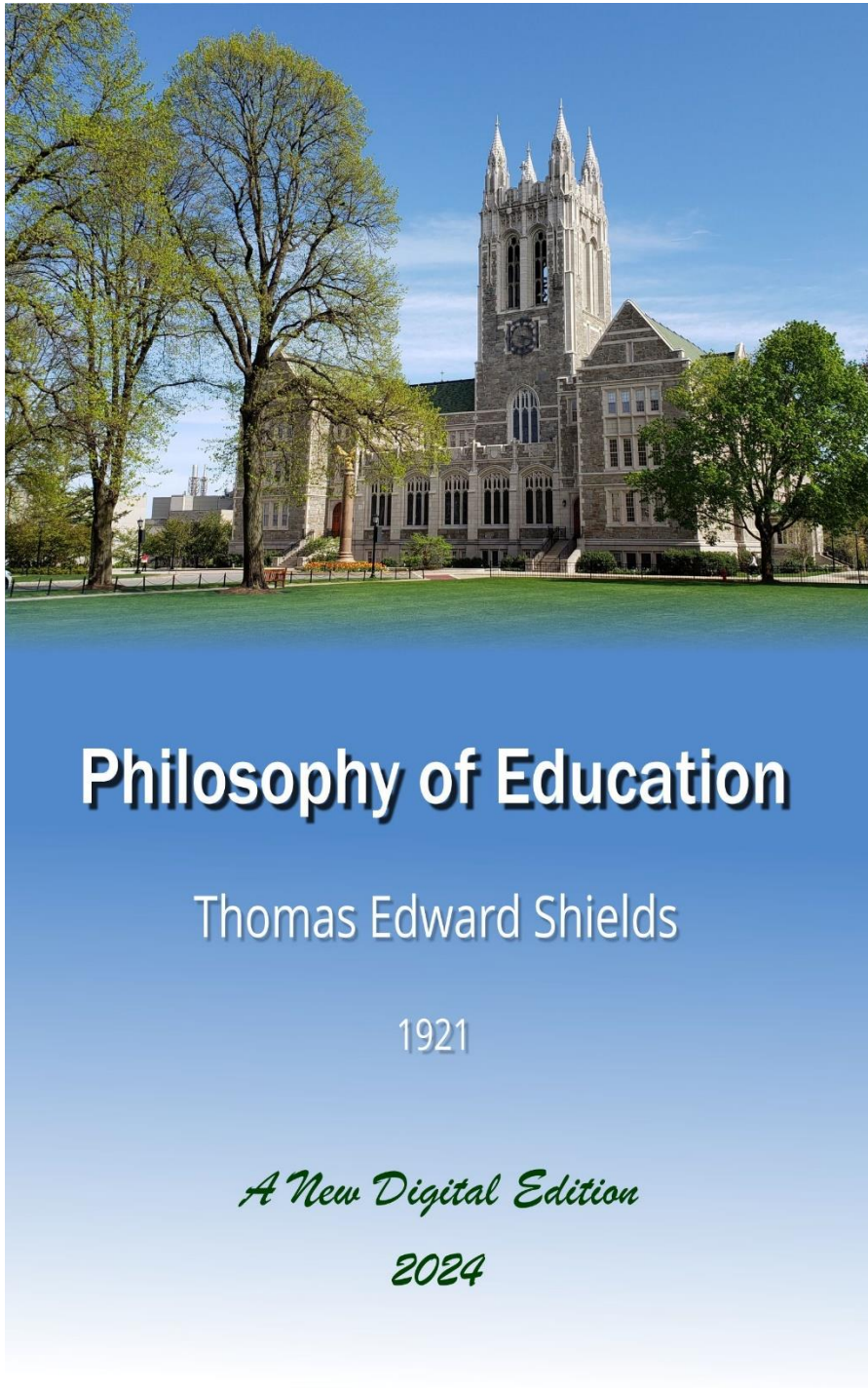


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Philosophy of Education

BY

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CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

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Note to the 2024 Ebook Edition

The new digital edition of Thomas Edward Shields's *Philosophy of Education* (copyrighted 1917, published 1921) is made available here intact, with these alterations and additions:

- (1) the footnotes have been presented in a single running numerical sequence instead of starting anew on each page;
- (2) a “live-link” table of contents has been added to the author’s detailed table of contents;
- (3) although most punctuation and formatting are retained as in the original, certain italicizations and corrections of typographical errors have been introduced;
- (4) a newly-collected, separate bibliography of the main works cited by Shields has been appended;

(5) the page numbers of the original have been represented in the text within square brackets; this arrangement allows not only for references that respect the original pagination but also for the validity of the extensive original index (with well over 1000 headings and subheadings). Note that the bracketed page numbers always indicate the *beginning* of a new page, so that “[10]” means that page ten begins with the following text.

This impressive synthesis was worked out over many years by a tireless advocate for the improvement of Catholic education in the United States. The author’s research, vision, and critical analyses will also be of considerable value to many other educators and historians of education. Those who are looking for an introduction and bibliography are referred especially to the concise and substantial essay by John L. Elias at the Biola University Database of Christian Educators of the 20th Century (<https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/thomas-edward-shields>) and to Leonardo Franchi’s very helpful *Thomas Shields & the Renewal of Catholic Education* (Washington, DC: Catholic Education Press, 2023).

Thomas Edward Shields was quite aware that his efforts were part of a dynamic enterprise. He promoted the application of contemporary “scientific” insights to the methods and contents of education; the anchoring and unification of Catholic education in Christ and the Gospel; and the dedication of ample thought, time, and resources to the formation programs for teachers. Shields realized that his ideas would be controversial and that further advances in science and practice would continue to be made; but, as he states in his preface, “The important thing is to arouse interest and center attention on the chief problems that are calling for a fresh study and a new formulation in the light of the present social and economic changes and of the present trend of state education.” We can still learn much from Shields’s example and from his energetic—even obsessive—efforts to help create the kind of education that will best profit us personally and societally.

Claude Pavur, S.J. / Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies / Boston College / November 7, 2023

[...]

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PREFACE

The Philosophy of Education furnishes a common meeting ground for all who are interested in any phase of educational work. The correct solution of the problems which it discusses concerns the pastor and his people no less than it does the teacher and his pupils.

The Catholics of this country are justly proud of their schools. The magnitude attained by the Catholic school system, during the last few decades, in spite of the double taxation of our people which is involved, bears eloquent testimony to the faith, generosity and loyalty of our Catholic people. The excellence of the work accomplished by the schools for our Catholic children along intellectual, moral and religious lines is abundant compensation for all the sacrifices made.

The time is now at hand for earnest consideration of the great fundamental principles which make for the integration and standardization of our schools. They have all sprung from Catholic impulse and they all share in the common aim of the preservation of the Catholic faith of our children and the salvation of

their souls. But there is urgent need of more uniformity in curricula and methods among the several hundred teaching communities which are at present conducting the schools. There is need also of clear vision to save our schools from being injuriously affected by the educational philosophy which is reducing itself to practice in our state schools and which is finding persuasive expression in educational manuals and in current literature.

Both in the problems selected for discussion in this book and in the method of their treatment, the needs of [8] the pastor and of our intelligent Catholic laity have been kept in mind as well as the needs of the teachers actually engaged in the work of our schools. It is a matter of grave importance that our Catholic laity should have a thorough understanding of the meaning of Catholic education, of the needs of our schools, and of the relationship which should exist between their work and that of the state schools. It is not to be expected, of course, that the reader will in every instance agree with the author in the solutions arrived at. The important thing is to arouse interest and center attention on the chief problems that are calling for a fresh study and a new formulation in the light of the present social and economic changes and of the present trend of state education. The pastor can accomplish much in the promotion of Catholic interest in educational matters by the discussion of many of these topics from the pulpit and the platform.

It is hoped that the book may serve as a convenient text for use in novitiate normal courses and as a means of stimulating the professional studies of the teachers who are in actual service.

The book is divided into three parts, in the first of which the nature of the educative process is examined from various points of view. In Chapter II, physical and social heredity are contrasted. The meaning of infancy, together with the possibility and the need of education, is studied. In Chapter III, attention is called to a fundamental change of far-reaching importance in the center of human interest, both in the world at large and in the educative process. In the following chapter, education is studied in one of its effects, namely, that of adjusting the individual to his environment. The fundamental and pernicious errors involved in the Culture [9] Epoch Theory are next pointed out. A study is then made of the child-mind under the aspects of growth and development. In Chapter VIII, the various steps are pointed out through which man, from a recognition of the controlling power of law in physical phenomena, has come to recognize the fact that, in spite of intelligence and free will, mental life in its growth and development is subject to similar laws. This phase of the work closes with a discussion of the function of experience, which has recently come into the foreground in educational literature as the key to methods.

After this study of the nature of the educative process, attention is called in the second part of the book to the various ends towards which the process should be directed by educational agencies. An attempt is made, in the first place, to determine the ultimate aim of Christian education. Once the direction is fixed, attention is then called in succession to other aims in the general order of their importance. The third part of the book is devoted to a consideration of the chief educational agencies, such as the home, the church, the school, state school systems, and the Catholic school system. The concluding chapters are devoted to a brief consideration of the curriculum and of the selecting and training of teachers in the state systems and in the Catholic system.

In the study of educational agencies, the historical point of view is dominant. This is in accordance with the theory developed in Chapter III. The nature of these institutions cannot be rightly understood by a study of their present condition or through a study of a cross-section of any one period of the past. The relation of the school to the church, the home and the state is best seen in an historical survey of the relations which the institutions [10] bore to each other in different countries and of the effect produced.

No attempt has been made to cover the entire field of the philosophy of education. Such a procedure would either swell the volume unduly or reduce the treatment of each topic to a mere synopsis which would lack vitality and power. The present plan was adopted in the belief that more would be

accomplished by treating a few topics with sufficient fullness to awaken interest than by giving a mere outline of the whole field, however balanced might be its proportions.

Much of the matter contained in this volume has been used by the author in lectures given in various parts of the country at diocesan institutes and at the mother-houses of teaching communities of men and women between the years 1895 and 1910. Portions of it were also used as a text in courses given at the Sisters College and in the Department of Education at the Catholic University. Several chapters have appeared in their entirety in the *Catholic Educational Review* during 1916.

It is believed that sufficient reference to the bibliography is supplied in the footnotes in which acknowledgment to the sources drawn upon is made. A fuller bibliography may readily be obtained today in any educational library and need not, therefore, cumber our pages.

The author takes this occasion to make grateful acknowledgment to Dr. Pace for many valuable suggestions received in the preparation of several of the chapters of the book and to Dr. McCormick and Father McVay for suggestions and criticisms. Thanks are also due to Miss Frances Askew for assistance in preparing the manuscript and for reading the proof. T. E. S.

Feast of the Purification, 1917.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Philosophy of Education is the basic element in the professional training of the teacher. In this science the teacher seeks for the meaning of the educative process as it takes place in the mind of the pupil and for the goal towards which it should be directed. He must turn to the same source for the fundamental principles which should guide in the selection and arrangement of the materials of the curriculum in the various stages of the educative process and for the educative values of the different disciplines to be employed. In these days of rapid and deep-seated social and economic changes, the work of the school is undergoing a corresponding change in character and in aim. This makes unusual demands on the philosophy of education and places added emphasis on its necessity in the training of the teacher, nor is the necessity for this science confined to the teacher. The layman, through his vote, exerts a controlling influence on the school and upon the relationship which should exist between it and other social institutions of such fundamental importance as the home, the church and the state.

The Philosophy of Education is closely related to the Psychology of Education and to the History of Education. Through the former, light is shed upon the conscious processes of the child and intelligence is gained concerning the educative process in its relationship to the unfolding powers and faculties of the individual. The philosophy of education carries these considerations up to a wider viewpoint and studies them in their relation to life as a whole and to the attainment of its aims. Through the latter, control is exerted upon the conclusions drawn both [22] in the psychology of education and in the philosophy of education, and further light is gained on the relations which should exist between the school and other social institutions.

The philosophy of education, the psychology of education and the history of education are linked together in their services to the teacher and interwoven with each other as the basis of his professional training. On this basis rest the other branches included in the curriculum of the normal school and the teachers college.

Philosophy, psychology and history belong to the academic rather than to the professional curriculum. They are pure sciences and, as such, are presupposed by the corresponding applied sciences, which latter belong to the professional curriculum. The aim in pure science is knowledge; the aim in applied science is action. In the former, the desire culminates in knowing; in the latter, it is not satisfied until the knowledge gained issues in action. Pure science leads to discovery, while applied science aims at invention. Applied science presupposes pure science and is limited by its development. Invention may lag behind discovery; it rarely, if ever, overtakes it, and, from the nature of the case, it never can transcend it.

Philosophy, more perhaps than any other discipline, deserves the name of pure science, since it deals with the highest aims and ultimate causes of all things. At first sight, it seems to be far removed from the strife and turmoil of actual life in this material world, and yet the practical conclusions reached in philosophy have a more far-reaching effect upon the conduct of life than do the findings of any other science. A man's philosophy, by imperceptible degrees, colors the whole of his life and affects his attitude towards all things in heaven and on [23] earth. In like manner, the prevalent philosophy of a people gradually transforms all their social institutions; nevertheless, the aim of philosophy, as such, is knowledge, not conduct. This, however, does not prevent the content of philosophy from exerting its practical influence. The conscious and deliberate aim in eating may be the gratification of the palate and the immediate satisfaction of appetite, but these aims do not, for all that, prevent the food from nourishing the body and from building up bone and muscle and nerve.

That portion of the field of pure philosophy which deals with the development of the mind, with the process and meaning of education, with the relations of the school to the church and the home, might

appropriately be called educational philosophy, but, in spite of the information which it supplies to the teaching profession, it is an academic and not a professional discipline.

The philosophy of education, as a branch of applied science, is not concerned directly with the establishment of fundamental principles in any department of philosophy. Its business is to apply the truths and principles established by pure philosophy to the practical conduct of the educative process. It seeks to lift into consciousness and to make rational and deliberate, as well as more immediate and effective, the relation between the philosophical truth and the life and conduct of the pupil, and endeavors to guide the teacher in the manifold relations which he sustains towards his pupils in the imparting of knowledge, in the building of habits, and in the gaining of power and insight into the purposes and meanings of life.

If philosophy were an exact science, such as mathematics, the task of the writer on the philosophy of education would be lighter but, as the case stands, we [24] find men, in every department of philosophy, differing profoundly in the conclusions which they draw. A prevalent school of philosophy in our own day confines the meaning of life to this world, rejecting the existence of God and the continuance of personal consciousness beyond the grave as myths which have no claim to human belief. In a word, to these men human life is nothing more than a high form of animal life, and the purpose of education is to render the individual more aggressive and more efficient in the struggle for existence, either alone or in groups. They reject wholly the existence of any supernatural power which could redeem fallen man and find the highest ideal of human life laid down in the physical heredity of the child.

Over against this school of philosophy should be placed the philosophy maintained by the Catholic Church, which aims at perfecting man in the present life as a means of fitting him for a life hereafter; which seeks to suppress aggressiveness and enthrone brotherly love as the controlling power in human affairs; which finds one of the chief functions of education to be the redemption of fallen man, the elimination of low instincts, and the substitution of supernatural virtues built up in the light of faith and with the assistance of Divine grace.

The philosophy of education tends to quicken and to deepen the flow of conviction into action, of doctrine into conduct, and it is achieving these ends in ever-increasing measure in our day. The current educational literature, monographs, text-books, and popular treatises are forming all our teachers and animating their work with the current philosophy, which is, for the most part, a philosophy wholly at variance with Catholic ideas and ideals of life.

If the pure philosophy drawn upon be wholesome, the [25] philosophy of education will tend to make the transformation of society through the school an uplifting process. But, on the other hand, if the philosophy used as the source be false and its ideals low, the philosophy of education will have equal effectiveness in debasing life and in corrupting social institutions. It is, therefore, a matter of the utmost importance to Catholics that the philosophy of education employed in the training of Catholic teachers be not only technically efficient, but that it be such as draws from the pure fountains of Catholic philosophy wholesome principles of life.

The philosophy that leaves no room for God, for a spiritual soul, nor for a life hereafter, fixes a totally different goal for the educative process from that aimed at by the Catholic who not only believes in the spiritual side of human nature, but holds among his most firm convictions the belief in a supernatural destiny and in a redemption wrought through the merits of Jesus Christ. The educator who holds that man does not transcend the realm of animal life, will naturally endeavor to endow each coming generation of children with those qualities which have marked the success of the animal in the long biological struggle for existence. He will seek the ideal of human life within the narrow lines of physical heredity and will turn exclusively to physical sources for the means of realizing that ideal. Nor must what is here said be regarded as an accusation brought against a prevalent school of thought by an unfriendly critic. This view is expressly set forth as the ideal of the Eugenic School by many of its votaries. We select, as a typical instance of such teaching, the following passage from an address

delivered before the Child Conference for Research and Welfare at Clark University in 1909, by Dr. John Franklin [26] Bobbitt, an alumnus of Clark University and a professor in the University of Chicago:¹

“Since man became man, he has always looked forward to an ideal future state on earth, a Eutopia, a millennium, a City of the Sun, a Platonic Republic, where all men should be good and wise and strong. And yet, wherever man has builded a civilization in his striving to realize his ideal state, in Egypt, or Greece, or Carthage, or Rome, invariably he has met with defeat. Without exception, his state crumbles and falls. There has always been some invisible undermining influence, which he failed to see and to prevent.

“With the rise of the science of biology, we have discovered the secret of their decline, and have discovered the formula for counteracting it in our own case. The undermining influences were, at bottom, biological in their cause; and the formula for counteracting them in our case must likewise be biological. The formula is the simple one used by Luther Burbank in his superb creations; for all life grows on a single stem. As is the parentage so is the next generation. If the next generation is to be higher than this, its average parentage must be higher than our average. This law is fundamental, ineluctable, not to be vetoed or evaded. We may prefer to shut our eyes to the law because of its difficulty of application; we may prefer to trust to an assumed plasticity because it appears more docile to our wish; we may find it more comfortable to fall back upon the faith that good intentions cannot go wrong. These things are more pleasant, if pleasantness is our aim. But if improvement of the human stock is our aim, biological law must be followed regardless of personal wish.”

[27]

The author of this passage leaves little room to doubt the nature of his philosophy or his views concerning human nature. His methods for improving the human race are explicitly stated to be the methods employed by the stock-breeder or the horticulturist. He explicitly denies a plasticity on the part of the individual which would permit of the effective operation of redeeming grace or the effective performance of a redeeming function by our educative agencies. The philosophy here stated, however, is extreme; it not only excludes the supernatural and the life beyond the grave, but it runs counter to sound biological doctrine as well. Dr. Bobbitt’s concentrated attention on the processes of physical heredity seems to have blinded him to the fact that man’s chief privilege lies in social heredity and that it is to this source he owes his place of supreme control and headship in the world of physical life. This phase of the subject is brought out more explicitly in the following passage in the same paper:

“At present our doctrines of heredity are not as they were. We are coming to see that heredity is dominant in the characters of men. Human plasticity is not so great as has been assumed. A child cannot be moulded to our will. The design laid in heredity is the only one that can be worked out in actuality. The actual is only a realized copy of the potential. It is true the potential is drawn in rather broad lines thus permitting the necessary degree of adaptation; to this extent the individual is plastic. But recent statistics of heredity show that the possible deviation is not great, except downward in the direction of breaking and marring.”²

Such a philosophy leaves no room for redeeming grace. [28] It denies to man the privilege of being “born again of water and the Holy Ghost,” and seeks to develop him along merely animal lines. If this philosophy be followed out consistently, it must interpret the whole content of the child’s social heredity in such a manner that it may fit into the narrow limits of animal nature.

A more systematic presentation of the philosophy which lends its support to the eugenic view will be found in *Genetic Philosophy of Education, an Epitome of the Published Writings of President G. Stanley Hall, of Clark University*, by G E. Partridge, Ph.D.

President Hall, in his preface, accepts it as a correct presentation of the views which he has expressed on so many occasions in public gatherings, in teachers’ meetings, and in books and brochures, during the

last thirty years. It has a still Luther significance, coming from the President of Clark University and the recognized leader of this school of thinkers, which is widely represented in the teaching staffs of the training schools for teachers throughout the country. The following passage will serve to illustrate the manner in which this school of educators seek to dispense with all sources of uplift outside the narrow confines of man's animal nature:

"Conversion is not only the center of the religious and biological change at adolescence, but it is also the clue to understanding the psychology of the higher stages of the history of the race. The conversion motive has played a great part in history, and everywhere, where civilization has reached the higher levels, it is recognized. Among primitive peoples we find its beginnings in the form of initiatory rights which symbolize the entrance of the youth into manhood, and into the position of adult responsibility. This is the beginning of primitive education. It is a [29] conscious effort to establish, in the mind of the youth, the best traditions of the race to which he belongs. Much in our own religion is symbolic of conversion and the adolescent change. The conquest of the world, through grief and pain, by the life of Jesus, is its greatest expression. The cross symbolizes the adolescent struggle, in which the old life of self and sin comes into sharp conflict with the new and higher motives of love and service. Here the movement is more than individual; it is racial. Jesus initiated into the world, at a time when it had, degenerated as a result of individualism, a new religion, and a new culture, based upon love and self-surrender. He himself was an adolescent, and most of His disciples were youths. Every youth in becoming transformed into a normal adult thus passes through the stages through which Jesus led the world.

"The story of the Cross and of the life of Jesus is thus the great religious masterpiece of the race, most truly representing its higher life. In lesser form the theme appears in many literatures. Dante is the story of adolescence; the Holy Grail, the Golden Fleece, Prometheus, Beowulf, and Hiawatha all tell the same tale. It is the central theme of religion, in its highest form. Through all the lower stages of racial religion the child of this higher civilization passes, and the partial and false beliefs by way of which he reaches the truer and higher are necessary steps. When religion is true and deep, these beliefs are never merely cast aside or dropped, but the highest of all faiths retains the power of still carrying the germs of the old beliefs, and of sympathizing with all that it has once loved. Religion is, therefore, to be regarded as a product of inner growth, a natural result of the stages of feeling through which man passes [30] Religion has its sanction within us, and all religious ceremonies are valuable only as they introduce the individual to powers within himself that are unexpressed. The higher truths of religion are revelations to a single self from the racial or cosmic self within him.

"The religious life presents many other problems of psychology, and has both its normal and its abnormal phases. Among the questions which are largely psychological are: prayer, obedience, sacrifice, chastity, asceticism, renunciation, creeds, dogmas, doctrines, worship, sacraments, ritual, ceremonies, priests, saints, miracles, the Sabbath, symbols, vows, oaths, sects—all these and all similar problems are open for psychological investigation, and upon psychology rests the task of restating them, and of reinterpreting all the facts. All such questions are problems of the higher emotions, and they must be studied with reference to the stages of development of the feelings, both in the race, and in the individual. Psychology must reform the ancient dogmas by showing the validity of the feeling elements upon which they rest. By this means the essentially true in religion will be reinterpreted in scientific terms, and all its practical problems will be brought into relation with questions of education and other needs of the present day."³

This passage indicates sufficiently both the trend of educational psychology in this country and the need of a presentation of the subject from a Catholic standpoint, both as a protection to our teachers against the dangerous doctrines that are seeping into schools of all classes and as a statement of the Catholic position for the enlightenment of non-Catholic educators. The philosophy of life [31] presented by President Hall and his school stands in sharp contrast to that maintained by the Catholic Church. The one looks to man's animal nature for the highest ideal to be attained and for all the means to be

employed in the educative process for its attainment. The other finds in man a higher nature which transcends animal life and claims kinship with the Pure Spirit Who created the heavens and the earth. The one looks for its ideal in the physical inheritance of the child. The other seeks it in the revelation made by God to man and it seeks for the means of realizing this ideal in Divine grace, which flows not from human nature but directly from the Deity.

As the philosophies of these two schools stand in sharp contrast to each other, so must the ways and means dealt with in the corresponding philosophies of education differ. The content and organization of the curriculum differ, the interpretation of what is taught, the selection and training of teachers, no less than the methods to be employed by the teachers and to be embodied in text-books will differ in accordance with the differences in the underlying philosophies.

But in spite of the many differences discernible between the fundamental principles which these two schools seek to apply to the educative process, and in spite of the divergent means and ends which must forever separate a naturalistic or a materialistic philosophy from the philosophy of the Catholic Church, a substantial agreement exists between them on certain points of fundamental importance. Men who have learned to think in terms of biology, no matter how widely they may differ in their religious beliefs or in their fundamental philosophy of life, have learned to look upon education as a process by which society seeks to perpetuate its institutions and [32] its life and to adjust each generation of children to the environments into which they must enter at the close of the school period. It is true that, according to one system of philosophy, this adjustment is ultimate, while the other system of philosophy maintains that it is but a means to an end and that the ultimate end of all life and of all human striving is to be found in a future life. Nevertheless, these two schools maintain with equal force that it is the business of education to adjust the child to earthly environments, to the social institutions in which he must act his part. The child must be fitted for effective citizenship. He must be rendered worthy to take his place in the home. And to these two the Church would add the further demand that he be properly prepared for membership within her fold. It should be further noted that there is no conflict between these various adjustments, since the more perfectly the individual is adjusted to the life of the state and the life of the home the more worthy he will be of membership in the Church. The Church adds to what is demanded by the state and the home. And the Christian philosopher makes the further claim that through this very addition the preceding adjustments are rendered more secure and more perfect.

[...]

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¹ *Proceedings*, New York. 1909; p. 73.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

³ Partridge, *Genetic Philosophy of Education*, New York, 1912, pp. 56–8.