

BODY, MIND, SOUL:

AN EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETATION

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THOSE who formulated the main outlines of the theory of a liberal education may hardly be said to have made a distinction between the mind and the body. The distinction with which we are familiar today was really made by modern philosophical writers. As it was formulated by the philosopher Descartes in the first half of the seventeenth century it was somewhat as follows: There are two ultimate and indestructible realities or substances in the world—*res extensa* and *res cogitans*. These two are separate and distinct except in the case of man where the two are combined through the curious mechanism of the brain and especially through the pineal gland which, he said, served as a fulcrum over which the mind could be brought into effective control of the body. This is substantially the popular view held today of the way the mind and the body are related. However unsatisfactory this view may appear at first glance, we would not be wise in rejecting it until we examine it quite closely.

The very first question to be answered is, What is our knowledge of substances? I hold a ball in my hand; I know how it looks; how it feels and what it does under given conditions. I say of the ball, it is round, it is made of rubber, it will bounce, it will decay, it will burn, and when it burns it will give off a pungent and offensive odor. In fact, I can make an indefinite number of verifiable statements about the ball without being in the least able otherwise to define the "it" with which all the statements begin. The ball itself is beyond the reach of my senses. The best evidence I have of its reality, probably the only evidence is an inference to the effect that so many characters require something to bind them together into the form of a unit. If the ball is black *and* round I am led to believe

that these two qualities are stuck together by some sort of cement. If I make one of the qualities modify the other—i. e., black roundness—the total effect is to attribute a more substantial existence to the roundness than I do to the blackness. This example will serve to illustrate the principle that a substance is a logical device for expressing relations which we discover in our experience. This seems to be all that we can know about a substance.

If this is the proper definition of substance we shall see that there is no reason to suppose that there are just two substances, no more and no less. To the substances that occupy space we might at least add those that occupy time. We affirm the same substantive relation if we say of truth that *it* is relative or of substance itself that *it* is a logical device. The use of the Latin word *res* and the corresponding English word “thing” is likely to give a false appearance of simplicity when we say. There are extended *things*, and thinking *things*. Without being fully aware of it we tend to set one up beside the other as though they were equally objects of vision and therefore we think we have made a clearer distinction than we have. There seems to be no reason for denying that a “thing” may be both extended and thinking. We may certainly affirm that a “thing” is neither; as when we declare that truth will prevail. Truth has the same substantive value in such a proposition as *res extensa* has in the statement, the ball is round. Is it not, therefore, likely to mislead us in thinking about the body and the mind to start out with a distinction which cannot be defended? The number of substances would have to be as great as the possible number of statements which we could make about our experience.

But if for the sake of the argument we should agree that there are just two substances, there are enough questions still remaining to plague us before we can think clearly about the body and the mind. Such is the question, for instance, as to the method of interaction. How does the mind act upon the body? Which caused the other? How were they both caused? These are the questions about which have raged many *battles royal*. The bare statement that there are just two substances bristles with insoluble problems. For the sake of illustration we may cite some of the answers to the above questions.

The first question, How does the mind act upon the body? was asked and answered by Descartes. His answer was that although the mind could have no effect on the gross forms of matter directly it could be supposed to move the refined matter of the pineal gland

and then in turn through many stages to put in motion the human body and finally other bodies. As for the animals, he supposed that they were mere automatic mechanical adaptations of matter. By an analogous reasoning the influence of matter upon mind is proposed as the cause of thinking. Thus Thomas Hobbes and many others have advanced the theory that motion in the external world is transmitted directly through the nerves to the brain and, becoming finer and finer, it somehow leaps the gap that separates body from mind and *prestò* body acts upon the mind. The fallacy involved in such reasoning seems to be that we start out with a distinction which cannot be maintained to the end and therefore we gradually put back into the magic hat what we had suddenly removed. The result sooner or later is to conclude that mind is after all only a form of body or that body is only a form of mind.

Is the body the cause of the mind or is the mind the cause of the body? This question is not essentially different from the first one. It merely extends the field of inquiry from the individual to the general cosmic relation of mind and matter. The answer to this question, like the question itself, does not differ materially from its predecessor. It makes the same unwarranted separation between mind and matter. It supposes that they are distinct and independent substances and then vainly attempts to establish a causal relation between them. The total effect is to reduce one to the terms of the other. This is altogether a futile thing to do, as it brings us back to the very point from which we started the argument.

At this point many would be ready to abandon the entire problem of the relation between the mind and the body and to say that it is of no concern to the teacher in any case. This will not do, for sooner or later every serious theory of education must give an account of some kind of the relation between the mind and the body. It is the particular answer in terms of substance that must be abandoned. The experience of every day shows us that some kind of motion in the outside world stimulates a nerve and if we are to believe the neurologist the motion is transmitted by the nerve to other nerves and nerve centers. This motion may go on as far as you care to suppose; but as long as it remains motion in the accepted sense of the word it is not an idea. The supposition that motion by becoming finer and finer can gradually be transformed into the idea of motion is much like the supposition that persistent vertical extension may some day yield a horizontal line. The two may be and probably are related without being in any way reducible one to the other.

A more hopeful attempt at defining the relation of mind and body will abandon the assumption that they must be related either as objects juxtaposed in space or as a father is related to the son. If a figure of speech is desired to embody the relation we might say that mind is related to the body as the meaning of a word is related to the printed or spoken symbols of that meaning. While no figure of speech is entirely adequate this one at least avoids the fantasy of trying to reduce the world to just two or any given number of substances. It does not cut the world up into fragments and then lament its inability to get it put together again. If we study the relation expressed in this figure of speech we may discover its usefulness in a theory of education.

The first characteristic of the relation of meaning and symbol is that it is indissoluble. As far as education is concerned, mind and body are also indissoluble. The teacher does not and could not pretend to be dealing with one to the exclusion of the other. The communication of meaning is mediated by symbols and the symbols in turn demand meaning for their very existence. The teacher uses the body to reach and perhaps to create the mind as the writer uses words and other symbols to embody meaning.

In the second place the relation between mind and body is like the relation between meaning and symbol in that it is variable. The substance philosophies do not satisfy this test. The simplest experience of life reveals its fluid or dynamic character to such an extent that we somehow feel the grotesqueness of treating mind as a static thing. Meaning plays about the symbol as light plays about the open fire, it moves, turns this way and that, retreats and thrusts itself out in some new place. This is a better description of the mind than to call it merely *res cogitans*. The teacher not only recognizes the veracity of such a description but has a fair starting point from which to plan and execute modifications of mind. Mind is mediated by body as meaning is mediated by symbols. Teaching becomes an art like the art of writing or painting.

In the third place our figure of speech is useful because it makes intelligible the degrees of worth or value which we attach to the various phases of our experience. Without denying or seeming to deny the permanent necessity of body we may yet hold to the superior worth of the mind. We do not hesitate to say that the symbol exists for the sake of the meaning. The meaning is an end toward which the symbol is a means and we cannot by any twist of the imagination reverse the relation. This is in keeping with the all but

universal testimony of men in all generations. The savage and the civilized, the oriental and the occidental, the Greek and the barbarian, the learned and the ignorant attach some superior value to mind.

Finally, this theory of the relation of mind and body will not permit us to mistreat or despise the body for the sake of the mind. A perfect meaning is conveyed only by a perfect symbol. It must, therefore, be the highest duty of the teacher to secure a sound mind in a sound body. This is the result although not the exact process by which the Greek philosophers defined the aim of education. Having made no sharp separation between knowledge and virtue, theory and practice, mind and body, they were not embarrassed by the distorted conceptions of the aim of education that characterized some other epochs in our history. Such a theory gives no countenance to sensualism on the one hand or to the flattery of martyrdom on the other. The sensual man is he who blindly serves the body; the arrogant martyr is he who seeks to get the meaning without the mediation of the symbol.

Wherever man has left a record of his thoughts either in the form of written language or in the more primitive pictures which he made on the walls of caves and tombs, he has revealed his interest in the soul. It has been supposed that the idea of the soul originated in man's desire to find an unchanging and abiding reality amid the stress and danger of life. This theory supposes that the soul exists only in the imagination of ignorant men who give a name to their ignorance. Lying down to sleep they dream of other scenes and when they awake they declare that some vital part of themselves has been abroad during the night. When they see the phenomena of death they infer that something leaves the body. They dream of those who have died and infer an existence in some realm apart from the decaying body. Some ancient people identified the soul with the breath; others found its seat in the heart, or the kidneys or some other recess of the body. These crude figures of speech are often cited as further evidence that the soul is a myth. By the same method of reasoning we might show that the mind is a myth or that any other intangible is a myth.

But for the teacher it is far more important to examine the meaning content of the idea of the soul than it is to speculate about its origin; for the idea of the soul is at the heart of any theory of value; and education above everything else in the world must have a theory of value. Without a theory of value the whole edifice of

educational practice would tumble into ruins. We have already made a beginning on a theory of value in the discussion of the relation of mind and matter. We have seen that there is pretty general agreement that the mind is of more worth than the body. Nevertheless, if we follow the theory of the Greeks, we cannot hold the body in contempt because it is through the body that the mind realizes itself. We must examine the conception of value a little more closely. It may be possible to locate it still more exactly in that which men call the soul.

When we say that a man or a thing has a soul we call attention to the fact that the distinguishable parts which go to make up the whole are of unequal worth. The word *soul* is a symbol of the otherwise unnamed part which ranks above them all, the very center and core of being. The judgment that a man has a good soul seems to mean that notwithstanding faults and imperfections which all may recognize and deplore there is in him that which commands our praise and respect. It means that we can overlook much that is superficial, and penetrate to that which is more important.

If we try to define the most valuable thing in the world we must be prepared to define it in terms of our own life experience. From time to time some one tells us that if we would be strictly scientific we must detach ourselves from human interests and bias and for the sake of truth measure the world with the mind of a fish or an amoeba. This is little better than nonsense or at best a magnificent gesture. When we imagine what a fish desires we imagine what we desire. For example, we often say to a child, "I should not do that if I were you," when greater accuracy would make us say, "You would not do that if you were I." The barrier that separates us from the child is slight when compared with the barrier that separates us from the fish. Rebel against it as we may, our judgments of worth are human judgments and are born in human experience.

Probably no definition of value has ever been suggested which did not rest upon a conception of human desire either, expressed or implied. The inarticulate child crying for the moon, the gourmet scanning the menu card, the anchorite in his cell, the politician, the scholar, the sailor and the rest of the human race are seeking to satisfy some desire. In such a confusion and conflict of desires, however, one may well hesitate before making an attempt to find a common feature. For this reason many have contended that there is no supreme desire and consequently no supreme value in life.

Such a contention is the expression of a mind too tired or too timid to undertake the arduous task of thinking through the syllogism of experience. No honest teacher can adopt such a theory of value for it leaves all our judgments without significance and the enterprise of education becomes a silly farce: "Pushpin is as good as poetry"; crying for the moon as worthy an undertaking as the development of astronomy. Moreover, those who hold to such a view are so profoundly impressed by the conflict of desires that they are blind to the equally obvious fact that each man adopts some scale of values as a working hypothesis in the organization of his own experience. He prefers one form of life or another even in spite of protests that *pushpin is as good as poetry*. The phrase itself is in a state of unstable equilibrium and sooner or later finds its full expression in the form "pushpin is better than poetry." The rejection of a scale of values is a theory which breaks down of its own inherent weakness whenever it is carefully scrutinized.

Amid the conflicting desires and experiences of a human life the discovery of the supreme value is largely empirical. No *a priori* argument for this or that satisfaction can take the place in the individual's life of patient analysis at each stage of growth. Nevertheless, the condensed experience of the race as found in history, literature and philosophy draws the main outlines of a scale of values. Without this condensed experience, commonly called our social inheritance, the struggle of the individual to chart a safe course would be extremely painful and hazardous. As it is, he who runs may read that there are some satisfactions of desire which men have found richer, fuller and more enduring than others. If there is uncertainty and confusion in the condensed experience of men it is slight when compared with the blind groping of the solitary individual after some principle of organization within his own flood of desire.

If the preceding argument is fundamentally sound it seems to follow that a definition of the soul must be written in terms of the organization of experience in relation to a supreme value. Perhaps the following definition may be useful in grasping the true significance of man's perennial interest in the soul: the soul is the living organization of symbol and meaning achieved by the individual through an intelligent participation in the generalized desires of mankind. As the mind seems by common consent to be of greater value than the body, so the soul transcends them both because it is the spiritualized relation of mind and body through the divine function

of activity. Such a definition need not be interpreted in such a way as to deny a soul to the meanest creature because symbol and meaning are never separable at any stage of development. Matter untouched by organization is a figment of the imagination. It is not therefore a case of the presence or absence of organization but rather a case of more or less. The definition would seem, however, to exclude the possibility of attributing a soul to all things at random as if it were a commodity to be handed about or parcelled out and kept in one's possession. If the soul is to have any meaning in an educational context it must be thought of not as a thing but rather as a process. If the soul is to be understood in terms of value it demands the function of critical intelligence for its very being. Value as we have argued is *of or pertaining to persons* because it demands the exercise of judgment. Probably the key to the puzzle may be discovered in a proper distinction between organization *for* experience and organization *of* experience. It is to the latter only that value seems to pertain. It is a fruitless quest to seek a point in the scale of existence below which there is no soul. Such a search is destined to fail precisely because it postulates a fixed relation within a system which gets its entire definition by its relation to a point outside of itself. That is to say, value and the soul are attributes of experience and not single points within that experience. We can only say that wherever principles of organization are at work there is the realm of value.

As a corollary to the preceding argument it seems to follow that value in some sense is independent of the temporal order. It neither is to be found at a point in space nor at a point in time. Value is rather the significant organization of sequence than any moment in such a system. If we conclude that the soul is a principle of organization we have already introduced a theory of immortality, but for the purposes of education it is unnecessary to develop that theory. It is enough to point to the fact that human experience is organized in terms of intelligibility and value—that the idea of the soul is the postulate of the supreme value—and that education has to do with the achievement of this supreme value.

The task of education clearly emerges at this point in the discussion. It is none other than the task of organization—the task at once the most intimate and the most universal of human experience.