

On Socially Responsible Education

The increasing interest in introducing more social responsibility into education reflects widespread concern with the declining authority of the traditional institutions that dealt with childhood socialization, such as organized religion and the family. In this context, many people turn to education to fill the vacuum. However, it is not clear what a “socially responsible education” might mean. We probably all have some notion of what being “socially responsible” might be (e.g., being a good citizen, or acting for the wellbeing of others, etc.), and we can all come up with examples of “social irresponsibility,” but the relationship between “social responsibility” and education (and therefore the possibilities) is not at all clear. Many committed educators see the need to step into the breach left by these declining traditional sources of childhood socialization. They realize that schools are often the last best hope for many young people to learn many things which family, community and religions used to teach, even though schools were never designed to teach them (e.g., emotional development, conflict resolution, character development, and social responsibility). But how can an educator help a young person learn social responsibility without some clarity as to what this means?

This paper considers the question of what “social responsibility” might mean, as it relates to education, so that creating a more “socially responsible education” can be better understood. There is, of course, a great deal that one could explore about notions of “the social” and notions of “responsibility,” never mind all that could be said about notions of “education” (and a great deal of philosophical writing already exists on these topics); but to keep this paper to a manageable size, the intricacies in these concepts must be swept aside, and we will have to assume that we all have reasonably confluent understandings of them in order to proceed. This paper is, therefore, despite its philosophical approach, meant more to further the work of educators than that of philosophers.

Social Responsibility: the Contents or the Conduct of Education

To begin to answer the question of what “socially responsible education” may mean, we can ask whether the term “socially responsible education” describes the contents of an education (i.e., what it is hoped the students will learn), or whether it describes the way in which the education is conducted, or both. Although many people may assume the term “socially responsible” will predominantly refer to the contents of an education, some thoughts about the way education conducts itself in regards to social responsibility merit consideration.

The conduct and contents of an education are not necessarily separate for the student. A highly regimented or brutal educational system will teach a child what regimentation and brutality are. Nonetheless, it is possible to distinguish two things that are distinct but not separate (e.g., two sides of the same coin) so that the social responsibility of the way an education conducts itself can be distinguished from the social responsibility of an education’s content. In fact, the social responsibility of the way education conducts itself is a principal argument for the existence of public education, in that it is seen as socially

responsible that a quality education be freely available to all children; and that argument has remained unchanged despite many changes in the contents of public education.

Another example of education attempting to be socially responsible in its conduct (without regard to its contents) is the educational calendar that has long summer vacations so that children can help with the cultivation of crops – the educational calendar is “responding rightly” (one well considered definition of “acting responsibly”¹) to a social need. Conversely, it might be that such an educational calendar is being irresponsible if children are no longer needed for seasonal work, and long summer vacations are an extra burden for parents who need to be employed full time to support their families. An educational system might be socially responsible in its conduct if it feels it should look after children during the typical working day of parents, so that children are never without adult care. In this, it might be thought that those who are officially *in loco parentis* during the day would be irresponsible to eject children from their care and abandon them to regular and prolonged periods with no adult guidance, care, or protection.

An educational system may also be socially irresponsible in the way it conducts itself if it expects children who are hungry to be able to learn, or if it counts towards their grades the homework of children who are homeless. With this in mind, we can imagine an education that is socially responsible in its content (e.g., lessons about social responsibility) yet irresponsible (perhaps unwittingly) in its conduct, and we need to think of the over-all lesson a child takes away from such dissonance (e.g., “It’s only what you say that matters, not what you do.”). Educational systems, therefore, need to include the ways in which they conduct themselves in their considerations of social responsibility, for if they fail to do so they are vulnerable to failing to enact what they claim to care about, and unwittingly teaching lessons in hypocrisy.

Responsibility to or Responsibility for

Considerations of what a socially responsible education may mean in terms of educational content seem more vexed and complicated. This is so partly because we need to ask what social structures determine our responsibility, and partly because, regardless of the social structure, we need to ask, “What is the responsibility toward, in aid of, or meant to accomplish?” To help us understand these complex questions, we can think of two kinds of responsibility: responsibility to that which is social, and responsibility for that which is social. There may be some responsibilities which are both, and that will need consideration after this initial distinction is made.

The expression “that which is social” (which I will contract to “the social”) is used instead of the word “society” as there are many social structures within society at large which make claims of responsibility on us (e.g., my social circle, mi barrio, my homeys, my religious group, my colleagues, my teenage clique, my platoon, etc.). These (usually local) social structures are often at variance with society at large and eclipse it in our daily worldview, and so this distinction between them and society needs to be highlighted.

The extent to which people can be said to be responsible to “the social” can be seen as the extent to which they are accountable or answerable to “the social.” In this, “the social” determines what should or should not be done by an individual (i.e., what is socially “right” in that social structure), and it is the responsibility of the individual to act in accord with that. Much that is custom, convention, or tradition would fall into this category of responsibility; and clearly the nature of most social structures depends on such “glue” to provide the cohesion they require.

An education that is interested in conveying responsibility to “the social” needs to teach students “cultural fluency,” i.e., an understanding of the cultural rules, signals, mores, etc. – and this includes the responsibilities incumbent on membership in that particular “the social.” Since, however, we all live in multiple social structures, this is not simple – there is not just one social structure we need to understand so that we can be responsible to it. A person needs to be fluent in the rules, signals and mores of their work place, their local community, their peers, their ethnic enclave, the culture as a whole and, I would argue, other cultures. Learning what is “right” on the street and what is “right” in the workplace is necessary if we want our students to survive in both social structures (or whatever others in which we anticipate our students living); and this being so, we would want to ensure that our students learn their responsibilities to those social entities as such responsibilities are construed by those entities.

In this responsibility to, the individual or group does not determine the nature of the responsibility, but rather assumes it (or is meant to assume it) by virtue of their membership in “the social.” In this sense, the individual or group is subservient to “the social.” As disagreeable as this may seem to some, it is important to stress that responsibility to “the social” is necessary for simple social cohesion; and, therefore, education in such responsibility and for such responsibility is necessary. People who violate this requirement are almost invariably punished by the social structures through exclusion or worse, and some psychologists and sociologists have claimed that such punishment is necessary for society². The question now follows: even if education for responsibility to “the social” is necessary, is it sufficient?

Responsibility for “the social” seems quite different from responsibility to “the social.” In being responsible for “the social,” an individual is accountable or answerable for what “the social” is or will become; the responsibility is for shaping, determining or effecting “the social” rather than simply doing what “the social” wants. This puts the individual in a position that is not subservient to “the social,” but one which has more similarity to that of a guardian (and there may be something fundamental about the nature of democracy in this responsibility).

One of the benefits of this distinction between the two responsibilities (to and for) is its illuminating how these different responsibilities may come into conflict. This is seen in instances of civil disobedience in which the responsibility to “the social” is violated in favor of a responsibility for “the social.” There are important implications for education arising from this conflict: an educator may need to choose between education to “the social” or for “the social” on particular issues. Consider a society that enters into a

controversial war: education that feels a simple responsibility to “the social” would necessarily respond positively to society’s call to war, and support that war; whereas education which feels responsibility for “the social” might well respond negatively to that call if it sees the war as unjust. Such conflict has sometimes been blithely dismissed as an aspect of what has come to be called “the culture war,” but this characterization ignores (or is ignorant of) the understanding that being positioned differently to questions of responsibility within the same culture (not different or opposing cultures) can bring about such conflict.

Values in Socially Responsible Education

While the conflict between responsibility to “the social” and for “the social” does involve values, it does not necessarily involve different sets of values, as some proponents of a “culture war” would have us believe. Instead, the conflict can be over the level of abstraction of the values that direct action. Take, for example, the value of “goodness” – a value which most people probably support, but which is abstract. Even amongst people who agree that they value “goodness,” there can be tremendous disagreement about what “goodness” means, especially in terms of daily life; e.g., does it mean forgiving and trying to rehabilitate the confessed murderer, or pursuing a notion of justice that involves executing the murderer? All cultures have abstract levels of values (e.g., “goodness,” “compassion,” etc. which I shall henceforth call *arch-values*) and very quotidian levels in which the abstraction is expressed (e.g., “goodness” involves “kindness,” and “kindness” involves “sensitivity to others,” and “sensitivity to others” involves “politeness,” and “politeness” involves holding doors open for others). However, quotidian expressions of values (unlike *arch-values*) are both culturally and historically bound. A man holding a door open for a woman is not a point of politeness in most Islamic cultures, and even in the U.S., at the height of the women’s liberation movement, it was considered to be an expression of chauvinism and, therefore, an expression of insensitivity and impoliteness.

Responsibility to “the social” does not require values that rise above the quotidian expressions of values, whereas responsibility for “the social” often does; and therein lies a principal source of conflict. In taking responsibility for shaping, determining, and effecting “the social” (yet being in conflict with its more superficial expressions) a person is saying that the quotidian expression of values are not sufficient and need to be altered, enlarged, or refined. The luxury of simply having responsibility to “the social” is that a person needn’t wrestle with such values dilemmas (and that this luxury is a great reassurance and comfort is necessary to appreciate); one need only act in accord with the expression of values established by external social authorities (religious and/or secular).

Conflicts in Social Responsibilities

Conflicts in responsibilities are not just confined to those between responsibilities to and responsibilities for “the social.” There are also conflicts within each category. However, conflicts in responsibility for “the social” are more amenable to resolution than are the conflicts in responsibility to “the social.” This is because each of us have multiple selves³ and, therefore, live in multiple social structures (e.g., our peer/colleague group, our friends, our families, our neighborhoods, our communities, our nations, our religious affiliations, and perhaps ultimately the “human family”). The competing claims of these

various social groups are complicated enough (e.g., giving time to peers/colleagues takes time away from the family, etc.), but it becomes much more complicated when these claims not only compete but conflict. For example, the responsible member of a Mafia social order is frequently in conflict with the claims for responsibility being made from his/her larger community or nation or religious affiliation; a gang member whose actions are responsible to his/her gang can easily, with that same action, be irresponsible to his/her family or larger community.

It seems inevitable that responsibilities to differing social entities would eventually conflict: the values that underpin different social entities are different, and are often mutually exclusive, forcing an individual or group to choose which values they wish to uphold or to which social entity they feel most responsible. To avoid such conflict – or to deny its existence – people perform remarkable psychological/conceptual gymnastics; but the results are rarely very satisfactory, and a lingering dis-ease or psychological dissonance often ensues. One way to avoid such dissonance is to have a hierarchy of social groups, and in fact this is what people frequently do. Usually in an un-reflected, and frequently-reversed fashion, people decide that (for example) their gang is more important than their community, or their peers/colleagues are more important than their family; and then reverse themselves at a later date (often with regrets for their previous choices). More attention needs to be given to this question of a hierarchy of social groups, as there may be an approach to this that is more substantive than that which is usually adopted, and which may avoid some of the dis-ease and dissonance. We shall, therefore, return to this question later (especially as this has implications for education). For the moment, however, distinctions between responsibility to and for “the social” need a bit more elaboration.

Responsibility for “the social” does not necessarily involve the same kinds of conflict as responsibility to “the social” as the values that underpin the former can supersede particular expressions of values (as mentioned previously). Furthermore, it can be presumed that if *arch-values* are comprehensive enough (or generalized beyond quotidian expressions, which are culturally relative), such *arch-values* could be relevant to many, if not all, social groups. This is certainly the claim made by most religions and by most modern secular expressions of religiousness (often called “spirituality”) – i.e., that there are universal values or “perennial truths” (like “honesty” or “compassion”) that are universally held to be good. This is also the claim made by some of the more esoteric psychologies, such as those of Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers. Adherence to such comprehensive values does not, however, eliminate moral/ethical/value dilemmas; such dilemmas seem to be an inevitable part of limited human capacities trying to merge the conceptual with the actual, the abstract with the concrete, the sacred with the mundane.

Discovering responsibility for

It seems simple enough to say that responsibility for “the social” requires feeling responsible for what “the social” could or should become, but doing this in any serious way is far from simple. The basic challenge is finding what “the social” could or should become independently of the influence of “the social,” otherwise responsibility for ends

up being nothing more than an obfuscated responsibility to. The hidden values, assumptions, and perspectives of our society (the entire *weltanschauung* that creates the responsibility to) simply shapes the responsibility for, but now in a way that is invisible.

Fortunately, several profound thinkers have tackled exactly this problem. Amongst others, Pierre Bourdieu called this *weltanschauung*, or unchallenged perspective, *doxa*.⁴ Thomas Kuhn described it as the barrier through which a new perspective has to break in order to produce what he called a *paradigm shift*;⁵ and many people interested in psychological liberation have described breaking these chains of conditioning.

What they all seem to have in common, and this has interesting implications for education, is that it is necessary to look at social structures from outside of those social structures. Put simply, looking at the activities of a social structure (e.g., gang, teen-age clique, country club, etc.) from within the *weltanschauung* of that social structure is very different to looking at those same activities from outside that *weltanschauung*. Learning to look at our immediate psychological enclave from outside of it seems like a very important thing to learn in our increasingly pluralist world, as well as trying to discover our responsibility for.

The role of ideology, and that of all the –ism’s comes into focus in this context. Looking at any social structure from an ideological perspective (e.g., gangsterism, socialism, fundamentalism – Islamic or Christian – liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, etc.) necessarily inhibits or even prevents responsibility for if those ideologies cannot be put aside to view the social structures which they create. It may be helpful to adopt a conservative perspective in order to discover what a liberal social structure could or should become (and vice versa), but not being able to step outside the conservative perspective when trying to discover what a conservative social structure should or could be results in an inability to see beyond the present quotidian expressions of that ideology.

Much has been written on this subject, and does not need to be reproduced here. What is important for our present purpose is that education (which has already learned to help students understand cultures that are different from their own; e.g., the many multi-ethnic/multi-cultural initiatives) should be able to help students see their own cultures (or social structures) from the perspectives of others; and that doing so may be fundamental to developing responsibility for, and, therefore, fundamental to a socially responsible education.

Discovering the Social Through the Individual

A full discussion of *arch-values* which might supersede their quotidian expressions would be long, and is beyond the remit of this paper. In any event, such discussion already exists in religious and philosophical literature. There is, however, one aspect of these *arch-values* that we do need to examine. *Arch-values* are frequently involved in ideas of what “the social” could or should be, and such values frequently lie at the heart of the reforms of “the social” that people seek. Ideas of what “the social” is or might become needn’t be utopian. It can simply be an understanding of something that is absent

or underdeveloped in “the social.” All notions of social injustice, reform, and progress have such a “could or should be” imbedded in them.

It seems to follow that imbedded in any notion of what “the social” could or should be are also notions of what is the best that individual humans can be. Throughout much of history there have been three principal causal relationships proposed between what “the social” and the individual could or should be: 1) that a good society brings about good individuals, 2) that good individuals bring about a good society, and 3) that goodness in society and individuals co-evolve. However, in responsibility *for* “the social,” in which individuals take responsibility for what “the social” is or could or should become, the social determinism of the first causal relationship has no place. The nature of “the social” is seen as following from the nature of at least some individuals. Interestingly, most if not all religions take the same perspective.

The implication of this for education is that any education that wishes to have its students assume responsibility *for* “the social” would have to include some attempt to give students a sense of the best that individual humans can be. It follows still further that helping students get a real sense (and not just an idea) of the best that humans can be necessarily involves helping those students, as individuals, have a sense of the best that they can be. This is a consequence of understandings we now have about types of knowledge, perhaps put most simply by some philosophers who have highlighted the distinction between learning *about* a thing – which can be from second hand sources, like a book or a movie – and learning *of* that thing – which requires first hand knowledge, i.e., experience.⁶ One can, for example, learn *about* riding a bicycle from reading books or hearing stories or seeing a movie about bicycle riding; but one can only learn *of* riding a bicycle from riding one. In other words, an education working substantively to help students acquire an understanding *of* the best that they as individuals can be, helps them understand the best that humans in general can be, which in turn helps them explore the best that “the social” could be. This has certainly been the contention for the last 240 years of the many educational descendants of Rousseau (e.g. Progressive Education, Holistic Education, etc.).⁷

An example may help clarify this seemingly abstract connection between the importance of a person understanding the best that they can be and that person understanding the best that “the social” could be. If a person believes in enlightenment (of a Buddhist or Hindu variety), or saintliness (of a Christian or Islamic variety), or self-actualization (of a psychological variety) as the best that humans can be, then an education that helps children gain a sense of what “enlightenment” or “saintliness” or “self-actualization” is, would necessarily, at the same time, help students appreciate what social structures such “ultimately developed” humans might advocate. While there are some problems with a simplistic application of this logic, it has been the logic of centuries (even if badly applied) that studying the lives of saints helps people be more of what they can be, which in turn ‘should’ produce a more saintly or enlightened society. Even though something isn’t true simply because it has been repeated for centuries, the apparent human need for exemplars (e.g., heroes, saints, sages, etc.), and the well noted tendency for humans to imitate what they admire, does lend credence to this logic. At the very least, even if there

are alternative paths for discovering the best that “the social” could be, each child discovering the best that they can be seems unlikely to be counter-productive.

Part of the discussions surrounding the differences between knowledge *about* and knowledge *of* (which has also called “conceptual” knowledge versus “embodied” knowledge)⁸ is their different relationships to action; and this may be a key to why, over the centuries, the logic of moral development (as discussed in the previous paragraph) has been badly applied. Simply having knowledge *about* something does not make one act in accord with that knowledge. This has been the source of consternation for many educators and activists for many good causes, because people who know *about* things (behavior that will keep them out of trouble, prevent unwanted pregnancy, degradation of the environment, ease world hunger and poverty) act as though they don’t have that knowledge. However, knowledge *of* a thing does effect action, and some have said that this is the most important kind of knowing we can develop because it is the kind that acts.⁹

In our secular schools, values that derive explicitly from religions can be problematic; but this is not an argument against the basic proposition that values should be a deliberate part of education, nor is the separation between religions and secular education a necessary constraint to this education in values. There are (as already mentioned) visions of the best that humans can be which are secular (e.g., those of Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Krishnamurti, etc.) which many people feel are compatible with those of all religions, every bit as compelling, and perhaps easier to discuss in our increasingly pluralist world.

An interesting implication of the view that an education which feels responsibility *for* “the social” must begin with students having a *sense* (not just an idea) of the best which humans can be, is that in such an education the student is both the object and the subject of education. A student coming to grips (actually, not just conceptually) with the best that he/she can be must simultaneously come to grips (at least to some extent) with what he/she currently is. In this way, self-knowledge becomes an unavoidable aspect of a socially responsible education, and (if a good individual brings about a good society) self-knowledge is a cornerstone of socially responsible action.

This essay would be incomplete without touching, at least briefly, on some aspects of students discovering the best that they can be, other than the above brief mention of self-knowledge. There is, as in the previous discussion of *arch-values* or their quotidian expression, the matter of levels of abstraction in a person’s view of the best that they can be. Repeating the previous example, a person might see that they can have “goodness” in their lives, or they may only see the possibility of politeness (and politeness can have the exercise of cultural capital, and therefore power, as its intention, and consequently be vicious and anything but “good”)¹⁰. If, in order to even see the best that (s)he can be, a person must have some sense of what we have been calling *arch-values* (e.g., goodness, honesty, compassion, integrity, etc.), we need to touch upon how a person is to have or experience such a sense. It has already been mentioned that several writers have discussed the difference between knowledge *about* a thing (like knowing *about* riding a

bicycle, which one could get just from reading books about bicycle riding) and knowledge *of* a thing (like knowing *of* riding a bicycle, which requires having ridden one). Similarly, a person can have knowledge *about* love or compassion without any knowledge *of* love; i.e., a person can have concepts about love without ever having experienced love, and end up conflating lust with love, security with love, etc. and acting in a way which contradicts any real sense of the original intention. History seems replete with examples of actions which contradict the original “good”; atrocities committed in pursuit of virtue.

If a person needs to have a sense *of arch-values* (and not just concepts *about* them) to be the best that they can be, and acquiring this sense *of* is to be a concern of education, then this has far reaching implications for pedagogic methods. For one thing, educators cannot rely on traditional methods of instruction which use *telling* or *transference of concepts* – students must have an experience of these values. As Rousseau claimed, “it is in doing good that one becomes good; I know of no practice more certain.”¹¹ What can be successfully *told* or *instructed* are the quotidian expressions of values (e.g., manners, mores, etc.), and while these are an important part of the cultural fluency mentioned earlier, when education stops at these, it seems fair to say that it is failing to fully educate. This understanding would reinforce the significance of learning like “service learning,” and would bring such learning from its current peripheral location in education to one of central importance.

Hierarchy of Social Structures

We should address the possibility that there are no *arch-values* which supersede the quotidian expressions; that all values are social/cultural artifacts, and therefore relative. The arguments for and against this position are well rehearsed, and there isn’t the space here to even summarize them, nor do we need to sort out this old philosophical conundrum for our present purposes. We can content ourselves with simply asking, “If all values are culturally bound, on what basis can we chose amongst all the competing values of all the different social structures which claim our allegiance?” This seems to come down to, “How can we prioritize amongst all the different social structures which claim our allegiance?” which returns us to our previous question about a hierarchy of social structures.

To begin looking at this question of a possible hierarchy of social structures, it may help to ask another question, “Of the many social entities to which we belong (e.g., family, friends, peer/colleague group, neighborhoods, ethnic enclaves, communities, nations, religious affiliations, and perhaps the “human family”), which should have our first loyalty?” In other words, what social entity *for* which we have responsibility takes precedence over all others? A reasonable answer (and the one I will use simply to advance this exploration) would be *the family*. Family as the social entity that deserves our first loyalty makes sense for several reasons. Firstly, there seem to be fairly compelling reasons (articulated by several evolutionary psychologists) to think that there is a biological basis to such loyalty: it favors the preservation of one’s genes. Secondly, however families are constituted (extended, nuclear, compound, re-constituted, etc.), they are generally acknowledged to provide the basic building blocks of many other social

structures. Thirdly, for the purposes of child rearing and the formation of the eventual adult, many psychologists and sociologists claim that families are a vital, if not *the most* vital, social entity.

There are some interesting educational implications if the family is the social entity which is our primary responsibility (rather than our nation, our religious affiliation, our peers groups, etc.). At the very least it seems to imply that education should aim to strengthen, support, and further the family. This might include, 1) helping students understand family dynamics, responsibilities, and roles, 2) education in support of sibling care, 3) education for parenting, 4) education for elder care, and 5) greater involvement of the family in education. In such an education, responsibility *for* and responsibility *to* seem inextricably intertwined.

A small clarification seems necessary here. It seems helpful to distinguish responsibilities that are social in their nature and responsibilities that are not social in nature but are social in their expression. A religious person may feel that their responsibility to “God,” “Allah,” or “The Atman” takes precedence over all other responsibilities; and a philosopher may feel that their responsibility to “Truth” does as well. However, a case is easily made that such responsibilities are non-social (they do not derive from, depend on, or necessarily involve anything social) even if they often have a social expression. In this, a distinction can be made between a person’s responsibility to what they see as sacred (and which is non-social) and a person’s responsibility to a religious affiliation (which is social) – and many a religious person has made just this distinction in going against or breaking away from their original religious affiliation in order to be true to their personal sense of the sacred, founding new religions or denominations. What is important for our present purposes is avoiding conflation of the social with the non-social in examining a hierarchy of social structures *for* which or *to* which a person feels responsible.

If the family is the primary social entity for which we are responsible, what might be the second? A reasonable answer (which, again, I propose to advance this exploration – a great deal more argument is needed) is the *human family*. Amongst the many reasons for proposing this to be a reasonable answer is that our birth family and the human family are the only two groupings about which we have no choice – our membership in these entities is not relative or conditional or subject to our whim. We can leave any other social structure which doesn’t suit us and join others, but from our family and from the human family we can only feign withdrawal. Therefore, our responsibility stems from our being inseparable from them. We are them and they are us; our membership is written in our genes. There is, admittedly, also a certain attraction to the elegance of having the two most important social entities be the smallest and the largest; perhaps implying that we might be able to successfully navigate our way through the claims of all the other social entities if we never violate these first two. This answer also has interesting implications for education in our world that has increasing pressures on the family, and that is increasingly pluralist.

To those who would maintain that the human family is not a social structure, there are many arguments. However, again for the sake of brevity, we can say that whether the

human family was not a social structure a thousand years ago might be debated, but in our era of “the global village” that position seems less tenable. We can also point to the arguments in many religions, as well as some philosophies and psychologies, which claim that all of us are part of the largest collective, and that our brotherhood/sisterhood is not diminished because of distance, race or ethnicity. These arguments also state that our commonality is not just biological, but profoundly social; and statements like Martin Luther King’s “An injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere” ring true to many people.

Summary

Where does this leave us in considering what Socially Responsible Education means? It would seem that if we are to be concerned with an education that is socially responsible:

- 1) We need to think of how education conducts itself as well as what it seeks to convey to students.
- 2) We can profitably distinguish between responsibility *to* and responsibility *for* “the social,” and we mustn’t neglect either. Understanding this distinction may also help resolve some cultural conflicts, such as that between those who want to teach children “my country/religion/socio-economic group, right or wrong” and those who want to teach those same children “social activism.”
- 3) We can instruct or teach what is entailed in responsibility *to* “the social,” but we need to approach education in responsibility *for* “the social” differently. Much more needs to be said about education in responsibility *for* “the social,” but for the moment we have to content ourselves with saying that it needs to be based on the most *arch-values* we can understand, and that a student must have a “sense” or experience of these values and not just a concept of them.
- 4) Self knowledge cannot just be a luxury for the contemplative or the philosopher, but is necessary for social responsibility.
- 5) We belong to many different social entities which make competing and even conflicting claims of responsibility on us, and our ability to deal with these competing or conflicting social entities seems important. A socially responsible education should help students navigate through these turbulent waters, and help them develop a basis for continuing to do so in their future. It seems reasonable to assume that people who can approach their social responsibilities coherently would help produce a society that is socially responsible.

No exposition as short as this can pretend to be a definitive comment on this difficult and important subject. The intention here has been simply to contribute to the conversation of educators who are interested in this topic. It isn’t sufficient to simply complain about irresponsibility (by individuals, groups, segments of the community, or the government), or to say that learning social responsibility should take place elsewhere (e.g., in the family or the church) as, far too frequently, this clearly is not occurring. We also have no reason to expect the media to take on this task. Today, educational establishments seem like the most logical venue (if not the *only* venue) in which to promote a widespread learning of social responsibility. But this will not occur by accident, nor on its own, and it will probably need a great deal of deliberation; and it seems reasonable to begin such deliberation by thinking about what “socially responsible education” might mean.

NOTES

¹ An expression frequently used by J. Krishnamurti. See for example KRISHNAMURTI (1975) 4th Public Talk. Saanen, Switzerland, Transcript.

² E.g., JUNG, C. G. (1977) *Adaptation, Individuation, Collectivity*. IN READ, H., FORDHAM, M. & ADLER, G. (Eds.) *The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous writings*. 2nd ed. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

³ MARKUS, H. & NURIUS, P. (1986) Possible Selves. *American Psychologist*, 41, 954-969.

⁴ BOURDIEU, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁵ KUHN, T. S. (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

⁶ For examples of this see DEWEY, J. (1922) *Human Nature and Conduct: an Introduction to Social Psychology*, London, George Allen and Unwin.; as well as WAKEFIELD, J. & DREYFUS, H. (1991) Intentionality and the Phenomenology of Actions. *John Searle and His Critics*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

⁷ FORBES, S. H. (2003) *Holistic Education: An analysis of its ideas and nature*, Brandon, VT., Foundation for Educational Renewal.; as well as MILLER, R. (1992) *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education In American Culture*, Brandon, Vermont, Holistic Education Press.

⁸ POLANYI, M. (1974) *Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.; as well as RYLE, G. (1984) *The Concept of Mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

⁹ KRISHNAMURTI (1992) *Social Responsibility*, Ojai, CA, Krishnamurti Foundation of America. p.6

¹⁰ BOURDIEU, P. (1984) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

¹¹ ROUSSEAU, J.-J. (1979) *Emile or On Education*, London, Penguin Classics. p. 250