Understanding Dualism in Education
The Field Before Us: Relational Education with Fullness and Joy
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Let knowledge grow from more to more;
but more of reverence in us dwell.
Charlotte Mason

What We Will Do Today
• Review Plato’s dualistic view of reality/the human.
• Review the effects this view has had on Christianity mainly by looking at the work of Jerram Barrs and Ranald Macaulay and Christian Overman.
• Review what current day educational philosophers say about the effects of Plato’s Idealism on education.

What is dualism: separating reality or some aspect of reality into two separate categories such as physical/spiritual or mind/matter or religious/secular or Divine/human.

Some categories may be good such as Divine and human but the human being is both spiritual and physical and both must be held together or we are no longer fully human from a biblical perspective. Because Mason refused to separate education from the rest of life, or the physical from the spiritual, she viewed education was the handmaid of religion. Our question today is: If education is the handmaid of religion and thus cannot be separated from religion does Platonic dualism have a negative effect on education as it does on Christianity?
Definitions

- Classical - I am defining classical as being “of or relating to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art, or culture.” This tends to be the standard definition of classical. I am not here defining it as general “tradition.” Neo classical then is the revival of the classical style, etc.

- Classic - Judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind: a classic novel; a classic car. A work of art of recognized and established value: his books have become classics.

- Dualism - In Philosophy a theory or system of thought that regards a domain of reality in terms of two independent principles, especially mind and matter (Cartesian dualism).


- For example, in religion - good and evil, human and divine, secular and sacred, etc.

- Idealism is the educational philosophy term used to describe the effects of a Platonic education.

Disclaimers

- Not here to attack anyone’s views on education.

- Simply want to point out some ideas that I think we need to consider as we think about the education of children as whole person's made in the image of God.

- I am not a philosopher and I am not a theologian—I am an educator trying to make sense of how theology and philosophy make an impact on education.

- I will be talking about the philosophy of Plato. I cannot deal with all the intricacies of a philosopher like Plato. I am pointing out a part of his thinking that I believe makes a negative impact on education.

Important Concepts

- While understanding the ideas and beliefs of the ancients can help us understand their times, theirs cultures and ideas, it must never be our orientation in terms of how we define ourselves or in terms of how we understand life. In this presentation I am dealing with one classical writer - Plato.

- True, common grace means that God can speak through whomever he chooses, but, it is only the Hebrew Old Testament and the Christian New Testament that Mason followed and took as divinely inspired texts. We cannot look for final truth about ourselves within the ancient antiquity framework (meaning the ancient Greek and Romans).

- I cannot cover every aspect of this topic today as I wish I could. It is too complicated and thick. My hope is that it will spur you on to read some of the books I mention today and use in this presentation.

Plato’s views of reality

- Ozmon - “[Plato] conjectured that the human soul once had true knowledge but lost it by being placed in a material body, which distorted and corrupted that knowledge” (p. 9).

- Barrs and Macaulay - “Accordingly, in Platonic thought the spiritual realm is considered superior to the material. The spirit is housed in a body of clay from which it longs to be released. In this life, however, the aim is to dwell in the realm of the spirit as far as possible and de-emphasize and devalue the material realm” (p. 40).
From C. S. Lewis’ *The Discarded Image*

If men can go to heaven it is because they came from there; their ascent is a return (*revertuntur*, xxxvi). That is why the body is ‘fetters;’ we come into it by a sort of Fall. It is irrelevant to our nature; ‘the mind of each man is the man’ (xxiv). All this belongs to a circle of ideas wholly different from the Christian doctrines of man’s creation, fall, redemption, and resurrection. The attitude to the body which it involves was to be an unfortunate legacy for medieval Christendom (p. 28).

Earth is in fact ‘offscourings of creation,’ the cosmic dust-bin.

*Lewis, The Discarded Image*, p. 63

Like Cicero, Macrobius believes that the soul can return to heaven because she first came thence; that the body is the soul’s tomb; that the soul is the man . . . .

*Lewis, The Discarded Image*, p. 69

Jonathan Sacks makes this comment about philosophy since the time of Plato: “Philosophy is about truth as system. The Bible is about truth as story” (p. 140).
The Incarnation

Understanding Dualism

Greek Religious Leaders
Greek Philosophers
Small Gods
Man’s Reason
Create an infinite impersonal Good
Personal
Not Infinite

This diagram is taken from page 40 in Macaulay and Barrs’ book Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience.
Hebrews were told who they were by God—made in his image. They did not need to make it up from their own reason. They were made for relationship. The idea of relationship does not exist in the ancient world. That is why virtues were for glorification and virtues such as humility, caring, (fruits of the spirit), etc. were not apart of the Greco-Roman mindset.

Mason’s methods of education are developed out of her understanding of scripture—not Plato and the ancients or those from the middle ages.

Before Socrates

- Religious Leaders
- Atomists - tries to account for everything by matter, motion, and chance.
- Sophists - traveling educators in 5th and 4 century Greece who went from one city to another teaching young men the skills needed for success in public life: rhetoric, grammar, history, science, art, and the virtues of character that lead to public admiration.

Two groups of Greek thinkers

- Religious leaders
- Small gods
- Large god
- Philosophers - finding truth through reason
  - The supreme authority of human reason
  - the consequent attempt to make rational claims
  - about the nature of all reality
  - the consequent claim that all reality is basically one
  - the continuing problem of dualism: the antagonism between impersonal fate and the shapeless stream of life
• the shapeless stream challenges the power of reason to grasp reality. The Philosophers try to deal with this problem in various ways, without compromising their fundamental allegiance to autonomous reason.
• The philosophers’ inability to maintain the rationality of their enterprise indicates failure of their attempt to understand the world—autonomously and thus putting themselves in an impossible position—in an irrational world.
• These difficulties invalidate much of what they say about the soul, ethics, and society.

Because God is Lord of all of life and there is no division between sacred and secular or between heaven and earth, education cannot be allowed to get its direction from any other source than Scripture.
This I believe was Mason’s position.

Effects of Plato’s Ideas on Christianity

• Justin Martyr
• Therefore in the third century, Christians associated physical with sinful.
• This resulted in many sitting upon pillars in the desert or having themselves sealed in caves.
• Others stressed the “transcendence” of God and taught that meditation or union of the human spirit with the divine was the point of life.
• Plotinus wrote, “to separate yourself from your body and very earnestly to put aside the system of sense with its desires and impulses and every such futility” (Mackenna, 1948 as cited in Macaulay and Barrs, p. 43).

Because the physical is material and therefore evil, our goal becomes to be one with God in the spirit. This idea promotes a devaluation of all language and knowledge perceived by our minds. Thus serious study of scripture is not necessary. What is important is to read and let the Holy Spirit touch us with His knowledge as we read.
• To be a self is bad. In Scripture it is sin that is to be mortified not the self.

Effects of Plato’s Ideas on Christianity, con’t

• Viewing the Holy Spirit not as a person, but as a “spiritual realm.”
• Produces a separation of the sacred and the secular.

• “World” in the New Testament is where God’s Lordship is rejected—it is not the physical world. This does not mean that we are to hate culture, nature, sex and other material things (p. 54).
• Prayer, worship, evangelism and “the ministry” are thought to be sacred. All other activities are secular. The sacred is said to be more spiritual (p. 54).
• It is more important for me to make sure that I have all the educational pieces of my child’s education perfectly arranged and sorted—than to help that hateful and obnoxious old woman or man who lives down the street and has never said a nice word to us.
• Nature is not valued only the supernatural.
• Spiritual gifts vs natural gifts.
• The reason is to be down played and the spiritual uplifted.
Platonic Thought on Education

- There are some good ideas that seem to have come from the early Platonic thinkers and from others that follow in that vein.
  - Promotion of a high cognitive level of education
  - Concern for morality and character
  - Revere the teacher
  - Self-realization
  - Stress on human and personal side of life
  - Comprehensive, systematic, and holistic approach

(taken from Ozmon, 2102, p. 28).

Difficulties with Platonic Thought on Education

- Intellectual elitism or a more provincial view of life
- Education was not for the masses but for the chosen few.
- Detrimental to affective and physical development
- Education is for the upper classes of society, especially for those going to academic, government or religious careers.
- Thus, education is a luxury for the privileged few.
- Vocational and technical education are good for the masses and a liberal education is suitable for the elite.

(taken from Ozmon, 2102, p. 28-29).

How have Plato's view influenced education?

Platonic View on Education
- Highly cognitive, intellectual, promotes an elitism.
- Ignores the affective and the physical
- Promotes Competition - such as the college we get in, etc.
- Knowing is for getting a great paying job.

Mason View on Education
- Educates the whole person
- A liberal education for all
- Engages with the physical world through nature and through other means
- Promotes caring for others while at the same time paying attention to detail and thoroughness.
- Knowing is about relationship which promotes caring, sensitivity and a long for the world to know Christ as we know him.

Some of Mason’s Theories

- Involves both the spiritual and the physical
  - Handwork - Physical
  - Picture Study - Spiritual
  - Nature - Physical
  - Literature - Spiritual
- For all children - The Liberal Education for All not just the elite
- Emphasizes the physical world including the physical development of children not just their ability to memorize or just their cognitive abilities
- Does not divide between the secular and sacred but rather has three domains of knowledge — knowledge of God, knowledge of man and knowledge of the universe
- Does not emphasize reason nor down plays it, just acknowledges that as fallen human beings it must not be our master but rather it must be our servant informed by the Holy Spirit (as when reading a living book).
Our real concern is that children should have a good and regular supply of mind-stuff to think upon; that they should have large converse with books as well as with things; that they should become intimate with great men through the books and works of art they have left us, the best part of themselves. Thought breeds thought; children familiar with great thoughts take as naturally to thinking for themselves as the well-nourished body takes to growing; and we must bear in mind that growth, physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, is the sole end of education.

(The Story of Charlotte Mason, p. 231)

The function of education is not to give technical skill but to develop a person; the more of a person, the better the work of whatever kind.

(An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Ed, p. 136)

Reference List


