THE ESSENTIALIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN EDUCATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

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By

Steven I. Miller

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the assumptions underlying the Essentialist movement. This was done in the belief that an examination of Essentialism could shed additional light concerning the origin of the movement, as well as its impact on contemporary educational thought.

Within this framework several additional themes were explored. These included the notion that Essentialism draws its philosophical presuppositions from classical idealism and realism; the idea that Essentialism was an outgrowth of larger social and economic forces which in turn shaped much of the thinking of the members of the Essentialist Committee; that the crux of Essentialist educational theory rests on its conception of the "social heritage"; that the development and articulation of Essentialism was left,

principally, to the work of one man, William Chandler Bagley; that certain problems of an organizational nature confronted the Essentialist Committee; and that some of the principles of the original Essentialists are still present in contemporary American education.

Methodology

The methodology of this study consisted exclusively of historical research. All writings available to the writer concerning Essentialism were examined. In addition, original correspondence concerning various aspects of Essentialism was obtained from the files of Dr. William W. Brickman, editor of School and Society. These documents were quoted with Dr. Brickman's permission. The writer also obtained further information on Essentialism from the three surviving members of the original Essentialist Committee, Louis Shores, F. Alden Shaw, and Walter Ryle.

In order to present a point-by-point analysis of Essentialist beliefs, the writer used a system of comparison between the most important Essentialist documents, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education" and "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory." The approach used in this analysis consisted of stating each major proposition as found in the documents, and then analyzing the content of the proposition,

citing reasons for its origin and commenting on the type of evidence used to support the claim.

Conclusions

The study, being descriptive in nature, was concerned primarily with the examination of ideas as presented in a particular body of educational thought. From a critical examination of these ideas, the writer drew several conclusions differing somewhat from previous writings on Essentialism. The conclusions were as follows:

1. Essentialism, although tracing its origins in the philosophical presuppositions of idealism and realism, cannot be thought of as a distinct system of philosophy. Rather, Essentialism is primarily an educational movement dealing in a concrete fashion with such issues as subject matter, sequence of presentation, and transmission of the social heritage.
2. The members of the Essentialist Committee were reacting, in their writings, to the effects of the Depression of the 1930's. As conservative educators, they were distressed at the great social and economic crisis confronting the nation. They were also deeply concerned with the rise of totalitarian states in Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Given these factors, the Essentialist Committee was reacting to Progressive education on the grounds that it was not providing a bulwark against the rapid social changes of the times. The issue, therefore, was not one in which Essentialists and Progressives challenged one another in terms of philosophical beliefs. Rather, it was a confrontation involving the most acceptable methods of perpetuating the social heritage. The points of controversy involved the actual types of teaching practices going on in the public schools.

3. Essentialism had its greatest impact immediately after the founding of the Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education. This impact lasted, in the writer's opinion, for approximately two years after the founding meeting.

4. The formulation of Essentialist ideas was primarily the work of two men, William Chandler Bagley and Michael John Demiashkevich. It was Bagley who was responsible for the writing and publishing of the documents of the Essentialist Committee.

5. It was found that the Essentialist Committee was a loosely formed organization that was held together principally

through the efforts of F. Alden Shaw and William Chandler Bagley.

6. It is the writer's contention that the Essentialist movement gradually lost momentum after the death of one of its key members, Michael John Demiashkevich. Demiashkevich did not sign the original Essentialist Platform on ideological grounds, therefore weakening the overall organizational structure of the Committee.

   The internal organization of the Committee was likewise plagued by a lack of active interest on the part of the other members. In addition, there was no viable financial structure within the organization, causing its quick demise due to a lack of sufficient and consistent publicity.

7. The Essentialists failed to gain the support of a large segment of the population. The organization, consequently, became a type of debating society given to intellectual arguments between itself and the Progressives.

8. The claim that Essentialism is once more an important educational theory in American education must be qualified in some important ways. There has, to be sure, been a recurrence of Essentialist thinking since the late 1950's.

However, it should be remembered that the original Essentialist ideas were formulated in a specific social and economic milieu. The social conditions are not the same today. Consequently, one cannot draw too many parallels between the two times. It is, therefore, somewhat presumptuous to say that Essentialism is the dominant form of educational thought in American education today.

It is more accurate to contend that certain curriculum changes (mostly in the natural and biological sciences) have been implemented in the schools since the 1950's. These curriculum changes do, in part, agree with some of the thinking of the original Essentialists, but in rather a broad context. That is, the original Essentialists would have agreed that the sciences should be included in the curriculum.

9. It was found that there is often a confusion of educational levels when speaking of Essentialism. This confusion of levels has, in turn, often resulted in a misinterpretation of Essentialist ideas. It is the writer's contention that the original Essentialists were concerned with primary education and, by implication, the effects this would have on secondary education. Bagley's primary concern was in

seeing that the "essentials" were given to the children in the primary grades as building stones for further work. The Essentialists' criticisms were directed toward the "activity movement" within the primary grades. This, to them, was where the danger was greatest.

Yet, writers on Essentialism--either in praising or condemning the movement--often speak of Essentialist thinking as being concerned primarily with secondary education. This is not the case.

10. Lastly, it was found that there is a paucity of empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that Essentialist ideas are permeating the entire educational system. It would, likewise, be difficult to gather such information in a completely reliable fashion.

The final phase of the study was concerned with positing a number of recommendations. These recommendations dealt with some possible research problems that might prove to be fruitful for further exploration in this area.

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In any type of writing effort there comes a time when encouragement and support are deeply needed and sincerely appreciated. This is the crucial time when one believes that the goal is within sight, and yet wonders how long the effort must be pursued.

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INTRODUCTION

A significant event in the history of education occurred in 1938. On February 26, 1938, a group of prominent educators[1] gathered in Atlantic City to discuss some of the major problems confronting American education. The group came to be known as the Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education. The term "Essentialist" was first coined by M. Demiashkevich, one of the members of the Committee, and formulated more fully in a volume written by him.[2]

The Committee was formed to combat what it thought to be the drastic inroads of the Progressive education movement. It was specifically reacting to those phases of Progressive education which seemed to be excess. These criticisms centered around the distortion of the original Progressive movement into activities that

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[1]The members of the committee were: William C. Bagley, M. Demiashkevich, Walter H. Ryle, M. L. Shane, F. Alden Shaw (chairman and organizer), Louis Shores and Guy M. Whipple.

[2]M. Demiashkevich, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p. 138.

permitted complete freedom for the student in choosing what "problems" interested him; in the abandonment of traditional subject matter; in the abandonment of grading and vigorous examinations; and, especially, in the neglect of transmitting the social heritage of the country.

There was grave concern by the members of the Committee that American education had reached an all-time low level. This concern was exacerbated by the severity of the Depression and the rapid rise of totalitarian regimes throughout the Western world. Comparisons were made by the Committee to illustrate that American school children compared very unfavorably to their European counterparts.[1] Additional data were gathered to show that problems of American education had occurred because of the development of the "universal" school.[2] In addition, the Committee implied that rising crime rates were at least one of the causal factors resulting from the lowering of standards brought on by the Progressive movement and the universal school.[3] Much criticism was directed to the

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[1] William C. Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," Educational Administration and Supervision, XXIV (April, 1935), 242.

[2] Ibid., p. 243.

[3] William C. Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," Classical Journal, XXXIV (March, 1939), 332-333.

original "transfer experiments"[1] which were in great part responsible for the discrediting of traditional education.

Essentialism, as a definite philosophy of education, has its roots both in classical realism and idealism. It is not, however, a system of philosophy as such, but rather it is concerned with the need to preserve and transmit a definable body of knowledge based on the social heritage and what it conceives of as certain principles of truth. Kneller has stated[2] that the Essentialist position is based on (1) the necessity of viewing learning as hard work and application, (2) realizing that the initiative lies with the teacher rather than the pupil, (3) that the core of education is the absorption of prescribed subject matter, and (4) the school should retain the traditional methods of mental discipline. The main job of the school in this view is the transmission of knowledge. That is the core of any and all educational experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The history of education is primarily concerned with the social, political, and economic forces that have given rise to

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[1]William C. Bagley, Education and Emergent Man (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1934), pp. 82-93.

[2]George F. Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 115.

certain educational thoughts and practices. The history of any educational movement is imbedded in a complex matrix of social ideas that stem from a specific cultural milieu. As these educational ideas become institutionalized and transmitted through the school, an interaction process is set up whereby the school reflects the culture and the culture defines and directs the educational process.

Every educational movement is a vital factor in defining the state of a particular culture at a given point in time. The educational "movement" is a graphic representation of the way men view their society and the world. It represents, in terms of the functionalist, the particular "state" of the sub-groups of a social system.

The Essentialist movement in American education was (and in some respects still is) a vital link in the history of education. It represented the reiteration of certain principles of education that have a long tradition--principles concerning the necessity of transmitting the social heritage in order to preserve social stability and, in the case of the United States, the very foundations of political (and economic) democracy.

The specific research problem will be concerned with the following:

(1) Showing the continuity of thought within the history of education leading up to the actual formation of the Essentialist Platform, that is, tracing and explaining the philosophical assumptions upon which this movement rests;

(2) Stating generalizations as to what social, educational and political factors immediately preceded the movement, and attempting to specify the causal links between the rise of Essentialism and American society in the 1920's and 1930's;

(3) Examining critically the contents of the actual Essentialist Platform and delineating what their position was, what evidence they presented for it, and the types of reasoning used to arrive at their conclusions;

(4) Criticizing the strengths and weaknesses of the Essentialist position; and

(5) Attempting to substantiate, through historical research, the hypothesis: Essentialism is a dominant philosophy in contemporary American education.

Need for the Study

In order to view education as a total process, it is necessary to know something of its history. Every new idea or innovation

within the field has, in some sense, an historical precedent. The history of educational ideas is on-going and never static. All ideas, philosophies, or movements within education are connected in some logical fashion. Without the historical explication of these ideas, however, the study of education becomes fragmented and distorted. Historical continuity is needed in order to lay claim to education as a body of interrelated and continuous knowledge. Likewise, any proposed innovations or conclusions drawn from empirical research can only be implemented in a meaningful way if they are placed within the complementary context of historical investigation. Fred N. Kerlinger makes the point when he states:

> Without good history and good historians, a discipline can lose perspective, not to mention the serious consequences on the intellectual development of the students of education of this neglect, even derogation, in education of the philosophy and history of education. Rigorous historiography is needed, just as good scientific research is needed. [1]

The present study will be an attempt to investigate the origins and significance of one important movement within the history of education. It is hoped that a type of integration of ideas, causes and generalizations will result wherein one can see, within a broader cultural context, the reasons why the Essentialist movement developed.

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[1] Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 700.

The primary need for this study, however, is to demonstrate that once a movement in education is begun, its effects are present in some form for a long period. In addition, there is a need to show that educational movements may be dormant for a while and then reappear when certain social and cultural factors emerge. This, indeed, is the case for Essentialism: it has now, once again, taken its place on the contemporary educational scene.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study will encompass the tools of historiography and descriptive sociology. As Borg states, "Historical research is the systematic and objective location, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions concerning past events."[1] The conventional methods of historiography will be employed in this investigation. That is, (1) the examination of primary and secondary sources, and (2) the use of notation that follows a logically consistent order, and is concerned with relating facts to generalization and causative factors within the study.

The specific use of historical method is supported by Borg when he states,

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[1]Walter R. Borg, Educational Research: An Introduction (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1963), p. 188.

> The historical study of an educational idea or institution gives us a perspective that can do much to help us understand our present educational system, and this understanding in turn can help to establish a sound basis for further progress and improvements. Historical research also can give us an insight into human behavior that can be very valuable in arriving at practical solutions for educational problems.[1]

The writing will take place in a sequential pattern where information will be gathered for a chapter, researched, ordered, written and integrated with the next unit. The emphasis will always be on the relation between ideas, rather than the exclusive reporting of facts. Kerlinger summarizes the approach here when he states,

> Obviously historical research is important in education. Outside of the intrinsic interest in history, it is necessary to know and understand educational accomplishments and developments of the past in order to gain a perspective of present and possibly future directions.[2]

The need for the study is both personal and social. On the personal level, the writer is attempting to investigate an educational topic that has been a source of interest and curiosity for a period of time. This curiosity stems from prior investigations into the nature of Essentialism. This initial inquiry brought to light the fact that Essentialism is a little understood and frequently maligned theory of education.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, p. 698.

Further investigation revealed that only one major philosopher of education (Theodore Brameld) has commented in depth on the historical and philosophical origins of Essentialism. Yet, even in this instance, there is not a detailed study of Essentialist writings and related documents. Furthermore, it is the writer's opinion that Brameld has not presented a completely fair and balanced picture of Essentialist thought.

In addition to having a keen personal interest in Essentialism, the writer chose this topic for broader social reasons. It was felt that this writing could bring additional data and clarity to the Essentialist position. This would be accomplished by compiling all known resources on Essentialism, and also documents that are not generally quoted in writings on Essentialism. The principal social aim of the study, however, was to present a critical analysis of the primary documents of Essentialism. The analysis will attempt to better clarify the exact nature of Essentialism, and present evidence to show that Essentialism was formulated in a specific cultural context. This cultural context involved the expansion of the universal school and the social upheavals of the Depression of 1929.

The final aim was to support the hypothesis that Essentialism was again an important educational theory, especially in the secondary schools.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE ESSENTIALIST MOVEMENT

The basic purpose of this chapter will be to set forth the philosophical assumptions underlying the Essentialist movement. The first part of the presentation will deal with that portion of Essentialism that is grounded in classical realism and idealism. The final portion of this chapter will be concerned with a brief sketch of the correspondence and coherence theories of truth. The latter portion follows logically from the former and is needed to establish a context for the entire movement.

At this stage a fairly technical presentation is necessary. It is necessary in that Essentialism is a complex doctrine and its complexity can only be unravelled if it is seen in the light of certain philosophical assumptions. For these assumptions we must turn to technical philosophy. This will have a tendency to lead us into several areas of inquiry that may first appear to be tangential to the primary discussion of an educational movement.

This form of presentation is an important prerequisite in understanding the specifics of the movement as they later came to be developed and implemented.

Essentialism as Related to Idealism and Realism

Essentialism has been succinctly defined by Theodore Brameld in these words: "In briefest compass, it views the established beliefs and institutions of our modern heritage as not only real but true, and not only true but good."[1] He goes on to say that, "Indeed, one of the basic characteristics of essentialism is a wide eclecticism, typified by the presence within its camp of both professed idealist and professed realist."[2] Although Brameld is not sympathetic to Essentialism as such (we shall examine the reasons in a later chapter), he does make the important observation that the movement can be traced to both realism and idealism, and that at several points there is a synthesis of the two streams of thought.

At this point, let us look briefly at some of the proponents of idealism. This will be done in an historical perspective with a

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[1] Theodore Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955), p. 254.

[2] Ibid., p. 204.

summary of some of the main points of the system. As Brameld indicates,[1] Essentialist doctrines have their base in classical antiquity, but more directly in the world-view developed since the Renaissance and encompassing the nineteenth century. The greatest proponents of the idealist position could be generally listed as Rene Descartes (1724-1804), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and George Hegel (1770-1831). Granted, many additional philosophers could be added to the list, but the ones listed represent the idealist position in the era that had the greatest influence on subsequent Essentialist ideas.

Descartes was primarily interested in establishing principles for defining the nature of reality. He thoroughly examined the prevailing philosophical doctrines of his day and found them all lacking, especially in clarifying the old problem of the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge. His problem was to solve this riddle, which took the form of the mind-body dualism, by establishing a method of knowing that assumes an almost mathematical perfection. As Copleston says, "he aspired to establish the true philosophy which would rest on pure reason and not on past tradition, and which would be free from the limitations of time and space."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 208-212.

[2] Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. 4: Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Liebniz (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1963), p. 160.

To arrive at this "true philosophy," Descartes began with the method of doubt.[1] That is, he tried to deduce that knowledge which was absolutely certain. He finally concluded that the only thing of any real certainty was the fact of his own existence as presented in his famous affirmation of "cogito, ergo sum"--"I think, therefore I am." From this position he went on, through an elaborate analysis, to show that his doubting implied a more perfect Being who was beyond doubt, and that this Being must be God.

The point here is the formulation of one of the most important bases of idealism--the idea of the primacy of the self.[2] Descartes' philosophy set some of the important foundations of idealism in that it (1) postulated the reality of the self as a firsthand immediate experience, and (2) that the self was conceived of as the starting point in defining and translating experience.[3]

Godfried Wilhelm von Liebniz's complicated writings made a further contribution to the philosophy of idealism. The principal point of interest here is his concept of monadism.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 100-104.

[2] J. Donald Butler, Idealism in Education (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 6.

[3] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

To Liebniz, monads were the sample units that made up the universe. They had these basic properties: (1) each was different from the other, (2) each changed at a different rate, (3) each varied in the degree of complexity, (4) they were spiritual substances, and (5) the highest monad was conceived of as God.

Again it should be stressed that Liebniz's thinking provided another link in the structure of idealist philosophy, and that this philosophy was responsible in interpreting the world in a certain manner. This interpretation provided one of the cornerstones of an educational philosophy that was eventually translated into some of the tenets of the Essentialist movement.

Returning to Liebniz and his contribution to idealism, Butler states, "his monadology is idealistic in that the monads are conceived as points of mental force and not physical. His treatments of human selves as spirits and God as a spirit without limits are both important items in the metaphysics of Idealism."[1]

Immanuel Kant has been considered one of the greatest lights of philosophy and of idealism. His main focus was the examination of every conceivable function of the mind, and the part that "a priori" judgments played in analyzing the nature of reality. In The Critique of Pure Reason, The Critique of Practical Reason and

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[1] Ibid., p. 17.

The Critique of Judgment, he sets out to respectively analyze the a priori statements that form our synthetic statements, our moral judgments, and our aesthetic and teleological judgments.[1] Butler adequately summarized Kant's contributions to idealist philosophy and lists them as (1) Kant's belief in universal moral laws, (2) man's obligation to follow that moral law, (3) the belief in individual freedom, (4) his belief in the immortality of the soul, and (5) his belief in the existence of God.[2]

A synthesis, and yet a new conception of idealist thought, was established by George Hegel. Hegel's idealism was grand in scope. He was interested in developing a purely deductive theory of reality. In this regard, he postulated the idea of pure thought existing even before the creation of the world. The idea is a dynamic force that is manifested in the world and is developed both in space and time. "The Idea developing in space and nature . . . the Idea developing in time is Spirit."[3] Reality then is a unity of thought for Hegel. It is the objectification of the Spirit or Mind within the world.

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[1] Copleston, Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz, p. 70.

[2] Butler, Idealism in Education, pp. 26-27.

[3] G. W. F. Hegel, Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History, translated and Introduction by R. S. Hartman (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1953), p. xii.

Hegel believed that all creation existed within the Idea but in a form that had to be gradually worked out. This struggling was necessary for the Idea to resolve itself and once more become united with its source, the Infinite Mind. This constant struggle is known to us as History. "History, thus, is the progressing self determination of the Idea, the progressing self-development of Spirit."[1]

But in this struggle there emerges a regular pattern of events. Hegel named this the dialectic. The dialectic follows in a complementary and logical order. That is, there is a thesis or the Idea, the antithesis or Nature, and a new synthesis or Mind. The dialectic arises from the paradoxical nature of thought and the inherent conflict it produces. Yet this conflict is necessary in the steady unfoldment of History.

Within this brief scheme, it may be seen that Hegel's contribution to idealism lies in the notion of the Infinite Mind manifesting itself in the world.[2] At bottom, the world itself is an idea; it exists in the Mind of the creator. This is an important principle of idealism and one that undergirds its entire system of metaphysics.

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[1] Ibid., p. xvi.

[2] Butler, Idealism in Education, p. 34.

The Underlying Assumptions of Idealism

Within the idealist tradition are numerous philosophies and points of view. The preceding brief sketch was only by way of introduction, attempting to touch on merely some of the better known names associated with idealism. One could speak of the idealism of Plato, or Berkeley, or Spinoza or the more recent idealist philosophers such as Bradley. The works of the Greek idealists, such as Plato, were not included in the idealist tradition for two basic reasons. First, there was not ample space to give a satisfactory treatment of these ideas, and, secondly, the Essentialist tradition relating to idealism is most generally found in the authors of the Renaissance and, roughly, the following two centuries. Thus Essentialist educators would look to writers such as Locke and Hegel, rather than concentrate on the Greeks or Romans as the perennialist would.

The main emphasis here is to examine the common themes of idealism and eventually relate these to the basic principles of the Essentialist movement. But first it is necessary to state some common idealist presuppositions. Thus idealism conceives the world and man as primarily spiritual. Man is thought of as being a unique spiritual animal.

The idealist theme of man as a unique spiritual animal is best presented in a contemporary perspective by the idealist Herman H. Horne. As he states it, "Idealism is the conclusion that the universe is an expression of intelligence and will, that the enduring substance of the world is of the nature of mind, that the material is explained by the mental."[1]

The grounds advanced by Horne[2] for idealism may be looked upon as an adequate formulation for the entire position. These principles may be stated as: (1) The mind must be viewed as the ultimate explanation of all. All our striving, working and thinking has its source in the mind and is dependent upon mind. (2) Mind is independent of matter. The mind has meaning; it experiences pleasures and pain; the mind possesses ideas of what is good, beautiful and true; and mind perceives color, tones, and so for the while matter is not capable of this. (3) The origin of mind is another mind. The position generally holds that matter, no matter in what form, could not be the originator of mind. (4) It is not possible to have an object without a subject. That is, there must be someone who is

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[1]Herman H. Horne, "Philosophies of Education," An Idealistic Philosophy of Education, the Forty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Bloomington, Illinois: School Publishing Co., 1942), p. 139.

[2]Ibid., pp. 141-152.

perceiving the object and this is a person with a mind. This is the noted idealist position of "esse est praecipi"--to be is to be perceived. (5) Man is convinced that his personality is a reality. The reality of the personality is fundamental to any idealist position. (6) Man has the conviction of his personal freedom, even though he may deny it at times. (7) Idealism supports the notion that man's self is a permanent part of his being, that his self is immortal.

This is, then, the fundamental position of philosophical idealism. This form of idealism has had a direct influence on the Essentialist doctrines concerning subject matter, content, sequence, the role of the teacher and the perpetuation of certain institutions. But this emphasis on the ideal in Essentialist thinking has been balanced by thinkers in the tradition of philosophical realism. Both streams must be examined, therefore. There is throughout the Essentialist movement an interplay between these two schools of thought. We must now examine some of the assumptions of the realist position in traditional philosophy.

Basic Assumptions of Philosophical Realism

The realist differs basically from the idealist in his conception of reality. To the idealist reality is a spiritual or mind substance. There are no objects in the world that have any reality outside of a mind perceiving them. It is the mind that gives objects

(if indeed they do exist, and this cannot be known with any great certainty) their appearance of extension, quality and space.

The realist takes a contrary position. Although there are a variety of realist positions, most of them center around common sense notions usually referred to as "naive realism." Hospers[1] has summarized this position in five steps. He maintains realism of this type believes: (1) in the existence of a world of physical objects, (2) that statements about these objects can be made known through the senses, (3) the objects of perception have an independent status--they are there even if there is no one to perceive them, (4) our senses can be counted upon as giving a fairly accurate description of the world, and (5) the sense-impressions we have are produced by the objects themselves.

For the realist, then, there is a world that can be known to man primarily through the data of his senses. Much of the history of philosophy has been taken up with arguments as to the exact nature of our sense-impressions and their role in producing reliable knowledge. Our purpose, however, is to see how the divergent views of realism and idealism could both be incorporated into the educational ideals of Essentialism.

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[1] John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 494.

It will be sufficient here to view briefly one of the chief exponents of realism, namely, John Locke (1632-1704). Locke maintained that there are physical objects existing independently in the world. However, the ways in which we interpret them through our senses are in many ways dissimilar to their actual form (whatever that form may be, since we have no way of knowing this with any assurance). Locke distinguished two distinct aspects of our sense-impressions. The first aspect he termed the "primary qualities" of any object. These qualities were composed of those elements that were capable of being measured, such as size, weight, and shape. In addition to these, there were further qualities of an object which he labelled "secondary." These qualities, such as color, taste, touch, and smell, were secondary in the sense of producing the power of transmitting these ideas. The secondary qualities are not inherent in the object itself, but only produce certain sensations on the mind. "The experiences produced in us by secondary qualities, then, are qualities of an object only in a derived sense; for the object does not really have them. . . ."[1]

Locke left some weakness in his position. For instance, he could not arrive at a solution as to what kind of "substance" held objects together, or how the mind transformed simple sense-data

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[1] Ibid., p. 497.

into complex ideas. Nevertheless, he set forth one of the best positions for representative realism as a whole. As will be mentioned later, the impact of his philosophy was felt in the broader areas of social philosophy, politics and economics.

The realist, therefore, has as his basic intellectual orientation the idea of a universe governed by laws which can be apprehended through the senses. He further believes that objects can be perceived independently of the mind. That is, sense-experiences of everyday life are more than simply extensions of our minds. There are objects in this world, in other words, that have their own reality.

Brameld nicely summarizes the position of realism as derived by several philosophers:

> Nature is primarily self-evident reality, a starting point in philosophizing . . . the primary qualities of experience exist in the physical world. . . . There is something that produces my sensations and perceptions . . . which cannot be known to be mental in character. . . . Mind is like a mirror receiving images from the physical world. . . . The mind of a child is similar to a blank sheet of paper upon which the world proceeds to write its impressions. [1]

As a summary contrast to the realist position, Brameld lists some of the basic principles of idealism. These he enumerates as follows:

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 207.

> Ultimate reality is of the same substance as ideas. . . . Behind the phenomenal world is an infinite Spirit which is both sub-structure and creator of the cosmos. . . . The existence of God is made necessary by certain factors in selfhood. . . . The self is the prime reality. . . . By examining his own ideas and testing their consistency, man can achieve truth. . . . The self reads meaning and unity into the objective world.[1]

These positions have been summarized in order to show not only the contrast, as such, in the ideas of realism and idealism, but also to indicate that the essence of both stances is to be found in how they approach epistemology, that is, the theory of knowledge. It is in the epistemological sense of these two streams of philosophy that the Essentialist movement draws its fundamental support. For the Essentialist movement was primarily an educational defense of certain practices and beliefs as found in the more traditional philosophic outlooks. Since Essentialism is primarily an educational theory, its main focus would, of course, be on the nature and meaning of knowledge. Knowledge is directly connected with the question of what is truth, and the search for truth is the focal concern of epistemology. We must therefore examine some of the classical theories of knowledge. These ways of knowing are the crux of the Essentialist movement. It is here that the synthesis of realism and idealism is attempted. Let us examine these methods of viewing the world.

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[1] Ibid.

The Correspondence Theory of Knowledge

The correspondence theory of truth most nearly accords with the realist position in philosophy. This theory maintains that truth, or knowledge, has some correspondence with the world around us. For instance, my belief that I am writing on a table corresponds to the fact that there is actually a table in front of me. As Brameld states it, "we should note carefully that the correspondence theory of knowledge . . . holds that, in general, what we know to be true is a product of an agreement obtaining between the fact, relations, processes, and laws of the objective world and our individual judgments about these phenomena."[1]

It should be pointed out that the correspondence theory of truth is not as simple as it appears on the surface. Indeed it is plagued by numerous difficulties. These difficulties have fascinated philosophers for generations. Basically, the correspondence theory suffers in its attempt to interpret the nature of sense data, or perception. Consequently several difficulties of a perplexing nature arise: (1) When one speaks of comething "corresponding," he is using language to convey the idea. The language used is an assertion in terms of a proposition. (Technically, a proposition is a sentence that purports to report a "state of affairs" that exists. If in fact it does exist, the proposition is true; if it does not, then the proposition is false.) Now the difficulty comes

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[1] Ibid., p. 225.

in talking about propositions as separate entities and divorcing their expression from the entity expressing them.[1] (2) Or we may believe that there is a "picture" in our head that corresponds to the object, and that a true judgment is made because one image corresponds to the other.[2] But again we rely on words to express images, and words do not adequately express images. There may be wide divergencies between two people attempting to speak of a certain image. The technical point here is that sense data may not convey an accurate picture of reality.

In the camp of the correspondence theory of truth are many shades of realists; however, two stand out: the neo-realist and the critical realist. The neo-realist is close to the behaviorist and naturalist in assuming that our knowledge comes primarily through sense data. The critical realist, on the other hand, is more in the spirit of Locke, insofar as Locke was equally concerned with the process by which primary and secondary qualities of objects are formed into simple and complex ideas. For Locke, the formation of knowledge was more than the simple process of data impinging on our senses.

Even though the connection between the realist position and the correspondence theory of truth is a complex one, there are some common elements that give form to the position. And it is these

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[1] A. C. Ewing, The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy, Collier Books (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 60.

[2] Ibid., p. 61.

common elements that are implied in the Essentialist educational theory. Brameld states the common inferences running through the myriad forms of the correspondence theory.

1. The first inference is that realist psychologies and philosophies are inclined to accept a more or less completely mechanistic world, within which human beings exist and function. It is a world governed by the cause-effect determinations of physical and chemical processes and most accurately conveyed to the mind through mathematically formulated laws.
2. The second inference is the basic assumption underlying the correspondence theory--namely that the "stamping in" of stimuli to responses to stimuli provides reliable knowledge. The "mind" is exposed to this environment in much the same way as a camera plate is exposed to light.
3. The third inference is that the correspondence theory of knowledge is usually equally appropriate to the theories of the idealist and realist. For both, the universe of antecedent order is the source of all we know; both the realist and idealist assume a pre-existent and cosmic source of truth with which it is the business of the mind to correspond.[1]

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, pp. 225-226.

Although a link can be seen between the positions of idealism and realism, it is necessary, nevertheless, to examine the complementary theory of truth, the coherence theory. This is essential in that it has a somewhat closer affinity with idealism; and, as has been pointed out, this philosophical stance is equally important in understanding the foundations of the Essentialist movement in American education.

The Coherence Theory of Truth

The coherence theory of truth views the nature of knowledge, again, in somewhat of a different light. Whereas the correspondence theory was concerned with relationships between judgments and objects, coherence is based on the validity, or internal consistency, of propositions. This is basically a deductive approach to truth using such devices as syllogistic reasoning. The principal aim of this theory is consistency and validity. It is not so much concerned with objective fact. Implied in this theory is the notion that all of nature is a coherent expression of experience. Indeed, to give meaning to experience is to look for its inherent consistency. Thus the philosopher Blanshard states,

> Hence at any given time the degree of truth in our experience as a whole is the degree of system it has achieved. The degree of truth of a particular proposition is to be judged in the first instance by its coherence with experience as a whole, ultimately by its coherence with that further whole, all comprehensive and fully articulated, in which thought can come to rest. [1]

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[1] Brand Blanshard, "Coherence as the Nature of Truth," in Readings in the Theory of Knowledge, ed. by J. V. Canfield and F. H. Donnell, Jr. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), pp. 287-288.

By way of further example, the coherence theory is concerned with the type of validity found in mathematical or syllogistic reasoning. Thus the mathematical expressions A = B and B = C, therefore A = C, is a form of coherence that follows logically. If coherence is to be established, two criteria must be met. First, all facts that are being dealt with must be included; and secondly, the ideas must be ordered in a non-contradictory manner.[1]

An important point of concern here is the relation of the coherence theory to the epistemology of idealism, and, then by implication, to the Essentialist movement. Kattsoff connects the epistemological and ontological threads when he states,

> Truth must be a property of our ideas, since all that we know are these ideas and never any external, hypothetical thing-in-itself. Since it is thinking that discovers the order, arrangement and system in the reality that is given us and since thinking results in ideas and the ideas cannot be compared to something that is not ideas, truth lies in the coherence of these ideas.[2]

Thus, in its fundamental approach, the coherence theory of truth lies within the idealist framework. This is significant for it provides an added link in the pattern of knowledge relating to the Essentialist movement. That is, we can see a pattern emerging (although eclectic) between idealism and the coherence theory of

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[1] Louis O. Kattsoff, Elements of Philosophy (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 168.

[2] Ibid.

truth. And, as has been mentioned, there are points of contact between the two. This gives the Essentialist movement a valid basis for its own claims to existence.

Thus the central point of the theory of coherence is its emphasis on the wholeness necessary in any systems of thought. Ideas are not fragmented bits of knowledge. They are elements in a broader pattern of understanding. One of the most perfect models of the coherence theory is the type of a system constructed by Hegel or Descartes. For Descartes, the most complete system of knowledge was the type formed around deductive thinking, especially in such disciplines as geometry. Within geometry, certain theorems are put forth; from these theorems proofs are deduced, one following from the others, until the problem is solved.

For Hegel, the universe had an internal logic or coherence of its own. As Kneller says, "for an absolute idealist like Hegel, knowledge is valid to the extent that it forms a system. The more comprehensive the system and the more consistent the ideas it embraces, the more truth it may be said to possess."[1] The mental substance that supports the universe expresses itself in terms of the dialectic. History, itself, is a form of unfolding logic that is the grand example of the coherence theory of truth.

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[1]Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, p. 35.

Yet, as with any system of knowledge, the coherence theory has its weaknesses. In very brief fashion they may be listed as follows: (1) If truth is defined according to coherence, there may be the possibility of defining it in terms of itself. Truth must be defined also in terms of something objective.[1] (2) It is assumed that the "mind" is the ordering principle of truth, yet the perception of stimuli may be the crucial ordering factor. (3) There may be a complete system of coherent ideas. Yet the whole system might be false, as in the coherence presented in such fables as Alice in Wonderland.[2]

Thus it can be seen that traditional systems of knowledge have their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose here has been to outline their main approaches in order to establish at least two principal ways in which men view the universe. These methods have direct educational value. For they view the nature of reality in a specific context, and from this context are derived the social, political, and economic ideas that in turn form the basis of educational philosophy. The next task will be to summarize, in a short historical sketch, the social milieu in which both these philosophies and their respective epistemological derivations were expressed.

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[1] Ewing, The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy, p. 62.

[2] Kattsoff, Elements of Philosophy, p. 169.

The Social Background of Essentialism

As opposed to such educational philosophies as perrenialism, Essentialism has a relatively recent past. As Brameld summarizes it,

> Essentialism is above all a modern theory--a product of the Renaissance centuries. In place of an ancient and medieval absolutism symbolized by the unchallengeable, dogmatic authority of the Church, modern essentialist philosophy aims to provide a systemitized, unified conception of man and the universe that will be as appropriate as possible to modern needs and institutions. [1]

This systematized conception of man and his place in the universe was formalized during the Renaissance and the century following. This was an age of both humanistic and scientific discoveries. Within this period can be included such men as Copernicus (1473-1543), who developed the heliocentric theory of the universe; Kepler (1571-1630), dealing with the latent force of inertia and its transformation into mechanical energy; Galileo (1564-1641), who viewed nature in terms of events capable of being deduced through mathematics; and Newton (1642-1727), who revolutionized the theory of the universe by conceiving it in strictly mechanistic terms.

Within the humanist tradition, but mirroring the profound changes of the age, were men like Erasmus (1466-1536), Comenius

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 206.

(1592 - 1670) and Locke (1632 - 1704). Erasmus was, perhaps, one of the most noted intellectuals, especially in theological matters, in the beginning of the sixteenth century. In terms of the new humanism, he advocated the training of teachers in the psychological understanding of the child, the development of new curriculums for the changing times, and the fostering of an international outlook. Comenius was one of the greatest of Renaissance educators. One of his greatest contributions was the realization that knowledge can be gained through the senses. Accordingly, he wrote textbooks using illustrations and substituting the vernacular for the Latin, then still predominantly in use. Locke's significance as a social thinker was in the political and educational developments stemming from his philosophy. His theory of sense data as being the raw material for ideas implied that knowledge was the product of man's environment, and that absolutist ideas of the universe were now outmoded. His philosophy gave great impetus to the theory that knowledge was for the growth of a well-rounded personality. He advocated education based on the critical use of reason and observation, the teaching of languages by conversation, stress on such subjects as the sciences, geography, astronomy and mathematics, and the cultivation of the manual arts.[1]

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[1]Robert Ulich, History of Educational Thought (New York: American Book Co., 1945), p. 208.

These were times of great change in every facet of life. The basis of a new social order was being laid, a social order which was founded upon empirical science and deductive mathematical systems. These new attitudes filtered down to other areas of human concern, especially politics and industry. Monarchical absolutism was giving way to at least rudimentary forms of parliamentary representation; the use of the vernacular was creating the concept of a nation-state having fixed boundaries and a common culture; and, finally, there arose the notion of a system of economics based on discernable mathematical laws.

Brameld gives a good synopsis of the prevailing climate of the time when he says,

> At the same time that the processes of nature were being subjected to scientific explanation, thinkers were hard at work exploring social and individual processes and attempting to explain them by comparable principles. Thus, Adam Smith and his associates sought to formulate economics and political laws with the same finality and regularity that they ascribed to the natural world. Hume and others prepared the ground for an equally inclusive science of mental processes . . . a psychology that would explain the phenomena of the mind in terms as objective as those of modern chemistry or physics. [1]

Thus both idealism and realism were transformed from strictly metaphysical and epistemological outlooks to views which encompassed social, political and economic phenomena.

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 265.

We have been attempting to show that the foundations of any particular "philosophy" of education have their deeper roots in more classical philosophic points of view. The types of world view exemplified in educational programs reflect a larger scope of experiences. These experiences are codified and passed on in accordance with how a group of people view reality. The point is that the outlook, although reflecting particular social or economic positions, is based in the first instance within philosophy. The principles of educational psychology, for instance, are derivative, in most part, of a nineteenth century mechanistic world view. Theories of "learning" have their genesis in a form of sense-data impinging on the senses that may be traced back to the philosophy of John Locke.

As will be pointed out shortly, the Essentialist movement, or position, is an interplay of the world views embodied in the classical idealist and realist positions. This point is worth repeating, for these two ways of knowing provide the cultural context for Essentialism.

Another way of stating this is to view both a philosophic tradition and an educational system as being products of a specific cultural pattern. Brameld, in a recent volume, stresses this emphasis by saying,

> Thus culture is man's all embracing achievement. More than this, it is uniquely his achievement. For, while other animals

> possess the instinctive ability to organize societies, no other animal is capable of constructing culture. The age-old quest of philosophers for a definition of man's essence may thus be answered now in a fresh and scientifically supportable way: man is that species of animal alone capable of culture building.[1]

The Essentialist movement, then, must be viewed in this cultural context: the product of men's thinking about reality and truth from the Renaissance to the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Given this background, the next task will be to view Essentialism in terms of the individual, the school and society. Again these views will be derivative, in some part, of those schools of philosophy previously outlined. There will necessarily be emphasis once more on the nature of knowledge. For this concept forms the core of the Essentialist position, and from it Essentialism draws its views as to the formation of the nature, mind and character of the individual.

The question now confronting us is the one posed by Meno to Socrates:

> Can you tell me whether (excellence) can be taught or is acquired by practice, not teaching; or if neither by practice nor by learning, whether it comes to men by nature or in some other way (such as luck or divine gift).[2]

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[1]Theodore Brameld, Education for the Emerging Age (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 114.

[2]W. R. M. Lamb, Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Enthydemus (New York: G. P. Putman and Sons, 1924), p. 265.

CHAPTER II

THE SPECIFIC IDEAS OF ESSENTIALISM

The purpose of this chapter will be to provide a background of Essentialist beliefs concerning three areas: (1) the nature of society, (2) the nature of the individual, and (3) the Essentialist position in relation to the school and society. The analysis will, once again, follow the broad pattern outlined by Theodore Brameld, but new elements will be added to the discussion and differing conclusions drawn where deemed necessary.

This part of the presentation follows logically from the former. The contention was made that Essentialism is a broad and eclectic point of view. It was further stated that, in order to understand any educational movement in depth, it is necessary to look for an explanation in philosophy. That is, one must look for primary causes (in a philosophical sense) and further examine the historical and cultural milieu in which it arose. Consequently, some exposition was given in regard to Essentialism's common core in classical

idealism and realism. This was followed by an exposition in which Essentialism's cultural context was set forth.

The task now will be to extend the philosophical and historical analysis of Essentialism into the realms of the state, individual and school.

The Essentialist View of Society and the Social Heritage

The educational Essentialist is foremost concerned with the perpetuation of the social heritage. This in turn implies a certain outlook about society in general. Brameld puts the position well when he states:

> A common character of the essentialist position may, however, be adduced from the literature: since society is integral with reality as a whole it is also integral with and subject to the same spiritual or physical universalities as other aspects of reality are--universalities of law, order, custom, which it is the primary duty of education to disclose and perpetuate.[1]

The key concept in the Essentialist's view of society is discernible uniformity--be it spiritual or physical. This, once again, leads us into the idealist-realist philosophies.

To the idealist, society is a spiritual entity, the unfoldment of a mental or spiritual plan. The idealist conception of society is

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 254.

almost one of "natural law." This view holds that there are spiritually given "natural laws" that are universal and not subject to man's caprice. In other words, man's social life is a microcosm of the greater Infinite macrocosm. Men gather in groups and form societies, according to this view, in order that there may be a collective expression of the self. Society, in whatever form it takes, is the manifestation of a "group-mind" that is in a particular stage of evolution to the Infinite.

For the Essentialist with idealist leanings, society can be understood in terms of certain universals that are applicable to all men. The contemporary idealist Hocking expresses the theory in these words:

> . . . the authority of society is derived. . . . Society can expect every man to do his duty, on one condition: that it speaks for a divine will, which expects every man to do his duty. It is this being beyond society which provides the staying power for a flagging conscience and a flagging love. . . . God is the law of a normal social life.[1]

At times, the Essentialist-idealist does not make references to a transcendental Being. His position concerning society takes, rather, a different course. This is usually an appeal to some type of universal ethical norm. In this regard, Kant's moral dictum is

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[1]W. E. Hocking, Science and the Idea of God (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 83, quoted in Theodore Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 229.

often employed. As Bertrand Russell states it, "an act only has moral merit (according to Kant) when it is performed because the moral law enjoins it."[1] Kant's influence, especially in the realm of ethics, is still a potent force in the Essentialist's conception of the social order. The ultimate form of this position lies along the grand lines set down by Hegel. In speaking of the nature of the state, he says:

> The definite content which receives this universal form and is contained in the concrete actuality is the spirit of the people. This spiritual content is something definite, firm, solid, completely exempt from caprice, the particularities, the whims of individuality, of chance. This spiritual content then constitutes the essence of the individual as well as that of the people.[2]

This manifestation of universal laws, having a spiritual origin, is the fundamental concept in the thinking of Essentialists with idealist tendencies. Let us now examine the Essentialist-realist position on the nature of society.

Essentialism and the Realist Conception of Society

The Essentialist with realist leanings views society in rather different terms than his idealist counterpart. Although they

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[1] Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 645.

[2] G. W. F. Hegel, Reason in History, p. 52. (My emphasis.)

have fundamental differences, they do agree on the necessity of finding some type of universals, universals that will give order and stability to the social setting. Both are searching for lasting patterns that will direct the course of human behavior, the idealist thinking this direction is increased closeness and understanding of the Infinite, the realist believing that increased order and rationality (in the scientific sense) is the ultimate goal.

Those Essentialists with a realist background conceive of the social order in Lockian terms, that being some type of "contract" between citizens and rulers that forms the basis of the state, or social order. The basis of the "contract" has three parts: (1) a known body of law for the adjudication of disputes arising between the citizens, (2) the guaranteed impartiality of those who judge, and (3) a recognized power to enforce the decisions of the judge.[1]

The Essentialist-realist is searching for a society based on predictable laws that are akin to the findings of natural science. The task, for the Essentialist, is to find the causal link between the individual and the society that he forms. The central question of the Essentialist-realist is, "How can I discover through reason and the methods of natural science the basis for the origin and perpetuation

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[1]John Locke, Locke Selections, edited by Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1928), p. xxix.

of any given society?" Frederick Breed, a philosophical and educational realist, sees the relationship of the school and society in these terms:

> Truth is defined as the body of knowledge of the highest certainty. The teacher would become a knowledge specialist for the state. The school would be enlisted in the service of the state as an organ of social investigation and instruction. . . . It would be conducted for the purpose of developing a keen social intelligence, ability to think effectively about the problems of society.[1]

This attitude of scientific certainty (even in the social sciences) is the major objective of the Essentialist-realist. For him the school can mirror the society, and it is the function of the school to change institutions. As Breed says, "the school also has another function, that of contributing to the improvement of social institutions."[2] This type of improvement comes about through attempting to look at society as a body of knowable generalizations. These generalizations would consist of those facts that can be ascertained about any particular society (and its corresponding system of beliefs).

In the realist conception, therefore, the relation of school and society becomes one of "interaction." The state and the school

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[1] Frederick S. Breed, Education and the New Realism (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 184.

[2] Ibid., p. 185.

complement one another in attempting to implement the scientific outlook. Thus Breed maintains, "hypotheses are legitimate in the classroom only if carefully labeled so as not to be confused with verifiable results."[1]

John Wild, a contemporary realist, states clearly the realist conception of the school and society. In searching for a type of stable knowledge through which societies can be understood, he says,

> Such knowledge, especially that which treats of human nature, can provide us with immutable and trustworthy principles for the guidance of individual and social action. All men share common traits which determine vague tendencies in every child. The invariable, universal pattern of action, individual as well as social, required for the completion of human nature is called the moral law or natural law. By disciplined study of human nature and the events of history, this knowledge may be increased and clarified. Such knowledge is the only trustworthy guide for human action.[2]

The Essentialist, of either philosophical leaning, is vitally concerned with establishing a solid foundation for the social heritage. The social heritage consists of the cumulative experiences of the race. It is a body of beliefs, attitudes, and institutions that have been painfully worked out over the course of the last three centuries.

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[1] Ibid., p. 186.

[2] John Wild, "Education and Human Society: A Realistic View," in Modern Philosophies and Education, the Fifty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 18.

Society, for the Essentialist, is an organism based on certain established principles. These principles have endured the test of time and have been given to us for preservation and application. It is at this point that the extreme Essentialist runs into difficulty. He does not allow for the factor of change. We shall speak of this later.

The basic point, however, is that the Essentialists, even those of liberal persuasion, place great store on the accumulated knowledge of the social heritage. Kneller states it in this way:

> Essentialism emphasizes the importance of race experience or the social heritage over the experience of the individual. This heritage summarizes the experiences of millions in attempting to come to terms with their environment. The wisdom of the many, tested by history, is more significant than the knowledge of the individual and more significant than the totally untested experience of the child.[1]

An important concept in the Essentialist view of society has been intimated by Kneller. It is the idea that the society is prior to the individual. This of course ties in with the correspondence theory of truth in acknowledging an antecedently existent world of reality. The Essentialist views society as an integral whole. It is prior to the individual in the sense that the individual "steps into" a culture that has already been established. Although the individual may in his lifetime contribute to the store of accumulated knowledge, his

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[1]Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, p. 117.

contribution is not made in a vacuum; it does not just happen. He will contribute to his culture only to the extent that he has learned the lessons from the social heritage. In fact, the very "tools" that he needs in order to function in the society have been given to him. For instance, the forms of reasoning and investigation employed in mathematics and science are themselves the products of long development within the context of the social heritage. This extension of the social heritage is likewise the basis for our concepts of freedom and individual liberty. Kandel, a leading Essentialist, states:

> A free society cannot divest itself of the obligation of handing on to new generations those common traditions, loyalties and interests which make community life possible, but it can and should avoid that claim to omniscience and infallibility which must in the long run spell stagnation and failure to permit adaptation to changing conditions.[1]

This function of passing on the social heritage is the key to grasping the entire Essentialist movement. The search for universals, of some variety, is for the Essentialist of primary importance. Without these verities the social order cannot maintain itself. The knowledge, of which the social heritage is constituted, must remain in basically the same form from generation to generation. As Kandel states, "the aims of education in the past were

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[1] I. L. Kandel, Conflicting Theories of Education (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 27-28.

social in intent and were directed to the promotion of the welfare of societies."[1]

It should be pointed out that when speaking of "universals," as concerns the social heritage, this is not meant in the traditional philosophical sense of immutable, God-given truths. Nor is the perennialist position of truth as embodied in the "Great Books" implied. Rather, the term "universal" is understood in a cultural sense. It refers to the basic skills needed by any society to perpetuate itself. It also refers to the political and economic ideas that undergird our institutions.

It is important to note that the Essentialists, although being labeled "conservative educators," do not view the nature of society as being static. The common term to describe the social order, in its dynamic characteristics, was put forth by the principal founder of the movement, William C. Bagley. He called the dynamics of society the "emergent evolution." This concept had a biological origin and reflected the training of Bagley in the natural sciences. For Bagley, the progress of man can be measured by both biological and social evolution. In both forms man is emerging from a lower state of perception to a higher one. In the process he, hopefully,

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[1] Ibid., p. 2.

constructs systems of thought and tools for the handling of practical problems. Man, in other words, builds culture piece by piece. It is a laborious process and the accumulation of knowledge is very slow. Yet, over time, ways of looking at the world become established in systems of philosophy, and ways of manipulating the natural environment become crystallized into systems of technology. This process, in a sense, is evolution in a teleological form, from the lower to the higher, from the less perfected to the more perfected. However, as this process of emergent evolution continues, man, of necessity, must look to what has gone before, and from his heritage keep and perpetuate those elements that will help him continue to progress. Thus, for Bagley, the continuance of the social heritage becomes a very crucial matter. As he states,

> Written records are especially precious elements of the cultural heritage because it is in such records that the accumulated wisdom of the race is preserved. They include: (1) the formulations that crystallize the facts, principles, laws, postulates, and hypotheses which make up the total complex called "knowledge," (2) descriptions and illustrations of skills and techniques, (3) the dramatic story of man's progress as this has been reconstructed by historians and pre-historians . . . , (4) the written records themselves, and (5) the records of personal impressions, interpretations, reactions. . . .[1]

Again, the central thesis of Essentialism depends on identifying those elements of knowledge that are worth preserving.

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, pp. 21-22.

This brings us once more to the problem of "universals." However, since we are dealing with the social heritage, these "universals" must be understood in the sense of cultural products, rather than philosophical entities.

Although Essentialists have not traditionally interpreted the social heritage from a cultural point of view, this perspective will now be adopted in order to better illuminate the core of the problem. It should be noted that Brameld does analyze the Essentialist position in critical terms from the standpoint of culture.[1] However, his interpretation deals mainly with an historical presentation. He does not view the Essentialist position from the perspective of modern social science. The contention here is that such an analysis, at least as concerns the nature of the social heritage, is needed to place the Essentialist movement in another perspective.

The perspective taken will be one supporting the claims of a viable social heritage. This is not to agree with that position which holds that society is static and that institutions must not undergo change. Rather, the thesis is made that there are elements within any given culture ("universals," if you will) that can be seen as having a continuous history, and that these cultural factors, in a

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, Chapter 9, pp. 261-281.

broad sense, are necessary for the maintenance of the culture. In other words, the position held is one of cultural universalism.

Cultural universalism holds that there are similarities in values cutting across the differences between cultures. It is opposed to the view (cultural relativism) which maintains that each social act must be interpreted exclusively within the context of culture. We are not adopting an attitude of "naive idealism" which holds that there are lasting universal truths common to all cultures. Rather, the position favored is one that attempts to examine relevant psychological and sociological data. These data indicate a similarity of patterns of behavior that transcend many cultures. In other words, there appear to be cross-cultural "universals" which constitute the essential elements of the social heritage. Kluckhohn substantiates this point in saying:

> Psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and anthropology in different ways and on somewhat different evidence converge in attesting to similar human needs and psychic mechanisms. These, plus the rough regularities in the human situation regardless of culture, give rise to widespread moral principles which are very much alike in concept--in "intent." These considerations make the position of radical cultural relativity untenable. Indeed this view when pressed to its logical extreme soon reached absurdity. If one is to evaluate an act or a moral judgment entirely by its context, it is inescapable that no two contents are literally identical. And yet the brute fact is that the members of all societies create and are influenced by principles of some generality, by moral abstractions. Human beings generalize as well as discriminate. The human parade has many floats, but, when one strips off the cultural symbolism,

> the ethical standards represented are akin. The ostensible self-effacement of the Zuni and the exhibitionism of the Kwakiutl affirm the same moral value: allegiance to the norms of one's culture.[1]

In order not to lead us too far astray from the Essentialist movement, let us further substantiate this position of cultural universalism. The educational Essentialist must, in today's world of rapidly expanding knowledge, look to the literature of the social sciences. Since the Essentialist movement is educational in content, and since it is based around the key concept of the social heritage, it is necessary to present evidence for even the possibility of "a social heritage" existing. This evidence is best found in the sociological data concerning the similarities between cultures. Linton further acknowledges the universality of cultural patterns in saying,

> The first impression which one receives from the study of a series of unrelated cultures is one of almost unlimited variety. Since all the varied patterns function successfully as parts of one culture or another, the stage is set for the development of the concept of cultural relativity. The insistence on scientific objectivity, which means the rigid exclusion of all ethical judgments and the substitution of an attitude of, "Well, some do and some don't" contributes toward the same end. Actually, many anthropologists have espoused this position and considerable support can be found for it as long as investigation is limited to the overt behavior patterns of various societies. However, when these patterns are analyzed in terms of their functions

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[1] Clyde Kluckhohn, "Ethical Relativity: Sic Et Non" (a paper delivered at The Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures of the Laboratory of Social Relations, Harvard University, no date given).

> and interrelations, certain general principles emerge. Behind the seemingly endless diversity of culture patterns there is a fundamental uniformity. To discover what the common factors are and to plan culture change in conformity with them is the most important task of the social scientist.[1]

It is vital for the Essentialist to demonstrate some evidence for cultural universalism. This is for two reasons: (1) to indicate that cultures transmit from one generation to another certain patterns of beliefs and uniformities in behavior, and (2) to adopt a broader point of view which shows that the social heritage is indeed a cultural by-product, consequently, that it is capable of change. Cultural universalism is in some ways akin to Bagley's concept of "emergent evolution." Bagley was attempting to show the inherent need of all societies to accumulate skills and beliefs both to survive and to progress. He was stressing the need to observe societies (and their cultural matrix) as they move along a continuum. In this movement some things are kept, others discarded. Those parts of "knowledge" that are maintained constitute the ingredients of the social heritage. Thus all societies follow similar patterns, and it is these patterns which constitute cultural universalism. Let us quote Kluckhohn, in summary, to lend further support to the Essentialist position. He writes:

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[1]Ralph Linton, "Universal Ethical Principles: An Anthropological View," in Moral Principles of Action: Man's Ethical Imperative, ed. by Ruth Nada Anshen (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 646. (My emphasis.)

> The basic similarities in human biology the world over are vastly more massive than the variations. Equally, there are certain necessities in social life for this kind of animal regardless of where that life is carried on or in what culture. Cooperation to obtain subsistence and for other ends requires a certain minimum of reciprocal behavior, of a standard system of communication, and indeed of mutually accepted values. The facts of human biology and of human group living supply, therefore, certain invariant points of reference from which cross-cultural comparison can start without begging questions that are themselves at issue. As Wissler pointed out, the broad outlines of the ground plan of all cultures is and has to be about the same because men always and everywhere are faced with certain unavoidable problems which arise out of the situation "given" by nature. Since most of the patterns of all cultures crystallize around the same foci, there are significant respects in which each culture is not wholly isolated, self-contained, disparate but rather related to and comparable with all other cultures.[1]

With this cultural presentation of the nature of the social heritage, it is now necessary to view the Essentialist position on the nature of the individual.

Essentialism and the Individual

The Essentialist's beliefs on the nature of the individual may be based on three themes: (1) The individual is, above all, a spiritual being that has the unique gift of reason (if the spiritual side is not emphasized, then it is the exclusively rational part of man); (2) the individual is to a great extent shaped by his social

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[1]Clyde Kluckhohn, "Common Humanity and Diverse Cultures," in The Human Meaning of the Social Sciences, ed. by Daniel Lerner (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 176.

heritage; and (3) in order to bring out his unique spiritual or rational nature, the individual must be trained along certain lines. That is, the curriculum in any formalized system of schooling must be ordered and structured in such a way as to reveal the scope of the social heritage. Let us examine these three positions.

To the Essentialist with an idealist background, the spiritual growth of the individual is of primary importance. The individual is viewed as a microcosm of the greater Infinite macrocosm. He is, in other words, a small copy of the universe. According to this view, the "self" becomes all important. It is the self that is the core being of every person. Since this self is a miniature copy of the Infinite, it is the teacher's foremost duty to develop all the latent potentialities of these "selves." Brameld says of this position,

> Man thinking, then, is but a simple expression of God thinking. This is not to say, of course, that, as subjective idealism holds, man himself is the source of reality, but that, although he may first come in contact with God through intimate awareness of his own spiritual self, that fact is that God's self, as universal is prior to and the cause of man's self. [1]

The Essentialist with realist tendencies does not, as has been seen, posit a spiritual self as the ground of ultimate being. His concern, rather, is with the unfolding of man's rational powers. Man's nature is in direct proportion to the development of his

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[1] Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 219.

rational faculties; he knows himself and nature to the degree that his mind can order and regulate nature. To the Essentialist-realist, the mind is a storehouse for empirical truths. Its function is to receive data through the senses, classify and sort this information, and, finally, use it to understand the regularities of the physical universe.

The Essentialist-realist, however, does not see the individual as only a perceiver and orderer of information. His epistemological views extend into the realm of ethics. As Wild says, man "has not been endowed with an exhaustive array of inflexible instincts which automatically propel him to the proper acts . . . he has been given very flexible tendencies together with the power of cognition by which he may rationally understand his essential needs. . . ."[1] Thus, nature, in addition to holding the secret of physical laws, is also capable of yielding ethical norms. But these norms are established by man through reason, and not necessarily "given" to him by some higher self. Again, truth for the Essentialist-realist lies in translating and ordering of sense-data, and this, for him, is accomplished through the correspondence theory.

No matter what side of Essentialism is emphasized, the individual is seen as an expression of the social heritage. The

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[1]Wild, "Education and Human Society: A Realistic View," p. 18.

social heritage is expressed through knowledge, and so what is learned must have more than a purely instrumental value. Bagley states, "knowledge, then, has values over and above those that we have designated as instrumental. Knowledge may be background as well as instrument; its value may be interpretive as well as utilitarian."[1]

In the Essentialist view, the child must be exposed to the social heritage along specific lines. The curriculum must reflect those essentials of the social heritage that are permanent, enduring, and stable. The Essentialist, Kandel, states:

> Rather it is the function of education to enable the pupils, through content selected for that purpose, to understand the environment in which they live, to cultivate breadth of interest, to gain the ability to find information for themselves, to develop the capacity for judgment, to acquire an appreciation of standards of right and wrong, to be stimulated to a readiness to work and co-operate with others, and to be initiated into the art of living.[2]

The views of Bagley follow Kandel closely. Bagley sees the necessity for training along specific lines as the crucial determinant in developing a sense of community. Let us also recall that the Essentialist is concerned with the preservation of democracy. He sees the stability of a democratic society as being dependent

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, p. 73.

[2] Kandel, Conflicting Theories of Education, p. 127. (My emphasis.)

upon the social heritage, and this social heritage as forming the ideal of a homogenous community. Bagley emphasizes this position in saying,

> A most important function of formal education, especially in a democracy, is to insure as high a level of common culture as possible--meanings, understandings, standards, and aspirations common to a large proportion of the democratic group--to the end that the collective thinking and the collective decisions of the group may be done and made on the highest plane possible. This obviously calls for a goodly measure of common elements in the school programs throughout the country, and particularly in the programs of the universal school.[1]

These "common elements," and those who are to teach them, must now become our concern. We will next examine Essentialist thinking on such matters as the nature of the curriculum as an agent for transmitting the social heritage, the nature of the school in society, and the training of teachers.

Essentialism and the Role of the School

Essentialism is, above all, an educational doctrine. Its concern is with school curriculum, teacher training and the social relationship between the school and society. Heavy emphasis is usually placed by all Essentialists on the nature of the school in a democratic society. For the Essentialist, those democratic institutions worthy of preservation are a direct result, or a product of,

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, p. 139. (My emphasis.)

the social heritage. The social heritage both shapes and is the basis for our democratic institutions.

The school, according to Essentialist thinking, is a necessary adjunct to the wider sphere of the social heritage. The school defines the boundaries of the social heritage, and, at the same time, serves as the most fundamental transmitter of the culture. It has a unique relationship with the society, a relationship that is reciprocal. As Kandel sees it,

> . . . the school as a social institution has the obligation of selecting such experiences as will develop the individual into a socially responsible and intelligent member of the community. The school, in other words, is an institution established and maintained by society to achieve certain ends, to transmit certain values, and to give each individual his rightful share in the great heritage of human experience.[1]

It is believed by Essentialists that the school as a reflector of society also has a parallel interest in changing that society when change is indicated. The Essentialist views those principles of learning within the social heritage as sufficient criteria for measuring the amount and degree of social change. In other words, if education is guided along certain established principles, these principles will be the mainspring for evaluating the society at a given time and recommending changes if needed. How, then, is it

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[1]I. L. Kandel, The Culture of Uncertainty (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943), pp. 108-109.

possible to measure whether the historic function between school and society is being carried out? Bagley says,

> Social evolution . . . was defined as the accumulation and refinement of learnings, and education was defined in its widest sense as a primary factor in social evolution, while as an organized social institution its chief responsibility is to transmit the spiritual heritage from generation to generation. It follows from our fundamental postulates that, in the selection of learnings to be perpetuated . . . the criteria of selection should be the welfare and progress of society.
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> The fundamental criteria of the system's effectiveness are to be sought in those social statistics which inform us of the welfare of society and whether it is progressing or standing still or going backward.[1]

Bagley goes on to list the criteria that can be used as a way of measuring social change. He is saying that if these criteria are negative, there is a fundamental disorder within the social system; and this imbalance is, in part, the fault of education. It is worth listing these criteria. Some of them are later used in the official platform statements of the Essentialist Committee. The criteria for social progress are:

1. The educational system should be devoted to preserving social order and stability. Educators, consequently, must look to the statistics on crime. If the crime rate is soaring, then there is social instability and the educational system is to be blamed.

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, p. 119.

2. Levels of health and longevity are important barometers of social progress. Infant mortality should especially be low. Again, it is the task of education to watch for the social statistics.
3. An important step of social progress would be seen in the decrease of corruption in public office, decrease in special privileges for special classes, and a decrease in prejudicial appeals.
4. Progress in social concerns would also be measured in decreased rates of venereal disease, drunkedness, and mental illness traced to alcohol.
5. A decrease in poverty and an advance in the standard of living.
6. A decrease in the divorce rate.
7. The removal of slums and increased provisions for playgrounds and parks.
8. Another index of social progress would be the increased consumption of good literature and music, and decreased exploitation by the mass media.
9. An increase of "creative" activity in all areas of life, such as the arts and sciences.
10. A decrease in exploitation of the weak by the strong.

11. Decrease in birth-rates among those unable or unwilling to supply adequate care for their young. Adequate amounts of food, clothing and shelter.
12. An increase in the type of motivation to work for ends that are not exclusively pecuniary.[1]

Bagley believes that education must work to remedy what he believes are the dominant social evils. And, again, he maintains that it is only possible to do this through a specific form of education based on the social heritage. The next step will be to examine some Essentialist thinking on the nature of the learner and the structure of the curriculum.

The Learner and Curriculum in Essentialist Thinking

It is the contention of most Essentialists that the curriculum is the most important method of transmitting the social heritage. Within the curriculum are the methods and principles of learning that must be instilled in the child if the experiences of the race are to be maintained. There is, according to the Essentialist, a continuity and structure to all knowledge. This structure is embodied in certain subjects which must be given to the child if he is to fulfill his role in a democratic society. Kandel states the idea in these terms:

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[1]Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, pp. 120-122.

> Since the environment carries in itself the stamp of the past and the seeds of the future, the curriculum must inevitably include that knowledge and information which will acquaint the pupil with the social heritage, introduce him to the world about him, and prepare him for the future.[1]

In terms of specific educational practices, the Essentialist educator will differ somewhat as to whether he has idealist or realist inclinations. The Essentialist-idealist will stress learning that is whole, not fragmented. He will be concerned with the inter-relatedness of all knowledge, and the process by which all knowledge reflects the workings of the mind in its search for the infinite. In pedagogical method, there will be emphasis on the spoken and written word.[2] To the Essentialist-idealist, there will be a need to stress the logical structure of knowledge and the coherence theory of truth in verifying that knowledge.

For the Essentialist-realist, knowledge will be equated with science, for the most part. The emphasis will be on the ordering of all sense-data into logical systems based on induction. He will stress the empirical method in arriving at truth, and will be most interested in imparting that knowledge embodied in the sciences

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[1]Kandel, Conflicting Theories of Education, p. 99.

[2]VanCleve Morris, Philosophy and the American School (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 329.

and mathematics. The realist is interested in quantitative language, in dealing with a curriculum that emphasizes things.[1] His concern is to establish and transmit that knowledge which is capable of verification through the scientific method.

Although there are some differences between the two educational approaches, both the idealist and realist have several meeting points in terms of curriculum: (1) Both favor "established" subjects that have "content"; (2) they both believe subject matter should progress from the simple to the complex in a logical order; (3) both stress the need of the scientific method for the verification of truth; (4) they both place emphasis on the written word; (5) they visualize the learning process in terms of giving the child certain "basics" of "stamping-in" knowledge; (6) both favor the written examination methods of testing to see if knowledge has been grasped; and (7) both place emphasis on the correspondence theory of knowing--that is, equating knowledge with an external reality, whether that reality be physical or spiritual.

Bagley has summarized some important points of Essentialist doctrine as they pertain to the curriculum. These he lists as:

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[1] Ibid., p. 333.

(1) Gripping and enduring interests frequently, and in respect to the higher interests almost always grow out of initial learning efforts that are not intrinsically appealing or attractive.
(2) The control, direction and guidance of the immature by the mature is inherent in the prolonged period of infancy. . . .
(3) . . . imposed discipline is a necessary means to this end.
(4) The freedom of the immature learner to choose what he shall learn is not at all to be compared with his later freedom from want, fraud, fear, superstition, error and oppression. . . .
(5) Essentialism provides a strong theory of education. . . .[1]

Essentialist Views on the Teacher and Learner

For the Essentialist, the three areas of curriculum, teacher and the learner are intimately connected. All interact to produce the fundamentals of Essentialist doctrine. Thus, although there are definable bodies of knowledge constituting the social heritage, there must be teachers trained along specific lines to impart this knowledge. It also requires the holding of certain beliefs concerning the child.

The teacher's main function, in Essentialist thinking, is twofold: (1) He must be the agent through which knowledge is given, and (2) he must present the elements of the social heritage in such fashion as to stimulate the child in pursuing knowledge that he may

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[1]William C. Bagley, "Just What Is the Crux of the Conflict between the Progressives and the Essentialists," Education Administration and Supervision, XXVI (1940), 510-511.

not see as being immediately useful. Brickman, a writer with Essentialist leanings, explains some of the qualifications of the Essentialist teacher in these words:

> Essentialism places the teacher at the center of the educational universe. This teacher must have a liberal education, a scholarly knowledge of the field of learning, a deep understanding of the psychology of children and of the learning process, an ability to impart facts and ideals to the younger generations, an appreciation of the historical-philosophical foundations of education, and a serious devotion to his work. [1]

The Essentialist teacher, whether of idealist or realist leanings, is concerned foremost with developing a curriculum based on content and sequence. And, importantly, it is the content of the subject matter that gives any course of study its structure, coherence and correspondence. The Essentialist is opposed to the excessive use of "self-directed" activity on the part of the learner. He feels that intrinsic motivation is vital, but maintains the necessary ingredients for this motivation stem from the knowledge of the teacher and the content of the course. If the content is laborious, it is the teacher's function to see that it is made palatable without deviating from the logical sequence of the subject matter. As Bagley holds, "the essentialist would have the teachers responsible for a systematic program of studies and activities to develop the

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[1] William W. Brickman, "The Essentialist Spirit in Education," School and Society, LXXXVI, No. 2138 (October 11, 1958), 364.

recognized essentials."[1] He goes on to list the outcomes of learning to which every Essentialist teacher should aspire as being: (1) habits and skills, (2) knowledge: ideas, concepts, meanings, facts, principles, (3) ideals and emotionalized standards, and (4) attitudes--intellectual and emotional perspectives.[2]

As the founder of the Essentialist movement and an educator for many years, Bagley lays heavy stress on the importance of good teaching. He insists that the "teacher's function [is] to make the lessons of race experience vibrate with life and meaning."[3] The teacher, as a product of the social heritage himself, is obligated to impart the lessons from it in clear and unambiguous terms. He must stress, as always, the internal logic of all he teaches. This stress on coherence and correspondence does not mean that subject matter is only an artificial contrivance of educators. Kandel insists that there is a deeper purpose inherent in organized subject matter:

> The attack on subject matter ignores the fact that subjects are not something artificially created for use in schools but represent crystallized bodies of experience and activities which the human race has found to be of the greatest and most permanent significance for its own survival as well as for its continued progress.[4]

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, p. 80.

[2] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[3] Ibid., p. 188.

[4] Kandel, Conflicting Theories of Education, p. 96.

It should be remembered (as will be explained more fully in the following chapter) that Essentialism was a movement founded in direct opposition to the Progressive education movement. Essentialism posited itself as a countermovement to the excesses of Progressive education. Criticism was directed to the Progressive's misinterpretation of Dewey's philosophy, especially in matters concerning the nature of the curriculum. The Essentialists felt that American education was being seriously undermined by Progressive doctrines which stressed the "self-activity" of the learner. They were opposed to receiving the teacher as merely a person whose function was to encourage children to follow their own interest and become socially compatible. Thus they placed great stress on the interrelationship of the teacher, the curriculum as embodied in the social heritage, and the learner. Bagley defines this relationship by relating the connection of subject matter and teacher responsibility. He states,

> There can be little question as to the essentials. It is by no means a mere accident that the arts of recording, computing, and measuring have been among the first concerns of organized education. They are basic social arts. Every civilized society has been founded upon these arts, and when these arts have been lost, civilization has invariably and inevitably collapsed. Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia are strewn with the ruins of civilizations that forgot how to read and write. Contemporary civilization, for the first time in history, has attempted to insure its continuance by making these arts in so far as possible the prerogative of all.

> Nor is it at all accidental that a knowledge of the world that lies beyond one's immediate experience has been among the recognized essentials of universal education, and that at least a speaking acquaintance with man's past and especially with the story of one's country was early provided for in the universal school. Widening the space horizon and extending the time perspective are essential if the citizen is to be protected from the fallacies of the local and the immediate.
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> Investigation, invention, and creative art have added to the heritage and the list of recognized essentials has been extended and will be further extended. Health instruction and the inculcation of health practices are now basic phases of the work of the lower schools. The elements of natural science have their place. Neither the fine arts nor the industrial arts are neglected.[1]

The Essentialist grants that the elements of the social heritage are not easily grasped by all. He, therefore, believes that the individual is in need of direction and guidance in order to learn the subject matter. Again, the skill of the teacher is all-important in this process. Kandel addresses himself to this point by saying,

> Education in the school is not life but the acquisition of those experiences and activities which society regards as essential for its survival and which give meaning to life. Since not all first hand experiences are desirable, the school and teacher must select those that are valuable for the individual and for society.[2]

Even though the knowledge and techniques of the teacher are primary, the Essentialist feels there must be a corresponding effort

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[1] Bagley, Education and Emergent Man, pp. 79-80.

[2] Kandel, Conflicting Theories of Education, p. 36.

on the part of the child to learn. This is often difficult, but there must be some element of intrinsic motivation present. Bagley says, "mastery, then, in any real sense of the term means for most persons who achieve such a mastery persistent effort and sustained concentration."[1] The doctrine of effort, then, becomes a central Essentialist belief. This effort is basic to man as a rational evolving being. It is this internal striving for sustained growth and more and increasingly complex knowledge that gives man the principle of effort. On this point most Essentialists would agree, in principle, with Dewey's theory of growth and development.

The Essentialists, it should be remembered, believe in the organic evolution of man. They hold the belief that man progresses as he interacts with his environment, and as he solves the human problems the environment poses. This belief in man as a problem-solving animal has, accordingly, many similar points with the Progressive doctrine. The position differs only in prescribing unequal weight to the influence of the social heritage. But in both positions the role of ideas plays a prominent part, especially the use of ideas as a problem-solving technique and as an important function of the intellect. Breed, a leading Essentialist-realist, says,

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[1]William C. Bagley, "An Essentialist Looks at the Foreign Languages," Educational Administration and Supervision, XXV, No. 4 (April, 1939), 243.

> Ideas are true when they work, but when they work they do so because they conform to a definite order of things beyond them. Ideas thus become a priceless source of guidance, a means of adjustment or adaptation in agreement with the biological conception of the relation between organism and environment. Education, then, is not a process of reconstructing the universe, but a process of teaching humans how to make their way in it. It is guidance through discovery.[1]

The emphasis on the important function of ideas is, of course, founded on some notion as to the nature of intelligence. We will conclude this chapter by presenting some ideas as to how the Essentialist views intelligence. Bagley, as founder of the movement, was concerned with placing the principles of Essentialism within some understandable context. This context necessarily had to deal with the concept of intelligence. He repudiates, first of all, those notions of intelligence that are strictly deterministic in behavior, that is, the view which treats of intelligence as a capacity that can be definitely measured by the use of tests.[2] For an Essentialist like Bagley, intelligence is a very complicated process. He criticizes the "determinists" mostly in the a prior assumptions they hold, and in their tendency to generalize from too few cases.[3]

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[1]Breed, Education and the New Realism, p. 88.

[2]William C. Bagley, Determinism in Education (Baltimore: Warwick and York, Inc., 1925), pp. 11-20.

[3]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

> Differences in native mentality, of course, are biologically inevitable. It is not their existence but their meaning that we are concerned with. What the determinist has forgotten is that resemblances in ideas, ideals, aspiration and standards may and do unite men by bonds that are vastly stronger than are the differences in native endowment that would otherwise pull them apart.[1]

The Essentialist, then, does not hold a narrow view of intelligence. Even though there may be innate differences, this does not exclude the possibility of educating most people in the essentials of the social heritage. The levels of abstraction may have to be modified, but the permanent elements of knowledge of the culture can still be given. Bagley has set forth some provisional conclusion concerning the nature and rate of intelligence in society. Although these ideas were formulated more than a quarter of a century ago, they still retain certain characteristics that are held by even contemporary Essentialists. These elements set forth by Bagley will be in summary form, only to show the general nature of the position. They are:

1. An acceptance (provisionally) of the term "general intelligence" to denote the most important function of the mind: ability to control behavior in the light of experience.
2. General intelligence is a broad concept and may include ability to draw abstract references, to apply general principles, etc.

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[1] Ibid., p. 31.

3. General intelligence is in part determined by environmental circumstances, especially by systematic schooling.
4. The contribution of systematic schooling to general intelligence probably equals the effects of innate ability and environmental pressures together.
5. The effects of systematic schooling in intelligence varies, but the greatest effect on intelligence comes from that type of schooling which emphasizes systamatic and sustained mental effort.
6. The importance of early discipline and systematic training cannot be overlooked.
7. The level of general intelligence of a nation will be in some part dependent on its freedom from war, revolution and degeneration.
8. The "disciplinary" function of formal education probably exercises an important influence in the type of "transfer" that takes place.
9. Democracy is dependent upon a system of schooling that emphasizes discipline--freedom has not been a gift, but has had to be earned.[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 157-160.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to show some of the specific beliefs concerning Essentialist education. It was maintained that the fundamentals of Essentialist doctrine center around the ideas on (1) the nature of society, (2) the nature of the individual, and (3) the relation between the school and society.

The overall attempt has been to show how all Essentialist beliefs center about the origin and nature of the social heritage. Accordingly, the social heritage was viewed in the context of culture. It was shown that the teaching of the social heritage was defensible on two points: (1) It is necessary for all cultures to transmit the essentials from their past in order to insure a modicum of social stability and to preserve those skills and techniques that are indispensible for survival; and (2) an attempt was made to show that all cultures display certain "universals" and that these "universals" are the main constituents of the social heritage of those cultures. Therefore, the Essentialists' insistence on perpetuating these essentials is justifiable.

Finally, within this broader discussion of the nature of society, the Essentialist position was shown concerning the role of the teacher, the nature of the curriculum, how the learner is

influenced by the two, and the broad position of Essentialism concerning the nature of intelligence.

Our next task will be to examine some of the background of those men forming the Essentialist movement, and, then, to carefully examine and criticize the primary documents of the Essentialist Committee.

CHAPTER III

EXAMINATION OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES OF ESSENTIALISM

Social Background

To understand the Essentialist movement and place it in its proper perspective, it is necessary to briefly summarize the social conditions brought on by the Great Depression. The Depression occurred at the end of October, 1929. It brought forth such social and economic upheaval that many previously held American ideals concerning democracy had to be revamped or abandoned.

The years of the 1920's had been ones of great national prosperity. Business was expanding everywhere and people were optimistic. The business expansion was most marked in the growth of the stock market. In 1920 there were 26,609 stockbrokers. By the time of the Depression, this figure had jumped to 70,950.[1]

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[1]Dixon Wecter, "The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941," in The Historians' History of the United States, ed. by A. S. Berky and J. P. Shenton, II (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1966), 1243.

People with small incomes, as well as the wealthy, were investing heavily in the stock market. Unnoticed went the facts that small banks were, even as early as 1920, closing at the rate of nearly two a day, or that the output of goods was far below the potential production.[1]

Investment continued unabated through the 1920's. Another fact ignored by many was that the average income of most American families was still very meager. Yet, it was this income group, tempted by the possibility of quick riches, that continued to invest heavily in stocks of various kinds. On October 29, 1929, over 16 million shares were traded and the bubble finally burst. As Wecter describes it:

> But now the luxuries and amusements, the bustling sense of power which cloaked life's essential materialism . . . were suddenly stripped away. This greatest of economic reverses gave millions of citizens the jolt of taking a downward step in the dark. . . . A nation used to regarding prosperity as a habit found itself startled. . . . It made the situation no easier that the adversary was invisible.[2]

This invisible foe dealt a severe blow to all Americans. In the aftermath of the fall, banks closed, railways collapsed, private enterprises were ruined, farmers were hard hit, and virtually the

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[1] Ibid., p. 1246.

[2] Ibid., p. 1250.

whole class of white collar workers were out of work.[1] The situation grew worse the following year and the years afterward. There were millions of people unemployed, actual starvation was imminent and a growing sense of complete desperation and anxiety continued to grow. The measures undertaken by Hoover were insufficient to stop the widespread economic collapse.

But, despite these setbacks, there came the realization to many Americans that the traditional ways of thinking and traditional institutions, that had worked so admirably in the past, were no longer sufficient. The entire philosophical position had to be re-evaluated. Dulles speaks to this point:

> There was forced upon a reluctant administration the unhappy realization that the powers of government had somehow to be invoked to try to stem the tide of economic disaster. Confident reliance upon a laissez faire philosophy and the spirit of rugged individualism was no longer possible when forces seemingly beyond men's control threatened the paralysis of business, trade and agriculture. . . .[2]

Old attitudes and ways of doing things no longer seemed sufficient. New reforms, new outlooks were needed to keep the country from plunging further into economic and social chaos. To

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[1] Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, The Beards' New Basic History of the United States (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), p. 420.

[2] Foster Rhea Dulles, The United States Since 1865 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 341.

stem this tide, the Democrats offered what was to become known as the New Deal.

The New Deal incorporated a series of radical measures to deal with the ever-expanding crisis. These began in 1933 and were continued throughout the Depression. The New Deal legislation fell under these headings: (1) control over banking and currency; (2) the extension of federal credit to individuals and businesses in trouble; (3) relief programs directed towards farmers; (4) regulation and stimulation of business enterprises; (5) systematizing the rights of collective bargaining; and (6) the extension of social security to needy groups.[1]

These were emergency measures taken by the Federal Government. The situation had grown so critical that only desperate departures from the traditional were thought of as being capable of helping. To this end, Roosevelt initiated several programs. Some of them were the Civilian Conservation Corps, which eventually employed over 3,000,000; The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, providing direct assistance to the needy; and the WPA (Works Progress Administration), which provided work for over 8,000,000 persons in a variety of public work projects.[2]

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[1]Beard and Beard, The Beards' New Basic History of the United States, pp. 423-424.

[2]Dulles, The United States since 1865, pp. 360-364.

Yet, even with all these measures, the Depression continued. Another crisis struck the country in 1937. The American Year Book reported: "A new depression overtook the country in September. Unemployment increased with almost unprecedented swiftness."[1] The situation continued until the upsurge in production brought on by World War II.

The point of relating all of this is to indicate the prevailing social conditions in which Essentialism was founded. The Depression influenced, to a great extent, the writers of the Essentialist Platform. They were men molded by their times. Their educational ideas were influenced by and directed towards the conditions brought on by the Depression. Their educational beliefs were primarily in opposition to the extreme Progressives. And yet they were also speaking out on the greater social conflicts created by the Depression. To them, the social upheaval being witnessed was an indication that something was drastically wrong with the educational system. In fact, they inferred that education under the Progressives was creating an "effete" type of individual unfit to withstand the social changes, and possibly the type of person capable of being swayed by totalitarian propoganda.

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[1] Beard and Beard, The Beard's New Basic History of the United States, p. 427.

Essentialism, then, has to be viewed in this broader social context. To this end, it is necessary to understand, in its broad outlines, the doctrines of Progressivism. For it is against some specific doctrines of this movement that Essentialism was founded as an alternate educational movement.

The Progressive Education Movement

The purpose of this section will be to present a brief exposition of the Progressive movement in American education. This is necessary in order to provide a perspective in which to place the criticisms lodged by the Essentialists. Their criticisms, in the main, were directed to the excesses in educational practices of the Progressives.

The Progressive movement came about as the result of a uniquely American philosophy called pragmatism. This philosophy, although having its foundations in antiquity, became a distinctly American world view through the writings of such men as Charles Pierce, William James, and, of course, its chief exponent, John Dewey. Pragmatism was based on the theory that change is one of the fundamental principles of the universe.[1] It posited the individual

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[1]Charles S. Brauner and Hobart W. Burns, Problems in Education and Philosophy (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 62.

as an organism that is influenced by and influences the environment. Man, in other words, is not limited by any a priori standards. He is free to shape his own environment and develop his own criteria for what is the good, beautiful and true. The common themes that run through pragmatism are: (1) change as a reality; (2) the relativity of values; (3) the social and biological nature of man; (4) the dedication to democracy as a way of life; (5) and the value of critical intelligence in all aspects of life.[1]

The crucial term in pragmatism is experience. Experience is the all-encompassing stratum of life. It is the one thing that we all have to deal with. It is the producer of our ideas and hence of our conception of knowledge, value and aesthetics. There are several dimensions to experience. Brameld deals with some of these when he states that experience is dynamic, temporal, spatial and pluralistic.[2] Experience is what constitutes truth for the pragmatist.

Therefore, man is responsible for the formation of his own knowledge through the application of his reason to the experiences produced by the environment. There is a complex interaction between man and his environment. And from this interaction truth is

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[1]Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, p. 45.

[2]Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 103.

ascertained. Yet truth, for the pragmatist, is not only correspondence with an external reality. As Kneller points out,

> Truth may not be something outside man awaiting his discovery, as the realist would put it; but neither is it something willfully manufactured. Truth is what man concludes after he has carefully investigated the evidence. Because truth depends on the data investigated and the methods used to investigate them, it is necessarily revised and expanded as better methods are used and more data discovered. Truth then is relative and changeable.[1]

From this general philosophical background of pragmatism, let us examine how these ideas were translated into educational practices. This transformation became the Progressive education movement.

Progressive education claims to be exclusively concerned with the welfare of the child. The child's nature is considered open, plastic and capable of receiving an infinite variety of influences from the environment. Therefore one of the primary goals of education is to closely observe and direct the child along those activities that are most natural to him. To foster the natural sense of curiosity in a child is held to be very crucial to that child's development. As Dewey states:

> We thus reach a technical definition of education: It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. The increment of meaning

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[1]Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, p. 48. (My emphasis.)

> corresponds to the increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged.[1]

The child, then, learns and grows as his experiences, and the specific activities connected with them, increase and mature. The teacher's principal function is to guide the child into those activities which will insure the maximum possibilities for growth. Kneller summarizes these basic postulates of Progressivism by saying: (1) Education must be related to the interests of the child; (2) learning should be based on problem solving, not forced memorization and recitation; (3) education should be life itself rather than a preparation for it; (4) the role of the teacher is to advise not to direct; (5) the school should encourage cooperation rather than competition; and (6) only a democratic system of government permits true growth.[2]

Dewey, as the principal exponent of the Progressive doctrine, was concerned with two concepts, growth and experience. For him, the end product of any educational system had to be measured in terms of the growth it promoted and the habits it formed. Traditional education, in its negative aspects, considered

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[1]John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), pp. 76-77.

[2]Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, pp. 96-102.

the child as a miniature adult into which all sorts of information had to be impressed. As Dewey stated, "the traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly to maturity."[1]

This was the central criticism of the Progressive against traditional education. They conceived of traditional methods as stifling the unique potential of every child. To the Progressive educator, the child must be viewed as the "whole child"; it is not enough to only concentrate on the development of his mind.[2] This was Dewey's principal thesis: the direction of many and differing activities all tending towards the growth of the child. Dewey says on this point:

> Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests and habits. It must be controlled at every point by reference to these same considerations. These powers, interests, and habits must be continually interpreted--we must know what they mean. They must be translated into terms of their social equivalents. . . .[3]

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[1]John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 18-19.

[2]Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 131.

[3]John Dewey, "My Pedagogical Creed," in Dewey on Education, ed. by Martin S. Dworkin (New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1959), p. 22.

Dewey was opting, then, for a psychological as well as logical (i.e., what he can "learn") interpretation of the child. He was interested in the many and complex facets of the child, in how the child would react to environmental pressures, in how he could use his experiences to build knowledge. "Everything," in Dewey's words, "depends on the quality of the experience."[1] If the child can be made to follow his natural curiosity and allowed to develop and evaluate his experiences, then growth can proceed.

The Progressive Curriculum

The heart of the controversy between Progressive and Essentialist is in the nature and structure of the curriculum. To be sure, there are basic philosophical differences, especially in ontology, but the scope of the argument eventually centered along curriculum differences. For the Progressive,

> The well-constructed curriculum is not unlike a laboratory. It is unceasingly experimental, and all its participants are, in some fashion, staff-scientists. Hence, it is necessary to avoid rigidity in school requirements, absolute boundaries, mechanical standards, preconceived solutions. Just as the experimental method is flexible, exploratory, tolerant of the novel, curious to try the hitherto untried, so too is its educational symbol.[2]

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[1]Dewey, Experience and Education, p. 27.

[2]Brameld, Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective, p. 142.

The Progressive curriculum is based on the notion of flexibility and growth; in fact, the two terms are often held to be synonymous. This flexibility is exemplified by the Progressive in his ability to restructure traditional curricular patterns. Thus, there is the use of such devices as the project method, correlation of subject matter, the "core-curriculum," and the "experience-centered" curriculum. All of these have as their central purpose the abolishment of rigid and traditional lines of curriculum construction.

The assumptions behind the curricular changes were held to be fundamental rather than merely structural. That is, the idea was to provide the school as an environment that was a part of life (in the sense of all experience being continuous), not an artificial creation having no connection with the central purposes or directions of life. Scheffler touches on this idea in saying,

> Furthermore, the very division between the school, between learning and living, is one which needs to be overcome. It is based on the idea that the school can, in isolation, provide pure knowledge during a specified interval so as to prepare the student for a lifetime of informed action. But this idea ignores the fact that learning is living. . . .[1]

It is this organic connection of all experiences to one another that Dewey is talking about. The experiences that make a

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[1]Israel Scheffler, "Educational Liberalism and Dewey's Philosophy," Dewey on Education, ed. by Reginald D. Archambault (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 101.

difference to the child, in terms of growth, must be included within the curriculum. The curriculum, then, since it is connected to the greater whole, must be seen in its influence in a democracy.

Dewey saw this new type of education as being, in essence, the very foundation of democracy. He says, "a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[1] Thus the Progressive curriculum would provide the learners with experiences based on community efforts, shared goals, the examination of facts through use of the scientific method, and the free and open discussion of controversial ideas.

Dewey was likewise concerned with the problem of social control. Some control in a learning situation was, ideally, to be imposed by the teacher. But discipline was to be provided by the learners themselves, especially in keeping with the democratic dictum of majority rule, but minority respect. Dewey conceived of this democratic ideal in terms of rules. Rules are made by groups of people to define and, in some instances, limit behavior. Once the rules have been agreed upon, they should be kept because they have been agreed upon, and because they define a whole range of

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[1]Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 87.

experiences common to the group. That is, rules define those experiences that are conducive to growth. As Dewey states it:

> Now, the general conclusion I would draw is that control of individual actions is effected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are cooperative or interacting parts. For even in a competitive game there is a certain kind of participation, of sharing in a common experience.[1]

Dewey, likewise, laid emphasis on the use of critical intelligence as a form of control and as a form of common sense in educational matters. The critical use of reason would, in turn, develop certain habits which would tend towards growth. A habit is defined by Dewey "as a form of executive skill, of efficiency in doing . . . an ability to use natural conditions as a means to ends."[2] The development of proper habits was essential in Dewey's scheme of education. This was the essential "end" of education as Dewey saw it. Habits developed by the learner and teacher, leading to activities based on reason, were the aims of Progressive education. A habit means:

> formation of intellectual and emotional disposition as well as an increase in ease, economy, and efficiency of action. Any habit marks an inclination and active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise.[3]

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[1]Dewey, Experience and Education, p. 53.

[2]Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 46. (My emphasis.)

[3]Ibid., p. 48.

Habits, in turn, must be based on rational educational planning. The Progressive scheme of education was not interested, of course, in complete abandonment of discipline or direction. Democracy could not exist in a chaotic social situation, whether it be in the classroom or the country. Dewey stresses this in saying, "it does not follow that all planning must be rejected. On the contrary, there is incumbent upon the educator the duty of instituting a much more intelligent . . . kind of planning."[1] The teacher, consequently, had a central role in the Progressive scheme of education.

These, in very abbreviated form, are some of the principal assumptions of the Progressivists' position, especially in its influence on education. The following section will deal with the controversy between Progressives and Essentialists concerning education.

Excesses of Progressivism as Perceived by the Essentialists

The Essentialists took issue with Progressive doctrines involving many points. But it should be noted here that the objections were directed mainly to specific educational practices and not to a condemnation of the philosophical position as such. Confusion often

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[1]Dewey, Experience and Education, p. 58.

exists concerning this point. It should be remembered that Essentialism is not a school of philosophy but rather a pedagogical viewpoint. It was founded to direct criticism against specific educational doctrines. Let us note what these points of contention were:

1. The Essentialists insisted that, although the child should be given the opportunity to follow his own inclinations, he should also be regarded as an "immature" organism that needs direction. The teacher, as a specialist, has to distinguish at some time what is essential knowledge and what is not worth pursuing. The Essentialists placed heavy emphasis on the role of the teacher as a trained professional.
2. The Essentialists agreed with the Progressives that growth is of great importance to the child. However, they insisted that growth should be directed to some goal or end. To say that any given educational practice leads to "more growth" still begs the question. It must somewhere be specified that growth is directed to some end, some goal.

John Dewey himself recognized the misinterpretations given to some of his doctrines, and the misguided zealousness of some teachers in trying to implement his philosophical position. He says to this point:

There is a tendency in so-called advanced schools of educational thought to say, in effect, let us surround pupils with certain materials, tools, appliances, etc., and then let pupils respond to these things according to their own desires. Above all let us not suggest any end or plan to the students; let us not suggest to them what they shall do, for that is an unwarranted trespass upon their sacred intellectual individuality since the essence of such individuality is to set up ends and aims.

Now such a method is really stupid. For it attempts the impossible, which is always stupid; and it misconceives the conditions of independent thinking. . . .[1]

3. The Essentialist holds that a child cannot always choose those goals that are best suited for him. He may have grandiose expectations or ambitions that he cannot possibly fulfill. The teacher's task is to direct him into those activities that are, in some measure, parallel to his ability to learn. This, of course, should take into consideration such variables as socio-economic background and the unique case of the "late-bloomer." Yet the teacher, as a professional, has the right to direct this development.

4. The Essentialists believe that Progressive pedagogical theory fails to adequately teach the vital elements of the social heritage, and to teach this heritage in a systematic, logical way. In the Essentialist Platform (p. 248), the

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[1]John Dewey, "Individuality and Experience," Journal of the Barnes Foundation, II (January, 1926), 1. Bagley used this quotation to support the Essentialist position in his article in the Classical Journal, March, 1939.

Committee stresses this point and again uses a quote from Dewey:

> Development . . . is a continuous process, and continuity signifies consecutiveness of action. Here was the strong point of traditional education at its best. . . . The subject-matter of the classics and mathematics involved, of necessity, for those who mastered it, a consecutive and orderly development along definite lines. Here lies, perhaps, the greatest problem of the newer efforts in education.[1]

5. The Essentialist objects to the Progressive idea that the school should be a replica of life. As Kneller points out, "the school is an artificial learning situation."[2] That is the purpose of the school--to provide a situation where learning can take place without the countless distracting stimuli of the environment.

6. The Essentialist is opposed to the Progressive notion that democracy is best represented in a school having no limits imposed on behavior. Kneller indicates that this is contradictory: the society itself places limits and restrictions on certain forms of behavior. The school, then, is not imitating "life" if it does not set its own limits.[3]

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[1] John Dewey, "The Need of a Philosophy of Education," The New Era, London (November, 1934), p. 214.

[2] Kneller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, p. 105.

[3] Ibid., pp. 105-106.

7. In keeping with the theme of the social heritage, the Essentialists insist on subject matter being taught instead of vague "projects" that may only touch the periphery of organized knowledge.

These are some of the objections to Progressivism that the Essentialists have maintained as the center of their pedagogical creed. Their criticism has been directed to the excesses of Progressivism as translated into educational objectives. The following section will deal with the primary documents issued by the Essentialists. These documents state the official position of Essentialism, and recommend means to combat what they perceived as the most formidable threats to American education.

The focus of this part of the chapter will be to examine in some detail the actual Platform of the Essentialist Committee. There are two primary-source documents that will be used. They are entitled "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education,"[1] and a second document bearing the title "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory."[2] Both

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[1]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," pp. 241-256.

[2]Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," pp. 326-344.

of these documents were under the authorship of William C. Bagley, who can be thought of as the "father" of the movement. The first document was the work of Bagley and the other members of the Committee, although, as will be shown in another chapter, the final copy of the document was drawn up by Bagley and reflected, mainly, his own thinking. The second document was solely the work of Bagley. In this document Bagley was trying to maintain the momentum created by the organization in their founding meeting at Atlantic City in 1938.

The analysis will center around the specific hypotheses of the Platform. The intent will be to view both documents as a whole. Consequently, there will be shifting from one to the other, as this is necessary to clarify the Essentialist position. There is a certain logic and order to the documents, and it is this organization that will be the center of attention. As the theses in the Platform unfold, comment will be made on how these relate to the overall doctrines of Essentialism. The purpose, then, will be to examine the documents as to logical presentation, the nature of the arguments, and the type and amount of evidence marshalled in support of the assumptions.

The term "Essentialist" was originally suggested by M. Demiashkevich, one of the members of the Committee.[1]

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[1]Demiashkevich, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, pp. 125, 138, 147, 438.

Thereafter, it became the official name of the organization. To place Essentialism once again in perspective before we begin the analysis of its specific ideas, it is well to remember Brickman's words. He says:

> Neither a philosophy nor a movement (in the political sense), Essentialism represented a state of mind--one of healthy skepticism, watchful waiting, and appreciation of the good regardless of age or label.
>
> It is an approach to set the schools on a straight path, to maintain the proper balance between subject and method, teacher and pupil, school and home, the old and the new.[1]

The Committee itself viewed Essentialism as a set of educational valies and ideals rather than a school of philosophy. Their aim was to view American education during a certain period of time--roughly from the turn of the century until the time they were writing. During this period, they believed American education had suffered an enormous decline in prestige and effectiveness. Their job, as they perceived it, was to analyze the social causes of this decline and make recommendations for its alleviation. Bagley maintained Essentialism was to be the springboard from which to voice dissent "with the teachings of the school of educational theory which has become increasingly dominant in the United States during the past generation and which, in its well intended efforts to improve

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[1]William W. Brickman, "A Call to Essentialists," School and Society, LXXIX, No. 2029 (March 20, 1954), 92.

American education, has, in effect, discredited and belittled the significance of a mastery of what we commonly call subject matter. . . ."[1] The primary focus of attention, then, would be the educational system.

Statement of the Major Problems in American Education

The Essentialist Committee attempted to analyze the difficulties of American education from several standpoints, i.e., social, political and economic. However, the Committee's focus came to rest upon one social policy that to them seemed to be the heart of the problem: the creation of the universal school. This was posited by them as being the central causal factor for the decline of American education. As Bagley says, "this position was based primarily upon certain incontestable weaknesses in American education. These weaknesses were traced to the vast upward expansion of the universal school."[2]

The Essentialist Committee, having placed the main causal factor of the decline of American education on the development of the universal school, presented some evidence for their claim. The evidence was based on these assumptions:

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[1] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 326.

[2] Ibid., p. 329.

1. Age for age, the average pupil of our elementary schools does not meet the standards of achievement in the fundamentals of education that are attained in the elementary schools of many other countries.[1]

The Committee felt that it was a significant fact that American achievement tests given to primary school children of European countries (and Canada) showed that these children scored significantly higher than the American children.[2]

2. Within the past decade the effectiveness of high school instruction has been weakened by increasing disabilities in so basic an accomplishment as reading. It is scarcely too much to say, indeed, that increasing proportions of pupils in the junior and senior high school are essentially illiterate.[3]

In this statement a reference is made to the quality of European secondary education; but it is acknowledged that this form of education is basically elitist and so, on that ground, cannot be compared with American secondary education. No data are given to support the contention that American junior high and high schools are producing illiterates.

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[1]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 241.

[2]Data for these conclusions were drawn from a study by The Scottish Council for Research in Education, published by the University of London Press in 1934 under the title of "Achievement Tests in the Primary Schools: A Comparative Study with American Tests in Fife."

[3]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 242.

3. In other and not at all exclusively scholastic achievements, American education is relatively ineffective. A recent study suggests that juvenile delinquency may be correlated in many cases with these reading disabilities.[1]

The Committee makes clear that it does not draw a causal relationship between crime and the type of education. But it does contend that only in the United States was there a correlation in the last one hundred years between the rise of the universal school and delinquency. The study cited to support this claim is not given in the Platform, but is referred to in the other document on educational theory.[2]

The Committee stated that although it recognized that the universal school was the principal agent in changing the character of American education, it did not oppose it per se, but only the effects that were being manifested at present. They say, "the Essentialists recognized that the expansion of the universal school had to come about through the operation of fundamental social and economic forces, chief among which, very obviously, had been the marvelous technological developments. . . ."[3] It was, however,

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[1] Ibid., p. 243.

[2] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 333. The study referred to is the Uniform Crime Report, prepared by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Published by the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., no date given.

[3] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 330.

the end results of this technological process that the Committee was concerned with.

> It is the Essentialist's contention that, because the opening of the upper grades and the high schools to unselected and increasingly heterogeneous groups was inevitable, so a modification of the older standards was inevitable. Rigorous requirements simply had to be relaxed, and they have been progressively relaxed over a period of thirty years.[1]

This relaxation of standards, according to the Committee, was necessary in the given circumstances. There were factors such as the rapid growth of population, the advancement of the frontier, the arrival of millions of immigrants, social and political clashes arising from the mixing of these diverse ethnic groups, the increases in national wealth, the rapid growth of cities, the mobility of the population, the profound changes brought about by the transition from a rural to an industrial economy, and a host of others.[2]

The Committee took into consideration all these complex social and economic factors; but, in addition, they were looking for further evidence to substantiate their claims. Accordingly, they came up with additional factors indicative of the decline of American education. These factors included the following:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 243.

> One fairly trustworthy available measure is the per-capita consumption of "solid" literature as reflected in the statistics of book publications exclusive of fiction. When we make these comparisons on the hypothesis that an educational system plays a significant part in determining such consumption, we find that we are far below practically all other literate countries. . . .[1]

This, of course, is one form of an educational index. However, the Committee did not give details as to which countries were compared. More information could also have been given as to the populations of the countries compared, their social, political and economic systems, and the structure of their educational systems. Too strong a correlation is implied in the Committee's statement. The amount of fiction consumed is not necessarily indicative of a country having an inadequate educational system.

Another piece of evidence, of some questionable value, is a comparison of American Nobel Prize winners. The Committee maintained there were too few, and that this was further evidence that something was drastically wrong with our education.[2] It did not mention advances in applied science or the number of patents registered in any given year.

But the bulwark of the Committee's assumptions centered around the possible correlations of education and social decay.

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[1] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 332.

[2] Ibid.

Instances were cited of the large degree of political corruption, the amount of juvenile delinquency and the rising divorce rate.[1] The Committee's tactic was to posit these conditions as being the result of the excesses of Progressive education, and then let the Progressives refute these allegations, if they could. Bagley states this theme in saying,

> . . . I have maintained [that] the proponents and defenders of relaxed standards and the lines of least resistence in education should recognize their serious responsibility and assume the burden of evidence in defense of their policies. I have raised the question whether the educational theories which have increasingly influenced and now dominate American schools are not likely to compound rather than correct these unquestioned weaknesses of our national life.[2]

The Committee was vitally concerned with the possible weakness to American life brought about by the wholesale acceptance of the Progressive doctrines. These concerns were, of course, exacerbated by the social turmoil created by the Depression. It was this fear of social anarchy and the possible demise of traditional democratic institutions that most concerned the Committee. This attitude was brought out by the implied correlations between Progressive education and the increased crime rate. As the Committee stated it:

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[1] Ibid., p. 333.

[2] Ibid.

> And it should be said that, in general, the states that have had the most substantial . . . school systems have by far the lowest ratios of serious crimes. In a notable degree, too, these same states, many of which do not rate high in per capita wealth, are those that have been the least dependent upon the federal government for "relief" during the depression years.[1]

Thus the Platform Committee stated its case concerning the state of American education: it was, to them, in deplorable condition. They agreed that this was the result of many social and economic factors. However, they were in agreement that the main causal factor was the upward expansion of the universal school with its consequent lowering of standards. With the general outlines of their case stated, the Committee next prepared to outline some of the specific educational issues that were at the crux of the problem.

The Weaknesses of Educational Theories

The Essentialists believed that American education was being drastically weakened through the adoption of certain educational theories. They maintained that the history of education has been marked by two different educational theories. The emphasis of the two theories can be noticed by the pairing of certain words: "individual vs. society," "freedom vs. discipline," "interest vs.

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[1] Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 243.

effort," "play vs. work," "immediate needs vs. remote goals," "psychological organization vs. logical organization," and so forth.[1]

The Committee goes on to make the point that this dichotomy in educational philosophy was begun in ancient Greece by the sophists. The dualism was further strengthened during the Renaissance and propounded from then on by such men as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart, and in America by Horace Mann, Francis W. Parker and John Dewey.[2] The Committee states,

> Under the necessity which confronted American education of rationalizing the loosening of standards and the relaxation of rigor if mass-education were to be expanded upward, the theories which emphasized interest, freedom, immediate needs, personal experience, psychological organization, and pupil-initiative, and which in so doing tended to discredit and even condemn their opposites--effort, discipline, remote goals, race-experience, logical sequence, and teacher-initiative--naturally made a powerful appeal.[3]

An important item to note is that the Committee was laying the blame for the spread of misconstrued Progressivism on two groups: professors of education and teachers in the primary schools. Bagley says, "Over more than a generation these theories have increasingly influenced the lower schools."[4] The Committee, at this

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[1] Ibid., p. 244.

[2] Ibid., p. 245.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

point, was trying to disprove the counterallegations leveled by the Progressives that American children compared unfavorably with their European counterparts because there still remained so much of the Essentialists' doctrine in American education. Bagley maintained that this was potentially false. He says, "one would be rash to assert that teachers use progressive practices exclusively or consistently or efficiently, but it is equally rash to maintain that the progressive educational theories have not significantly influenced what we may without disrespect call the rank and file of American teachers."[1]

Bagley goes on to show some evidence of the contention that Progressive doctrines had greatly influenced American education:

1. He cites a poll taken for the National Society for Study of Education (No. 33, Part 2, The Activity Movement) as showing a "very general sympathy" with the Progressive tenets.[2]

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[1] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 334.

[2] Ibid., p. 335.

2. He states a piece of his own research as indicating the use of Progressive methods in the elementary school.[1]

3. Reference is made to the large number of teachers-in-training, and regular teachers who have been taught Progressive doctrines in summer sessions.[2]

4. He maintains that the public press has upheld as being models of the best education those schools which have primarily espoused Progressive teachings. He cites as an example the publicity given to the Progressive Lincoln School at Columbus University, while its counterpart, the Horace Mann School, dominated by Essentialist doctrine, was seldom mentioned.[3]

After stating its case for the dissemination of Progressive theories through the primary schools, the Committee undertook to list some additional specific grievances related to Progressivism and the undermining of American education.

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[1]William C. Bagley, "The Textbook and Methods of Teaching," The Textbook in American Education, Thirteenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II (Bloomington, Illinois: Public School Publishing Co., 1931), pp. 7-26.

[2]Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 335.

[3]Ibid.

The Influence of Progressive Theories on American Education

The Committee listed several major points in the second portion of the Platform. They were:

1. "The complete abandonment in many school systems of rigorous standards of scholastic achievement as a condition of promotion from grade to grade, and the passing of all pupils 'on schedule.'"[1]

Although they acknowledged the many complicated psychological factors, their main concern was with the quality of student that eventually ended up in the high schools: he could not handle the work at that level. The responsibility for this situation was put on the Progressives for their many curriculum changes based on Thorndike's transfer of training experiments.[2] These experiments were used as evidence to discredit the necessity of teaching any formal subject matter. The limited findings of the experiments were generalized for too much, according to the Essentialists, and

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[1] Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 245.

[2] William C. Bagley, Education Values (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), pp. 180-194. (The early "transfer" experiments are to be found in E. L. Thorndike and R. S. Woodsworth, "The Influence of Improvement in One Mental Function upon the Efficiency of Other Functions," Psychological Review, VII (1901), quoted in Bagley, Education Values, p. 183.)

were seized upon by the Progressives to substantiate their own claims.

2. "The Disparagement of system and sequence in learning and a dogmatic denial of any value in, even of any possibility of learning through, the logical, chronological, and causal relationships of learning materials."[1]

The Essentialists were reacting against the idea that only those problems are worth solving or knowing about that originate in the interests of the student. It was their contention that all subject matter has a logical order that can be presented in a chronological fashion, always indicating the causal relationship between materials that are being used. As Bagley says, "the planning of an assignment becomes a matter of prime importance . . . learners should be left in no doubt regarding what they are to do."[2] He reiterates elsewhere the necessity of teaching the liberal arts as a source of common social heritage and as a guarantee of democratic principles.[3] The

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[1]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 245.

[2]William C. Bagley and Marion E. MacDonald, Standard Practices in Teaching (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 38-39.

[3]William C. Bagley, An Introduction to Teaching (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), pp. 71, 72, 98-100.

common purpose, however, in insisting on system, sequence, and content was Bagley's idea that the liberal arts were a way of modifying human behavior. Education did, indeed, have a utilitarian value. But that "value" was in the degree that it influenced behavior or conduct, the crucial point being that definite, organized knowledge had to be given, and this knowledge, coupled with the experience of the teacher, would determine the conduct of the learner.[1]

3. The Committee referred to "the wide vogue of the so-called activity movement."[2]

Again, the Committee was objecting to the excesses of Progressive doctrine wherein self-directed activity turned into license. The Essentialist had no objection to the project method if it was based on guided direction in which a topic was chosen, thought about, researched, and based ultimately upon the logic of a particular discipline, i.e., geography or natural science.

4. "The discrediting of the exact and exacting studies."[3]

Here the Essentialists maintained that the widening of the universal school and the overgeneralizing of the "transfer"

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[1]William C. Bagley, Craftsmanship in Teaching (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911), pp. 166-167, 171, 189.

[2]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 246.

[3]Ibid., p. 247.

experiments caused the inherently difficult subjects of Latin, geometry and algebra to be abandoned. They felt this trend would have long range detrimental consequence. Not only would a valuable portion of the social heritage be excluded, but adults would have no adequate knowledge of language or mathematics to function effectively in a rapidly changing society. Bagley, for instance, believed that the "undeniable effect of the Progressive teachings is to belittle the significance of organized knowledge, to subordinate the tested lessons of race experience to the unpredictable learning out-comes of personal and incidental experience, and, . . . to exalt and even enthrone individual interests and desires above social needs."[1] That the Progressives did carry the "activity method" too far was substantiated by the fact that even John Dewey spoke out against its extremes.[2]

5. "An increasingly heavy emphasis upon the 'social studies."[3]

The Committee in this statement is reacting to the introduction of the social sciences in the lower grades, the objection

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[1]Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 338.

[2]John Dewey, "Individuality and Experience," Journal of the Barnes Foundation, II (January, 1926), 1, quoted in Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," p. 338.

[3]Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 248.

being that the generalizations of the social sciences are not in the same class as those of the natural sciences. This is not to say that they should not be taught. The Committee insisted on the usefulness of these subjects as teaching students more about man and his environment. However, the objected to their wholesale use as a substitution for the teaching of other courses, especially science and mathematics. They further objected to the Progressives' theory that democracy could best be upheld through the teaching of the social sciences. The Essentialists contended that the social sciences were as yet an imperfect tool in predicting man's actions; and, therefore, they were not the complete answer in the educational development of the child.

The last two propositions listed by the Committee were directed toward developments in the lower schools.

6. "Using the lower schools to establish a new social order."[1]

The Committee, although not stating it overtly, was concerned with the problem of indoctrination in the lower schools. This concern was expressed in the previous proposition dealing with the introduction of the social sciences. The fear was that young minds would be given a steady diet of propaganda instead of direction in

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[1] Ibid.

learning the fundamentals. This concern was strengthened by the social disruption caused by the Depression and in the alarming growth of totalitarian states during the 1930's. If the social heritage was not preserved in formal schooling, the Essentialists reasoned, there would always be the possibility that young minds could be manipulated to accept only one point of view.

7. "The 'curriculum-revision' movement and its vagaries."[1]

The Committee recorded that curriculum revision had been going on in the lower schools for over twenty years. In fact, in 1933 there were over thirty thousand curricula on file at Columbia. The Essentialists' prime source of complaint was that all this experimenting was hurting the child. As mobility became an increasingly dominant form of life in America, there was an increased need for a body of knowledge that had a modicum of uniformity. The culture needed to share a common set of learning experiences if cultural homogeneity was to be a fact. In addition, the Essentialists said this constant curriculum revision had the overall effect of weakening the content of the fundamental subjects.

Thus, the Essentialist Committee presented a series of claims against American education. These charges were directed

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[1] Ibid., p. 249.

against the excesses of the Progressive movement and in the weaking of traditional learning brought on by the widening of the universal school and the consequent lowering of standards.

The final portion of the Platform presented some basic hypotheses concerning Essentialists' beliefs and some recommendations to alleviate the problems. Let us look at these suggestions.

The Problem and the Platform

After presenting some of the background conditions of the crisis in education, the Committee attempted to present their solutions to the problem. Their primary concern at this time was with the rapid social and economic changes taking place because of the Depression. The Essentialists were concerned with the upholding of certain democratic institutions and practices, namely those guarantees set forth in the Bill of Rights. As they stated it,

> Hence a primary function of American education will be to safeguard and strengthen these ideals of American democracy, with special emphasis upon freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion.
>
> These then are among the first essentials in the platform of the Essentialist.[1]

The Platform, after stating the above, goes into a fairly long piece describing the possible dangers to American education

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[1] Ibid., p. 250. (My emphasis.)

brought on by the rise of totalitarian states. The mood is one of impending danger and a fear that democratic ideals are being seriously weakened. The logic of the argument at this point in the Platform runs something like this: Totalitarian regimes are rapidly rising and posing a direct threat to the existing democracies; the democracies have certain values (i.e., the Bill of Rights) to uphold; these values are perpetuated through the educational system; therefore, it is of utmost importance that education be given in the fundamentals of knowledge constituting the social heritage.

The Platform then cites the French educational system as being admirably suited to this goal: the French maintain the same rigorous standards in their educational system despite the vagaries of government, and despite the many changes in the political structure. In other words, there is the "Culture Generale" (the social heritage) that is the essence of French life and which is always given through formal education.

The key to the Committee's argument is the word discipline. They equate the need for discipline as a prerequisite for a strong democracy. Without discipline, cherished values crumble, laxness enters into every stage of life, and the country cultivates the seeds of its own destruction. The Essentialists insisted that the terms

"democracy" and "freedom" were emotionally charged, and could not be used with a high degree of clarity. Their principal objection, however, was with the tendency of Progressives to equate freedom with democracy. The Essentialists insisted that the term "freedom" implied a degree of responsibility, also. And this responsibility had to be exercised by the teacher in guiding the young. The Committee stated its position like this:

> Now, obviously, the freedom of the immature to choose what they shall learn is of negligible consequence compared with their later freedom from the want, fear, fraud, superstition and error which may fetter the ignorant as cruelly as the chains of the slave driver . . . and the price of this freedom is systematic and sustained effort often devoted to the mastery of materials the significance of which must at the time be taken on faith.[1]

The Essentialists were insisting on the close correlation between education, the development of reasoning in a critical manner, and the preservation of democratic institutions. To accomplish these ends, education had to be based on a guided discipline, stressing the essentials. Education had to develop (1) basic literacy, (2) developing and expanding ideas, (3) and knowledge of the way collective thought and judgment operate in a democracy.[2] This attitude was formally stated in the Platform as:

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[1] Ibid., p. 251.

[2] Ibid., p. 252.

> Among the essentials of the Essentialist, then, is a recognition of the right of the immature learner to guidance and direction when these are needed either for his individual welfare, or for the welfare and progress of the democratic group. The responsibility of the mature for the instruction and control of the immature is the biological meaning of the extended period of human immaturity and necessary dependence.[1]

The Committee quickly acknowledged the fact that discipline could be carried to extremes. It was not for the use of any type of coercion or control where an external agent is used in a punitive manner. This resolution on the use of discipline was followed by one of the most important doctrines of Essentialist thinking--the social heritage. The Committee stated it like this:

> An effective democracy demands a community of culture. Educationally this means that each generation be placed in possession of a common core of ideas, meanings, understandings and ideals representing the most precious elements of the human heritage.[2]

The Committee followed this statement by indicating the necessity for "essentials" in any culture. It was their firm belief, as mentioned before, that the continuity and growth of a culture was in proportion to the transmission of the social heritage. To substantiate their point, they quote the historian Beard when he says, "while education constantly touches the practical affairs of the hour

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[1] Ibid. (My emphasis.)

[2] Ibid.

and day, and responds to political and economic exigencies, it has its own treasure heavy with the thought and sacrifice of the centuries."[1]

The next resolution followed and expanded the one on the social heritage. This one advocated that "a specific program of studies including these essentials should be the heart of a democratic system of education."[2] Again, the emphasis was laid upon the responsibility of democratic governments to insist on the essentials forming the major portion of the primary school program. Mention was made that many foreign countries stress the importance of the essentials in the lower grades. The Committee repeatedly placed emphasis on the relationship between democracy and the maintenance of a rigorous educational program. This program "of the recognized essentials should be taught as such through a systematic program of studies and activities."[3] This, naturally, brought into question the problem of school failures. The last formal proposition of the Committee dealt with the issue in this way:

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[1] Ibid., p. 253, quoting Charles A. Beard, The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy (Washington: The Educational Policies Commission of the National Educational Association, 1937), p. 71.

[2] Bagley, "An Essentialist Platform for the Advancement of American Education," p. 253.

[3] Ibid., p. 254.

> Failure in school is unpleasant and the repetition of a grade is costly and often not very effective. On the other hand, the lack of a stimulus that will keep the learner to his task is a serious injustice both to him and to the democratic group which, we repeat, has a fundamental stake in his effective education.[1]

The Committee followed this statement by a plea not to stigmatize failure in such harsh terms. It acknowledged the problem of different rates of learning by individuals, but insisted that nearly all could be given the essentials. Their reasoning was premised on the changing social conditions. They believed only a person grounded in the essentials could effectively compete in a rapidly changing society. Consequently, although some would have to fail, they reasoned this in the long run would be to their advantage.

The concluding remarks of the Platform center around the economic and social conditions of the country. It is a restatement of the opening sections of the document. The Committee was trying to emphasize that the great social upheaval that had taken place since 1929 (and which was still in effect when the Committee wrote) had produced such far-flung consequences on traditional American society that there was a danger of totalitarianism.

This is why the Committee continually makes reference to the threats to democracy. They were indeed concerned with the rapid rise to power of Hitler and Mussolini, the failure of the League

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[1] Ibid.

of Nations, and the civil war raging in Spain. These situations, coupled with the profound social changes wrought by the Depression in America, were a cause of great concern for the Essentialists.

To compound the difficulties, they saw the extremes of Progressivism in education as a direct threat to cherished democratic ideals. It was a time, they felt, for an increase in discipline and effort. Yet, effort and discipline were inherent to a rigorous and formal system of education. Thus, they assumed that some Progressive doctrines were actually a national threat, rather than merely an alternate form of educational philosophy.

It is the writer's contention that the Essentialist Platform was a response more to the trials and personal hardships engendered by the Depression, and the resulting drastic social and economic changes, than to the fear of the educational inroads made by the Progressive movement.

Thus, in the last portion of the Platform, the writers again re-emphasize the social changes taking place. They lay heavy emphasis on the economic transformation that is in progress, and, by implication, are wary of some of the newer programs put into effect, especially programs initiated by the Federal government and having "socialistic" leanings. Thus they say, "in societies that have lifted themselves above the plane of the brute and the savage, a most

powerful steadying and civilizing force has been the ideal of personal economic responsibility for one's own survival and for one's old age and the care of one's dependents."[1]

There is a tendency for the Committee to hearken back to the principle of "rugged individualism." They are suspicious of the type of government that is responsible for the people's "social security." Social security, for instance, would be an acceptable policy, but only "under the condition that each generation had been rigorously disciplined in its responsibilities and made clearly aware of the pitfalls that await the spendthrift and the idler."[2] The Essentialists were visualizing a society that might come about through the combination of a lax educational system and an emphasis on social welfare by the government.

There was a genuinely felt danger by the writers of the Platform. This is why they gave such weight to the problems of education: Education had to be the stabilizing force within the society whether or not the many social changes were right; education had to serve as a counterbalance to excesses or fads. The Essentialists stated, "a clear and primary duty of organized education at the present time is to recognize the fundamental character of the changes

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[1] Ibid., p. 255.

[2] Ibid., p. 256.

that are already taking place, and to search diligently for means of counter-acting their dangers."[1]

The Committee, therefore, was reacting not only to Progressivism, but to the larger issues of the day. Progressivism, however, became a twofold menace: (1) It was weakening and undermining the social fabric of American society at present; and (2) it was perpetuating these practices which would continue to weaken democratic institutions in the future. Thus the Progressive movement was seen by the Essentialists as the causal factor (although not openly admitted) to the continuing problems of the Depression

In other words, the members of the Platform Committee were products of their age reacting to a definite social situation--the Depression and its aftereffects. The problems of the period were seen by the members in educational terms, because they were educators. A relationship had to be found between the miseries of the Depression and the educational system. This was found in the expansion of the universal school and the lowering of standards. A further link was established by inferring that the rise in crime, divorce rate, and general moral decline was, in part, due to the lessening disciplinary function of education. All these factors were then implied as being related to the inroads of Progressive education.

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[1] Ibid.

It was from the above assumptions that the official Essentialist Platform was formulated. Whatever their motivations, it can be said that the Committee did have the welfare of American education at heart. They perceived unbridled Progressivism as the root-cause of the problems of American education, and sought to remedy this through a system of education that stressed mathematics, natural science, history, and certain of the social sciences. Bagley attempted to place the entire controversy in perspective when he said,

> What I wish to say here is that no reasonable program for American education could omit many of the policies and practices that the Progressives have emphasized. The Essentialist certainly would endorse the functional approach to the problems of teaching and learning; the effort always to build the lessons of race-experience upon the individual, first-hand experience of the learner; the condemnation always of stupid, parrot-like learning; the importance in the earlier school years especially of the procedures that are reflected in such concepts as the project method and the activity program; and the efforts to make school life a happy as well as a profitable series of learning experiences. On the other hand, the Essentialists would hold that out of the experience of the race have come certain lessons so important to social welfare and social progress that it would be the height of folly to leave their mastery to the whim or caprice of either teacher or learner. They would hold that "the freedom of the immature to choose what they shall learn is of small consequence compared with their later freedom from the want, fear, fraud, superstition, and error which may fetter the ignorant as cruelly as the chains of the slave-driver . . . and the price of this freedom is systematic and sustained effort often devoted to the mastery of materials the significance of which must at the time be taken on faith."[1]

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[1] Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," pp. 340-341.

This was, in substance, the educational position of the Essentialists. The following chapter will be devoted to examining the principal members of the Committee, how the Committee came into existence, the internal organization of the Committee, and the philosophical differences existing between the members.

CHAPTER IV

PRIMARY SOURCES CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ESSENTIALIST COMMITTEE

The purpose of this chapter will be to discuss three basic points. (1) The background of the members of the Committee will be discussed, devoting most of the writing to two key members, William Chandler Bagley and Michael John Demiashkevich. Background discussion will also be provided on the remaining members of the original Committee. It was, however, the work of Bagley and Demiashkevich that provided the theoretical and philosophical aspects of the Essentialist movement. Therefore, more emphasis will be placed on these two members.

(2) Background information will be provided as to the origin of the actual Essentialist Committee. Although this aspect of Essentialism has been aptly documented by Chambers,[1] the writer will

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[1]Gurney Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich" (unpublished Doctoral Thesis, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1967).

attempt to shed additional light on the phase of the Committee's organization. (3) Lastly, the writer will try to show, through primary source documentation that, first, the Essentialist Committee was founded on the strength of William Chandler Bagley and Michael John Demiashkevich; second, that the greatest strength of the movement occurred in the year following the original meeting in Atlantic City; and, third, that the original ideals of the movement were altered by a breakdown of organization as the months went by. After reviewing additional sources on Essentialism, the writer feels that the organizational aspect of the movement has not been emphasized sufficiently.[1]

Background Information on the Original Members of the Essentialist Committee

William Chandler Bagley

William Chandler Bagley (1874-1946) was the acknowledged leader of the Essentialist movement. He attended public school in Michigan and graduated from Michigan Agricultural College in 1895. He taught briefly in a small school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

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[1]All documents quoted here have been examined independently by the writer through the courtesy of Dr. William Brickman, Professor of the History of Education and Comparative Education, University of Pennsylvania. All documents are in Dr. Brickman's files and have been quoted with his permission.

He studied psychology at the University of Chicago in 1896, and went on to take his master's degree in 1898 at the University of Wisconsin under Joseph Jastrow.

Bagley was trained in the natural sciences and in experimental and physiological psychology. Later he went to Cornell University and there obtained his Ph.D. degree under the famous psychologist Titchener in 1900. This orientation towards the natural sciences was to remain with Bagley for the rest of his life. This became evident much later in his disagreement with Demiashkevich on the nature of man.

In 1909 Bagley went to the University of Illinois and became the director of the School of Education. There he established a lifelong friendship with men like Boyd H. Bode and Guy Whipple, who was later to serve on the Essentialist Committee. At Illinois, Bagley's long list of publications began with such books as Classroom Management and Human Behavior: A First Book in Psychology for Teachers. By 1914, Bagley was recognized as an outstanding leader in American education.[1]

Bagley worked for the Carnegie Foundation and was appointed to Teachers College as a specialist in the preparation of

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[1] I. L. Kandel, William Chandler Bagley: Stalwart Educator (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1961), p. 13.

teachers. He was one of the first men to criticize the use of intelligence tests in his book Determinism in Education (1925).

Bagley over the years became the most vocal opponent of Progressive education. His criticisms were wide ranging. He deplored the lack of drill and discipline in the schools and the poor teaching of the social heritage. In his book Education and Emergent Man, Bagley laid the foundation for his philosophy of education. His philosophy of education centered around the belief that man was an evolutionary being. Bagley, however, defined evolution in broader terms. For him, the most important form of evolution was what he labeled "emergent evolution." This type of evolution was basically cultural. He maintained that man evolves only through previous experience. He called this previous experience the social heritage and divided it into two parts, (1) the material heritage and (2) the spiritual heritage of tradition, custom, knowledge, and skill.[1]

For the remainder of Bagley's life this notion of the necessity of transmitting the social heritage became his central concern. This, in fact, became his philosophy of education. He united this concept with the idea of discipline. His main objection to Progressive education was that it followed the lines of least resistance.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 80

[2] Ibid., p. 84.

For Bagley, the social heritage could be learned only through a form of rational discipline.

Bagley's ideas on education became widely known when the Essentialist Committee's Platform was published. Here Bagley set out his complete philosophy of education, which included the necessity for teaching the social heritage, the structure of the curriculum, the weaknesses of Progressive education and the relationship between the social heritage and democracy.

Bagley was the principal theorist behind the Essentialist movement. The official documents of the Committee mirror, primarily, his own views. He was the acknowledged leader of the movement and remained its chief supporter until the time of his death.

Michael John Demiashkevich

Demiashkevich, like Bagley, was one of the truly great men of the Essentialist Committee. He was born in Russia in 1891 and received a rigorous classical education at the Imperial Historico-Philological and Imperial Archaeological Institutes in Petrograd. Demiashkevich taught in Russia from 1914 to 1923, when he came to the United States.

Demiashkevich's disagreement with the Bolshevik's caused him to leave his post at the Ministry of Education and flee to the

United States.[1] He enrolled at Teachers College, Columbia, and there began work on his doctorate in 1923. Demiashkevich received his degree in 1926 and spent the following two years working at the International Institute of Teachers College and studying in Paris, Munich, Berlin, London, and Grenoble. His overseas study produced two books and a number of articles on European education.

Demiashkevich then accepted a position at George Peabody College for Teachers and remained there until his death ten years later.

Demiashkevich was highly trained in philosophy, and if a label could be attached to his thinking, one would have to call him an Idealist. He viewed education as a science consisting of three branches: the philosophical, the social, and the natural.[2] The school, he believed, was the one institution that could best transmit the social heritage of a country; indeed, this was the school's primary function.

For Demiashkevich, man was both a spiritual and physical entity. He believed one of the most important functions of the school was to transmit, by way of the social heritage, spiritual and moral

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[1]Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 9.

[2]Ibid., pp. 89-90.

values. A society, for Demiashkevich, was only as good as the children it produced. Therefore, the logical starting point for the transformation of character should be the school.

In his most famous work, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, Demiashkevich set forth the proposition that the two most important functions of the school were intellectual training and character formation.[1] He believed in absolute moral values and felt that it was the schools' task to teach these. Of all the members of the Essentialist Committee, Demiashkevich was probably the most brilliant.[2] He was a brilliant linguist, read some 22 languages, and pursued a reading program that was both extensive and deep. Bagley was the chairman of his doctoral committee, and between them some of the ideas of Essentialism began to develop. Demiashkevich visited frequently with Bagley and Isaac Kandel, and from these meetings the plans for a group called the Essentialists emerged. Demiashkevich was responsible for drawing up the first Essentialist document, called "Tentative Theses." He was also the first to coin the term "Essentialist." After the founding meeting in Atlantic City, Demiashkevich continued to support Essentialist ideas. He did not,

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[1] Ibid., p. 98.

[2] Correspondence with Louis Shores, December 9, 1969.

however, sign the Platform document, mainly because of philosophical reasons, as will be seen later.

Demiashkevich, overburdened with teaching and depressed at hearing of the atrocities to his family in Russia, committed suicide in the late summer of 1938.

The Remaining Members

The other members of the Committee were F. Alden Shaw, Louis Shores, Guy M. Whipple, Walter Ryle, and Milton L. Shane.

F. Alden Shaw was the headmaster of the pretigious Detroit County Day School in Michigan. He was the official organizer of the Essentialist Committee and served in the important capacity as secretary to the organization. He was mainly responsible for encouraging Demiashkevich and Bagley to undertake the intellectual portion of the movement. Shaw's extensive correspondence with the other members kept ideas flowing smoothly and contributed to the feeling of solidarity within the organization. His own school was run along Essentialist principles and continues to be run so today.[1]

Walter Ryle was a distinguished educator who was an historian and later became president of North East Missouri State Teachers College. His intellectual career centered around the

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[1]Personal interview with F. Alden Shaw, January 16, 1970.

teaching of the history of Missouri. He was likewise active in teacher preparation programs, and the implementation of Essentialist ideas within teacher training institutions.[1]

Guy Whipple was a prominent educational psychologist who taught at the University of Michigan, Cornell, and the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He was the author of several books on mental measurement, as well as being the editor of several Year-books of the National Society for the Study of Education.[2]

Louis Shores was a well-known figure in the field of library science. He studied under Demiashkevich and later taught at Peabody College. He did pioneering work in the area of encyclopedia design, and was responsible for the publishing of sixteen books and over three hundred articles.[3]

M. L. Shane was a college professor and colleague of Shores at Peabody College. He also studied under Demiashkevich. Shane was at the founding meeting in Atlantic City but was not as influential or well known nationally as the other members.

This has been a short summary of the men who composed the original Essentialist Committee. Bagley and Demiashkevich,

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[1]Correspondence with Walter Ryle, February 23, 1970.

[2]Who's Who in America (Chicago: The A. Marguis Co., 1940-1941), XXI, p. 2734.

[3]Correspondence with Louis Shores, December 6, 1969.

of course, stand out, and it is to them that the credit must be given for formalizing and systematizing the Essentialist position.

Organization of the Essentialist Committee

The Essentialist Committee was begun through the interest of F. Alden Shaw, headmaster of the Detroit County Day School. Shaw had written to Demiashkevich asking him if he would be interested in forming some type of organization espousing Essentialist ideas.[1] On Demiashkevich's advice, Shaw proceeded to write Bagley to solicit advice and possible help. Shaw stated in his letter to Bagley,

> In accordance with this suggestion I am writing to seek your co-operation in this movement. Of course, I have no authority to offer anybody any office until the association is formed, but I heartily agree with Prof. Demiashkevich and I believe that any association would feel honored to have you as its president.
>
> I would appreciate very much if I may hear from you regarding your views, for your language experience would be very helpful in matters of this kind.[2]

In reply to Shaw's letter, Bagley indicated his interest in such an organization. Bagley states,

> I believe that a national organization of the type that you suggest is greatly needed. The Progressive school of educational theory is now supreme in our educational councils. Irrespective of the merits of progressive education, it is not well for the country

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[1]Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 20.

[2]Letter to William C. Bagley from F. Alden Shaw, November 14, 1937. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

> that its monopoly should be so nearly complete. As in government, there should be organized criticism of the parts in power.[1]

Bagley, because of his advancing age, was not interested in assuming the leadership and suggested a younger man be chosen.[2] Shaw proposed the formation of an "executive committee" to launch the organization. Bagley wrote to Shaw,

> Your suggestions of the advisability of an executive committee to initiate the movement is excellent. Perhaps a beginning could be made by an informal meeting at Atlantic City at the time of the midwinter sessions.[3]

Bagley's enthusiasm for the meeting apparently increased. He wrote to Shaw again, indicating that an organization could be established at Atlantic City. He states,

> I have noticed many indications that an increment clarifying the situation in educational theory would be warmly welcomed by the public-school workers. I hope that you will take the initiative in calling the meeting.[4]

Bagley went on to outline a list of possible members for the Committee. He wanted to include men in specific subject-matter fields. He was, however, wary of including two categories of people: (1) men like Dr. Hutchins of Chicago, whom he labeled an

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[1] Letter to F. Alden Shaw from Bagley, November 10, 1937.

[2] Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 21.

[3] Letter to F. Alden Shaw from Bagley, November 18, 1937.

[4] Letter to F. Alden Shaw from Bagley, November 22, 1937.

"extremist," in addition to men who were not acquainted with the problems of the public schools; and (2) members whom he considered in opposition to Progressivism whose criticisms were lodged in economic or social doctrines. These persons, he felt, would detract from the movement's concern with educational problems.[1]

Shaw, hoping to elicit the opinions of various men possibly sympathetic to the Essentialist point of view, wrote to the realist Frederick S. Breed for his comments. Breed was in favor of the meeting but thought it should be a preliminary, exploring, and clarifying session. He went on to say,

> I think that one of the most important problems confronting educators at the present time is to assess the value of the progressive theory in comparison with alternative theories and then attempt to organize a program that will not be subject to the errors of omission and emphasis that characterize most of these plans. A search for areas of agreement on the one hand and points of irreconcilable disagreement, if any, on the other hand is what we need, as I see it.[2]

Shaw sent a letter to Demiashkevich listing some additional members. Bagley replied to Shaw saying he was in agreement with most of the names. However, he again sent a cautionary note saying, "I think some of these will not cause serious difficulty if the association

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[1] Ibid., p. 2.

[2] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Frederick S. Breed, December 9, 1937. Carbon copy in Brickman file addressed to Bagley.

of the educational Progressive with social and economic radicalism can be 'kept out of the picture.'"[1] Bagley wanted the focus of the meeting to remain educational, if possible.

Bagley met with Demiashkevich and wrote to Shaw that they had discussed the proposed meeting at Atlantic City in some depth. Both Bagley and Demiashkevich were in agreement that some non-professional groups should be represented. They suggested the parents of children who had attended Progressive schools and schools representing Essentialist ideas.[2]

Interestingly, Bagley, in this letter, suggested the name of Dr. Mary E. Townsend, who had recently completed a study of the Russian educational system. He states about Dr. Townsend:

> She has made a personal study of educational conditions in the Soviet Union with the conclusions that are at variance with those of the Progressives who are disposed to interpret the abandonment of Progressivism in Russia not as recognition of an education failure, but as a rejection of policies that in their judgment encourage independent thinking.[3]

Bagley probably thought some cross-cultural evidence could strengthen the case against the Progressives.

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[1] Letter to F. Alden Shaw from Bagley, January 3, 1938.

[2] Letter to F. Alden Shaw from Bagley, January 7, 1938.

[3] Ibid., p. 2.

Some tentative theses concerning the Essentialist position were first of all drawn up by Shaw and given to Demiashkevich.[1] These proposals were formulated by Shaw using Demiashkevich's book, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. Not thinking these proposals detailed enough, Demiashkevich drew up another set of statements which he labeled "The Tentative Theses."[2]

Demiashkevich's "Tentative Theses" are unique in their scope and direction. The writer will attempt to present the general content of the theses and indicate those sections that were similar to the final draft of the Essentialist Platform.[3]

Demiashkevich divided his paper into four main sections. They were entitled: "Education for Citizenship," "Character Building," "Education for General Culture," and "Educational Experimentation and Academic Freedom."

In "Education for Citizenship" Demiashkevich argues that the major responsibility of the school is the presentation of those

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[1]Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 22.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Gurney Chambers includes a copy of the "Tentative Theses" in the appendix of his work on Demiashkevich, but does not analyze the contents of the "Theses." The writer examined a copy of the "Tentative Theses" that was sent to William C. Bagley on January 13, 1938, and is in the Brickman file.

ideals embodied in the Bill of Rights. He says, "This Association believes that the understanding, love, and preservation of the American ideal and form of government is an essential objective of American education."[1] Because of his experiences in Russia after the Revolution of 1917, Demiashkevich was strongly opposed to all totalitarian systems. He says in this regard, "The Essentialists are opposed to the use of the schools for the promotion of totalitarian forms of government, whether communist or fascist, under whatever label or disguises."[2]

To Demiashkevich some of the highest values were human life and happiness. In the first article he states his opposition to any system that sacrifices the individual to a particular doctrine.[3]

One of the longest of the "Tentative Theses" is the second, which he labeled "Character Building." Here Demiashkevich states:

> This Association considers it to be among the first and foremost obligations of the school to assume its share of responsibility with the home and church in assisting the young toward the development of a sense of duty and the will to do good and to oppose evil.[4]

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[1] "Tentative Theses," p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 2 (No. 2).

In this article, Demiashkevich states one of his central beliefs: the existence of permanent, transcendental moral values.[1] He felt that no character building could take place if the school did not teach moral values.

He then goes on to state another one of his basic ideas: that the human personality is more than a physiological machine.[2] He says to this point:

> The significance of the human personality in social, political, and economic matters can be solidly guaranteed, in the last analyses, only through the recognition of man by fellow men as a bearer of spiritual value--in particular of the ideal of the good, the beautiful, and the true.[3]

Demiashkevich continues this theme of humane character building in his section called "Education for General Culture." Here he states the position that the Essentialists should advance the cause of liberal education, over vocational education, in elementary and secondary education.[4] Demiashkevich defined the purpose of liberal education as "forearming the pupil with the knowledge of the mode of thinking and living, of the ideals, aspirations, achievements, and

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[1] Ibid., p. 2 (No. 3).

[2] Ibid., p. 3 (No. 4 and No. 5).

[3] Ibid., p. 3 (No. 6).

[4] Ibid., p. 4 (No. 8).

failures of mankind."[1] This idea of learning the lessons of the past was a basic for the formation of the idea of a cultural heritage that is one of the central concepts of Essentialism. Demiashkevich believed the lessons of the social heritage were deposited in the humanities and the natural-mathematical sciences.[2]

Demiashkevich further stressed the necessity for reading as an important function of the school.[3] One of his main points, and one that was incorporated in the Essentialist Platform, was the presentation of material in a sequential manner. He says in this regard:

> It is the duty of the school to secure reasonable mastery of a rich sequential or systematic curriculum on the part of the pupil. This curriculum should show proper balance between mental and manual training, and should include the irreducible body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to effective participation in a democratic society.[4]

Demiashkevich felt that the curriculum should be abstract. He thought that if abstract thinking was not developed in the primary and secondary grades, then the educational system would produce citizens incapable of understanding their own political and economic

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[1] Ibid., p. 4 (No. 10).

[2] Ibid., p. 5 (No. 11).

[3] Ibid., p. 6 (No. 13).

[4] Ibid., p. 6 (No. 14).

system.[1] He visualized the best education as being one based on strict intellectual discipline stressing exact information and critical analyses of facts.[2] Demiashkevich concluded the theses by saying that experimentation in education must be based on the experience of the past, and that academic freedom must be guaranteed.[3]

The "Tentative Theses" were important in that they formed the early written basis for the Essentialist movement. The theses were not officially adopted by the Committee, but they were circulated to Shaw, Bagley, and Robert Hutchins of Chicago. While Bagley and Shaw approved of the theses, Hutchins believed them to be too general.[4]

Bagley wrote to Demiashkevich after he finished reading the theses. Bagley was in agreement with the theses, but did not agree on two fundamental points. Here is an early indication of the philosophical differences between Bagley and Demiashkevich. The differences of opinion, Bagley wrote, were:

1. As I have suggested in earlier letters, I do not believe it wise to let the proposed organization be thought of as a

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[1] Ibid., p. 7 (No. 17).

[2] Ibid., p. 8 (No. 18).

[3] Ibid., p. 8 (No. 19 and No. 20).

[4] Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 22.

"stand-pat" group in respect of social and economic reforms. The first theses, in my judgment, might justify such an implication.

2. I personally could not subscribe to a belief in transcendental values if this implies personal values that transcend human experience. Nor can I hold to a belief that ethical judgments and moral conduct must necessarily depend upon the acceptance of supernatural forces.[1]

In the last part of the letter Bagley agreed that the important issues in the theses had to do with effort, discipline, sequence, and system in the process and materials of education.[2]

Shaw received a carbon of the letter from Bagley to Demiashkevich and tried to resolve some of the differences. In regard to the first thesis, Shaw wanted to adopt a compromise statement. He said:

> I see no reason why a clause cannot be added to the final thesis, stating that we always stand ready to adopt demonstrated truth, or truth to be revealed, in any field, social, economic or educational. I do not feel that we should take the position that the Progressives have not re-emphasized some neglected truths.[3]

Shaw, likewise, attempted to resolve the issue about moral values. He says that Bagley's position on the human basis of moral values is substantiated in history. He cites the works of Marcus

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[1] Letter to Demiashkevich from Bagley, February 1, 1938. Carbon copy to F. Alden Shaw.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, February 3, 1938.

Aurelius as an example. He then goes on to say that the discussion of moral values is leading them into the field of theology--which is not their basic purpose. "As you say," Shaw concludes, "we have so much in common that we can adjust our differences."[1]

Shaw, somewhat concerned over this matter of differences, further suggested that a statement might be drawn up in which the members would say they agree to the general aims of the Essentialists' theses. The statement, however, would be open enough so that individual differences in philosophy would be acceptable.[2]

Shaw then suggested that the Committee officially meet on February 25, 1938, at 2:30 p.m. in the Seaside Hotel. He suggested that each member read a ten-minute prepared text outlining his thinking on the purposes that such an association should serve.[3] A general discussion would then follow.

Shaw concluded on a rather serious note, showing his concern over the proposed meeting. He said,

> In closing I would like to express a deep sense of responsibility I feel in all I am trying to do, and I will appreciate it very much, Dr. Bagley, if you will continue to give me the benefit of your opinions regarding all the above projected plans.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 2.

[4] Ibid.

The Atlantic City Meeting

The official meeting of what came to be known as the Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education (ECAAE) was held on February 26, 1938, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The session was noteworthy in that a premature and unauthorized release of the Essentialist Platform was seized upon by the press. This incident launched a heated debate that was to rage for months. Although the Committee met only two other times, in 1939 and 1940, the furor caused by the meeting was to place the Essentialists in the forefront of opposition to the Progressives.[1]

The largest publicity given to the new group came about as a result of an article in the New York Times. Louis Shores, one of the members, was quoted as saying, "The progressives have turned the American Education system to the ability of the lowest class of morons."[2] John Dewey, who was attending the meeting at Atlantic City, countered the charges of the Essentialists by saying,

> The statements of the essentialist group are so general that there is no way of telling what they regard as essentials. So far as it does not mean a return to the 3 R's, the movement is apparently an imitation of the fundamentalist movement,

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[1]Chambers, "The Educational Philosophy of Michael John Demiashkevich," p. 29.

[2]"Study Row Stirred by Essentialists," New York Times, March 2, 1938, p. 8.

> and may perhaps draw support from that quarter as well as from reactionaries in politics and economics.[1]

Kilpatrick, a leading Progressive, also countered with the statement,

> As far as the statement that American children do not show up as well as foreign ones on standardized tests, in so far as it is true, it is a criticism of the traditional methods which are still largely in use in the schools of this country despite the advance of progressivism.[2]

The debate continued in several newspapers.[3] The Hartford (Conn.) Times presented the grievances of the Progressives, while the Seattle (Wash.) Star explained the Essentialist position. The Jackson (Miss.) News and the Wheeling (W. Va.) Intelligence sided with the Essentialist also. The Tulsa (Okla.) Tribune took the position that parents were not being informed fully as to the benefits of Progressive education methods. The Philadelphia (Pa.) Bulletin maintained that there was no statistical evidence to hold that the fundamentals were being neglected. The Portland (Ore.) Oregonian concluded that the debate was beneficial in that the Essentialists were at least forcing the American public to look more closely at what was going on in the schools.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Editorial Comment, "The Press Views Education," The School Executive, LVII, No. 9 (May, 1938), 416-417.

The Phi Delta Kappan presented a harsh editorial criticizing the Essentialists. The editorial pointed out that the Progressives had capitalized on education a few years earlier, and that now it was time for the Essentialists to make themselves heard:

> Now come the Essentialists capitalizing again on the present wave of conservatism and public distrust of anything new in the way of social, political, or economic policy and again putting millions of teachers and thousands of school systems on the defensive against an implied charge that they all went "haywire" during the '20's and "cheated" The American School Child.[1]

The publicity was a concern to Bagley, especially. He had hoped for a quiet discussion of the issues, and was optimistic that John Dewey in his speech at Atlantic City would point out the misinterpretations given to his philosophy. In a letter to Dorothy Thompson, a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune who had written an article in support of the Essentialists, Bagley stated,

> I had stipulated that all publicity should be withheld pending the lecture by John Dewey on Tuesday evening, which had been announced as a reinterpretation in part of his educational theory. Because Dr. Dewey has frequently criticized many opinions and practices of his Progressive followers, it was my hope that a more systematic restatement of his position would make further controversy unnecessary.[2]

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[1] Editorial Comment, Phi Delta Kappan, XX, No. 7 (March, 1938), 209.

[2] Letter from Bagley to Miss Dorothy Thompson, March 11, 1938. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

Bagley went on, in this letter, to expound many principles that were later to appear in the official version of the Essentialist Platform.[1]

The Diminishing Impact of Essentialists Due to Organizational Changes and Lack of Consistent Leadership

The months following the organizational meeting at Atlantic City were filled with enthusiasm for the Essentialists. But the initial publicity began to wear off and more pressing problems of an organizational nature came to the fore.

Shaw wrote to Bagley concerning the good publicity the Essentialists had received in the Detroit Free Press. At the end of the letter he mentions that he distributed the "Theses" to some people in Detroit for their comment. He replied to this:

> They seem to feel that the presentation is too academic to kindle the fires of enthusiasm. On the other hand, Dr. Demiashkevich is very much disturbed that we have not re-drafted the original and have the same signed by the advisory council. Personally, I do not attach so much importance to this phase, but if we are to keep harmony in the ranks it might be advisable to do this. I don't share his dread of newspaper publicity.[2]

Shaw still assumed the responsibility of holding the organization together. In a letter to Demiashkevich, Shaw mentions the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 2-4.

[2] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, March 16, 1938. Carbon copy in Brickman file. (My emphasis.)

necessity of printing material outlining the Essentialist position as well as beginning work on a year book.[1] Shaw was also concerned with financing the operation. He stated in this regard:

> The next problem that is beginning to rise is the one connected with finance. To date I have from my own pocket advanced whatever has been necessary and I was very glad to do this for the sake of the objective, but as our influence becomes more widely extended our correspondence will, of course, necessarily increase and I shall need some help of a clerical nature.[2]

In April, Bagley submitted the official Essentialist document, "Platform for the Advancement of American Education," to Shaw for comment. Shaw was in general agreement with the document. He criticized Bagley, however, in terms of social philosophy.

> On page 17, you lay aside the mantle of educator and become prophet, a forecaster of the social order.
>
> It seems to me to be taking too large a change to say that "inevitably the crisis of a new social and economic order will be reached," because so many people have said the same thing in the past, and the crisis was avoided by some new discovery or invention or situation. Thomas Jefferson was sure that it would take 500 years to settle the Mississippi Valley.[3]

Bagley received Shaw's criticism of the document and sent out a general letter to all members of the Essentialist Committee. He had previously sent a copy of the Platform to all of the members on April 16, 1938.

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[1] Letter to Michael Demiashkevich from Shaw, March 21, 1938. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Letter to William C. Bagley from Shaw, April 22, 1939.

This letter is crucial in that it presents Bagley as the figure who takes sole responsibility of developing the Platform. Whereas Shaw was concerned with the structural side of the organization, Bagley was more interested in the actual educational philosophy.

At this point, Bagley mentions Shaw's criticisms of the Platform, but defends his position.

> The paragraphs referred to represent, in my judgment, a position that should be taken if we are to spike the guns of those who denounce us as reactionaries and as unyielding supporters of the status quo. It seemed to me that, with the developments now so clearly in sight, our indicated duty is to accept them and, in granting their value, point out as I attempted to do their very real dangers, and the need of directing education toward a counteraction of these dangers.[1]

In this somewhat confusing statement, Bagley was trying to clarify his position as to the direction of the present social order. He felt that the social and economic upheaval the country had experienced since the Depression was producing consequences detrimental to education and democracy. His position held that it was necessary to point out the dangers of present social legislation and educational philosophy, and submit educational alternatives to the impending crises.

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[1] Letter to the Essentialist Committee from Bagley, April 26, 1938.

At the same time, Bagley did not want to alienate the economic and social liberals.[1] He wanted, in other words, to criticize the system but within reason. He goes on to say, "by far our greatest asset so far has been the endorsement of Dorothy Thompson, and primarily because she is known as a liberal. I am personally aligned with that group."[2]

Following this, Demiashkevich replied to the proposals of the Platform. Demiashkevich's criticisms were stranger than Shaw's. There were some fundamental philosophical points in the Platform that Demiashkevich could not agree with. This disagreement, in the writer's opinion, was a serious factor in the organizational weakness of the Essentialist Committee.

Demiashkevich says in the beginning of the letter,

> I sincerely regret to be unable to subscribe to the Platform in toto in its present form and to bother you with several suggestions of changes. I know you will not hold this against me and therefore I shall frankly and freely put before you my doubts regarding a few points of the Platform.[3]

Demiashkevich went on to state that the movement would only gain strength if the Platform appealed to parents and

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[1] Ibid., p. 2.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Letter to William C. Bagley from Demiashkevich, April 30, 1938.

public-spirited citizens.[1] He also suggested that Bagley alter a section comparing American and European secondary education. The purpose here was "to forestall all suspicion or accusation that we are unfriendly to an upward development of mass education. . . ."[2] Demiashkevich also objected to the reference to Dewey as "the present great leader" of the Progressive movement. He felt that only future historians would be justified in giving this label to Dewey.[3]

Demiashkevich's most pressing criticisms, however, were centered around three main points:

1. First, the Platform makes no mention of our conception of man as something other than a mere behavioristic-materialistic physiological machine.
2. Second, the Platform has no mention of the Essentialists' sympathetic attitude toward religion as a great character-building social institution. . . .
3. Third, the statement relative to the economic crisis appears to me as possibly permitting of an interpretation that the Essentialists are ready to submit to, if not to welcome, an oncoming socialistic revolution.[4]

This statement of Bagley's "relative to the economic crisis" was a major concern to Demiashkevich and Shaw. Demiashkevich was opposed to Roosevelt's policies. He thought them to be the

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

harbingers of a noxious type of socialism. He equated some of these reforms with the "bolshevistic machinations" that he had experienced in Russia. Demiashkevich was genuinely concerned with the possibility of the New Deal creating the conditions for violent revolution. So concerned was he with Bagley's statement concerning the inevitability of social conditions that he wrote,

> Hence, I cannot, in all honesty with myself, sign anything--even though I certainly can't stop the oncoming revolution if one is coming upon us--that might give an impression, however remote . . . that the Essentialist submissively await, if not welcome an oncoming socialistic revolution, [1, 2]

The criticisms of the Platform continued, but not as strongly as Demiashkevich's. Guy M. Whipple, another member of the original Committee, was in favor of accepting the document as it stood. The changes he suggested were mostly editorial and were in

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[1] Ibid., p. 3.

[2] In the final copy of the Platform, Bagley made this statement (Section 8) in regard to the coming social changes: "It is the indicated and imminent task of the present dominant generation to solve this problem (unemployment) under whatever expert guidance at the hands of the economist and the social engineer it may find and accept. The student of education must co-operate with all other citizens in this task."

Thus Bagley's position was not basically changed in regard to Shaw's and Demiashkevich's criticism. Bagley was a "liberal" in the sense that he saw no other way out of the crises of the Depression than some form of drastic social change, i.e., at that time the changes instituted in the New Deal by Roosevelt.

opposition to the general philosophical position of the document. Whipple concluded by saying, "I think the platform, as I said before, is not only sound but exceedingly timely, and I hope that it will be given a publicity extending beyond the distribution of the periodical in which it is to appear."[1]

Bagley had hoped for unanimous consent from the members before publishing the Platform. He did not receive this consent and decided to publish using only his name. On May 2, 1938, he sent out a letter to the Essentialist Committee in which he stated,

> To date I have received exactly a fifty-percent response to my communication of April 16th. I cannot publish the theses as a pronouncement of the Committee without unanimous consent. On the other hand I am committed to some form of early publication. I shall, therefore, publish the theses as an independent article with an explanatory note. . . .[2]

The explanatory note stated that the first two sections of the Platform were prepared at Atlantic City, and that he, Bagley, was publishing these as well as a concluding section in order to clarify some of the erroneous publicity given to the Committee. He goes on to say, "I do this in order to set forth my own position. . . . This article is in no sense a pronouncement of the Essentialist Committee."[3]

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[1] Letter to William C. Bagley from Whipple, May 2, 1938.

[2] Letter to the Essentialist Committee from Bagley, May 2, 1938.

[3] Ibid.

This step to publish the theses independently is a significant milestone in the organizational structure of the Essentialist Committee. It appears that the burden to carry on the work was once again placed on Bagley's shoulders. Demiashkevich would not sign the document and the other members, while supporting Bagley, left the responsibility to him. He became the official spokesman, once again.

This situation was organizationally weakening to the Essentialists because it left the burden of articulating their position to only one man, a men who at that time was reaching the age of retirement. It also appears at this time that the hoped-for public support for Essentialism was not forthcoming.

Shaw seems to have sensed some difficulty. He wrote to Bagley attempting to find out what direction the Committee should now take. Shaw compared the Essentialists' plight to that of the "founding fathers" during the Constitutional Convention.[1] That is, it was now time for the Essentialists to set aside their differences in philosophy and take a united stand. The emphasis, Shaw thought, should be on common educational problems. He states, "We must leave unsettled questions on which we disagree."[2] In the next paragraph he reiterates his point, saying "it is for this reason,

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[1] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, May 9, 1938.

[2] Ibid.

Dr. Bagley, that I think we ought to restrict our platform to educational practice."[1]

Shaw also reversed his position concerning the existence of moral values. Earlier he had tried to reconcile the differences between Bagley and Demiashkevich on this point. Now he stated, "Personally, I feel very strongly in agreement with Dr. Demiashkevich's paragraph in the original theses regarding the ultimate objective in ethical values."[2]

In the concluding paragraph of this letter, Shaw said that the Essentialists must include liberals, conservatives, and Catholics within the organization. He concludes by saying, "Without the help of all these elements we will not, as I see it, make any progress."[3]

The Committee received a setback when Michael Demiashkevich committed suicide. Although he did not sign the Platform, he was one of the men who originally thought of the idea for a formal organization. He was, likewise, the formulator of the "Tentative Theses" which became the working document at the founding meeting.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] Ibid.

Bagley, in a letter to Shaw, was grieved at Demiashkevich's death and agreed with Shaw that a resolution citing Demiashkevich's contributions be drawn up.[1]

After Demiashkevich's death, Shaw continued to support the work of the Committee, trying to keep it intact and suggesting new members. He recommended that Frederick Breed of Chicago be added to the advisory board along with a Mr. Tietz, who was principal of the Dewitt Clinton High School in New York City.[2] The preceding month, Guy Whipple wrote to Bagley about the possibility of considering an official yearbook stating the Essentialist position.[3]

The Essentialists (particularly Bagley and Shaw) were concerned at this time over the publication of a book by Professor J. Wayne Wrightstone of the Ohio State University Bureau of Educational Research. (The book was published by Teachers College, Columbus University.) The study was reported in the New York Times under the title "Progressive Study Held Best in Tests." Wrightstone, the article stated, "found that the experimental school pupils were generally superior in the academic skills of reading, writing, and

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[1]Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, September 28, 1938.

[2]Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, November 2, 1938. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

[3]Letter from Guy Whipple to Bagley, October 4, 1938.

arithmetic, thereby meeting the chief objectives of the traditional educators."[1]

Bagley was distressed over how much publicity the Progressives were receiving from the article about Wrightstone. Bagley had one of Thorndike's associates, Dr. Irving Lorge, review the design of Wrightstone's study. It was Bagley's contention that the experimental design was faulty, and, therefore, conclusions drawn by Wrightstone were not warranted. In writing to Shaw, Bagley said,

> If the comparisons are valid they are not sufficient to confirm the chief contentions of the Progressives, for there is no evidence (and I think no claim) that Progressive principles were carried out with rigorous consistency in the "experimental" schools.[2]

Bagley hoped that the publicity the Progressives were receiving could be countered by a book that was being published by Frederick S. Breed. This book became the well known Education and the New Realism. Bagley read the manuscript for Breed and made some comments on it. Breed was convinced that philosophical realism was the best challenge to the inroads of the Progressives. Breed said,

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[1]"Progressive Study Held Best in Tests," New York Times, Monday, October 24, 1938, p. 18.

[2]Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, November 9, 1938.

> The truth of the situation is that since about 1910, when pragmatism reached the peak of its prominence, realism has given the pragmatists their most severe headache and stolen the show in philosophy. It is one of my most cherished hopes that I may be able to make the general outline of the realistic position a bit clearer to educators and leave them with the impression that herein is found a much needed corrective for the excesses of Deweyism. [1]

The debate between the Progressives and Essentialists continued, but the Essentialists as an organized group with a strong front began to diminish. Shaw, writing at the beginning of 1939 to Bagley, was trying to organize another meeting. He was concerned over the lack of response:

> I have been giving some thought lately to the matter of our Cleveland meeting, but I did not hear from a single one of the advisory board in response to the revised program which I submitted. Since there is only about a month left in which to make plans, I am somewhat concerned regarding this situation. [2]

On January 18, Bagley replied to Shaw that he was in favor of the meeting at Cleveland, but that he favored an informal meeting. [3] On January 30, Shaw replied, in a letter to Bagley, that he was confused about the organizational structure of the upcoming meeting:

> I am somewhat vague still regarding the different functions for which the advisory board and the Committee were appointed.

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[1] Letter from Frederick S. Breed to Bagley, November 23, 1938.

[2] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, January 16, 1939. Carbon copy in Brickman file. (My emphasis.)

[3] Letter from William C. Bagley to Shaw, January 18, 1939.

> I assume the advisory board serves the purpose of a steering Committee, and if this is the case, then I suppose that there should be a preliminary meeting of the board before the Committee as a whole meets. [1]

Shaw, in a letter to Bagley, later outlined a tentative list of topics to be discussed at the Cleveland meeting. [2]

In August of 1939, Bagley wrote to Shaw saying that he was surprised and pleased that over 1500 copies of the Platform had been sold. Bagley also mentioned the fact that he was retiring because of age from Teachers College and would assume the editorship of School and Society. [3] Thus Bagley, the cornerstone of the Essentialist Committee, was reaching the age where leadership would have to be taken over by a younger man.

It is the writer's contention that this type of leadership was not forthcoming, and as a consequence, the impact of Essentialism was lessened. Likewise, as the second world war grew closer, the initial impact created by the Essentialists was diminishing. The principles that they advocated would not gain full recognition again until the middle 1950's.

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[1] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, January 30, 1939. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

[2] Letter from F. Alden Shaw to Bagley, February 17, 1939. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

[3] Letter from William C. Bagley to Shaw, August 10, 1939. Carbon copy in Brickman file.

The feeling of diminishing influence of Essentialist thought was conveyed to Bagley by Shaw. Bagley replied in an encouraging note:

> I do not think that you need to feel at all depressed over your services to Essentialism. Beyond doubt, you started the liveliest controversy that the educational world has experienced during the past twenty years. Interest in it has not as yet abated, although little gets into print because of the pressure of war activities.[1]

A final instance of organizational problems and lack of publicity for the Essentialists can be cited in a letter from Bagley to Shaw in October, 1942.

Bagley felt that no formal meetings of the Essentialist Committee should be called at the annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators meeting in St. Louis. He stated:

> I am just now inclined to the belief that anything beyond an informal meeting of our committee would be inadvisable. The attendance, I think, will be light, and the programs will be crowded. It is true that the Essentialists' position has been pretty emphatically confirmed by the experiences of the war, and I hope that fact will be recognized, but I think that a dinner meeting, or even a luncheon meeting, would not be wise.[2]

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[1] Letter from William C. Bagley to Shaw, January 22, 1942.

[2] Letter from William C. Bagley to Shaw, October 28, 1942.

Summary

The writer in this chapter attempted to show the background circumstances leading up to the formation of the Essentialist Committee. The purpose was not to cover what has been already written concerning the first meeting, but to illustrate, through primary sources, some new aspects concerning Essentialism. These aspects had to do with (1) the philosophical differences encountered in the Committee between Shaw, Demiashkevich, and Bagley, (2) the analysis of the "Tentative Theses" presented by Demiashkevich in order to show more clearly the difference between this document and the final Platform, (3) giving some of the newspaper reactions to the Essentialists, and (4) setting forth the hypothesis that the original Committee suffered from organizational difficulties, and that these problems resulted in weakening of the Committee's original impact.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF ESSENTIALIST EDUCATION IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

The purpose of this chapter is to examine evidence as to the present status of Essentialism. The hypothesis being forwarded is that Essentialism--or more accurately, those who think according to Essentialist principles--is today, again, a recurring mode of educational thought. The writer, however, disagrees with the idea, recently presented, that Essentialism is once again the principal philosophy of American education.[1] There is some evidence (as will be shown) that various curricular changes have taken place since the period of the middle 1950's. These changes have emphasized, for the most part, the study of the natural and biological sciences at the secondary level. But this is not to say that all of American education has been markedly influenced by Essentialist thinking.

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[1]Gurney Chambers, "Educational Essentialism Thirty Years After," School and Society, XCVII, No. 2314 (January, 1969), 14-16.

It is more accurate to state that certain educational organizations have been founded whose main concern has been to see that more subject matter (in terms of mathematics and natural science) be included in the curriculum. There is no large body of evidence, however, to warrant the conclusion that many schools across the land are adopting Essentialist ideas. One must also be wary of making too many causal connections between the Platform of the Essentialist Committee and present educational practices. As has been pointed out, the Committee was a product of its times, and was shaped by certain social and economic ideas. It should likewise be remembered that one man, Bagley, was responsible for much of the thinking that resulting in the drafting of the Platform.

With these reservations in mind, it is possible, nevertheless, to look at some recent events in educational thinking that have some basic similarities with the Essentialist ideas of the 1930's.

The second portion of the chapter will deal with general conclusions and specific recommendations. The aim will be to view and explain the Essentialist movement from the perspective of history, that is, to present some notion as to why educational theories arise, persist, are often linguistically disguised, and then re-appear after a period of time. In addition, an attempt will be made to predict the future of Essentialism, especially in relation to its educational fruitfulness.

The Influence of Contemporary Essentialist Thought

To begin with, a brief summary will be made, once again, of the major Essentialist beliefs. Wingo summarizes the most important Essentialist propositions thus:

1. From the standpoint of the individual, the purpose of education is intellectual and moral discipline and these two are intimately related. From the standpoint of society, the purpose is to transmit the essential portion of the total heritage to all who come to school.

2. The curriculum of the school is an ordered series of subject matters, intellectual skills, and essential values that are to be transmitted to all who come to school.

3. Teaching is, in essence, transmitting. The art of teaching is the art of transmitting effectively and efficiently. The teacher is the active agent in the transmitting process.

4. The role of the school in society is one of preserving and transmitting the essential core of culture. As an institution the school has no call for reforming or altering the historic character of society, except as it may contribute incidentally to the ordered evolutionary process of change.[1]

These basic propositions of Essentialism have emerged once again on the educational scene. The cause of this renaissance has been the criticism leveled against weaknesses of American secondary education. This criticism reached its peak in the late 1950's, after the launching of the Russian "Sputnik." This event

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[1]G. Max Wingo, The Philosophy of American Education (Ann Arbor, Michigan: D. C. Heath and Co., 1965), p. 92.

convinced many educators that there were grave deficiencies in a system of education that was not producing a sufficient number and quality of technically trained individuals.

Much of the criticism was again directed against the comprehensive high school. Once again, the debate that had raged during the first three decades of the century was opened. Namely, what effects did the expansion of secondary education have on the quality of education? In a sense, this concern with universal education was misplaced. The comprehensive high school was a firmly established American institution serving a vast variety of interests and concerns. It came about, as the Essentialists acknowledged, because of social and economic changes taking place at the turn of the century. The high school population was no longer homogeneous, and this called for new thinking along the lines of curriculum and purpose. James Bryant Conant has pointed out how the role of the Progressives was, in a sense, necessary for the transformation of the high school. He says,

> Confronted with a heterogeneous high school population destined to enter all sorts of occupations, high school teachers and administrators and professors of education needed some justification for a complete overhauling of a high school curriculum originally designed for a homogeneous student body. The progressives with their emphasis on the child, on learning by doing, on democracy and on citizenship, and with their attack on the

> arguments used to support a classical curriculum, were bringing up just the sort of new ideas that were sorely needed.[1]

The Essentialists, however, thought that this process of opening up the high school was creating an adverse effect in terms of standards. The Committee believed that excesses in Progressive thinking were reducing secondary education to an increasingly weakened state. The schools, in other words, were obliged to reorganize their thinking relating to the large influx of students; but in doing this re-evaluating, there should not be a shirking of the responsibility of teaching subject matter.

The debate between the Essentialist and Progressive points of view ebbed somewhat during the war years. A compromise of sorts was effected whereby the comprehensive school was to serve the expanded ambitions of the Progressives and the more traditional outlook of the Essentialists. The function of the high school was only seriously reconsidered after the surprising Russian technological achievements of the late 1950's.

The overall response was one of concern and alarm. It was believed that greater national interests were at stake. We would now have to compete in an increasingly technological world. Consequently,

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[1]James Bryant Conant, The Revolutionary Transformation of the American High School (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 15-16.

the products of the schools would have to be trained in those basic skills needed as a foundation for more complex types of learning. The educational system would likewise have to insist on quality training in the various vocational areas. Thus the national spotlight was turned on secondary education.

The result of these concerns was a new preoccupation of educators with reviewing the programs of the high schools. The most influential body concerned with the problems of general education was created in the summer of 1956 and was called The Council for Basic Education. James Koerner, writing of the founding of this body, says its purpose "was established in the conviction that public education over the last half-century had too often become flaccid, anti-intellectual, and purposeless."[1]

The CBE was deeply concerned with the lask of sharply defined goals and curricula for secondary education, and for all public education. The CBE believed that "traditional education had been displaced by a philosophy and methodology sharply in conflict with what it superseded--a 'new' education that offered mostly a pious but fuzzy altruism. . . ."[2] To counter these weaknesses, the CBE proposed and supported certain measures, namely,

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[1]James D. Koerner, "Basic Education," Education, LXXIX, No. 6 (February, 1959), 372.

[2]Ibid.

1. That all students receive an adequate education in the basic intellectual disciplines, especially English, mathematics, science, history and foreign languages.
2. That the greatest of opportunities be given to those who are capable of rapid intellectual achievement, in order to progress without a waste of time.
3. That clear standards of student accomplishment be used as a prerequisite for promotion to higher educational levels.
4. That teachers be thoroughly trained in the subjects they teach.
5. That vocational training be placed in a proper perspective in terms of the main purpose, intellectual discipline.
6. That school administrators not be diverted from assigning peripheral functions to the school which would detract from intellectual discipline. [1]

The Council, then, was committed to a view of education that was in many ways similar to Essentialism. It is the writer's contention that the reforms in secondary education, beginning in the 1950's and continuing to the present, are restatements of the original Essentialist propositions even though social and economic conditions have changed.

Much of contemporary educational reform, especially on the high school level, follows the ideas of the Essentialists. There is a striking similarity, for instance, between the proposals of the Council for Basic Education and the Essentialist Platform. Bestor, in writing of the founding of the Council for Basic Education, says that the Council maintains "that only by the maintenance of high academic standards can the ideal of democratic education be

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[1] Ibid., p. 373.

realized--the ideal of offering to all children of all the people of the United States not merely an opportunity to attend school, but the privilege of receiving there the soundest education that is afforded any place in the world."[1] This statement is very similar to the philosophy of the Essentialists.

Other similarities may be found in these educational areas: Both insist on the importance of vigorous intellectual training through language, mathematics, sciences, and history; both uphold the principle of universal education and tax-supported public schools; both schools of thought insist on the importance of teaching the social heritage; and each maintains that the school's central function is teaching certain skills, not directly advocating social change. The statement of Bestor, writing on the relationship of education and society, adequately summarizes the similarities between contemporary educational thought and the Essentialist doctrine. He says,

> In the last analysis, there are three areas of such great concern both to young people and to society that every organized community provides some form of deliberate, self-conscious training for them. First of all, in even the most primitive society there is training for the practical tasks on which the livelihood of all depends. In the second place, every society provides elaborate means for indoctrinating its young members in the mores of the society, for transmitting to them its cultural traits and its ethical system. In the third place (though perhaps only in societies that we can call civilized), deliberate training is provided in the use of the intellectual tools that the civilization has developed: reading, writing, and arithmetic, at the

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[1] Ibid., p. 372.

> lowest level; logic, history, mathematics, science, art, philosophy, and the like, at higher levels. Until recent times, such training, in contradistinction to training of the first two kinds, has been provided only for a minority. Today universal literacy, the simplest index to the prevalence of at least rudimentary intellectual training, has become the accepted ideal of virtually every society and the actual achievement of most.
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> Each of these three kinds of training is closely related to one or another institution or group of institutions in society. This relationship can be labeled "traditional," but the fact that it became traditional is simply a consequence of the fact that it is in logic, and has proved to be in experience, a functional relationship.[1]

Like Essentialism, much of contemporary educational reform has centered around establishing some basic minimum requirements in order to insure that individuals are prepared to meet the demands of their society. The debate rages as to what areas of study are the most relevant. New curricular patterns have developed, but at the base of these changes there is the implication that some "basics" are needed by all; some fundamental material must be given if only to maintain the most necessary and elementary functions of society. As one writer maintains: "The so-called 'subjects' are not just irrational structures transmitted by tradition. They rest on principles of organization which have their own ample justification."[2]

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[1]Arthur Bestor, "Education and Its Proper Relationship to the Forces of American Society," Daedalus, LXXXVIII, No. 1 (1959), 76-77.

[2]John Macdonald, Mind, School and Civilization (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 86.

Reforms in education, following Essentialist principles, were instituted in the 1950's and 1960's. One of the most significant was the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC), which instituted significant reforms in high school physics. These programs were followed by others in biology, earth sciences, and the social sciences.[1]

The interest in general education was to a great degree initiated by the Harvard Report on General Education in a Free Society. The report tried to place in perspective the nature of general education. It stressed the need to look at education as a complex process within both the American and broader Western heritage. It emphasized the need of reconciling two distinct education heritages: the pragmatic outlook and the more traditional approach to education. The writers, speaking to this point, said, "the true task of education is therefore so to reconcile the sense of pattern and direction deriving from the heritage with the sense of experiment and innovation deriving from science that they may exist fruitfully together, as in varying degrees they have never ceased to do throughout Western history."[2]

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[1]Joseph F. Kauffman, Education (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 1966), p. 42.

[2]Harvard University, Committee on the Objectives of General Education in a Free Society, General Education in a Free Society (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 50.

The emphasis of much of the reform interest in high school education in one way or another concerned the place of the social heritage. This, again, was one of the important principles of Essentialist thinking. The function of the social heritage and its place in a scheme of general education is stated in the Harvard Report:

> Nor is the sense of heritage less important, though it may be less obvious, a part of education for modern democratic life. To the degree that the implications of democracy are drawn forth and expounded, to that degree the long standing impulse of education toward shaping students to a received ideal is still pursued.
>
> Here, then, in so far as our culture is adequately reflected in current ideas in education, one point about it is clear: it depends in part on an inherited view of man and society which it is the function, though not the only function, of education to pass on.[1]

This "inherited view of man and society" in turn determines the subject matter of the schools. Through the experiences derived from the social heritage, one can isolate certain skills, certain ways of looking at the world which to some measure are indispensible. These skills must be taught, for the individual without them cannot function properly in a democratic society. These skills are needed not only to handle elementary tasks; but they are essential as stepping-stones to more complicated tasks. Clifton Fadiman illustrates this relationship of basic education:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

> Basic education concerns itself with those matters which, once learned, enable the student to learn all the other matters, whether trivial or complex. . . . In other words, both logic and experience suggest that certain subjects have generative power and others do not. . . .
>
> Among these subjects are those that deal with language, whether or not one's own; forms, figures and numbers; the laws of nature; the past; and the shape and behavior of our common home, the earth.[1]

Essentialism has maintained that certain subject matter must be taught. This is part of the social heritage and without it a man cannot be considered educated. This is not to say that one of the "essentials" cannot be expanded upon or taught from a different point of view. What is being argued is that the substance of the subject must be taught somewhere. For instance, mathematics has taken many unique directions in the last ten years. We now have the "new math" differing in many aspects from what was formerly taught. Yet, mathematics is a vital part of the social heritage and must be taught to the populace as a whole. This is all Essentialism is saying: Give those essentials common to the social heritage to every school age child. Arthur Bestor summarizes the Essentialist position very succinctly. He states,

> The disciplines represent the various ways man has discovered for achieving intellectual mastery and hence practical power

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[1]Clifton Fadiman, "The Case for Basic Education," in The Case for Basic Education, ed. by James D. Koerner (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), p. 6.

> over the various problems that confront him. He lives in a world of quantity and relationship, and he has put four thousand years of ingenuity into creating the mathematical tools by which he handles quantity and relationship. He knows that the wisdom of mankind has been set down in a multitude of languages, and he has cultivated the linguistic disciplines. . . . He realizes that his present is influenced by his past, and he has therefore devised . . . the historical techniques which provide the maximum of reliable knowledge concerning this aspect of his environment. . . . There is nothing arbitrary or fortuitous in any of this. The older disciplines have emerged, and newer ones are emerging, as responses to man's imperious need for that wide ranging yet accurate comprehension which means power--power over himself and over all things else.[1]

A crucial point is made in the above passage. This concerns the status of "newer" fields of inquiry. The criticism is often launched against Essentialism that it is a static and conservative mode of education. This is a justifiable criticism if the "essentials" are thought of as omniscient, discrete, and exclusive areas of knowledge. They are often interpreted thus, and indeed a static and rigid educational philosophy comes about.

Essentialism, however, as has often been emphasized, is not a formal philosophy of education. Rather, it is a point of view--a point of view which holds that there are some elements of learning necessary to carry on life in a complex and technological age. These "learnings" are concerned with computation, language, science and the ebb and flow of history.

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[1]Arthur Bestor, The Restoration of Learning (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 35. (My emphasis.)

Now, Essentialism does not deny the validity or usefulness of any new field of inquiry. To do this would indeed be conservative in a reactionary sense. What Essentialism does maintain is this: (1) that before inquiry is made into a new discipline, some assurance be given that the student can read, write, compute, and has some knowledge of the physical and historical world. For instance, one should be able to compute accurately and read and write well if he is to study, say, economics; (2) that knowledge be thought of in some chronological fashion--from the less to the more complex; and (3) that the methodology of any field of inquiry be mastered.

Confusion often results from discussions of Essentialism because distinctions are not made in regard to level and types of learning. As to level, Essentialism is concerned with education from the primary grades through high school. A great deal of emphasis, however, is placed on the primary level as the starting point for all subsequent learning. As for the types of education, Essentialism stresses the "basics" above other forms of learning. This means two things: that Essentialism places the highest value (and it is a value judgment) on the subject-matter areas; and, secondly, it holds that other subject matter, especially of the type given in some comprehensive high schools, i.e., driver education, home economics, "life-adjustment" classes, be given a secondary

place in the curriculum. Vocational education is included within the Essentialist point of view if it is based upon some of the "essential" learnings, at least to a point. That is, automobile mechanics should be based on some prior knowledge of mathematics and the principles of physics.

The contemporary Essentialist position, in relation to high school education, is similar to the one formulated by James B. Conant in his study, The American High School Today. Conant's aim was to evaluate the role of the comprehensive high school in American education. Using a sample of fifty-eight comprehensive high schools, he drew up a check list which included everything from general education to student morale.[1] It is not proposed to go into the study in detail. It should also be mentioned that Conant's study may be criticized on several grounds. For instance, his sample was probably not large enough; his method for gathering data was exclusively the interview technique; there seems to be a tendency to interview more administrators than teachers or students; and Conant fails to mention the unique needs and problems in educating minority and underprivileged groups.

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[1]James B. Conant, The American High School Today (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959), p. 19.

Conant, however, does make some general proposals that are in keeping with Essentialist thinking. These proposals are significant in that they have been implemented in much of American secondary education. Furthermore, Conant found that many high schools were already offering the type of education he proposed.[1] The recommendations that Conant made at the conclusion of the study follow Essentialist principles. Only the most relevant will be summarized here. They are: (1) Every student should have an individualized program and not be labeled strictly as "vocational," "general" or "academic"; (2) to graduate, every student must have completed four years of English, three or four years of social studies (including two years of history), one year of mathematics and one year of science; (3) ability grouping should be done by subject matter; (4) English composition should occupy about one-half of the total time given to the study of English during the four years; and (4) diversified programs should be given to those desiring a marketable skill upon graduation.[2]

Conant's study, although having some shortcomings, gives credence to the position that Essentialist ideas are present and

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[1] Ibid., p. 40.

[2] Ibid., pp. 44-55. Conant makes additional recommendations. Like the Essentialists, he stresses the importance of accelerated programs for the gifted.

growing in much of American high school education. This point is validated by the additional interest generated since 1957 on the problems of what to teach and how to construct a curriculum to meet the full needs of both the individual and the society. These studies include the Rockefeller Panel,[1] the Educational Policies Commission Reports,[2] the White House Conference (1955),[3] Jerome Bruner's work,[4] and the National Education Association report.[5]

Most reforms on the secondary level have been in the area of the physical sciences and mathematics, although an increasing number can be cited in the social sciences. Many of the reforms have come about as the result of the work of specially appointed commissions. To mention a few whose work has been significant in this connection: Secondary School Curriculum Committee of the

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[1]The Rockefeller Panel, Prospects for America (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1961).

[2]Educational Policies Commission, The Education for All American Youth (1952) and The Central Purpose of American Education (1961) (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association).

[3]Lowel Keith, Contemporary Curriculum in the Elementary School (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 100-101.

[4]Jerome Bruner, The Process of Education (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960).

[5]National Education Association, Project on the Instructional Program of the Public Schools: Deciding What to Teach (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1963). Above reference cited in Keith, Blake, Tiedt volume.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, The School Mathematics Study Group, Stanford University, The University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics, The Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, The Chemical Education Materials Study, The Physical Science Study Committee, and a host of others.[1] All of these committees have, in one form or another, reiterated Essentialist thinking on the nature of the curriculum.

Within this framework, contemporary Essentialism is vitally concerned with the issue of standards. Standards, here, implies a wider commitment. It is not only standards in terms of artificial requirements, but standards in relation to quality of work. In the original Essentialist Platform this issue was dealt with. The Committee stated that high standards had to be maintained in order to insure the best education possible. Their Committee's statement was strongly worded, and was in opposition to the Progressive practice of ungraded classes and, in some cases, automatic advancement regardless of the level of competence.

Contemporary educational thought, emphasizing Essentialist thinking, still holds that the objectives of a course of study be clearly stated. In addition, it believes the same concrete standards

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[1]Harold R. Douglas, Trends and Issues in Secondary Education (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1962), pp. 33-34.

of performance be established and enforced. However, the emphasis on standards has been broadened to include the concept of excellence. That is, any course of study, barring the most superficial, and one that has stated goals and some type of methodology, can be taught from the point of excellence. As John Gardner says,

> There may be excellence or shoddiness in every line of human endeavor. We must learn to honor excellence (indeed, to demand it) in every socially accepted human activity, however humble the activity, and to scorn shoddiness, however exalted the activity.[1]

Modern forms of Essentialism, then, are concerned with both basic material and the preservation of high standards. Like the original Essentialists, contemporary thinkers believe that there is an intimate connection between a firm foundation in the social heritage, the maintenance of reasonable standards, and the training for good citizenship. There may not be, of course, any causal relationship between these factors: too rigid a training may produce automatons. It is a matter of balance--a balance which provides adequate skills and the ability to understand the past and look at the future in terms of the past. And to insure both of these functions, standards of performance and individual initiative should be encouraged. To quote Gardner again on this point:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

> Every democracy must encourage high individual performance. If it does not, then it closes itself off from the mainsprings of its dynamism and talent and imagination, and the traditional democratic invitation to the individual to realize his full potentialities becomes meaningless. . . . When it does not do so, the consequences are all too familiar: the deterioration of standards, the debasement of taste, shoddy education, vulgar art, cheap politics and the tyranny of the lowest common denominator.[1]

To summarize, the purpose of the first part of this chapter has been to present some evidence and points of view holding that the basic principles of Essentialism are still being practiced in American education today.

A crucial point to include is that American public education, because it adheres to Essentialist practices, is not conservative nor reactionary. And the tendency for it not to become reactionary has, in the writer's opinion, been the chief function of Progressivism. Progressivism has served as a type of counterbalance. It has rightly placed emphasis on the needs of the young child, and on the necessity of forming judgments and evaluating knowledge in relation to the canons of scientific method.

Today there is a balance of sorts. Contemporary Essentialism has re-emphasized the necessity of placing subject matter within the schools. The forms of teaching this subject matter, its expansion into daily life, its flexibility in methods of investigation,

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[1] Ibid.

and the willingness to adapt to changing social conditions have, in great part, been functions of the Progressive school of thought.

The next task will be to formulate general conclusions and recommendations concerning Essentialism.

Conclusions

In studying the Essentialist movement, several observations have come to mind. These will be commented on in the following:

1. Essentialism was never conceived of as a philosophy of education. It was, more accurately, an educational point of view. Although it is possible to argue that Essentialism has its roots in classical realism and idealism, a distinction must be made. It would be more accurate to say that different men writing or holding Essentialist views had their backgrounds in either the idealist or realist camps.

   One cannot make a positive case for an Essentialist metaphysics or epistemology as some writers have attempted. Again, Essentialism can be "fitted" within either the realist or idealist conceptions of being and truth. If Essentialism is to be presented as an alternative educational system, it must, of course, have some grounding in philosophy in order

to give it coherence and meaning. The point is that the tendency to strictly apply traditional philosophic schools of thought should be done with qualification.

2. Essentialism should be viewed as a specific historical phenomenon arising in response to changing social and economic conditions. There is, perhaps, too much of a tendency to view Essentialism in a wide historical perspective. Theodore Brameld, for example, often uses historical comparisons and analogy to demonstrate Essentialism's early beginnings. Like the philosophical presuppositions, the historical viewpoint is crucial. But this should not obscure the fact that Essentialism is a recent educational development. Its ideas are rooted in contemporary social and economic facts--the social facts being the changing function of the secondary school and the rapid growth of universal education. The economic facts giving rise to Essentialist ideas are the rapid industrial growth beginning in the twentieth century, the inflow of immigrants, the isolationism resulting after World War One, and, of course, the economic upheaval of the great Depression.
3. Furthermore, it should be noted that the men who drew up the Essentialist Platform were a product of their times.

Most of these men knew America even before the turn of the century. They remembered the stability and uniformity of American education before the World War. Between the war and the Depression of 1929, America went through profound social and economic changes. These changes affected those men most closely associated with Essentialism.

This is not to argue for any form of economic determinism. It is only to say that in a time of rapid social change some type of stability is usually looked for. For the Essentialists, this stability was represented in an educational system based on the teaching of "essential" subjects and the social heritage. In this era of fundamental change, the Essentialists saw the excesses of Progressivism as a poor alternative. For them, the Progressive doctrine as interpreted in the primary and secondary schools was tantamount to chaos. They were genuinely concerned that the excesses of Progressivism would produce a citizenry lacking in basic skill. And if, they reasoned, the citizenry was functionally illiterate, the very foundations of democracy would disintegrate.

4. This concern of the Essentialists was primarily educational. It was not, strictly speaking, a battle of opposing philosophical viewpoints. That is, Bagley was not opposed to Dewey

on metaphysical grounds, for instance. Rather the opposition was one of educational interpretation and practice. The Essentialist wanted the curriculum to remain subject-oriented so that the child could acquire the elements of writing, reading, computing and the social heritage. They did not see the child as a self-directed, problem-solving entity. The teacher's role was to give direction and encouragement, but likewise to teach subject matter.

The Essentialists were opposed to those teachers who misinterpreted Dewey and permitted a completely unstructured situation where no learning could take place. They believed the individual was entitled to the elements of the social heritage. Once these elements were given, a foundation would be established in which the investigation of other problems could be carried on following the individual's inclinations.

5. It is interesting to note that the debate between the Essentialists and Progressives at times reached ethereal heights completely divorced from reality. The debate became academic at times, with both sides discussing rather abstract philosophical issues. A notable criticism may be lodged against the type and quantity of evidence used.

The Essentialist relied heavily on the writings of Bagley. Bagley, in citing the inroads of Progressivism, used such evidence as the publicity given to the Progressive school rather than the Essentialist school at Columbia University. He also made reference to the number of different curricula on file at Columbia. No mention was made, however, as to the implementation of these curricula. A further reference was made to the number of teachers trained in summer programs in the Progressive way of thinking. It was believed that this training (although the content of the training was not mentioned) was fully implemented by each teacher. Bagley also inferred that the lax methods fostered by Progressive ideas were factors in considering the rising crime and divorce rates.[1]

The Progressives, for their part, quickly associated the Essentialist with all types of rigid and formal systems of education. The Essentialists were viewed as authoritarian schoolmasters who favored the trivium and quadrivium. Much of what was undesirable in classical education was quickly associated with the Essentialists.

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[1]The specifics of these allegations have been reviewed and commented upon in Chapter III.

Little notice was taken of the fact that Bagley was in many ways sympathetic to Progressive ideas, and, likewise, quite moderate in his views and criticism. Kandel, also, was in accord with some points of Progressive thinking.

It is the writer's contention that both sides overstated their case. In many ways it was an issue that became isolated on the intellectual level. Both sides debated it in the scholarly journals, but neither conducted any systematic investigation into the facts. No attempt was made to actually assess the influence on American education made by either position. No data, other than some tangential reports, were ever compiled.

Therefore, it is reasonable to say that in terms of its impact on day-to-day educational practices, Essentialism could not be adequately assessed at the time of its formulation in 1938. It was basically a point of view of what education should be, not a direct implementation of a program of action. Yet, both sides treated the debate as if there was a great internal struggle taking place within American primary and secondary education.

One writer, writing at the height of the debate, attempted to place it in perspective. John A. Sexson states:

No sane, intelligent progressive advocated any neglect of the "essentials" or the "fundamentals." There was a lunatic fringe of radicals who did so advocate, but the whole movement should not be condemned because of the ballyhoo of its would-be friends or the gross misrepresentation of a sensation-seeking press.[1]

6. Reference is sometimes made to the fact that the Essentialists oppose the teaching of the social sciences. The Essentialist Platform commented on this problem. It stated that the findings of the social sciences were not as reliable as those of the physical sciences. The social sciences have made significant strides since the 1920's and 1930's. Yet they should not be taught, even today, in isolation. And, indeed, they are not: The social sciences have developed their own methodologies and special areas of inquiry. Their methods of research are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and the conclusions drawn are usually not generalized out of the parameters of the problem.

Essentialism, in its contemporary form, realizes this and encourages the study of the social sciences. The original Essentialist position was objecting to the fact that the social sciences were often the exclusive areas of study, often to the exclusion of the basic subjects. They were also

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[1]John A. Sexson, "Editorial Comment," Phi Delta Kappan, XX, No. 7 (March, 1938), 209.

objecting to the weight given the conclusions in the social sciences. They felt these "findings" were subject to many errors and should not be implemented on a wide scale. The Essentialists were concerned with the possibility of "social engineering" leading to totalitarianism that could eventually be possible through misinterpretation of social science data. Likewise, one of their central concerns in this area was the tolerance and support given to the social sciences by the Progressive movement.

7. Whether it be a discussion of Essentialist thinking on the teaching of the social sciences or of Essentialist ideas on the social heritage, one crucial fact is overlooked. That fact has to do with the level of education under discussion. Essentialist writing often does not make this distinction clear, and so confusion arises about whether one is talking of primary, secondary, or university schooling. In Essentialist writings, the levels are often mixed. At one time it is the primary level that is implied, at another the secondary level. The critics of Essentialism often assume that it is only the secondary level that Essentialism speaks about.

It is this writer's hypothesis that Essentialism is not itself clear as to what level of education it is talking about. The Essentialist Platform discusses the effects on American education resulting from the "universal school," which, presumably, refers to the changes brought about in secondary education.[1] Yet at other times reference is definitely made to experiences in the primary school. It has been assumed in this paper that Essentialist thinking refers to both levels of education, stressing, however, that when "essentials" are mentioned, this is in reference to primary grade experiences as building a foundation for later work in subject matter areas. The teaching of the lessons of the "social heritage," on the other hand, usually refers to learning at the secondary level. This is using the term "social heritage" in its more narrow sense as the teaching of American history, government, and political institutions.

Recommendations

It is often difficult in a descriptive study to advance meaningful recommendations for the future. As in all historical research,

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[1]In this paper, I am using "secondary" and "high school" interchangeably. I am aware of the European use of secondary school. In American educational writing both terms are used.

one approaches a given issue with the aim of examining the facts, deliberating upon them, and, hopefully, bringing to light some evidence that was not previously recognized. It is hoped that this aim was at least partially achieved, especially in the critical examination of the primary documents of the Essentialist movement and additional clarification in the Essentialist-Progressive debate.

The following recommendations will be summary statements concerning the future of Essentialism and some additional directions for future research.

1. It is hypothesized that educational movements are prone to some type of cyclical pattern. Essentialism, for instance, after thirty years is once again a dominant form of educational thought. Ideas are often profounded and then remain dormant for some time. Their resurgence comes about by some event of social, political, or economic importance. For Essentialism, this event was the launching of Sputnik and the subsequent reappraisal of American education.

   This pattern may also be seen in such movements as perennialism. Under Robert Hutchins there has been a revival of the ideas inherent in ancient learning. It is believed these bodies of knowledge contain certain age-old truths that are unique to the human race and should, therefore,

be perpetuated through the school system. In a similar vein, Progressive ideas, ideas mentioned by John Dewey many decades previously, are being reinterpreted and supplemented. Theodore Brameld, for instance, built his philosophy of reconstructionism on Progressive ideas. More recent educational commentators, such as Paul Goodman, Jerome Bruner, and Jean Piaget, are incorporating the ideas of Progressive education in relation to the teaching of small children. Some of these writers, in turn, draw on the ideas of such early educationalists as Herbart, Froebel, and Pestalozzi.

A crucial area of the history of education might be research into the durability, reoccurrence, and transformation of key educational ideas. Hypotheses could be advanced as to the cultural factors that influence certain educational ideas or philosophies of education. For example, an interesting cross-cultural perspective is the transformation of the Russian educational system from 1920 to 1935. After the Revolution of 1917, the Russians adopted almost wholesale Progressive education. However, a critical point was reached where the chaos engendered by this system had to be stopped. The transformation to the opposite side of the

continuum was effected. Traditional and authoritarian methods of schooling, with a strong nationalistic flavor, became the vogue.

2. A further interesting area of research, in relation to the Essentialist movement, would be in trying to estimate the actual implementation of Essentialist ideas from, say, 1932 to 1939. The problem would be to determine what schools (if any) consciously adopted Essentialist ideas. Or, conversely, estimate the number of schools which completely reorganized their curricula along Progressive lines.
3. Essentialism could be taught more fruitfully in philosophy of education courses if it was approached from a cultural point of view. This would be in line with Brameld's analysis where the historical and philosophical origins are given. These origins are then looked at from the standpoint of culture, i.e., what were the cultural forces that gave rise to this view of the world and learning.
4. It would also be of interest to know how the ideas of Essentialism have influenced those men advocating varieties of Essentialism today. That is, a survey could be taken to see how many of these men were acquainted with the writings of the Essentialists, and how this has influenced their

educational outlooks. This could be extended also to schools and colleges of education. At the present, William Brickman, editor of School and Society, is probably the best known advocate of the original Essentialist ideas.

It would also be of interest to know the degree of dissemination there is at present of the original writings of Bagley, Kandel, and the other members of the Committee.

These are some possible directions for future research concerning the Essentialist movement.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to substantiate the claim that Essentialism is still a viable and dominant educational position. Evidence supporting this hypothesis was given in the form of opinions of prominent educators and the coming into existence of several significant curricular reform bodies espousing Essentialist ideas.

The last portion of the chapter was concerned with clarifying some of the issues within Essentialism and directions for future research.

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