



Chapter 1

Toward a Philosophy of Integrative Education

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Those of us who advocate for integrative higher education in the opening years of the twenty-first century stand in a long line of would-be reformers. An on-again, off-again movement to make America's approach to higher education more multidimensional has been at work since before there was a United States.

In 1774, representatives from Maryland and Virginia negotiated a treaty with the Indians of the Six Nations, who were then invited to send their boys to the college of William and Mary, founded in 1693. The tribal elders declined that offer with the following words:

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those Colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are

convinced that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours. We have had some Experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces: they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods . . . neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing.

We are, however, not the less oblig'd by your kind offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.¹

Here we are, two and a half centuries later, wanting the same thing these tribal elders wanted, in principle if not in detail: an education that embraces every dimension of what it means to be human, that honors the varieties of human experience, looks at us and our world through a variety of cultural lenses, and educates our young people in ways that enable them to face the challenges of our time.

The institution of higher education is notoriously slow to change. But many individuals within the institution have kept the vision of an integrative practice alive in their hearts—using *heart* in its original sense, not just as the seat of the emotions but as that core place in the human self where all our capacities converge: intellect, senses, emotions, imagination, intuition, will, spirit, and soul.

There are good and bad reasons for the slow pace of institutional change. One of an institution's key functions is to conserve the best of the past over time, serving as a collective memory bank to protect us against historical amnesia, cultural erosion, and the seductions of the merely new. For this we can be grateful. But institutions sometimes cling to their routines out of fear of change and under

the cover of the arrogance of power: when you are the only game in town, you do not need to listen to your critics.

If higher education is to keep evolving toward its full potential, it needs people who are so devoted to the educational enterprise that they have a lover's quarrel with the institution whenever they see it fall short of that potential—and are willing to translate that quarrel into positive action. We need to uncover and empower the heart of higher education in those faculty, administrators, students, alumni, and trustees who have a vision for reclaiming the unrealized potentials in the human and historical DNA that gave rise to academic life.

MODES OF KNOWING

At the heart of any serious approach to educational reform is a set of questions about the core functions of the university: knowing, teaching, and learning. Advocates for integrative education take facts and rationality seriously; the failure to do so would betray our DNA. But we also seek forms of knowing, teaching, and learning that offer more nourishment than the thin soup served up when data and logic are the only ingredients. In our complex and demanding worlds—inner *and* outer worlds—the human species cannot survive, let alone thrive, on a diet like that.

I have long been impressed by the fact that science itself—great science, original science, the science on which so much of modern culture is built—depends on our subtle faculties as much as it does on objective data and logical analysis. It depends on bodily knowledge, intuition, imagination, and aesthetic sensibility, as you can learn from any mathematician who has been led to a proof by its “elegance.” The hard sciences are full-body sports, enterprises that depend on experiential immersion in the phenomena and the process. To quote that classic of children's literature *The Wind in the Willows*, the greatest of scientists have always thrived on “messing about in boats.”²

I find it helpful from time to time to reread Michael Polanyi's fifty-year-old classic, *Personal Knowledge*.³ Polanyi, a physical chemist and philosopher of science, argues that our scientific

knowledge is dependent on us being in the world as whole persons, that if we did not have bodies and selves that “indwell” the physical phenomena of the world in an altogether inarticulate way, we could not know any of what we know at an articulate conceptual, logical, empirical level. Our *explicit* knowing depends, argues Polanyi, on a vast subterranean layer of *tacit* human knowing, and we will be arrogant about the hegemony of science until we learn to honor its wordless underground foundations. Reading Polanyi made me realize that a student who says, “I know what I mean but I don’t know how to say it,” is not *necessarily* blowing smoke!

When we honor the hidden aquifer that feeds human knowing, we are more likely to develop a capacity for awe, wonder, and humility that deepens rather than diminishes our knowledge. And we are less likely to develop the kind of hubris about our knowledge that haunts the world today. So much of the violence our culture practices at home and exports abroad is rooted in an arrogance that says, “We know best, and we are ready to enforce what we know politically, culturally, economically, militarily.” In contrast, a mode of knowing steeped in awe, wonder, and humility is a mode of knowing that can serve the human cause, which is the whole point of integrative education.

Human knowing, rightly understood, has paradoxical roots—mind and heart, hard data and soft intuition, individual insight and communal sifting and winnowing—the roots novelist Vladimir Nabokov pointed to when he told his Cornell University students that they must do their work “with the passion of the scientist and precision of the poet.”⁴ Integrative education aims to “think the world together” rather than “think it apart,” to know the world in a way that empowers educated people to act on behalf of wholeness rather than fragmentation.

The philosophical infrastructure of integrative education is a very large topic. I will try to bring it down to scale by framing these two opening chapters as “a dialogue with the critics,” an encounter with five archetypal criticisms of integrative education that I have heard or intuited over the years. As I look back on my own work in higher education, I am clear that I have learned more from my

critics than from my fans. Criticism awakens me at three o'clock in the morning, compelling me to chew on things in a way I never do when people tell me that I got something right.

There is another reason I want to bring the critics into this conversation up front. In my judgment, one of the saddest and most self-contradictory features of academic culture is the way it tends to run away from criticism. Academic culture celebrates "critical thinking," often elevating that capacity to its number-one goal for students. But academic culture is sometimes dominated by orthodoxy as profoundly as any church I know. If a mode of knowing, a pedagogy, a life experience, or social perspective is not regarded as kosher in the academy, it too often does not get a fair hearing. So if we are serious about integrative education, we must give a fair hearing to those who disagree with us. As we do so, we have a chance to model and help restore one of the academy's highest norms when it comes to good inquiry: engaging contradictory ideas in creative conflict.

CRITIQUE 1: WEAK PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter and the next, I want to explore five critiques of integrative education. Some of them have been made explicitly, while others I regard as the unspoken and underlying reasons why the academy has often resisted an integrative approach to its mission. The first critique—which has four subsections and will occupy the rest of this chapter—is that integrative education is a grab bag of techniques that have no philosophical underpinnings, coherence, or power, that it is merely an assortment of pedagogies like service learning, action research, and small-group process, behind which there is no deep-rooted or defensible educational philosophy.

Up to a point, the critics are right—if they weren't, there would be little need for this book! The integrative education movement has been obsessed with questions of technique. But the weakness

of the philosophical case for integrative education is not because none can be mounted. It is because many of us have not done our homework on these issues in a way that allows us to engage our critics in a constructive dialogue—hampered, perhaps, by a sense of having a “country cousin” relationship to our city cousins in the academy who embrace and are emboldened by the power of academic orthodoxy.

We cannot advance this movement by remaining on the margins and tinkering with methodology. We need to draw on the deep and rich philosophical resources that are readily available to us, that are found at the heart of the classic traditions that gave rise to higher education. The subtle faculties on which great science depends—including nonrational forms of intelligence such as bodily knowing, relationality, intuition, and emotion—deserve the most rational defense we can give them. Our challenge is to become more conversant with these things and more articulate about them, in dialogue with the critics.

As we move in that direction, two interesting ironies are worth noting. One is that in the university—where issues in the philosophy of education ought to be regular topics of discussion—the discussion, as everyone knows, is much more likely to be about who gets on-campus parking or the bigger slice of the credit-hour pie. Advocates of integrative education can serve the general renewal of academic culture well by putting subjects of more fundamental importance into play.

The second irony is this: the philosophical foundations of conventional pedagogy are so weak that no one even tries to mount a philosophical defense of them. For example, it is widely understood that the division of intellectual labor represented by discipline-bound academic departments is not the most illuminating way to gain knowledge of a complex world, which is why interdisciplinary studies are at the growing edge of the evolution of learning. But most teaching continues to occur within disciplinary silos, not because it is philosophically defensible but simply because that is how things have always been done. So if the critics who represent academic orthodoxy want a conversation about philosophical foundations,

they face challenges of their own. We need a genuine dialogue in which the partners help each other move past their own limitations for the sake of the larger enterprise.

I want to offer a few notes toward that possibility under the four philosophical rubrics of ontology, epistemology, pedagogy, and ethics, which I regard as foundational to the educational enterprise at large, including integrative education. These four as I understand them are woven together by the concept of “community,” not merely as a sociological phenomenon but as an *ontological reality*, an *epistemological necessity*, a *pedagogical asset*, and an *ethical corrective*. Of course, in the brief span of a chapter, I cannot begin to do justice to questions that philosophers have grappled with for centuries. I hope simply to help make these questions part of the conversation, knowing that Arthur Zajonc will address them in more depth later in this book.

An Ontological Reality

Ian Barbour, the distinguished philosopher of science, offers a quick and helpful three-stage summary of the complex history of ontology, the nature of being and how we perceive it, at least in Western civilization. In the medieval era, says Barbour, we viewed reality as mental and material “substance” or “stuff.” “In the Newtonian era our image of reality became atomistic, positing separate particles, rather than substances, to be the basic nature of reality.”⁵

Philosophical ideas sometimes have a trickle-down effect. The image of atoms colliding in the void as the building blocks of reality morphed into a way of thinking that had massive societal implications. In the Western world, it got translated (with the help of social Darwinism) into an atomistic notion of the self and a competitive “survival of the fittest” concept of human relations. That view, in turn, helped shape an educational system premised on the notion that knowledge consists of collecting atomistic facts about an atomistic reality, facts to be delivered by individuals who know them to others who do not in a system where learners compete with each other for scarce rewards.

But today, in stage three of Barbour's brief history of ontology, the atomistic view of being is starting to lose its grip on our cultural imagination:

Nature is understood now to be relational, ecological, and interdependent. Reality is constituted by events and relationships rather than separate substances or separate particles. We are now compelled to see nature as "a historical community of interdependent beings."⁶

Physicist Henry Stapp says it is no longer possible even to think of the atom as a discrete entity: "an elementary particle is not an independently existing, unanalyzable entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things."⁷

This relational ontology, rooted in reflections on the findings of particle physics, is just beginning to permeate our thought patterns, self-understandings, and ways of being in the world—though we still have a long way to go in overcoming our habit of thinking of reality as "atoms colliding in the void," an image that can all too accurately describe the felt experience of contemporary life. The good news is that seeing the cosmos as "a historical community of interdependent beings" has opened the way to systems theory in institutional life; to ecology and deep ecology in our study of nature; to depth and Gestalt psychology as we explore our inner landscapes; to integrative forms of teaching and learning that resemble an interactive and interdependent community that transcends "nature red in tooth and claw."

Much depends on the assumptions we make about the nature of being, the nature of the reality in which we are embedded that is also embedded in us. Those of us who advocate integrative education can make a strong case that ours is an approach to teaching and learning faithful to new understandings of how the cosmos is constituted. Helping students come to terms with reality is a fundamental aim of higher education, an unattainable goal when the unexamined foundations of education, the "hidden curriculum," are atomistic and competitive rather than interconnected and communal.

An Epistemological Necessity

Integrative education begins with the premise that we are embedded in a communal reality and then proceeds to an epistemological assertion: we cannot know this communal reality truly and well unless we ourselves are consciously and actively in community with it as knowers.

Of course, whether we know it or not, like it or not, honor it or not, we are in community with reality. We are communal creatures from the subatomic level, through our conscious and unconscious inner lives, to the social relationships and institutional arrangements that constitute our external worlds. The only question is whether we will embrace that fact and, in the case of education, re-vision our understanding of what it means to know, teach, and learn.

Contrary to the objectivist myth that has dominated higher education, the knower cannot be separated from the known for the sake of so-called objectivity. Given what we now understand about the mutually influential relationship of the knower and the known, objectivism is no longer a viable way to frame knowing, teaching, or learning, or the true meaning of objectivity, for that matter. Those of us who advocate for integrative education need to make this point foundational to our efforts.

I believe in objectivity, which is to say that I believe in a model of knowing that goes beyond truth claims made by individuals on merely subjective grounds. Objectivity, rightly understood, emerges from testing what we *think* we know in the context of a community of inquiry guided by shared principles and practices. But I also believe that there is no way to eliminate human subjectivity from human knowing—after all, another name for science’s way of testing validity in community is “inter-subjective verifiability.” Not only is eliminating subjectivity impossible but, as Polanyi argues in *Personal Knowledge*, we would know hardly anything were it not for the subjective foundations of knowing, including bodily knowing.⁸

There is a story from the heart of great science that makes the point as well as any I know. Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Barbara McClintock was the first to uncover the mysteries of genetic

transposition, doing so at a time when we lacked the instruments to observe the phenomena directly. She did it through a process rooted partly in what one can only call “mysticism.” When she died at age ninety, McClintock was eulogized by a distinguished colleague as “someone who understands where the mysteries lie” rather than “someone who mystifies,” a powerful description of a sensibility often found at the heart of great science.⁹

McClintock’s work was chronicled in a book by Evelyn Fox Keller, professor of history and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Keller asked McClintock, in effect, “What’s the secret of your great science?” and summarizes her answer with these words:

Over and over again she tells us one must have the time to look, the patience to “hear what the material has to say to you,” the openness to “let it come to you.” Above all, one must have “a feeling for the organism.”¹⁰

When pressed for her secret, this keen observer with a finely tuned logical mind, the winner of a Nobel Prize, speaks of the maize plants that were her primary experimental materials not as objects but as beings. She understood that we can know a relational reality only by being in relation to it—not keeping our distance, as in the objectivist mythology, but moving close and leaning in, then testing what we think we know against the standards of evidence and logic in the context of the scientific community. McClintock, says one writer, “gained valuable knowledge by empathizing with her corn plants, submerging herself in their world and dissolving the boundary between object and observer.”¹¹ Biographer Keller sums up McClintock’s genius—and the genius of all integrative knowing—in a single luminous sentence: McClintock, in her relation to ears of corn, achieved “the highest form of love, love that allows for intimacy without the annihilation of difference.”¹² When I read that, I thought, “Here’s someone who had the kind of relationship with ears of corn that I yearn to have with other people!”

At bottom, knowing and loving significantly overlap each other: there are passions of the mind that are almost indistinguishable from passions of the heart in the energy they generate. That is why the eleventh-century theologian St. Simeon described the deepest form of human knowing as the result of thinking with “the mind descended into the heart.”

A Pedagogical Asset

The ontology and epistemology I have explored here offer scant comfort to any pedagogy that involves dumping factoids into the “empty vessel” of the student’s head. Instead, they lead to a pedagogy of carefully crafted relationships of student to teacher, student to student, and teacher to student to subject. A relational ontology and epistemology can take us in no other pedagogical direction than this. We must get past the inertia and the fear of experimentation that has kept too much of academic culture frozen in pedagogical practices that are out of phase with what we now understand about the nature of reality and the dynamics of knowing.

This does not rule out lecturing, because there are ways of lecturing that can create or help community, for example, in the way a well-staged theatrical drama does. But a pedagogy shaped by relational principles and practices requires a virtue not always found in university classrooms: hospitality. Learning spaces need to be hospitable spaces not merely because kindness is a good idea but because real education requires rigor. In a counterintuitive way, hospitality supports rigor by supporting community, and the proof can be found in everyday classroom experience.

Pedagogical rigor requires more than a professor doing a rigorous solo act, which can feel more like *rigor mortis* from where the student sits. A classroom becomes rigorous when a student is able to raise his or her hand and say, “I disagree with what you just said, professor.” Or, at even greater personal risk, “I disagree with what my friend in the second row just said.” Or, pulling out all the stops, “Excuse me, I don’t understand anything that’s been said in here for the past two weeks. Could someone please explain?”

Admitting ignorance and encountering diverse viewpoints on facts and interpretations require us to clarify our assertions, explain ourselves at deeper levels and perhaps, *mirabile dictu*, even change our minds. Professors who encourage student behaviors such as these invite true intellectual rigor, the kind that emerges from a community of inquiry and is far more educational than a nonstop diet of “rigorous” lectures. From where the students sit, these behaviors are also riskier than keeping one’s head down and taking notes. That kind of behavior is not going to happen in a class that lacks hospitality, a class where people feel too threatened to say anything that might get them crosswise with the professor or other students.

Academic culture has long made a false distinction between the “hard” virtues of scholarship and the “soft” virtues of community, putting the first in the hands of the faculty and the second in the hands of the office of student life. In truth, the soft virtues and the hard virtues go hand in hand when it comes to good pedagogy. I did my doctoral work at the University of California at Berkeley. Occasionally, when we were not listening to lectures, we were in seminars where people played intellectual hardball. Under those circumstances, it was rare to hear an honest open question, to say nothing of an admission of ignorance. The questions, for the most part, were designed to let the professor know that the questioner knew what the professor wanted to hear. Rigor is not to be confused with playing hardball, which usually is a form of gaming that is essentially anti-intellectual, played to score points rather than seek understanding.

Today, the integrative education movement has a sizeable catalogue of methods of teaching and learning that support the idea of a “learning community.” From Socrates with his devotion to dialogical inquiry, to late twentieth-century innovations such as “learning communities” and service learning, the history of education is dotted with alternatives to the kind of information dumping that was bred by the myth of objectivism. The great need of the integrative education movement is not for new and better techniques but for an ongoing exploration of the philosophical

foundations of this movement—from which we can responsibly challenge the conventional pedagogy, hone and deepen the methods in our current catalogue, and invent new methods that honor our fundamental principles.

An Ethical Corrective

Every epistemology, or way of knowing, as implemented in a pedagogy, or way of teaching and learning, tends to become an ethic, or way of living. This final foundation stone in the infrastructure of integrative education points to a critical fact: integrative forms of teaching and learning support a kind of ethical thinking and action that an objectivist education does not.

An objectivist epistemology is based on the myth that we must hold the world at arm's length in order to know it purely, untainted by subjectivity, then transmit what we know in ways that keep us and our students distanced from that world. It stands to reason that this form of education would breed “educated” people whose knowledge of the world is so abstract that they cannot engage the world morally: disengaged forms of learning are likely to lead learners toward disengaged lives. What students learn about poverty from reading texts is almost always less compelling than what they would have learned by doing that reading while volunteering in a community where the sights, sounds, and smells of poverty are inescapable elements of the educational experience. The kind of “distance education” that objectivism breeds lays the ground for lives lived at a distance from the suffering of the world.




As a student, I learned about the Holocaust from historians who presented the facts and figures in an academically antiseptic way, at objectivist arm's length. My teachers never invited Holocaust survivors to come to class and tell their stories. They never showed us films of human beings lined up on the edge of ditches and shot from behind by grinning soldiers, of skeletal survivors of the death camps being freed by Allied troops, of bodies piled up like cordwood around the camp grounds. I knew the facts and figures. But they

had been taught to me in such a dispassionate manner that I held my knowledge of these horrors at great distance from my life, held it as if these things had happened to some other species on some other planet.

Only later did I begin to understand that the community in which I had grown up—a community where “people like them” were geographically separated from “people like us”—was shaped by systematic real estate practices rooted in the same forces of darkness that drove the Holocaust. On a more personal level, only later did I begin to understand that I have within myself a certain “fascism of the heart” that would “kill off” anyone who threatens my cherished world view—not with a gas chamber, but with a mental or verbal dismissal that renders that person irrelevant to my life.

Not until I appropriated the history of the Holocaust as a lens through which to scrutinize my own life story did I begin to lay the foundations for my own moral response to such evil. This is something I should have been given help doing in the course of my education. Lacking that dimension, the phrase “educated person” becomes hollow. We need to understand why a large percentage of the people who oversaw the murder of six million Jews had doctoral degrees from some of the “great” universities of the era. We need to understand how integrative forms of teaching and learning can mitigate against educational travesties and tragedies such as this.

Every epistemology—rooted (as all of them are) in a particular ontology, and manifesting (as all of them do) in a particular pedagogy—has an impact on the ethical formation of learners. Epistemology becomes operational in students’ lives not through overt conversation or explicit knowing but through modes of teaching and learning that tacitly form or deform learners in a particular way of relating to the world. An integrative pedagogy is more likely to lead to moral engagement because it engages more of the learner’s self and teaches by means of engagement: the curriculum *and* the “hidden curriculum” embedded in such a pedagogy support a way of knowing that involves much if not all of the whole self in learning about the world.



The “trickle-down” traced in this chapter—from ontology through epistemology through pedagogy to ethics—is something that we who care about integrative education must talk more about, with each other and with the critics. Doing so would help us consolidate the strong philosophical underpinnings of integrative education and help this movement become more credible, more effective, and more inventive.

