

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



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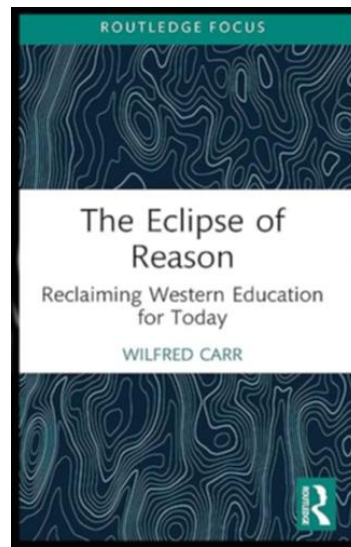
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Education is the Question: Is Reasoning the Answer?

Wilfred Carr's recent book, *The Eclipse of Reason: Reclaiming Western Education for Today*, is an elegant account of eclipse and darkness, worthy of a search, a new promotion, of enlightenment of our perception, facing today's "saber-tooth" curriculum (outdated), our 100-year reliance on psychometric testing, and the ratings of accreditation and *US News and World Reports* that beg for eclipse, but not for new canonicals. Our enthusiasm deserves attention to Carr's "attack" on the eclipse of reasoning as Education's goal.



Carr opens with a claim that evaluation of the status quo of education will be facilitated by an examination of its history. This he does throughout this short book, speedily, but persuasively. I lack the historical power to find flaws in his backgrounding but doubt that I would find growth to my concerns about "reasoning." I claim that reasoning has not been invented that withstands the abridgements of prejudice, and so my "answers" to the title question will more likely be found in refinements of prejudice.

But here we find in his Chapter 3 on Christianity, the Decline and Revival of the "Western Educational Tradition": (1) Hippo and Roman adoption of Christian religious education; (2) monastic schools; (3) cathedral schools; (4) scholasticism's use of Aristotle; (6) Cicero and Renaissance humanism; (7) Latin or grammar schools; (8) Erasmus' lean toward erudition, eloquence and culture; (9) Loyola and Jesuit Christian education. It says to me there was much partial eclipsing in the period called the Dark Ages. Five chapters to come.

Agreeing with Enlightenment's Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes and later with John Dewey, Carr wrote that Western Society's finest endeavor to educate

was built on reason, with human reason defined in terms of a potential to “advocate individual freedom, equality, democracy, and religious tolerance.” He stopped short of claiming that “rational knowledge, acquired through the application of scientific methods, would enhance the happiness and well-being of humankind.”

We search for protection against misuse of reason. The simpler notions of reason and scientific methods have “guard rails” to restrain misapplications of the military, agriculture, medical, and parenting (e.g., dictionaries, peer review, promotion committees, and hard-pressed reason) but guard rails do not eliminate collisions. No benefit goes without cost. We need those statements of potential benefit but also statements of potential cost. We are aware that those of church and state and goods to sell, who would side-track reason, often have resources that overwhelm its advocacy.

Reason and scientific method do have “guard rails” to restrain misapplication among the military, agriculture, medical, and parenting, (e.g., dictionaries, peer review, promotion committees, and hard-pressed reason) but guard rails do not eliminate collisions. No benefit goes without cost. We need statements of potential benefit, but also the ascertaining of costs. Even those who only indirectly oppose the study of costs have resources that counter the advocacy of reason.

We need philosophers, not to teach school but to teach the teachers who coach the teachers. Few children can learn logic, or from logicians. They learn reason by being children.

Rene Descartes came, reasoning, “I think, therefore I am.” And Jean Jacques Rousseau, reasoning, “Man is born free and everywhere is in chains.” And Friedrich Froebel, grouping children according to wit rather than age. With Pestalozzi, they built upon experience, early years of child living and knowing and caring. The teacher has a role, that of tour guide. The scene of education “should be” wherever the child is, little standardized, little scheduled. Some called it “Progressive Education” but others realized eclipsing it was state-supported “schooling”—worse, payment by results, the modernization of learning, and a marketplace conceptualization of liberal society.

Carr helps his readers see centuries of metamorphosis of education, in practice, refinement of the “system,” redound with philosophy and advocacy, sometimes pledged to a more democratic society, but even more often, more moth than butterfly. Carr holds true democracy close to his quest for reason. And in his celebration of John Dewey: “... education is not preparation for life, education is life itself.”

Dewey might have said, “It is not what was learned but what happened.” Carr reads him saying, “Schools in a democracy should themselves be democratic communities, promoting the kind of social intelligence that is prerequisite to individual freedom and growth.” (Read Reggio Emilia.) Experience needs the community, the classroom, but much of the best of learning is 1 and 0. Experiences needed are occasionally the experiences of the group; most of them

involve the learner's appetites and perplexities, not decided by textbook writer or lecturer, not the same for all, but each fitted to the individual.

More carrel than classroom. The curriculum is the smile, unconsciously choosing this my life, shaping my career, my retirement, no idea how the system works. The teacher now is child counselor, watching smile and sneer, tweaking provocation, seeking reflection, on cell phone screen. Another teacher is impresario, one child at a time, separate theatre, separate production, a different scene as needed, each student's unfolding aspiration. Same ratio as now: A thousand choices for each episode of science, spelling, aesthetics, linguistics, sports, home making. Children's choices from all the humanities, all the media: Stories, cartoons, testimonials, love letters, travelogues, puzzles, art, graffiti. (Read Stenhouse, as Carr has.) Less worry about complete coverage, but extra assurance of due complexity. Grades, yes, but not student comparisons.

We can do it. Already. Business schools, advertisers, can train script writers. Educators can interpret student faces and peoples' needs. Administrators can pay bills and avoid embarrassments. It is Dewey's democracy, without a University of Chicago classroom. The kids are ready. Technology is ready. Social intelligence is ready. Reason is already aboard.

Are we sure? My father, Earl Stake, said, "You don't pay someone for what they haven't earned." My mother's prejudice said, "There's not been man nor dog nor cat nor horse which hasn't earned his keep." Philosophers didn't cause the Dark Ages. Neoliberals did. Pre-neoliberals did. Let's have happiness and wellbeing.

About the Reviewer

Robert E. Stake is emeritus professor of education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a pioneering figure in program evaluation and qualitative research. After earning his Ph.D. in psychometrics from Princeton University in 1958, he served as a Psychometric Fellow at the Educational Testing Service (1955–1958) and as assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. In 1963, Stake joined University of Illinois. Stake championed qualitative methods, particularly case study research, authoring influential books including *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995) and *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (2010). These two books appear in more than 3,500 course syllabuses worldwide. His evaluative studies span science and arts education, teacher education, gender equity, special education, and urban education reform. His honors include the Lazarsfeld Award from the American Evaluation Association (1988), the Presidential Citation from the American Educational Research Association (2007). He holds honorary doctorates from the University of Uppsala (Sweden) and University of Valladolid (Spain).



About the Author

Wilfred Carr is an emeritus professor in the philosophy of education at the University of Sheffield, where he served for many years as Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Head of the School of Education. He holds additional honors as an honorary vice-president of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and an Honorary Professor at the University of Sydney, Australia. Carr's research focuses on philosophical questions concerning the relationship between educational theory, educational practice, and educational research, with particular interest in the philosophy and methodology of Educational Action Research. His influential 1985 book *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*, co-authored with Stephen Kemmis, became a foundational text in critical education theory and was translated into Spanish.



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