boundary established between the deviant and the normal, and that, in Michel Foucault's language, internal surveillance mechanisms, institutionalized definitions, and systematic silences were often in place to maintain these boundaries. The 1950s added to this mix the mass hysteria associated with the Red Scare.

Journals such as *Educational Theory* were also affected by these developments as well as by the consensus conception of theory that gave primacy to the usefulness of a practice to the collective social unit. The effect was the largely quietist, abstract, and insular tone characteristic of many of the essays in the journal. To put it bluntly, Benne's situation, tragic though it was, was largely beside the point. At the very best it was a private matter that should have been kept out of the press, and certainly should have had no effect on anyone's decision to hire him. No one would have been served by a quixotic challenge to accepted notions of normality — and certainly not Benne. Thus the prominent consensus notion of theory, the heated political climate, when joined with the vulnerable academic standing of the education disciplines, all contributed to this tone. And, as Foucault, Thomas Kuhn, and other scholars have now noted, one's conception of theory has a great deal to do with the sayable and the unsayable.

The paradigm that governed both Anderson's and Kilpatrick's conceptions of theory was engineering, or planned social change — a paradigm that intrigued Benne as well. For Kilpatrick this took the form of the engineer as problem-solver and change agent. For Anderson, this change required the development of a realm of pure theory, just as the engineer requires the conceptual maps developed by the physicist. This natural science model of theory worked on the individual as well as on the social level and it was clearly evident in Benne's confession of his need for rehabilitation and in President Stoddard's agreement. Yet such a conception of theory, as important as it is, must by its very nature work within the norms that are given to it. Unless those norms are challenged, it can work only with *given* definitions of social and individual improvement. William Connolly captures this limitation in a discussion of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, but the idea works just as well for the engineering models of theory that we are discussing:

The politics of becoming, when it achieves a modicum of success, repositions selected modes of suffering so that they move from an obscure subsistence or marked identity *below* the register of justice to a visible, unmarked place *on it*. In a modern world of justice as fairness between *persons*, this means that modes of being consciously or unconsciously shuffled below normal personhood become modified and *translated into the dense operational rubric of personhood itself through the politics of becoming*. A mode of suffering is thereby moved from below the reach of justice to a place within its purview; and now the language of injury, discrimination, injustice, and oppression can apply more cleanly to it.<sup>42</sup>

41. Percy S. Cohen, "Functional Analysis," in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, ed. Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper (London: Routledge, 1985), 322.

42. William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 63 (emphasis in original).

When Benne remarked that he was not “*basically* homosexual” he was reaching for a conception of theory as interaction that was not available even to someone as gifted as he was in fostering human relations. Connolly writes of this need when he contrasts critical responsiveness with liberal tolerance:

Thus where tolerance implies benevolence towards others and stability of ourselves, critical responsiveness involves active work on our current identities in order to modify the terms of the relationship between us and them. Critical respondents themselves enter into practices of self-modification in the very process of changing their recognition and treatment of the others already in motion. For example, as heterosexuals respond to the politics of becoming by which a previous history of medicalization and demoralization of homosexuality is reconfigured they are also pressed to acknowledge for the first time that heterosexuality is not firmly grounded in nature, the commands of a god, or the automatic outcome of normal sexual development.<sup>43</sup>

The change in the conception of theory reflected in these quotations is subtle, but significant. The medicalization of homosexuality is consistent with an engineering model of social change, one which assumes that problems come well-defined and that theory’s task is to develop the means to solve them. For Kilpatrick the problem was to apply already-known means to already-defined problems. For Anderson the task of theory was to develop the conceptual relations that would eventually enable practice to move ahead more smoothly. Both of these were certainly reasonable enterprises for *Educational Theory* to undertake. Yet Connolly is pointing to something new, an element of human theory that exists alongside these other two. Here the task is to take subliminal suffering, suffering that others can dismiss because the sufferer is not quite normal, or that can only be acknowledged through misrecognition — “I am not basically homosexual” — and to bring into question the very conceptions of normality that allow such dismissal or misrecognition.

By the end of the 1950s, *Educational Theory* had no doubt made large strides toward meeting its goal of promoting “effective discussion of theoretical problems within the educational profession.” However, the consensus conception of theory was still very much intact at the end of the decade. Although Anderson and Kilpatrick differed about the way theory should be represented in the journal, they shared a widely accepted understanding of the role of theory in education. Theory was that which grounded social change, and was conceived as the analogue of engineering. The difference between the two is the difference between someone who views theory from the point of view of the physicist and someone who views it from the point of view of the engineer. Both, however, are restricted views of theory, and each fails to understand that human theory differs from scientific theory and that physics is not always the best model to use when understanding educational affairs. Neither understood that theory about human beings works differently from theories about the physical world, and serves not just to change but to liberate.

While there were, even in the 1950s, books that questioned the psychological effects of conformity to the larger collectivity — *The Lonely Crowd* and *The*

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43. *Ibid.*, 62-63. While a committed religious believer (such as Odeshoo) would likely disagree with Connolly’s assertion that objections to such practices as homosexuality cannot be “grounded in the commands of a god,” he or she could certainly agree upon the importance of “critical responsiveness” and agree that Benne’s removal from the University as a result of behavior confined to his private life was unjustified.

*Organization Man* come to mind<sup>44</sup> — it was not until the Civil Rights movement moved North and the protests to the Vietnam War began that a strong dose of conflict theory began to find academic legitimacy. In recent times, as *Educational Theory* has focused on issues of gender, race, and sexual orientation, and as the ideas of Paulo Friere, Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas, among others, have received some attention in these pages, the conception of theory has been filled out somewhat. Yet if Connolly is correct, and as the ellipsis mark on the cover page of the very first issue suggests, educational theory is always incomplete, and the discourse must be continued.

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44. David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) and William Hollinsworth White, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).