

# THE CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

## INTRODUCTION

The literature of contemporary Jewish education contains much writing denoted as 'philosophy of Jewish education'. Paradoxically, however, this literature contains few, if any, attempts to analytically focus on the nature and meaning of the activity and concept 'philosophy of Jewish education'. Our concern in this essay is with that neglected subject<sup>1</sup>. In the first part of the essay, we discuss general characteristics of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education, as well as alternative meanings of the concept 'philosophy of Jewish education' operative in contemporary Jewish education. In the second part of the essay we propose and argue for a new focus and direction for philosophy of Jewish education.

## THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Contemporary philosophy of Jewish education may be described in terms of three predominant characteristics. First, the term 'philosophy of Jewish education' does not at all refer to a singular or monolithic phenomenon, but in fact is used to denote several phenomena<sup>2</sup>. That is, the phrase 'philosophy of Jewish education' does not refer to a clearly defined subject or corpus of writing, nor does it point to one clearly recognized and agreed upon activity. In fact, there are four meanings and activities commonly associated with this concept in the literature of Jewish educational thought and practice<sup>3</sup>. The first of these activities, which we shall denote as historical-descriptive philosophy of Jewish education, is the survey and description of important historical thoughts and systems vis à

vis Judaism, education, and their inter-relationship. The ( minimal) concern of such an approach is to analyze and clarify important historical positions. In many cases this activity also includes the attempt to apply or show the relevance of historical positions for contemporary Jewish education. Examples of historical-descriptive philosophy of Jewish education are studies of the educational thoughts of such figures as Maimonides, the Maharal of Prague, Rashi, and the educational implications of such systems as Hasidism, Zionism, Conservative, Orthodox, Reform Judaism<sup>4</sup>.

A second activity which is called 'philosophy of Jewish education' is the building of comprehensive systems and world-views of Judaism and Jewish education ( we shall call this activity normative-synthetic philosophy of Jewish education). The subject of this approach is Jewish existence and Judaism as a whole, and the objective is to create an all-encompassing system which explains and gives meaning to the grand questions of human and Jewish existence. One aspect of such systems is education, and normative-synthetic philosophy of Jewish education is usually also concerned with prescribing the meaning and goals of Jewish education. In some cases, the latter activity alone -i.e., the discussion and projection of the goals of Jewish education - has been treated as normative-synthetic philosophy of Jewish education<sup>5</sup>. In both cases, normative-synthetic philosophy of Jewish education has been characterized by a direct and immediate concern with practicality; i.e., with the prescription of immediate and operative objectives and behaviors for Jewish schools and educational institutions. Three thinkers often denoted as the normative-synthetic philosophers of contemporary Jewish education are: Martin Buber,

Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Mordecai Kaplan.

A third so-called activity of contemporary 'philosophy of Jewish education' has been the development of hypotheses, theories, and principles for the guidance of the practice of Jewish education. This activity, which shall be denoted as Jewish educational theory, is concerned with the formulation of intelligible, empirically verifiable, and practically operative educational principles for the guidance and direction of Jewish educational practice. Jewish educational theory is different from normative-synthetic philosophy of Jewish education in that the former is: 1) inter-disciplinary-i.e., rooted in several spheres of discourse, such as psychology, history, sociology, educational practice, philosophy, rather than in one discipline 2) more immediately concerned with the development of operative educational principles and practices, rather than with the formulation of general educational aims and ideals<sup>6</sup>. That is, the function of Jewish educational theory is not the clarification or construction of comprehensive philosophic systems, but the formulation of educational theories, principles, and practices, for specific educational situations and on the basis of several theoretical sources. One of the central examples of Jewish educational theory is the community theory of Jewish education, especially as enunciated and implemented by I. B. Berkson, and Professor Alexander Dushkin<sup>7</sup>.

A fourth activity often included in the 'philosophy of Jewish education' family is the popular discussion - by educators, school board chairmen, parents, rabbis, teachers, students - of the woes and virtues of Jewish education (we shall call this approach ideas on Jewish education). This activity includes discussion and reaction to the wide spectrum of issues relevant to contemporary Jewish educational

practice, from the problem of relevance and meaning of Jewish schooling, to issues of model sedarim on Pesach and procedures for Bar-Mitzvah parties. This approach is usually characterized by: 1) great fervor and emotion 2) reaction to already implemented - either successful or unsuccessful - programs 3) non-systematic and "common-sense" approaches to pressing problems 4) prescription of immediate corrective or alternative educational programs and practices. This fourth activity is different from Jewish educational theory in that it is not intrinsically rooted in theoretical spheres, but takes place exclusively within the sphere of everyday educational activity. The objective is not to develop an educational practice rooted in educational theory and principles, but to solve immediate problems. The most apparent examples of this approach may be found in popular communal and congregational publications, in school board and education committee meetings, and occasionally in professional educational journals.

Thus, we have seen that there is no such thing as the meaning of the concept 'philosophy of Jewish education' in the language of contemporary Jewish education since the term is used to describe at least four activities. This point, of course, is merely descriptive of what is the situation in contemporary Jewish educational thought, and is not to be regarded as a legitimization of current linguistic practices. In fact, we shall shortly argue that two of the four meanings of the term 'philosophy of Jewish education' are inaccurate and illegitimate usages of that concept.

The second characteristic of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education (as revealed in the analysis of the first characteristic) is that it is frequently not 'philosophy' or philosophy of education.<sup>6</sup> The thrust of this claim is not

normative nor evaluative (i.e., we are not claiming that contemporary philosophy of Jewish education is not good 'philosophy' or 'philosophy of education'), but analytic and formal. That is, our claim is that much of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education is non-philosophical or not 'philosophy of education' in that it does not contain the formal or logical criteria which constitute those two phenomena.

The claim that much of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education is not philosophical pertains essentially to the activities denoted as 'Jewish educational theory' and 'ideas on Jewish education'. 'Jewish educational theory' is related to, and to a certain extent rooted in, 'philosophy', but it is not equivalent to 'philosophy of Jewish education'. The relationship consists in the fact that Jewish educational theory employs a method of 'philosophy', i.e. synthesis - the amalgamation of several elements into one unified whole, in this case, operative educational principles. The two spheres are also related in that one of the theoretical sources of 'Jewish educational theory' is 'philosophy' and philosophic assumptions. There are, however, two important differences between 'Jewish educational theory' and 'philosophy of Jewish education'. First, the former activity is inter-disciplinary, drawing on several theoretical and practical spheres of discourse, such as : psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, educational practice. Jewish educational theory is not limited to the methodology or conclusions of one discipline, but represents a compilation and amalgam of several disparate sources. 'Philosophy of Jewish education', however, is not inter-disciplinary and inter-methodological, since it constitutes a specific discipline defined by a specific methodology. That is, 'Jewish educational theory' is a broader

activity than 'philosophy of Jewish education'. The second difference between the two spheres is in terms of aim.

'Jewish educational theory' is directly concerned with the development of principles which may guide educational practices and behaviors. Its function is to develop operative theories which may be tested, refined, and assumed as legitimate guides for educational practice ( until further theories are established). 'Philosophy of Jewish education' (at least logically) is not immediately and directly concerned with specific educational activities and behaviors, but with the 'meaning of ideas'. Thus, 'Jewish educational theory' is not 'philosophy' simply because its characteristics are not identical with those of 'philosophy'.

Again, this is by no means to claim that 'Jewish educational theory' is "irrelevant," "inferior," or " unimportant". On the contrary, 'Jewish educational theory' is most likely the most valuable theoretical activity of Jewish education.

'Ideas on Jewish education' reflect even more strikingly the non-philosophic nature of aspects of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education. This activity ; which is essentially an expression of feelings, attitudes; and reactions to specific aspects of Jewish education, is non-philosophic for the following reasons: 1) it is not at all critical, but simply assertative 2) it is essentially practical, prescriptive, and immediate in nature 3) it is often predominately emotive 4) it is usually rooted in local situations or private experiences; i.e., it is not general or universalizable 5) it is not concerned with the elucidation of underlying assumptions and meanings, but with the reaction to or projection of surface behaviors. It need not be implied from these comments that the philosopher of Jewish education must be cold, neutral, non-involved, emotionless, and detached from reality. But it is true that the term 'philosophy' (or 'philosopher') implies a stepping back from the heart

and heat of a local situation so as to be able to carefully and critically understand underlying assumptions and meanings. The reason why 'ideas on Jewish education' have been confused with 'philosophy of Jewish education' is fairly clear; both deal with 'ideas' rather than pencils, kipot, or filmstrips. However, it is certainly inaccurate to denote any reference to 'ideas and Jewish education', irregardless of objective, method, or subject, as 'philosophy of Jewish education'.

Up to this point we have claimed that many aspects of so-called contemporary philosophy of Jewish education are, in fact, not 'philosophy'. Now we wish to note the second part of the second characteristic of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education; the fact that it often is not 'philosophy of education'. The claim here is that when 'philosophy of Jewish education' is 'philosophy' (or at least resembles it somewhat), it often does not resemble 'philosophy of education'. The basis for this claim is the fact that contemporary philosophy of Judaism and Jewish education do not philosophically focus on key educational concepts. Concepts such as 'God', 'Torah', 'Israel', 'mitzvah' are analyzed; concepts such as 'teaching', 'moral education', 'spiritual education', 'the Jewish educational situation' are rarely treated. The most that contemporary philosophy of Jewish education does do is to present and defend a certain conception of Judaism (e.g., Judaism is x) and then to define 'Jewish education' as the teaching or transmission of that conception (e.g., 'Jewish education' is the teaching that: Judaism is x). Philosophy of Jewish education is not simply the tacking on of a paragraph or few pages as to the "implications for education" of a certain conception; it also includes a direct philosophic confrontation with educational terms and issues.

We have seen, then, that the term 'philosophy of Jewish

education' has at least four usages : in the language of Jewish education, all of which are not consistent with the logical meanings of 'philosophy' or 'philosophy of education'. A third striking characteristic of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education is its neglect of two other logically legitimate meanings and activities of the concept 'philosophy of education'; i.e. analytic and meta-philosophy of education. Not only has there been an acceptance of two logically illegitimate usages of the concept 'philosophy of Jewish education' in contemporary Jewish educational thought, but there has also been a neglect of two logically legitimate and educationally important meanings of the term.

Analytic philosophy of Jewish education refers to the explication, elucidation, and clarification of basic words, concepts, ideas, systems, in Jewish education. With a few exceptions, this activity can be said to be non-existent in the literature of Jewish education<sup>9</sup>. Academicians, principals, teachers, parents, rabbis have repeatedly used such terms as 'curriculum', 'Jewish values', 'ritual', 'relevance' without adequate clarifications of the meanings and implications of such terms. The seriousness of such a neglect is apparent, for it is on the basis of understandings or misunderstandings of such concepts that much of Jewish educational practice is based. In addition, there is often confusion and lack of communication in discussions on Jewish education simply because the participants have no clear conception of the meaning of their terms or the way in which the terms are used by others.

The second neglected activity is meta-philosophy of Jewish education - the analysis of the nature of 'philo-



sophy of Jewish education' and of 'the study of Jewish education'. Contemporary philosophy of Jewish education has told us little about its own nature and contribution to the realities of Jewish education ( i.e., its aims, methods, subject) as well as about the nature of the academic study of Jewish education. The absence of a meta-philosophy of Jewish education has had two unfortunate results: 1) the very confusion and inaccuracy vis à vis the nature of 'philosophy of Jewish education' which we have noted 2) confusion and inaccuracy vis à vis the study of Jewish education in teacher-training schools, colleges, and universities<sup>10</sup>. As we shall shortly see, analytic and meta-philosophy of education are partial and in some cases technical aspects of 'philosophy of education' (they certainly do not supply the ultimate philosophic answers which are usually sought). Nevertheless, they are important aspects and foundations of the broader aspects of educational philosophy. In addition, analytic and meta-philosophy of education represent the general direction and orientation of much of the contemporary effort in general philosophy of education<sup>11</sup>. In light of that fact, the absence of an analytic and meta-philosophy of Jewish education is even more striking.

It is our contention that these three characteristics generally describe contemporary philosophy of Jewish education. It is also these three characteristics which legitimize the use of the phrase, " the crisis of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education".

#### TOWARDS AN ANALYTIC AND META-PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

In the second part of this essay our concern is to clarify the conception of an analytic and meta-philosophy of Jewish education and to argue for their importance for con-

temporary Jewish education.

The essence of an analytic philosophy of Jewish education is the activity of explaining and clarifying important Jewish educational concepts. Such a 'philosophy of Jewish education' is not a corpus of integrated ideas about how one should educate, nor is it a synthetic world-view about the meaning and nature of Jewish life and education (in this sense it is probably somewhat strange and even misleading to talk about 'an analytic philosophy of Jewish education, since the indefinite article an may indeed imply the notion of a corpus or body of knowledge). Rather, it is an activity of rational reflection, critical analysis of arguments and assumptions, and systematic clarification of fundamental ideas. In short, analytic philosophy of Jewish education is the activity of applying philosophic method to the analysis of fundamental Jewish educational concepts<sup>12</sup>. The objective of such an activity is not to directly change educational practice, but to improve our understanding of Jewish education by clarification of our "conceptual apparatus". Consequently, this form of philosophy of education is not guilty of the charge of not answering the grand questions of philosophy and philosophy of education, since such is not at all its objective.

As we have already hinted, the question of the meaning or nature of 'philosophic method' (beyond the catchphrases 'rational' and 'critical') is complex and complicated, and we shall not discuss it here. Nevertheless, we should like to merely note four types of methodological analysis sometimes associated with 'analytic philosophy of education' to clarify our discussion further<sup>13</sup>.

The first method of analysis, called the "structural" by Professor Scheffler, is concerned with the logical or formal structure of an argument. That is, such a method is concerned <sup>with</sup> the pattern of an argument in terms of the types reasons presented, the procedures for moving from

certain reasons to conclusions, and the consistency of the argument in terms of adherence to accepted axioms and rules of procedure. Another type of method is the "contextual". In this case the concern is with the examination of the use and meaning of a term within a specific educational situation or environment. While this method may be limited because of its particularity, it is especially valuable for specific educational problems and situations in helping to clarify the specific problem or situation in question. Scheffler calls the next constellation of methods "the semantic"; i.e., the concern with the uses of terms in ordinary language. The concern here is not with the philological origins of words nor with particular meanings, but rather with the accepted meanings of terms and with the grammatical (in a broad sense) opportunities and limitations associated with words. That is, this method indicates the type things which can and cannot be said, and the type inferences which can and cannot be made in terms of the rules of logic and grammar which we have accepted in common speech. A fourth type of method, "the explicative" is concerned not merely with explaining standard usages, but with sharpening and even proscribing usages and patterns of linguistic usage so as to make human communication more precise.

There are two objections which might be raised against analytic philosophy of Jewish education in any of these forms just discussed. First, it might be claimed that such a conception is, nevertheless, merely semantics or "word games"; second, it might be claimed that such an approach is valueless or morally neutral, and is not concerned with and does not affect the realities of Jewish education. The mistake of the first objection is the assumption that analytic philosophy of education is

only interested in words qua words. The analytic philosopher is interested in words as an expression of ideas or thoughts accepted and acted upon by people within the educational sphere. His concern with language is to understand the underlying conceptual assumptions and meanings which are expressed by everyday language. In addition, this objection either limits or perverts the nature of the analytic philosopher of education's task. As we have just seen, the analytic philosopher is also concerned with the structural nature of philosophical arguments, with the meanings of terms within particular contexts, and with the clarification of language so as to facilitate communication and consequently enable more efficient educational practice.

The second argument, the "neutrality" or "irrelevance" position, is, at best, a hazy or mis-guided claim. If by 'neutral' it is meant that the analytic philosopher comes to clarify and indicate certain accepted or common meanings and usages, rather than enunciating his own particular bias, then the analytic philosopher is indeed neutral (although this would not even be true in the case of the explicative analytic philosopher who does in fact engage in some sort of linguistic legislation). If by 'neutral' it is meant that the analytic philosopher is a cold, non-caring, and non-involved person, this is false. It is clearly the case that the analytic philosopher's particular contribution to Jewish education is careful analysis, explication, and clarification, rather than prescription, world-building, or action. But this does not mean that the analytic philosopher does not passionately and normatively believe in the importance and centrality of his activity to the improvement of Jewish education, nor does it mean that as an individual or educator he has no value perspectives on Jewish education.

It is true that an analytic approach to philosophy of Jewish education is a more limited enterprise than the notion of 'philosophy of Jewish education' as answers to the grand questions of Jewish life and education. On the other hand, if any such grand notion of 'philosophy of Jewish education' is conceivable ( an assumption about which there is some doubt), it is only attainable when based in a careful analysis of fundamental concepts. The analytic philosopher of Jewish education cannot provide "Meaning" (with a capital m) his contribution is more realistic ( and to our mind, important) - he can help us understand "meanings".

Meta-philosophy of Jewish education is concerned with two activities: 1) the clarification of the meaning(s), tasks, and contributions of 'philosophy of education' vis à vis the practice of Jewish education 2) the clarification of the nature of the academic study of 'Jewish education'. We shall not comment further on the first activity beyond the brief guidelines discussed, since this essay in itself may hopefully serve as an example and justification of that aspect of meta-philosophy of Jewish education. We may, however, simply raise and agree with the potential objection that meta-philosophy of Jewish education in this first sense is also a limited and technical activity. The validity of this argument, however, in no way means that such a conception of philosophy of Jewish education does not have its particular - even if limited - contribution to make to the improvement of understanding and activity in Jewish education.

The second aspect of meta-philosophy of Jewish education, the clarification of the nature of the study of Jewish education, is especially important in light of the increased concern with the academization and profes-

sionalization of Jewish education<sup>14</sup>. This topic, of course, is not particular to Jewish education, and, in fact, it is a subject of much discussion in general education<sup>15</sup>. Such discussions are concerned with questions of the following sort: is 'education' an autonomous or dependent discipline, or is it a discipline at all? are there special methods for the study of 'education'? how exactly is an academic study of 'education' related to practice? is an academic study of 'education' at all relevant to educational practice? Clarifications of these issues are especially relevant for Jewish education which tends to neglect all disciplinary boundaries vis à vis the study of Jewish education, and to operate instead with a hodge-podge or melting pot notion of 'the study of Jewish education'. Thus, we find, for example, books, courses, and lectures "on Jewish education" without any delineation or concern for a particular methodological or disciplinary approach to the subject of Jewish education. (in a strict sense, there are no such things as books, courses, or lectures "on" Jewish education, only books, courses or lectures on \_\_\_\_\_ of Jewish education, where the blank is filled in with some methodological or disciplinary word, e.g. 'sociology', 'statistics', 'history'). Again, the problem with such an approach is that it does not insure the optimum contribution of an academic study of Jewish education to Jewish educational practice. In terms of this task, then, meta-philosophy of Jewish education certainly has important and direct implications for Jewish educational practice.

#### CONCLUSION

In the first part of this essay we were concerned with delineating some general characteristics of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education; in the second, with sug-

gesting new directions for the philosophic enterprise. We must, however, add one final clarifying comment. The argument for an analytic and meta-philosophy of Jewish education is not a claim for the substitution of such activities for other legitimate concerns of 'philosophy of Jewish education'. Rather, our position is that analytic and meta-philosophy of Jewish education are essential additions to contemporary philosophy of Jewish education and to contemporary Jewish educational practice. The argument for such new directions in philosophy of Jewish education is neither a retreat ( in principle) from world-views or theory-building, nor is it an attempt to emulate secular philosophy of education so as to be "k'chol ha'goyim". Rather, such an argument is based on the belief that Jewish education is such an important and worthwhile activity that it warrants the rigor and seriousness associated with important and worthwhile activities. The "grand questions" of Jewish education are indeed important concerns of contemporary Jewish educational thought. But the real contribution of contemporary philosophy of Jewish education lies not in the answering of the grand questions, but in enabling us to ask and understand them better.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article is an abridgement of a chapter on "The Nature of Contemporary Jewish Education" in An Introduction to Philosophy of Jewish Education now in preparation. This volume includes extended documentation and bibliography for issues discussed here.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of "philosophic pluralism" and other aspects of the term 'philosophy of education', see: Barry Chazan, "The Limits of 'Philosophy of Education,'" Educational Philosophy and Theory, (Winter, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>Among the important journals in this sphere are: Jewish Education, Sheviley Hachinuch, and Religious Education. See also the following two anthologies: Judah Pilch and Meir Ben-Horin (editors), Judaism and the Jewish School (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1966); David Feinstein and Michael Yizhar (editors), Modern Jewish Educational Thought (Chicago: The College of Jewish Studies, 1964).

<sup>4</sup>See for example the following: Y. Twersky, "Plato, Aristotle, and Maimonides," (Hebrew) Sheviley Hachinuch, 4, 1, 2, 3-22, 83-112 (1944); A. Kleinberger, The Educational Theory of the Maharal of Prague (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1962); Samuel Blumenfeld, "Rashi-the Teacher of Israel," (Hebrew) in Chevrach V'Hinuch B'yehaduth America (Tel Aviv: Neuman Press, 1964, 163-174); A. Soviv, "Hasidism and Education," (Hebrew) Sheviley Hachinuch, 21, 4, 198-212 (summer, 1961); Judah Pilch and Meir Ben-Horin (editors), Judaism and the Jewish School, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup>See the Pilch-Ben Horin volume, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of distinctions between: 'aims', 'goals', 'ideals', 'objectives', and 'ends-in-view' in education, see the General Introduction to: L.A. Brown, (editor), Aims of Education (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970, ix-xix).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example: I.B. Berkson, "The Community Theory and the Jewish School Curriculum," Jewish Education, 30, 1, 24-33 (Fall, 1959); I.B. Berkson, "The Community Idea for Jewish Education," Jewish Education, 24, 35-38 (Fall, 1953); Alexander Dushkin, "The Community Principle in Jewish Education," Jewish Education, 17, 2, 17-23 (Fall, 1946); Alexander Dushkin, "The Pattern of Community Thinking in Jewish Education," Jewish Education, 35, 3, 136-147 (spring, 1965).

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of the logical criteria of 'philosophy' and 'philosophy of education' see: Barry Chazan, "The Limits of 'Philosophy of Education'" op. cit.



<sup>9</sup>See the analysis of the following concepts: 'indoctrination', Jack Cohen, Judaism in Democratic Society (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1964, Part 2; Chapter 1); 'community', I.B. Berkson and Alexander Dushkin, op. cit.; 'klal Yisrael', Simon Greenberg, "The Role of the Concept Klal Yisrael in Jewish Education," Jewish Education, 32,3,137-146 (1962)

<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of contemporary Jewish teacher training and some of its problems, see: Alexander Dushkin, Comparative Study of the Jewish Teacher Training Schools in the Diaspora, (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, 1970)

<sup>11</sup>For discussions of analytic philosophy of education, see: Israel Scheffler, Philosophy and Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966, Introduction, pp. 1-11); Van Cleve Morris, Modern Movements in Educational Philosophy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969, 173-175).

<sup>12</sup>It must be noted that the terms 'rational reflection', 'critical analysis', 'philosophical method' are themselves concepts which must be elucidated to be truly meaningful.

<sup>13</sup>These four methods are discussed by Israel Scheffler in his Introduction to the volume Philosophy and Education, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup>See my comments on this subject: Barry Chazan, "Perspectives on the Profession of Jewish Teaching," Jewish Education, 40,1,24-29 (March, 1970).

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, the discussion of "the Study of Education" in Scheffler's Philosophy and Education, op. cit. 47-95; and J.W. Tibble (editor), The Study of Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).