

Stanley Rosen as Philosopher of Education

Joshua Fischel

Millersville University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again. Its priority before any other requirement is such that I believe I need not and should not justify it. I cannot understand why it has been given so little concern until now. To justify it would be monstrous in the face of the monstrosity that took place. Yet the fact that one is so barely conscious of this demand and the questions it raises shows that the monstrosity has not penetrated people's minds deeply, itself a symptom of the continuing potential for its recurrence as far as peoples' conscious and unconscious is concerned. (Adorno, 1966, p. 191)

Michael Oakeshott (1962) has written that the history of human civilization can be thought of as an ongoing conversation of which those living in the present are its inheritors. This conversation expresses itself over a range of different voices. Education, moreover, is necessary as "an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation" (Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 491-92). Unfortunately, Oakeshott laments, each voice of this conversation "tends to *superbia*, that is, an exclusive concern with its own utterance, which may result in its identifying the conversation with itself" (Oakeshott, 1962, p. 492). The result of *superbia* is "barbarism," or the privileging of one voice to the exclusion of others, leading to the recasting and merging of the entire sea of voices in terms of the privileged one, thereby stripping all other

voices of their distinctive contribution to the conversation (Oakeshott, 1962, p. 492). Oakeshott concludes that this is what has, in fact, happened over the last few centuries with the ascendancy of the voices of practical activity and science (Oakeshott, 1962).

While Oakeshott's claims are plausible, to make sense of them they must be understood in light of the particular form that practical activity and science have taken in the Modern age. In the Ancient world, both practical activity (*praxis*), which had to do with the cultivation of habits of sound judgment (or *phronesis*) that would end in a life well-lived in the *polis*, and science (*episteme*), or natural philosophy, dealt with entirely different domains of being (McCarthy, 1978 p. 3). With the parallel developments of Hobbes' science of society and Descartes' science of nature, both practical action and science eventually came to be thought about in terms that rejected the conceptions they were given in the ancient world. Ancient science morphed into the "modern conception of scientific theory" that was linked intimately to a "theoretically grounded technology" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 4). Practical action "was absorbed into the sphere of the technical" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 4). While the voices of practical activity and science have become the predominant voices, as Oakeshott notes, these voices themselves have collapsed into another, the voice of technology.

If this is correct, then education, as the voice that introduces and habituates students and society into the sea of other voices, has also collapsed under the weight of the voice of technology. Yet, on Oakeshott's description, education is a form of *praxis*, a kind of practical action understood in its classical sense. It's not a technology, nor is it a science. If Oakeshott is right and education is best thought of as *praxis*, a number of questions immediately present themselves. What implications follow when educational problems are thought about as if they were questions to be solved technologically? What follows when education is understood first and foremost as a *technology* rather than as a *praxis*? And how is it possible to rethink the relationship between education and the voice of science and technology in such a way that it preserves our understanding of education as a form of *praxis*?

To answer these and other related questions, I will take up the work of the philosopher Stanley Rosen. Alasdair MacIntyre has written that "it is an undeniable truth that Stanley Rosen's philosophical work has not received the attention it deserves" (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 13). While Rosen has addressed educational problems, he nowhere explicitly developed a philosophy of education. That is unfortunate. I will argue that in Stanley Rosen's work in the history of philosophy is an important contribution to the philosophy of education. Rosen's philosophy of educa-

tion accomplishes two general but important things: firstly, it draws out the implications of a philosophy of education that is conceived primarily as a *technology*. It presents the case that any attempt to understand education as if it were a kind of technological science that results in nihilism. Secondly, Rosen provides a suggestive philosophy of education of his own that reinstates the integrity of education as a *praxis*. In doing so, Rosen steers the Oakeshottian “conversation of mankind” away from the shores of nihilism to which it has devolved under the superbia of the voice of *technology*.

Modernity as Mathesis Universalis

In his lecture *Science as a Vocation* (1919), Max Weber writes the following: Science further presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is ‘worth being known.’ In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be interpreted with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life. (Mills & Gerth, 1958, p. 143)

Science presupposes the horizon opened up through ordinary experience and out of which human beings interpret the significance of their world. In leaving behind, bracketing, and otherwise ignoring this setting, science runs the risk of losing its anchor in the human world that it emerges from. In science’s effort and drive to cleanse everyday life of complexity, to render the ambiguous transparent, the chaotic stable and predictable, it has erased the everyday horizon in which science itself gains significance.

Rosen traces this precarious situation back to the origins of philosophical Modernity. As he sees it, “an important change takes place at the beginning of the modern age. The life of reason, and so too philosophy, is redefined in accord with the model of the mathematical and experimental sciences” (Rosen, 1999, p. 127). The mathematization of life expresses itself most pointedly in the distinction made by Galileo and Descartes (and others) between primary and secondary qualities of a substance. The result is that “the distinction between primary and secondary attributes in effect equates wakefulness with mathematics and human experience with a dream” (Rosen, 1999, p. 134). Accordingly, the context which provides the significance of the mathematization of the world becomes divorced from the sober realization of the nature of nature. The view from nowhere distorts and turns into a dream the view from somewhere. Rosen concludes that “Galileo and his followers created a reality that transforms the human world into an illusion” (Rosen, 1999, p. 134).

Yet, the turn to the mathematization of the world was never meant to undo the bonds that connected everyday experience to this new scientific enterprise. In fact, the new science presented itself as a breakthrough in human culture that would lead to civilizational happiness. Rosen (1999) puts it this way:

What I am suggesting is that the modern epoch begins, at least in its full theoretical manifestation, as a dream of universal happiness, and so precisely as the promise that sadness will be abolished from the face of the earth. In this dream, wakefulness is to be obtained by replacing poetry, metaphysics, and religion with mathematics and experimental science as the correct instruments for the analysis and vindication of human life. (p. 137)

The result has been something quite different. And as “[t]he life of reason, and so too philosophy, is redefined in accord with the model of the mathematical and experimental sciences,” so too does reason turn ordinary experience¹ into an illusion (Rosen, 1999, p. 127). To the extent that the universal project for civilizational happiness turns on the mathematical model of rationality, it saddens us. It saddens us because it lends its “authority to the presentiment that life is a dream” (Rosen, 1999, p. 138). This is troubling because it empties human existence of meaning and undermines the very scientific and technological project that is itself the cause of this condition.

To flush out Rosen’s position further, it would be helpful to look at what he takes to be the importance of Socrates’ “Second Sailing” in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedo*. The *Phaedo* presents Socrates in prison in conversation with his close associates on the day he will be put to death by the state of Athens. At one point in the conversation, Socrates provides an explanation for why he turned away from his studies of the natural world and came to adopt the practice of philosophy. Rosen (2002) draws the following lesson:

These are the historical consequences of Socrates’ second sailing. “He turns away from *ta onta* in the following precise sense: the study of the alterations, changes, and motions of natural beings does not explain human life. Attribution of the *aitia* of generation and destruction to physis in this sense forces us to jettison our understanding of ourselves as beings who act in accord with what they think is best. Natural motions, considered in themselves, are neither good nor bad, better or worse; they merely are. Of course, they may be beautiful to human perception; but this is because we see beauty in the order and in the splendor of the heavenly bodies and so on. Our vision of beauty is not itself a natural motion. (pp. 66-67)²

If science replaces philosophy, as Rosen argues, it has by the modern revolutionaries of the *nuevo scientia*, then there is no non-scientific rational account for why we perceive something as beautiful or just rather than as something ugly or unjust. Which is to say that “[t]here are no measurements by which to define the presence or the perception of beauty,” and more broadly still, no measurements which suggest to us whether or not to model our society on this ideal rather than some other (Rosen, 2002, p. 66). Without philosophy, there is no reason to choose and prefer to engage in scientific inquiry in the first place, since science cannot provide a “rational basis for the preference of science itself to ignorance” (Rosen, 2002, p. 8).

But, for Rosen, that’s not all. There is a second, perhaps, equally important result of this reorientation. While science replaces philosophy, it does so by elevating the *will* and demoting the intellect. Where the ancients would have identified the noble with the love of wisdom, the moderns redefine the love of the noble with freedom of the will, “or what is suitable, fitting, and admirable to oneself” (Rosen, 1999, p. 229). In other words, Modernity is not simply to be seen as coequal with the scientific revolution. Rather, the scientific revolution is a human production willed in order to create the conditions for a world amenable to the satisfaction of desire.

The centrality placed on the will leads, Rosen argues, to our inability to distinguish between what is and what is not desirable. It leads, in other words, to an inability to know what is a desirable way of life, inasmuch as it severs science and mathematics from the question of the good. If we can’t conceptually articulate between better and worse ways of living well, then we have no way of knowing which desires we should seek to cultivate.

On Rosen’s account, then, Modernity is without the conceptual resources to articulate a “hierarchy of ends.” To the extent that it cannot, Modernity is best thought of as a turn to *poesis*,³ a turn that sees Modernity siding ultimately with the poets in the famous quarrel between philosophy and poetry announced by Socrates in book 10 of the *Republic*. To insure the realization of our desires, the world must be transformed into an artifact of our desire: a poem produced for the attainment of human satisfaction. This, Rosen concludes, leads to *nihilism*.⁴ What begins as a noble project to redefine the world in terms of a *mathesis universalis* devolves into a nihilism masked as narcissism that sees poetry achieving victory over philosophy.

Once philosophy is replaced by science and mathematics, then the quarrel between philosophy and poetry is essentially replaced by the quarrel between mathematical physics and poetry. The victory in this case will

assuredly go to poetry. As he suggests: So long as we take them in their conventional senses, there is an essential discontinuity between poetry and mathematics. As a direct consequence, if philosophy is represented by the paradigm of mathematics, then it can never win its quarrel with poetry. The victory goes to poetry, which directs mathematics and gives it human significance. (Rosen, 1988, p. 25)

The nihilism that Rosen sees at the foundation of Modernity is not simply a result then of the narrowing of our understanding of reason. That is only part of the story. By narrowing reason's province, modern science inadvertently leaves the door open for poetry to reassert its claims to dominion over the direction and significance of human experience. Since mathematics can't certify its own significance mathematically, except for in terms of empty rhetorical gestures, the victory falls to poetry to take up the space formerly occupied by philosophy. In other words, desire is now made articulate by poetry, not philosophy, and realized through the techniques of science. Which desires are most desirable or choice-worthy simply becomes a question answerable, if at all, by appealing to our poetic dreams.⁵

Human Existence and Nihilism

But what does Rosen mean by nihilism? And how is it related to his critique of Modernity? Rosen argues that whatever nihilism 'is,' it's not something that is a product simply of the historical circumstances a society finds itself. While some historical situations are more favorable than others for its emergence, nihilism is rooted in human nature. As Rosen notes, "The threat of nihilism does not lie outside us but is a moment in the pulse-beat of our existence" (Rosen, 1999, p. 81). Nihilism, therefore, is not first and foremost characterized by an inability to distinguish right from wrong or good from evil. It's not *moral* nihilism⁶ that is the immediate threat to human existence. Rather, Rosen, like Nietzsche before him, argues for a *metaphysical* nihilism. Nihilism is rooted in the problematic nature of human existence itself.

The problem can be formulated in an introductory manner as follows:
Human existence is distinguished from the mode of being of animals on the one hand and machines (such as computers) on the other because it is by nature an attempted unification of theory and practice. (Rosen, 1999, p. 80)

Human beings are by nature philosophical animals.⁷ That is, they see the world in one way rather than another (*theoria*⁸), focus on this thing here and not that over there. But that's not all. They are also creatures of praxis. They must decide, based on what they see and how they see

it, what course of action to take (Rosen, 1999, p. 80). Yet, the ongoing attempt to unify theory and practice can never be completed. It always ends, Rosen argues, with a fracture between what we see and how we act (Rosen, 1999, p. 80).

To understand why this process never attains closure is to understand the role desire plays in a human life. It is desire that gives substance and direction to both theory and practice. But human desire is unlike that of other animals. Where the desires of other animals are finite and circularly closed, human desire is infinite. (Rosen, 1969, p. 212) If our desires were finite, we would no longer be human, since what it means to be human is at least in part the *freedom* to desire something other than what we have chosen in the past (Rosen, 1999, p. 80). As such, our nature always ends, for Rosen, in disunity or *diremption* (Rosen, 1999, p. 80).

The reason for this becomes clearer when we consider that nature has given us not only desire but speech as well. Speech is needed to articulate desire (Rosen, 1969, p. 212). Without speech, there is no indication of whether or not desire is present (Rosen, 1969, p. 212). Desire without speech turns the human being into a thing, since speech provides the articulation of what desire desires and whether or not what's desired is desirable. Thus, desire without speech cancels out desire (Rosen, 1969, p. 212).

Thus, while desire brings us closer to the world, as it draws us towards its realization in practice, speech pulls us away (Rosen, 1969, p. 213). Yet, speech is necessary in order to give direction and substance to our desires. While it provides the necessary distance from things that will allow for their proper evaluation, speech runs the risk of getting lost in speech (Rosen, 1969, p. 213). When this happens, speech becomes disconnected from ordinary experience. This leads Rosen (1969) to conclude the following about the origin of nihilism:

The danger of nihilism is inseparable from the nature of speech because speech is a mark of imperfection. Men speak because they are partially detached from things and try to overcome this disjunction with a bridge of language. Since words, however remarkable, are not things, the disjunction between the two can never entirely be overcome. The very remarkableness of words serves to charm us away from things (as the remarkableness of numbers and symbols charm us away from words), away from the unity desired, and into the lonely splendor of speech unrestricted by things, or poetry. (pp. 212-213)

In other words, speech not rooted in ordinary experience becomes solipsistic, and symbols systems like mathematics that “charm us” away from speech magnify this effect. Of course, to prevent this from occurring requires a kind of speech that ultimately takes its bearings from

ordinary experience. One that not only preserves but makes sense out of human life.

What is needed then is a balance between desire and speech (Rosen, 1969, p. 213). Without this balance, human existence can't maintain its bearings in ordinary experience. If the balance tilts in the direction of either desire or speech, the result is nihilism. (Rosen, 1969, p. 213) Speech without desire leaves us without our bearings in ordinary experience, and desire without speech leads to the eradication of desire. For Rosen, Modernity is not only a turn to *poesis* but is characterized by the flight from desire (or the world of things) into speech. Complicating matters further is the fact noted above that, while speech has taken flight from desire, desire has taken flight from speech. In other words, the kind of speech that is spoken is unable to state the goodness of its articulation. If desire is understood as "appetite.... but not rational discourse," then speech that can't state its own warrant becomes a slave to desire (Rosen, 1999, p. 132). Rosen (1987) argues:

Despite the exaltation of mathematical and experimental science as the mediate source of power, modern philosophy *demotes* the intellect by making it instrumental to the will. In so doing, it necessarily *promotes* what from the classical standpoint is the lower part of the soul. Modern man wills to be free because he cannot accept restraints upon his passions or desires. (p.180)

The desire for the good or the noble is replaced in the Modern world by the assertion that is what is good is our freedom to desire. The question of what desires should be satisfied is answered in complete independence of the question of what is good (Rosen, 1987, p. 85). Desire, in other words, comes to be separated from reason or speech, now defined as *ratio*.

Modernity, in summary, dissolves the conditions for understanding ourselves in ordinary experience. In doing so, it provides the space for the emancipation of our desires from speech and speech from our desires. The result, in either case, is nihilism. To the extent that what is reasonable is what is quantifiable, questions about what desires should be acted upon can't be answered by appealing to speech. Or if they can be, the result, for Rosen (1988), demonstrates the "inappropriateness of purity and precision as paradigmatic for understanding human life" (p. 25).

Despite these penetrating criticisms, Rosen stands with Modernity. His defense of Modernity, however, will not be without recommendations for how Modernity can right its ship and regain its bearings against the tide of nihilism. What will emerge from these recommendations is Rosen's philosophy of education. Before getting to this, however, it will be crucial first to link Rosen's criticism of Modernity with the relation-

ship between education and the problem of the good, and how nihilism is a result when the tie between the two is broken.

Education and Nihilism

John Dewey argues that education makes possible the “recreation” of the cultural and social life of a community (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 2). While there are many different ideas of what constitutes the purpose of social recreation, they can all be distilled down to what, along with Aristotle, we can call the goal of happiness or, along with Plato, living a life of goodness. So, for instance, we work, think critically, and practice citizenship, not simply to work, think, or be citizens, but for the larger goal of living a good life. What that good entails, Rosen reminds us, is a question and problem that emerges from ordinary experience. It’s not something imposed on us from the outside, but is part and parcel of human existence itself. The question of the good and the role it plays in its relationship to Rosen’s critique of Modernity, moreover, is important for seeing how education that fails to address this question ends in nihilism. In this sense, Rosen’s philosophy of education, which will be discussed in the next section, is in part a response to the failure of the modern age to appropriately grapple with this problem. To this we now turn.

At the very beginning of the Western intellectual tradition, an identification was forged between reason, self-knowledge, and the good.⁹ The more we reason, the more we know about ourselves and the world we inhabit (even if it’s knowing that we don’t know), and the more we know, the better chance there is to live well. That connection remains constant as the ancient world folds into the modern world. But something is decidedly different in the modern world. Rosen (1999) writes:

What I am suggesting is that the modern epoch begins, at least in its full theoretical manifestation, as a dream of universal happiness, and so precisely as the promise that sadness will be abolished from the face of the earth. In this dream, wakefulness is to be obtained by replacing poetry, metaphysics, and religion with mathematics and experimental science as the correct instruments for the analysis and vindication of human life. (p. 137)

As we have seen, modern philosophy led to the narrowing of what is considered reasonable. What is reasonable are the claims that science can justify. The self-knowledge needed to realize the promise of universal happiness, in this sense, can be attained only through the path paved by modern science and the artifacts it produces. It is no wonder that the self that has hopes to be educated in a manner that leads one day to living well has often come to be confusedly identified with these

artifacts. Take, for instance, the role that tests play in sorting those deserving from those not deserving entrance into spaces of educational practice in American society. So pervasive is the testing regime and the artifacts they produce, tests, that some students have come to think of themselves in terms of how well or how poorly they perform on them, as can be seen in t-shirts that brag “I’m a 1600, what are you?” (Hanson, 1992, p. 268). Fundamental and complex questions of self-knowledge (What am I? What am I to do?) become reduced to a numerical expression or a problem to be solved by the engineer.

To the extent that the science and technology of happiness have become one of the predominant discourses about happiness and the good, so it results in the “belief that hard science has ousted philosophy and ethics once and for all” (Davies, 2015, p. 76). Or as Rosen (1999) muses, “The blessedness of the sage is gradually redefined as the industry of the engineer” (p. 127). William Davies (2015), in a recent work, questions this process when he asks: “Is happiness measurement really a way of resolving moral and philosophical debate? Or is it actually a way of silencing it? Once the technocrats are in charge, it is too late to raise any questions of intrinsic meaning or collective purpose” (p. 38). Davies concerns takes us back to the heart of Rosen’s critique of Modernity. By reducing human nature to non-human nature, modern science distorts the vision of ourselves as intentional agents. Since science can’t justify its goodness scientifically, the result leaves us face to face, ironically, with the following situation:

We are, then, faced with something of a paradox. Modern science, one of the greatest creations of the human spirit and an unquestioned source of endless, even miraculous, blessings, is widely perceived as the most important cause of stultification of the human spirit. (Rosen, 1999, p.137)

On the one hand, science has greatly enhanced the possibility for creating the conditions for the realization of happiness, on the other, it has made us sad and anxious by turning ordinary experience into an illusion. Karl Lowith (1966) similarly notes that:

In the present age, we live in a mixture of amazement at the technical progress which we are making and anxiety in the face of its success. We experiment freely; we calculate everything that can be calculated, and we do everything that can be done. (p.160)

In short, “a quasi-mathematical rationalism not only cannot explain the phenomenon of human existence but serves to empty it of independent substance and significance (Rosen, 1999, p. 140). In losing ordinary experience, we lose ourselves and the likelihood of desiring the desires

that will lead to happiness and the life of goodness. We lose ourselves because we confound who we are with who we are not. As Rosen (1980) writes:

“Who am I?” leads one sooner or later, and rightly so, to define oneself in terms of who I am not. We go wrong, however, when we forget this initial distinction. The Platonic Socrates is the first to elaborate this distinction as one between human and divine or cosmic nature. What is called “Pre-Socratic philosophy” shares with modern scientific thought the failure to distinguish at a conceptual or epistemological level between these two dimensions. As a result, human life is conceived as an epiphenomenon of essentially homogeneous cosmic process, regardless of how poetically the conception may be expressed. (p. 257)

Jim Garrison has noted that “we cannot educate intelligently if we do not know what it is we are educating” (Garrison, 1998, p. 111). To which Rosen might add, we won’t know who we are if we confuse it with who we are not. As such, we come, like the students whose identities are tied to a test score, to see ourselves as a concept (a number) or a genetic series of biological processes.

This reduction cannot take place because “I cannot demonstrate my personal identity by conceptual analysis because I am not a concept and because analysis dissolves; it does not unify. I am not my neurophysiological processes but the person who undergoes them and who studies them” (Rosen, 1999, p. 140). Formal reasoning, in other words, is insufficient for coming to terms with the question of the good. In fact, there would be something quite odd if I asked a friend for advice on how to live well and they responded by delivering a disquisition in evolutionary biology or neuroscience. Robert Pippin (2009) similarly points out that:

Knowing something about the evolutionary benefits of altruistic behavior might give us an interesting perspective on some particular altruistic act but *for the agent*, first-personally, the question I must decide is whether I ought to act altruistically and, if so, why. I cannot simply stand by, waiting to see what my highly and complexly evolved neurobiological system will do. The system doesn’t make the decision, *I do*.... (pp. 38-39)

That’s not to say that science doesn’t have a role to play in thinking about questions of happiness and the good. Of course it does. Indeed, if health, as Aristotle suggests, is one of the necessary conditions for happiness, then knowing my cholesterol or triglyceride levels is helpful. While it’s helpful to know these measures, I am not my cholesterol or triglyceride levels, but rather the person who has chosen to live a certain kind of life that results in maintaining a diet of a certain sort.

Whatever human beings are, then, they shouldn't be confused with the artifacts of science. No amount of scientific knowledge will ever replace the need for a *philosophy* of education, for the need for a kind of speech that maps out the path, direction and meaning of social recreation; a path that is always rooted in the context of the *doxastic* nature of ordinary experience. If education is thought of as the initiation into a conversation about the process and direction of social recreation, a philosophy of education modeled on the image of scientific reasoning won't be able to appropriately respond to the problem of the good.

An education disconnected from the good, moreover, results in nihilism. Under these conditions, *philosophy* of education becomes beside the point. But if philosophy of education is beside the point, so *education*, too, is beside the point. Rosen's work suggests that education without philosophy turns the conversation of mankind into a dialectic of *silence* and *chatter* (Rosen, 1969, p. xix). Both together amount to the same thing; the inability to state rationally the meaningfulness, significance, and purposiveness of social recreation. In other words, once the Oakseshottian conversation becomes dominated by the speeches of science and technology, a one-sided speech sets in that distorts and marginalizes all the other voices to the conversation, and the reasonable center of the conversation becomes effaced.

Philosophy of Education as Phronesis

What remedy can be sought to right this one-sidedness that has led education to dissolve into nihilism? Taking up this question will permit a distinctive vantage point from which to see emerge what I want to argue is Rosen's philosophy of education, a philosophy of education that reinstates phronesis at the foundation of meaningful educational thinking and practice. Without phronesis, education can't justify itself: its theories, goals, and practices. If education is synonymous with scientific and technological reasoning, then there is no non-scientific justification for education.

In order to lay out more explicitly Rosen's philosophy of education, it's important to once again revisit his critique of modernity. Modernity is characterized by the recasting of rationality "in accord with the model of the mathematical and experimental sciences" (Rosen, 1999, p. 127). To be rational is to think scientifically. Modernity, however, is more than this. It also rethinks man's relationship to nature and, in doing so, attempts to liberate the human will from the constraints of the natural world. Rosen (1999) puts it this way in light of the quarrel between the ancients and moderns:

I can now express the fundamental difference between the ancients and moderns in political terms. The ancients construct tools as a defense against nature; the moderns subscribe to the thesis that the best defense is a powerful offense. (p. 116)

The revolutionary project of Modernity entails more than simply the replacement of *wisdom* in the ancient sense with the *natural sciences* in the modern sense, but is also a project that places the human will at the forefront of theory and practice.

For Rosen, it was and is worth taking this revolutionary posture. Despite the trenchant criticism of Modernity that we have outlined, Rosen stands with the moderns. He makes this explicit when he writes: “In short, I regard the modern revolutionary enterprise as more noble than the classical understanding of noble resignation” (Rosen, 1999, p. 238). While the modern project may be more “noble” than ancient “resignation,” it has become too extreme. If the ancients were immoderate in their moderation, the moderns were not moderate enough in their immoderation (Rosen, 1989, p. 11). In their zeal to liberate human desire, they tore away the foundations for stating the goodness of their mathematical and scientific project.¹⁰ What started out as a noble project to liberate mankind from the crushing blows of the natural world, lead to the unleashing of the will to power and the intellectual chaos that follows.¹¹ As Rosen writes:

I have therefore been arguing on behalf of the premise that modernity is intrinsically more noble than antiquity. But, to turn to the second version of extremism noted above, the greater nobility of modernity does not commit me to the identification of wisdom with demonstrative reasoning. (1989, pp. 18-19)

In identifying wisdom with mathematical and scientific reasoning “the Moderns have forgotten their own passion for comprehensiveness” (Rosen, 1989, p. 16). This one-sidedness has led the Moderns to ignore non-scientific and non-mathematical “...concepts and terms that are essential to the best statement of their own enterprise” (Rosen, 1999, p. 238). Educational modernity, and the conversation that entails, has led to a process of social re-creation that is unable to state the goodness of what it creates. It creates, and recreates, and then creates again according to the logic of mathematical reason, but the significance of this process can’t be stated rationally.

But what is to be done? For Rosen, we can’t go backwards to some distance past prior to the modern revolution. We must move forward, not through the mawkish idealization of the ancients, but through a reintegration of ourselves into the *doksatic* nature of ordinary experience. Rosen (1999) writes:

In less metaphorical language, one does not need to jettison the modern Enlightenment in the effort to rediscover the origin of philosophy within ordinary experience or *doksa*. I am not advocating the recuperation of *phronesis* at the expense of, but rather in order to preserve, *ratio* and *techne*. (p. 233)

Phronesis is needed as a supplement (not a replacement) to the privileged positions that *ratio* and *scientia* play within the contemporary conversation of mankind. In other words, *phronesis* is the kind of speech that allows for the passing of judgment on the significance and role that scientific and technological practices should play within the lives we live. What follows is that educational practice that is without its foundation in *phronesis* is unable to reasonably to state its significance and meaning.

Rosen's line of thought should also be understood in light of the erotic nature of human nature. As human beings act in ways that satisfy their desires, more desires emerge that beg to be acted upon. Eventually, desires comes into conflict with one another and elicit the need to figure out what desires are most desirable.

As we progress in the task of satisfying these desires, we soon experience that some desires conflict; we must arrive at a decision about the hierarchy of these desires. Which one supervenes over others? And this in turn leads to the following question: Is the satisfaction of desire its own end, or is there some end that we aspire to achieve through the satisfaction of desire? From here it is a short step to the question of the most desirable life, that is to say, the good life. (Rosen, 1999, pp. 231-32)

Ordinary experience, then, is the foundation for philosophical and educational questioning of the good. It is not a question to be answered scientifically. It's not because "goodness is a property that is not amenable to the precision of quasi-mathematical analysis" (Rosen, 1999, p. 140). What we need is not precision, since questions about goodness don't lend themselves to that kind of reduction, but a conception of reason that allows for figuring out which desires are most "choice-worthy." When someone claims that X is more choice-worthy than Y, they are saying that the former is more reasonable than the latter. They are making a claim or a judgment about the goodness of X (1999p.140). As Rosen (1999) writes:

We may express this choice-worthiness in religious, aesthetic, philosophical, or political terms, but in all cases we mean to say that it is both possible and reasonable to choose, or, in colloquial terms, that some things are better than others. In a word, we require *to metron*, "the appropriate," not *arithmetical exactness*. (pp.140-141)

What is needed is not the replacement of scientific or mathematical reasoning with another kind of reasoning, but rather a fuller articulation of our understanding of reason itself. All reasoning for Rosen (1999) is both identifying and “choosing” (p. 142). I choose to focus on this thing here rather than that thing over there. I act upon A rather than B. Reasoning is both analysis and synthesis, both identifying some X here and choosing to focus on it rather than Y or Z. All reasoning then ultimately turns on the question of the good. Ordinary experience is preserved only when reason and the good are understood to be necessarily intertwined. Rosen (1999) concludes that:

To come back to the general case, it is therefore evident that one cannot distinguish between analytical reason on the one hand and evaluation on the other. To analyze is to distinguish, and thus it is not simply to identify elements as of such and such a kind, but more broadly to isolate structures as pertinent or irrelevant to our intentions in initiating the analysis. (p. 141)

This broader understanding of reason is requisite for solving the problems and “crises” that are an intrinsic part of ordinary experience (Rosen, 1989, p. 17). “These {c}rises must be negotiated; this is not the same as to eradicate them. And negotiation requires moderation...” (Rosen, 1989, p. 17). And moderation requires the “cultivation of judgment” (Rosen, 1989, p. 17).

Any meaningful education, any act of social re-creation, must be rooted in ordinary experience. And if it’s rooted in ordinary experience, then it must take its bearings from *phronesis* or sound judgment. To do otherwise, is to turn one’s back on the setting that gives vitality and meaning to human life. Rosen reminds us that human experience is not a problem to be solved, but one that is negotiated, and it can only be negotiated well if the habits of sound judgment are cultivated. Any attempt to cleanse ordinary experience of its intrinsic disunity or *diremption*, either scientific or poetic, inevitably results in nihilism. Any philosophy of education that is not rooted in ordinary experience is not a philosophy of education. Which is to say that if philosophy is defined as science or if poetry replaces philosophy, then we no longer have a reasonable basis for determining the manner and direction that social-recreation proceeds. Education without philosophy hinders our capacity to adjudicate the *diremption* at the core of human nature, and makes it unlikely that we will ever be able to realize the happiness of living reasonably.

Conclusion

Consider the following remark from a graduate student doing high-level research in nuclear physics:

...or the anonymous young scientist who says to his interviewer-confessor, "What I'm designing may one day be used to kill millions of people. I don't care. That's not responsibility. I'm given an interesting technological problem and I get enjoyment out of solving. (Hazelrigg, 1989, p.11)

The inability to think through the meaning, significance and consequences of her research reminds us of the epigraph from Adorno that begins this paper. Despite the technological and scientific sophistication of this student's research, something is missing. What is missing, as our discussion of Rosen suggests, is *phronesis*, is a conception of reason necessarily linked to the good. When *phronesis* isn't the foundation of educational practice, the conditions for barbarism and nihilism are present. Desire disconnected from reasonable speech leads to the rule of *poesis*. In such cases, we lose the proper distance needed to pass judgment on the reasonableness of our desires, and our practices become incoherent. Similarly, rational speech disconnected from desire, as witnessed by this student's technical mastery, turns the everyday setting that allows us to make sense of these techniques into an illusion. In both cases, the world becomes an unreasonable dream. In other words, the space between desire and speech, theory and practice must be filled by *phronesis*. Rosen's work allows us to see clearly that the reasonableness of the conversation of mankind maintains itself as such only when initiation into the various voices to this conversation are rooted in a philosophy of education that is truly a *philosophy* of education.

Notes

¹The primary focus of Rosen's work could be said to be the attempt to articulate a philosophical vision where human beings are able to take their bearings in ordinary experience amidst the perpetual temptations to become God's or devolve into beasts. Rosen (2002) writes that ordinary, everyday or commonsensical experience "is articulated by customs and beliefs that are in continuous historical transformations. But these transformations are exhibitions of the flexibility of human nature, not of its nonexistence. It is with respect to what ordinarily endures that we identify changes in custom and belief, for example, as different ways of pursuing glory or enjoying the beautiful. If this were not so, we could never perceive changes as changes of a particular kind; in fact, we would not perceive that we were changing but only that we were responding spontaneously to the stimuli of existence. The same is true of common sense. It is of course true that

the content of commonsense judgments changes from one age to the other. But what we mean by common sense does not change (p. 224).

² *Ta onta* can be translated as “the things of existence.” *Aitia* can be translated here as “cause.”

³ *Poesis* can be translated as the ‘act of producing.’ Its meaning is much broader than simply what we are accustomed to think of as poetry, although it surely also includes that form of human expression.

⁴ What Rosen means by nihilism will be dealt with in more detail in the next section.

⁵ Similarly, Rosen (1988) writes that “...poetry encourages desire, and hence the will. It encourages production for the sake of satisfying the desires, or in other words defines completeness as satisfaction” (p.13).

⁶ According to Rosen’s argument, moral nihilism is a product of a more fundamental metaphysical nihilism that is at the root of human existence.

⁷ Rosen (1999) writes, “I hold to the Socratic thesis that the human animal is by nature philosophical. This means that every normal person is open to philosophy in some form or another, and primarily through the medium of sound judgment about ordinary experience” (p. 231). Compare Rosen’s sentiment here with part one of Rene Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1637).

⁸ *Theoria* should be translated here as “to see something as it is.”

⁹ To take one example, consider the connection between happiness, reason, and knowledge in Epicurus’ *Letter to Herodotus* and *Letter to Menoecus*.

¹⁰ See part 2 of Rene Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1637) where he draws an analogy between building a new home by tearing down its old foundation and the necessity of doing the same when it comes to reforming the beliefs we hold about the world.

¹¹ Rosen (1989) summarizes Nietzsche’s esoteric teaching as follows: “Succinctly stated, it is as follows. Since what traditional philosophers call Being or nature is in fact chaos, there is no eternal impediment to human creativity, or more bluntly put, to the will to power” (p, 197).

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