**Failure, Philosophy of Education,**

**and the Music of the Spheres[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**David B. Owen**

**Theme**

After a dinner full of good food and drink among friends and colleagues, it is not inappropriate to continue our symposium with some informal talk and with "eine kleine nachtmusik." The allusions to Plato and Mozart are intended to suggest that I want to take you on a journey to the Graeco-Austrian Empire, a place that exists in spirit, if not in history, one that I have come to realize I inhabit almost continuously, if sometimes impractically and even, at times, to my own detriment. Rather late in life I have come to see that, despite a rigorous classical training on the one hand and daily circumstances unceasingly pragmatic on the other, I am a romantic at heart. At first I was somehow ashamed of that discovery: it seemed so out of character for the age, for someone with my background and for that person so many others see me to be. After reflecting on it, however, I think I have begun to accept it as my fate.

The opportunity this Society has generously, and perhaps unwisely, afforded me tonight has encouraged me to represent for you something of my experience in this matter. So, I would like to present you with some personal reminiscences on the connection between, on the one hand, my most important leisure activity—listening to music, usually classical—and, on the other hand, my most important working activity, philosophy of education. The connection between these two is one I actually *do* experience. My talk tonight is not intended to be a formal statement and defense of the "truth" of the idea I want to explore, and I do not wish to convince you of anything, other than, perhaps, of the fact that I am being as honest with you as I am able. I just want to share with you some of my thoughts and, if possible, feelings in hopes that this may lead us into some mutually fruitful conversation.

The main theme here is simple to state: music is, at least for me—is it for others, too?—, a metaphor for philosophy of education. The metaphor not only applies in formal terms—both give rise to pluralism, whether musical (a pluralism of styles) or intellectual (a pluralism of modes of thought)—but also applies in material terms—both offer alternative, equally compelling conceptions of "reality," whether it be thought of as beauty or as human activity, including issues of truth and of moral and social action. Thus, I want to use the following piece of music, "An die Musik," "On Music," to represent my experience both of music itself and of philosophy of education. All the musical selections this evening will be by Schubert, with whom I have recently been particularly in love, and are songs that have moved me, and continue to move me, profoundly, both in their style and in their subject. Let me read a translation of the poem by Franz von Schober that Schubert set to music in 1817, at the advanced age of twenty!

[DBO: READ TRANSLATION OF "An die Musik"]

"An die Musik," D. 547b (1817)

Music: Franz Schubert

Text: Franz von Schober[[2]](#footnote-2)

Du holde Kunst, in wieviel Grauen Stunden,

Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt,

Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb entzunden,

Hast mich in eine bessre Welt entrükt.

Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf entflossen

Ein süsser, heiliger Akkord von dir

Den Himmel bessrer Zeiten mir erschlossen,

Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür!

[Translation:]

Thou [charming] art, in many a dreary hour

When life in all its dreaded toils surrounds me,

Hast thou my heart enkindled to new love,

And set me forth into a [better] world!

Often a sigh from out thine harp ascending,

A sweet, a sacred chord sent to me flowing,

[A heaven of better times to me has opened,]

Thou [charming] art, for this I thank thee now!

This recording, like the following ones, is by that extraordinary collaboration between the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and the English pianist Gerald Moore.

[DBO: PLAY "An die Musik"[[3]](#footnote-3)]

Let me draw your attention to two of the aspects of this song which are among those leading me to pick it to represent my theme tonight. First, "Du holde Kunst" presents the art of music as being lovely, friendly, as something charming, and to charm someone is in some way to cast a spell over them. And this idea of magic leads me to the second aspect I wish to emphasize, which is the power of this art to create "eine bessre Welt" and "bessrer Zeiten," a better world and better times. I want to alert you to these ideas now, but I will treat them explicitly toward the end of my talk. Let me begin, then, not at the end but at the beginning.

**Variation 1**

I want to set the scene with what has been for me one of the most frightening pieces of music I have ever heard. I listened to it frequently when my children were growing up and was continually reminded of one's utter impotence in the presence of the Eumenides, of fate.

[DBO: READ TRANSLATION OF Goethe's "Erlkönig"]

"Erlkönig," D. 328

Music: Franz Schubert

Text: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe[[4]](#footnote-4)

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind

Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;

Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,

Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

>>Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?<<

>>Siehst Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?

Den Erlenkönig mit Kron und Schweif?<<

>>Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.<<

>>Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!

Gar schöne Speile spiel ich mit dir;

Manch bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,

Meine Mutter hat Manch gulden Gewand.<<

>>Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörst du nicht,

Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?<<

>>Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind:

In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.<<

>>Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehen?

Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;

Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn

Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein.<<

>>Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort

Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?<<

>>Mein sohn, mein sohn, ich seh es genau:

Es scheinen die alten Weiden so Grau.<<

>>Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöene Gestalt;

Und bist du nich willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.<<

>>Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an!

Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!<<

Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind,

Er hälte in den Armen das ächzende Kind,

Erreicht den Hof mit Müh und Not:

In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

[Translation (by Robert Jordan):]

Who is riding so late through the night and wind?

It is the father with his child;

He holds the boy carefully in his arms,

He grips him securely, he keeps him warm.

"My son, why do you hide your face so fearfully?"—

"Father, can you not see the Erl King?

The Erl King with crown and train?"—

"My son, it is a streak of mist."—

"Dear child, do come with me!

I'll play very fine games with you;

There are many pretty flowers by the shore,

My mother has many a golden gown."

"My father, my father, can you not hear

the promises Erl King is whispering to me?"—

"Be calm, stay calm, my child:

The wind is rustling in the dead leaves."—

"Handsome boy, do you want to go with me?

My daughters shall tend you well:

My daughters lead the nightly round

And lull and dance and sing you to sleep."

"My father, my father, can you not see there

Erl King's daughters in that dark place?"—

"My son, my son, I see it clearly:

[It is] the old willows [that] look so grey."—

"I love you, your pretty form entices me;

And if you are not willing, I will use force."

"My father, my father, now he is taking hold of me!

[The] Erl King has [hurt me]!"—

The father shudders, he rides fast,

He holds the groaning child in his arms,

Arrives home [only just barely]:

In his arms the child was dead.

You will note that four speakers are involved here—narrator, father, son, the Erl King—, each with a different perspective on the event. Listen to how Fischer-Dieskau distinguishes each, even *develops* the emotions of each character in the incredibly short span allotted. And there is even one more character, the horse (in the pianist's right hand) driving events forward without pity until, like the listener, utterly exhausted at the end.

[DBO: PLAY "Erlkönig"[[5]](#footnote-5)]

Although this song is literally about a father and son, it has also spontaneously grown to have a metaphorical meaning for me: the central relationship becomes that of a man and his offspring of hope for the future, of me and my hope. For me, this music becomes a representation of the inescapable feelings of personal failure I have about what I do. I have had what others would call a very "spotty" career, dropping out frequently during graduate education, being incessantly hounded by what Winston Churchill so graphically called his "black dog," being turned down for tenure once, and "producing" relatively little in the way of scholarship. But many others struggle with similar or even more difficult problems, and I know that nothing either unique or particularly interesting presents itself my story. I still feel, nevertheless, that I have not lived up either to my own or to others' earlier hopes. Perhaps all that I am expressing here is conformity to the developmental psychologists' theory: I am merely having, at fifty-two, my "mid-life crisis"!

One item, however, I want to explore a little further with you because I think it raises questions not just about me but also about what we do as philosophers of education and about the character of the times we live in. The central feature about my "professional" life, at least from my perspective, is that I have chosen to spend the bulk of my effort and thought presenting the ideas of another individual, Richard McKeon. This has been a difficult decision for me to live with day-to-day, both personally and professionally, however right I may still think I was to have made it. The work involves transcribing and editing tape recordings of lectures and discussions from three courses the late philosopher Richard McKeon gave during the 1960s at the University of Chicago treating the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Psychologically, working with an individual of such gifts reminds me continually of my own shortcomings. The power of these presentations by a man whom I believe to be truly a genius have also tended to overwhelm whatever thoughts *I* might have to offer as being worthless by comparison, and I frequently find myself bordering on "voicelessness." Professionally, moreover, in the eyes of others in academic life, including colleagues at my university and in my own department, this work does not provide "an original contribution to the world of knowledge"—to use that famous dissertation criterion—but, rather, merely reiterates the ideas of others. They do not even characterize it as serious research; rather, they describe it as mere "scholarship," their voice implying irrelevant, eccentric antiquarianism. My original decision to follow this line of work was based on the judgment that what McKeon had to offer was *way* beyond anything I could contribute. I am even more convinced of that evaluation today, but I do find that this professional decision makes my life quite difficult.

**Variation 2**

I know a number of others struggle daily with feelings of failure as I do, but we need to remember that our individual responses occur in a much larger and much more significant context. *All* of us, I believe in my more lucid moments, must struggle with the failure of philosophy of education as a whole in American education today. Looking back over the last century, I have an overwhelming sense of loss of a guiding light for what we do with children in our schools and in our society. To suggest something of this larger failure, this loss, I have chosen the following song, "An die Entfernte," "To the Distant Beloved," one to which I have been particularly drawn.

[DBO: READ TRANSLATION OF "An die Entfernte"]

"An die Entfernte," D. 765

Music: Franz Schubert

Text: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe[[6]](#footnote-6)

So hab' ich wirklich dich verloren?

Bist du, o Schöne, mir entflohn?

Noch klingt in den gewohnten Ohren

Ein jedes Wort, ein jeder Ton.

So wie des Wandrers Blick am Morgen

Vergebens in die Lüfte dringt,

Wenn, in dem blauen Raum verborgen,

Hoch über ihm die Lerche singt:

So dringet angstlich hin und wieder

Durch Feld und Busch und Wald mein Blick;

Dich rufen alle meine Lieder;

O komm, Geliebte, mir zurück!

[Translation:]

So have I really lost you,

Are you indeed fled, o lovely one?

I still have in my accustomed ear

Your every word, every inflection.

As the wanderer's gaze in early morning

In vain searches the heavens

When, concealed in the blue of the air,

Sings the lark high above him:

So anxiously I search this way and that,

My eyes darting from field to bush and wood:

All my songs call on you,

O come, Beloved, come back to me!

[DBO: PLAY "An die Entfernte"[[7]](#footnote-7)]

I do not believe in some past "golden age" of philosophy of education, but as I look back to the period from roughly 1880 to 1940 I see a period in educational theory and practice of excitement, of growth, of exploration and experimentation, of idealism, of hope for the future. I do not have that sense of the period we live in now. An undertone of failure, of something gone wrong that apparently no one knows how to put right, pervades educational discussions today. Some of that feeling in education, of course, reflects the uniquely complex problems we face in society as a whole. Our general social failures confront us daily: the transformation of the family without sufficient support for the children and adults involved; the intractability of racial prejudice; the fragmentation of community relationships; the transformation of the workplace and of the national, even international, economy by transnational corporations. I am especially worried about two aspects: first, the decay of the political process, both of election and of governing, which threatens democracy; and second, the uncontained growth of technology, possibly the most socially dislocating of which are the media, including the computer and especially television, with their intentional design of an artificial reality.[[8]](#footnote-8) But many of you have a richer knowledge of these matters than I do, so let me pass on to failure in education itself.

The waves of anti-intellectualism that sweep through American history, so aptly depicted decades ago by Richard Hofstadter in *Anti-Intellectualism in America*,[[9]](#footnote-9) seem once again at flood tide in the public schools, sweeping all individuality and, with it, humaneness away in a wash of accountability, regimentation, and national "standards," threatening even the heart of public schooling with the "for-profit" proposals of EAI, Whittle, Charter Schools, and others. Higher education, led by the "leaders"—Stanford, Harvard, M.I.T., Chicago[[10]](#footnote-10)—, has turned away from education as its central mission, whether through teaching or research, and reshaped itself into the R&D department for corporate interests throughout the world. Educational institutions increasingly are managed and, consequently, act as though they were in business, seeking to burnish their brand and pump up their quarterly reports. Again, all of you have experienced this.

Let me turn to failure specifically in the field of philosophy of education itself. With all the outside forces just mentioned, it is no surprise that a field like ours is in serious disarray. For me, some of the indices that this is the case include the following. First, educational psychology has grown to have overwhelming control over issues of learning and teaching. Second, the idea of educational "foundations" has been degraded from what was originally a rigorous, imaginative application of Deweyan ideas into an introductory course in teacher preparation dominated by texts composed of intellectual pabulum, organized into a smorgasbord of issues with no intellectual coherence and characterized by a fundamentally technicist, anti-theoretic bias. Third—and here we reach an issue over which the field *does* have substantial control—, the long dominance of analytic and linguistic philosophy, especially in its more technical and esoteric forms, has had the consequence of convincing others not in the field that philosophy of education has little to offer educational theory and practice. This is reflected in the marked contrast with the progressive period, when a course in philosophy of education, as well as one in history of education, was frequently required at the *under*graduate level in teacher training, let alone also required at the graduate level for those seeking a Masters or Doctoral degree. Today, in numerous institutions one need never have been exposed to *any* philosophy of education either at the undergraduate or the graduate level. At least one whole generation of professors of education have almost literally *no* knowledge of what philosophy of education is, has been, and/or could be.

Need I say that any personal sense of failure pales to inconsequence in comparison with the contextual and institutional failures within which we all work?

**Variation 3**

Coexisting with this extensive awareness of failure—personal, social, and institutional—has been another, contrasting experience I have had, from its beginning one completely unwilled and unintended: I have fallen, and keep falling anew, "in love" with the work of Richard McKeon. I have had similar experiences with Plato and Aristotle and Rousseau and Dewey, but McKeon has always exerted a unique persuasiveness on me. As a partly humorous but also partly serious expression of the attractive power his insights have for me, I have chosen Schubert's setting of Shakespeare's "To Silvia," "An Silvia," an exquisite love song.

[DBO: READ TRANSLATION OF "An Silvia"]

"An Silvia," D. 891 (1826)

Music: Franz Schubert

Text: William Shakespeare[[11]](#footnote-11)

Was is Silvia, saget an,

Dass sie de weite Flur preist?

Schön und zart seh ich sie nahn,

Auf Himmelsgunst und Spur weist,

Dass ihr alles untertan.

Ist sie schön un gut dazu?

Reiz labt wie milde Kindheit;

Ihrem Aug eilt Amor zu,

Dort heilt er seine Blindheit,

Und verweilt in süsser Ruh.

Darum Silvia, tön, o Sang,

Der holden Silvia Ehren;

Jeden Reiz besiegt sie lang,

Den Erde kan gewähren:

Kränze ihr und Saitenklang!

[Shakespeare:]

Who is Silvia? what is she,

That all our swains commend her?

Holy, fair, and wise is she;

The heaven such grace did lend her,

That she might admirèd be.

Is she kind as she is fair ?

For beauty lives with kindness.

Love doth to her eyes repair,

To help him of his blindness ;

And, being helped, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,

That Silvia is excelling ;

She excels each mortal thing

Upon the dull earth dwelling ;

To her let us garlands bring.

[PLAY "An Silvia"[[12]](#footnote-12)]

McKeon's work is not as widely known today as it should be, and I would like to help change that. *Very* briefly, he developed a comprehensive, systematic philosophy based on one of the most extensive and profound scholarships of the twentieth century.[[13]](#footnote-13) His ultimate concern was inquiry into new problems, the relation of new people with new ideas and new materials in new circumstances; but he is most widely known for his historical and philosophic semantics, his explication of the variety of meanings at the heart of philosophic debates in the west since the Greeks. It is this latter aspect that I have focused on. His central thesis here is one of intellectual pluralism, namely, that certain intellectual positions, however reinvented, endure through time and are *all* present, in one form or another, at any one time, though with usually one or another being dominant. This makes sense of the apparently endless, and to me heretofore pointless, debates among philosophers. Even more, his semantic schematism allows me to see the reasons—and here I do not mean the "motives"—behind the differences in all the disciplines, not just philosophy. With his assistance I found I could enter the intellectual world and make sense of it.

In essence, what I find appealing in McKeon is that his conception of philosophy is not one of, "I'm right; you're wrong!" but, rather, of, "Look what I've found that makes sense of me and of the world around me and makes my experience of both richer and fuller of possibilities for the future." He has enabled me to understand and appreciate "the great conversation," as Robert Maynard Hutchins[[14]](#footnote-14) called it, to recognize what is often at issue in current conversations, and, maybe most important, to begin to see how to invent possible conversations that may never have occurred before in order to deal with circumstances that have never existed before. All of this is, I believe, of the highest importance for education, both in theory and practice. If one can not only perceive what is at issue when confronted with a particular situation but also think through alternatives, whether historical or newly invented, one is well equipped to function fruitfully for oneself and for others: one is educated. Thus, I believe McKeon has much to offer education, especially in these unique times which demand novel solutions to novel problems.

So, I plod on, editing a small piece of his work in hopes of stimulating greater interest in his contribution.

**Variation 4**

So, you may well be wondering, how do these antithetical experiences of failure and of McKeon fit together? To answer that I need now to speak of music as a metaphor for philosophy of education, for I find my experience of hope for "eine bessre Welt" and "bessrer Zeiten" embodied in both music and the universe of ideas. Let me suggest something of this hope with Schubert's "Frühlingsglaube," an exquisite ode to spring, to rebirth, to the possibilities of the future.

[DBO: READ TRANSLATION OF "Frühlingsglaube"]

"Frühlingsglaube," D. 686b (1822)

Music: Franz Schubert

Text: Ludwig Uhland[[15]](#footnote-15)

Die linden Lüfte sind erwacht,

Sie säuseln und weben Tag und Nacht,

Sie schaffen an allen Enden.

O frischer Duft, o neuer Klang!

Nun, armes Herz, sei nich bang!

Nun muss sich alles, alles wenden.

Die Welt wird schöner mit jedem Tag,

Man weiss nicht, was noch werden mag,

Das Blühen will nicht enden;

Es blüht das fernste, tiefste Tal:

Nun, armes Herz, vergiss der Qual!

Nun muss sich alles, alles wenden.

[Translation:]

Soft airs of spring awake once more,

That waft and breathe through night and day

United in one purpose.

O fresh, sweet air! O new, sweet sounds!

Now cease thy torment, my poor heart!

For all things must be changed.

The world looks fairer each new day;

One knows not what may come of it,

This endless, ceaseless blooming.

The furthest vale bursts forth anew;

Now my poor heart, forget thy pain!

For all things must be surely changed.

[DBO: PLAY "Frühlingsglaube"[[16]](#footnote-16)]

Some of you have undoubtedly detected an escapist leitmotiv in what I am saying. Yes, I warned you that I have that genetic trait—defect?—called romanticism: I believe in escapism! In particular, I believe in "escape" into music and into the world of ideas as an essential part of living actively here and now. Let me begin to explain that paradox, using music first.

What should one do if one finds oneself living in circumstances that cripple, even destroy, one's abilities and hopes, that try to make one less than one believes he or she can be? It is possible to let such situations become overwhelming. Escape of some sort, however, whether physical, mental, or emotional, can give a space within which one can still be true to oneself. The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, in his description of surviving a World War II concentration camp, speaks movingly about the fact that the Nazis were never able to imprison his mind, and so, despite their most savage efforts, he remained a free man.[[17]](#footnote-17) For me, music offers that freedom. There I can be challenged to the fullest of my capacities to listen and concentrate, to discriminate, to appreciate (not only in the sense of valuing but also in the sense of understanding), to enjoy in a variety of ways unimaginable before encountering a piece of music either new to me or encountered in a new way. Few restraints exist from my physical circumstances that limit me from becoming most fully who I can be. Even more important, I can be continually in the company of individuals of the greatest achievement, where human capacities stretch to, seem even to exceed, their greatest possibilities. With all the bombastic blather uttered about "excellence" in education today, here is a place I can actually be confronted by it, and I am made more alive as a consequence. It sets for me a scale of quality I acknowledge voluntarily and unreservedly, one that I can carry with me throughout all my everyday activities.

Most important, I have come to recognize—belatedly, I admit; I know others have always known this—that there is no necessary, single-track hierarchy of value in this universe: the beauty of Schubert is no greater than that of Mozart, and the latter is neither greater nor lesser than that of Bach, and so on. Some widely loved composers I confess I am not often moved by, say, Brahms or the currently popular Mahler. *But that doesn't matter.* I have learned experientially that beauty is radically plural. As the power to move me and make me more than what I was before experiencing it, music admits of many extraordinary expressions, for me not just the ones already mentioned but also the music of jazz and of India, to both of which I listen with great joy. These expressions are radically different in both style and content, yet all possess a genuine truth about the complexity and diversity of what it means to be human. Again, that translates directly into my everyday judgment and treatment of the different individuals I work with.

What about my other escape, into the world of ideas? As I suggested above, McKeon has allowed me to see the same radical pluralism in the world of ideas, one that permits, even encourages, a diversity of views on any issue one wishes to explore. I do not view this pluralism to be a mere relativism, a statement that anyone's ideas—or, for that matter, anyone's musical creations—are equally as valuable as any other’s. Rather, it is the care, insight, power, subtlety, breadth, persuasiveness with which the ideas, musical or intellectual, are worked out that gives them their value, a value which may also change over time. For me, escape from daily life is *essential* for bettering daily life, both my own and that of others with whom I come in contact. Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Dewey, a host of others, all force me to think with care, precision, and connectedness about how I and others live and in what ways we might live more enriched, human, and humane lives. Through escape I can experience ideals and reflect on alternatives, all of which can lead to activities aimed at the reduction of suffering, at the increase of knowledge, and at the appreciation of the real pleasures of true beauty, not the transient titillations of callow consumerism. In short, the ideal is a living alternative to the real. What is missing today, I think, is a spirited dialectic between the "is" and the "ought" or the "might be." The mechanistic, pragmatic, corporate spirit of our age denies the importance of much of what we are as humans.

Why do music and philosophy of education seem to merge so much for me? As best I can express it, they join reason and love together. Music is an art that for me uniquely joins reason to love, order to pure expression; philosophy of education, by contrast—and I need only remind you of the word's etymology—, joins love to reason, the feeling of common care for humanity with the ideas of helping others through education. I think this is why I am in philosophy of education and not philosophy. Education lies at the heart of what I have become and what I hope to offer to others. And in my mind, that offering is in a deep sense musical. It is my way of addressing what may well be the chief problem we face today: the degradation of both reason and passion. We need to find a way to preserve reason from technique, from the mechanistic conception of it encouraged by materialism run rampant; and we need to preserve love from passion unreflective, unrestrained, uncreative. One way to effect such a renewal of each is by putting them back in relation to each other, by making ideas musical and the love of music reflective. Philosophy of education can be a vocation, not just a profession.

**Finale**

Eight years ago in circumstances identical to these, Lawrence Dennis asked, "Did Dewey Dance?" In answering his own question, he functioned in Deweyan fashion as a critic—and teacher—of Mozart's "Masonic Funeral Music," K. 477. Distinguishing between the "art object" and the "work of art," that is, the transactive experience one has with that object, he directed his audience's perception to, in Dewey's words, "a fuller and more ordered appreciation of the objective content of [the work] of art."[[18]](#footnote-18) Though we both agree that Dewey did "dance," though possibly for different reasons, I am making tonight no such attempt to inform or to judge. Instead, I have tried to invent a series of events to suggest something of my idea of feelings as well as my feeling for ideas, stringing Schubert songs together like a string of pearls.

In contrast to Lawrence's use of Dewey, you may well sense in my last variation that Plato has in some way crept in. He has, and I think I should make explicit in what way. In the myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*, Er tells of his good fortune in seeing the eight spheres within which the universe moves and in hearing the music of the spheres, an idea which has had a long subsequent history. From what I have said I hope you can see why that idea strikes me as metaphorically true. Shortly before the Myth of Er, Socrates speaks of a hierarchy of pleasure which, in its use of proportions, is similar to the hierarchy of truth presented in the Divided Line. As the absence of pain is pleasure to someone in pain, even greater is the pleasure of the soul than that of the body. Plato uses the same kind of proportion in speaking about the hierarchy of reality in imitations of the artist: as the couch is to the painter of the couch, so the idea of the couch exists more truly than does the couch the craftsman made.

I introduce Plato not to declare myself a Platonist but to suggest something of the chain of proportions by which I attempt to reconcile myself with that sense of failure I expressed at the beginning, and especially with my chosen fate of being merely an editor of McKeon, of merely repeating what another has said so well. I am, at best, an accompanist. Yet—and here Plato's ratios come in—as the accompanist is to the singer, a mere support, so the singer is to the composer, a mere interpreter; but, to carry the proportion even further, even the composer is to "the music of the spheres" merely a translator. And as there are many spheres, there are many musics and many translations of what is "heard." In this case, maybe we all, in our different ways, are doing the same thing, and one need not despair utterly at being an accompanist. Is it not possible to be a midwife as Socrates was, even if one is unable to be a creator of wisdom or love? Is it not possible to help others in giving birth to a love of wisdom *and even* a wisdom of love? In a small way, like those anonymous monks and Arab scholars preserving Plato's and Aristotle's and other ancients' texts, for whom I have the deepest affection, perhaps I can, by editing the work of an extraordinary individual rather than generating my own inharmonious ideas, assist in the activity, however incompletely, of philosophy of education. For, ultimately, it is not *my* ideas of education but the education of ideas which is important, both today and in future.

A Presidential Address should, I think, in some way be a summing up: What have I learned? What can I pass on? Unfortunately, as your outgoing President, I cannot testify that I have learned anything new or that I can give you some words of wisdom. All I can do is try to act in some fashion like Gerald Moore—ever "The Unashamed Accompanist" (the wonderful title of one of his books)[[19]](#footnote-19)—who at his retirement concert bade his listeners public farewell with Schubert. This is what he offered them, and I you.

[DBO PLAY "An die Musik," arr. Moore (for piano solo).][[20]](#footnote-20)

1. The original version of this paper was given as the Midwest Philosophy of Education Society (MPES) Presidential Address on November 11, 1994, in Chicago, Illinois, and was printed in the *Proceedings of the Midwest Philosophy of Education Society, 1993-1994*, ed. George W. Stickel and David B. Owen (Ames, Iowa: 1995), pp. 3-17. Used with permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Text and translation are from “Franz Schubert: Lieder, Vol. II (1817-1828),” with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore (Deutsche Grammophon Compact Discs no. 437 225-2), Booklet, p. 38. Words in brackets are my emendations of the translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.*, Disk no. 1, Track no. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Text and translation from "Handel — Schubert — Schumann," with Jessye Norman and Geoffrey Parsons (Philips Compact Disc no. 422 048-2), Booklet, pp. 34 and 36. Words in brackets are my emendations of the translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. "Schubert: 21 Lieder," with Dietrich Fischer Dieskau and Gerald Moore (EMI Compact Disc no. CDM 7 69503 2), Track no. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Text and translation, “Franz Schubert: Lieder, Vol. II (1817-1828),” *op. cit.*, Booklet, pp. 106-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. "Franz Schubert, Lieder, Vol. II (1817-1828)," *op. cit.*, Disk no. 5, Track no. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A recent ABC television movie, "Without Warning," shown the night before Halloween and playing off of Orson Wells' (in?)famous1938 radio drama, "The War of the Worlds," had this declaimer shown after each series of advertisements: "This is a realistic depiction of fictional events. What you are seeing is not really happening." So much for sensationalist theories of epistemology! [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (New York: Random House, 1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The University of Chicago, my alma mater, has gone so far as to close, first, its School of Education, then its Department of Education, thereby terminating an important tradition begun a hundred years before when John Dewey came to Chicago and created the Laboratory School, possibly the most imaginative educational innovation in American history. The (official) reason? It would be too expensive [*sic*] to keep. Most shocking, a majority of the faculty in the Division of Social Sciences voted to close the Department. So much for the importance of education in American society, even among the apparently well educated. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. From the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Translated into German by Eduard von Baurenfeld). German text from *ibid*., Booklet, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibid.*, Disk no. 8, Track no. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In 1938, Bertrand Russell wrote a letter in which he described McKeon as “incredibly learned.” See Alan Gewirth, “Richard Peter McKeon (1900-1985),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, *58*, no. 5 (June 1985), p. 752. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The head of the University of Chicago (1929-1951) who hired McKeon from Columbia University. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Text and translation, *ibid.*, Booklet, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid.*, Disk no. 3, Track no. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon, 1959). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958 [1934]), p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Gerald Moore, *The Unashamed Accompanist* (London: Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew,1943). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. "Homage to Gerald Moore" (Angel Record Set SB-3697), Side no. 4, Band no. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)