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Joy and Process: A Philosophical Inquiry

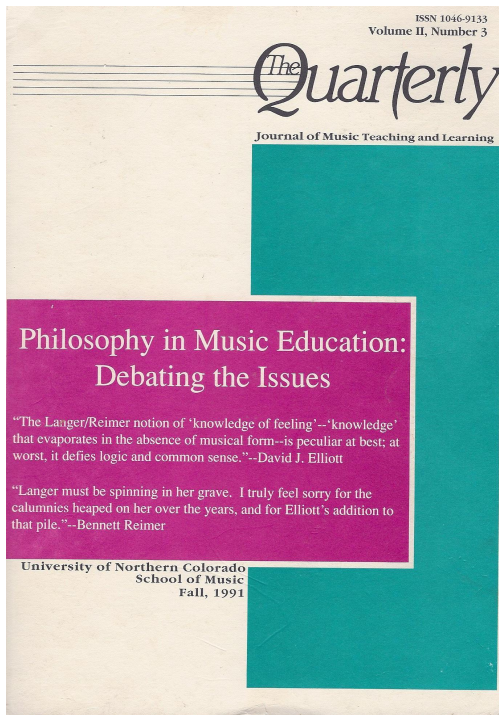
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Joy and Process: A Philosophical Inquiry

By James R. Johnson

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The dictum reads as follows: One must have a philosophy of music education to be a successful teacher. These are daunting words. How is a valid philosophy of music education structured? Does it have to be directly applicable to all situations? When is it complete? How can a bad philosophy of music education be distinguished from a good one? Cannot some extant philosophy simply be adopted *in toto* or adapted for the sake of expediency? To help address such questions, this article examines, in general, philosophical inquiry and delineates the procedural composition of philosophical research.

Philosophical Inquiry

One of the most common ways of defining philosophy is to present its area of interest: ethics, logic, aesthetics, truth, social obligation, religion, epistemology, metaphysics, meaning of life, and so on. This, however, provides no clear definition of philosophy. Rather than pursuing the categories of philosophical inquiry, the focus should be on philosophy as a process. As a process, it exhibits characteristics of degree and cohesion rather than entity and finality.

The philosophical process has no inherent point of departure; no concept from which all practitioners begin. There are, in other words, no elementary problems in the philosophical realm; eventually, everything may imply everything. For example, how could all the articles people sit upon be called chairs? Plato would have reasoned that “chair” must exist in its purest form and be realized in all the variety of appliances called chairs. There had to be

some “place” where the perfect forms of all these concepts existed; where perfection was realized; the realm of eternal verities. Even what appears to be an elementary conceptual structure soon becomes entangled in a web of metaphysical philosophy.

What does it mean to practice philosophy? What good is this pursuit which some, if not many, consider quite esoteric, in a derogatory sense? The answer lies in meaning. Philosophy is the pursuit of meaning; the process of examining the meanings and implications of the conceptual constructs we use. The focus of philosophical pursuits is to understand those concepts in relation and proportion, and as functioning within a system. Philosophy must help make sense out of the conceptions that are the basis of all perception and understanding. This requires close attention to the implications embodied in those conceptions.

In philosophy, concepts must be understood in detail—not only *in toto*—in order that the relations found are indeed extant and not products of an external form or content imposed upon the subject of examination. There is a very present danger of philosophy which is done in isolation, removed from a context. It fails to establish the deep connections which may exist because the knowledge of the concepts involved was superficial. A knowledge of music education that is superficial will result in a philosophical construct that lacks cohesion and integrity.

Philosophy must pay close attention to the implications embodied in the concepts under consideration. Implicit in every concept are its constituent concepts and in every proposition, its constituent propositions. By examining the implications of concepts, it is possible to identify those which lead to a paradox; for once a paradox has been exposed, it is possible to formulate the questions that make it feasible to

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carry on an analysis of such concepts.

One of the primary concerns in the philosophical analysis of concepts involves the specific wording used for the question being examined. The manner in which such a question is posed, predisposes its answer. William James's famous question "Does 'consciousness' exist?" is an example of a question formulated in such a way as to preclude the arrival at a satisfactory solution. The arguments eventually progress to the level of religious belief; what one professes as true, another holds as false and "ne'er the twain shall meet." The dualism demonstrated by the statement of this question poses more readily the problem of "How can my mind be sure that something such as 'consciousness' exists?" This matter-mind dualism is a concept that has been dismissed by most modern philosophy. To state James's question in a nondualistic form: "Can we talk coherently about 'consciousness'?" From that point on, it would be possible to identify the elements and relations which are involved in other conceptions of consciousness and a system worked out to discover the locus wherein the concept "consciousness" has the logical possibility of meaning.

Philosophy as the pursuit of meaning carries as its method the examination of conceptual implications through the relations evidenced by abstractable elements and forms. A philosophical examination will never result in the discovery of *the* form of any event any more than Schenker's analyses provided *the* form of all music. The conceptual implications are found and expressed only in the "language" of the analysis.

Philosophy, therefore, adds no factual knowledge as experiment does, although it can clarify the terms "factual" and "knowledge." Philosophical answers are not state-

ments of fact but interpretations of the words used to examine and express them. The province of philosophy is not empirical but conceptual. It is the pursuit of meaning; the clarification of conceptual implication.

Take, for example, an ever-present "research" concern of many music educators: What causes students to drop out of a music ensemble experience? Information could be

and has been gained regarding this problem by simply asking the students. This approach would be an empirical pursuit, outside the parameters of philosophy. The philosophical concerns of this problem could take two general directions: 1) an examination of the manner in which the questions asked of the students are posed and how those resultant "data" are categorized, delimited, and manipulated; and 2) the clarification of concepts involved in the questions, such as "What is meant by 'causes'?" or "What is an 'experience,' or a 'musical ensemble experience'?" Both "cause" and "experience" are enormous constructs of conceptual implications, and it is quickly apparent that this is another example of the fact that there are no elementary or entry-level problems

in the field of philosophy. The concepts, however, must still be analyzed and their implications investigated. If they are not, the research study runs the danger of presenting conclusions from the data collected that are at best unwarranted or worse, false. While the philosophical process of examining conceptual meaning will not add new facts to the situation being considered, it will serve to clarify, hopefully in advance, the implications inherent in the use of those particular conceptual constructs.

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Procedures of Philosophical Inquiry

The question of what it is to practice philosophy remains. How does one pursue the meaning and implications of the concepts used in everyday language in addition to the language of the researcher? There are some elemental choices to be made at the beginning of any philosophical endeavor—some of which will be made almost by default.¹

One obvious choice is to examine a single concept. With this decision the philosopher is faced with examining: 1) the other concepts implied by the one under consideration; and 2) what other philosophers, scientists, theologians, and others have had to say about the primary concept and those implied by it.

The first choice is fraught with the problems resulting from the sheer magnitude of implication (how can implication be delimited?). Returning to the music-ensemble retention problem mentioned above, an illustrative concept can be found in the term “cause.” The concept of cause has an extensive history of philosophical consideration. Over that history, a few of the implied concepts have been change, the unchanging, power, necessitation, choice, fatalism, determinism, plurality; the list is essentially endless.

Aristotle, for example, is famous for his four causes: efficient cause, that by which a change is made; final cause, the end or purpose of change; material cause, that which is changed; and formal cause, what it is changed into. Perhaps those categories are not sufficient and the concerns of empiricists such as Hume and Mill are brought into the consideration with the concepts of necessity and uniformity. “Did the student have a true ‘choice’ or were the causes plausible enough to make the dropping a ‘necessity?’” “Is ‘cause’ something external to the student and if so, how far back can or should ‘cause’ be pursued?”

There is no such thing as the ultimate cause in human terms. Even if there were a concerted effort at complete enumeration of the causes, there is no criterion for the perfect induction. This lack of criteria does not mean the attempt should not be made, because the problem is obviously important; but the role of philosophy in such pursuits must also be recognized. This delimiting as-

pect of conceptual analysis is one of the greatest challenges facing someone approaching a seemingly individual concept.

The second choice of philosophical procedure involves examining what other philosophers, scientists, theologians, and others had to say about a primary concept. Consider the concept of form in music as an example.

To mention that musicians are concerned with the concept of form is to state the obvious. A few examples may suffice to show, however, that the harmonious euphony expected may in actuality be a disjunct cacophony; form as a *concept* is of concern to many musicians, but the opinions held regarding the concept are widely disparate. In the introduction to his celebrated book *Musical Structure and Design*, Cedric Thorpe Davie writes:

Ever since there have been men who have deliberately set out to compose pieces of music and to give them a more or less permanent form by recording them in writing, they have been faced with one problem above all others. That problem arises at some point during the progress of the composition, and stated badly, it takes the form of the question “What shall I do next?”²

The answers provided by the composer create the structures and designs which make each composition unique. In order to understand musical composition, Davie advocates, as do numerous authors of music elements and appreciation textbooks, that form should be the focus of music instruction. “The understanding, and therefore the study, of musical design (or form, or structure) is one of the essentials of intelligent attentive listening.”³

Diverse Viewpoints

Stewart MacPherson adds a further requirement to the concept of musical design, claiming that “the need of consistent and logical design is, however, fundamental in the nature of things, and cannot be set aside. Were this logical design to be set aside, the work of art would be incapable of differentiation from the aimless wanderings of the rhapsodist.”⁴

Although strongly advocating the study of form, stable structure and logical design in the strict sense are not the formal concern of Ian Spink:

The study of changing and developing forms also leads to a truer appreciation of what form is. One of the most limiting attitudes in music

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is that which regards fugue or sonata form—or indeed any form—as an immutable fixture, as if the rules had been engraved on stone and handed down with the rest of the Law on Mount Sinai. Forms are not formulae. . . . Form is shape and everything has shape, even—if we think again—things we normally describe as shapeless. Physical shapes exist in space; musical shapes exist in time.⁵

Utilizing the fundamental work of Hugo Riemann in rhythm, meter, and structure, Hugo Leichtentritt bases his view “on the aesthetic premise that a mass of sound gains artistic value primarily by a sensible, rational form, a certain method of construction, which is closely allied to what we call style in art and in fact is the main element of style.”⁶ So ineluctable does Leichtentritt view the concept of form that Platonic idealism shows its head in the discussion. “Form as structural concept, idea, belongs to the permanently valid, immutable fundamental properties of music. The various forms, however, are the temporal, transient application of the unchangeable idea of form.”⁷

Schenker on Form

The theoretical work of Heinrich Schenker is some of the most influential in the field of music. As is well known, Schenker’s theory of analysis involves an *Ursatz* which is projected downward through the *Urlinie* and upward through the *Bassbrechung*. It is a reductionist theory whose method of analysis progresses from foreground to middle ground to fundamental reductions to yield the complete projection of the tonic triad. Form in a composition, as analyzed in the *Ursatz*, is “a principle of architectonic organization of structure.”⁸ This level of form, however is not given to immediate perception; being an elaboration of detail built upon the whole, it requires a high degree of analysis to achieve this understanding (perspective) of form or structure in a musical composition.

Recent theoretical work in musical form

has frequently adopted the term morphology. Siegmund Levarie and Ernst Levy have developed a concept of form based on coexisting aspects of change:

There exist countless musical forms but only a few musical form principles. Together they supply the contents for a musical morphology. Morphology is the study of form. The concept *form* points to something assumed to be stable. . . . One might object that there is no such thing, for everything changes continuously. . . . [However], change is understood as based on the unchanging. To our way of thinking the statement is not reversible; for change presupposes something that changes and that entity is exactly “some thing,” an ontic phenomena.⁹

Levarie and Levy argue against music as purely formal art, claiming that nothing that we receive through our senses is free from accompanying feelings. Even if we imagined music to be purely formal, “its very formality would possess stirring components inseparable from any form, let alone from an acoustical form.”¹⁰ Music does have *form* and is essentially an art of forms, and this characteristic integrates well with their argument that the very paths of our emotions are not devoid of form.

Although Leichtentritt arrived at his view of the importance of form through the concept of style, there is a similarity with Levarie and Levy in the use—perhaps unintended—of wording very similar to Platonic Idealism. The latter finds it virtually impossible to even employ the term form except to connote the idea of form.¹¹ The recognition of form is of paramount concern, stressing that:

Thinking in music cannot be elucidated by thinking in other terms; hence talking about music is difficult. A study in musical morphology aims at sensitizing us to specific musical shapes. To this end, all means may be used. Ultimately, however, the world of music—a world entirely *sui generis*—has to be comprehended in its own terms. Musical thinking is the goal.¹²

Form is structure (Davie); conscious plan,

logical design (MacPherson); shape (Spink); temporal shape (Leichtentritt); mutable (Spink); change based on the unchanging (Levarie and Levy); an element of style (Meyer and Leichtentritt); the architectonic organization and projection of the tonic triad (Schenker); the transient application of an unchangeable idea (Leichtentritt); the *idea* of form (Levarie and Levy). Music has form (structure), or as some may argue, music is form. Its shape is created like all other forms by using the techniques of repetition, contrast, and variation. Musical form may be a prime example of change in permanence; of the dynamic organism.

Quite obviously, the purpose here is not the comparison of the various theoretical explanations of form, much less the advocacy of one or the other as being correct. The intent is to demonstrate the plethora of views concerning the concept of form. There exists, in the philosopher's words, a paradox given embodiment in the term form. Form in music cannot have a singular meaning but rather exhibits the perspective from which the analysis grew. Any analysis must be bound by a recognition of the perspective which gave genesis to that particular abstraction.

The choice of scrutinizing the conceptual conclusions of other philosophers can also lead, in short order, to a consideration of what a particular school of thought had to say about a concept and how that compares with other schools of thought. Even before the philosopher can consider what each school said, however, there must be a determination of why these philosophers can be called a school; why they can be considered together and what, if anything, is different or unique in each philosopher's viewpoint.

Hume and Mill could be thought of as proponents of the empirical school of thought, and their views compared to the idealism of Hegel and Kant. The latter school becomes complicated by Kant's transcendental idealism and the objective of absolute idealism developed by Hegel. For example, what cause, or experience, means to the empiricists and the idealists is probably as unique as each individual philosopher's conceptual perspective. Within schools of thought there are frequently very fine distinctions drawn by

members as in the difference between pragmatism and pragmaticism in the work of Dewey and James. The whole process of comparing schools of thought is permeated with such difficulties.

Examining A Single Perspective

There is another option of the philosophical process available: Examine the concept(s) of a single philosopher. What is involved in the systematic examination of an individual philosopher is difficult to enumerate and the following list cannot be considered complete but functional:

Two of the most important aspects to be considered in the examination of a philosopher are: 1) not being content with the perceived or declared conclusions of that particular philosopher, but finding the initial questions and assumptions from which the work springs thereby identifying the perspectives for further conceptual development; and 2) establishing a chronological listing of the entire corpus of the philosopher's work to ensure that the beginnings are found and that the development of conceptual structures can be followed.

An examination of perspective must be left for another time, so the following discussion will center only on the importance of dealing with a philosopher's complete corpus. Obviously, primary sources are the initial concern. All the works must be collected and their chronology verified. Such verification cannot always be done by date of publication alone.

Frequently it is not only difficult to establish a complete bibliography but chapters of books, for example, sometimes appear years before the book itself, articles may contain verbatim use of earlier writings along with various changes, and transcripts of speeches can often be found in books carrying a publication date much later than when the speech was first presented. All this is further complicated with other writings published in the intervening years.

Sometimes, in the case of very prolific writers, they are not even aware of everything they have written. For example, while this author was attempting to examine the collected works of the philosopher Susanne K. Langer, she admitted in correspondence that

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she was not in possession of a complete bibliography of her own published works, much less those which never left her house in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Her initial suggestion was simply the consultation of the card catalog of a major university.

The purpose of a philosophical examination should not be, at least initially, the criticism of one doctrine in terms of another for the end result is usually one of decision by faith. Rather the purpose should be to show in its own terms that a doctrine is erroneous. Susanne Langer wrote:

The chance that the key ideas of any professional scholar's work are pure nonsense is small; much greater the chance that a devastating refutation is based on a superficial reading or even a distorted one, subconsciously twisted by the desire to refute. To attack an error is one thing; to throw out a whole theoretical speculation because it contains an error is another. A serious attack on a fallacious development may set it right if that is the critic's ambition. Such criticism is cooperative and aims at truth.¹³

Secondary sources attributable to proponents and opponents need to be carefully treated at the inception of such study. It is not feasible to completely avoid secondary sources, nor is it advisable, but it must be realized that prior readings which focus upon the philosopher under consideration may directly prejudice the examination. If the influence of secondary sources is undoubtedly strong, then the investigation should recognize that situation at the outset and present those delimiters as distinctly as possible. The goal of a study may be, for example, a pragmatic critique of a philosopher's work. It would then be incumbent upon the examiner to present exactly whose version of pragmatism (or pragmatism—following Dewey or James) is to be used so that the reader may be cognizant of the relevant perspectives.

The next step in a conceptual analysis of a philosopher's work involves numerous chro-

nologically ordered readings of the complete corpus with some method of recording. This author uses index cards with a computer-generated cross-indexing system. The conceptual content of each card is delimited as much as possible to make cross-indexing more flexible.

The primary purpose of the chronological readings is to identify the philosopher's initial questions and assumptions. Once those have been found, their development can be traced. This process helps insure that terms and concepts used as conclusions in the philosopher's work are understood from their inception.

During the course of the readings, every effort should be made to expand the conceptual bases being examined, realizing that the questions of concern in the initial reading, for example, may need expansion or contraction in subsequent ones. It is critical to keep in mind the axiom that the manner in which a question is posed predisposes its answer. There is, therefore, a continual process of modification going on over the course of such a philosophical effort and this results in two caveats which must be recognized prior to the inception of same.

First, the results of any philosophical procedure are not quantifiable. There are no extant criteria for the complete analysis nor are there any for the perfect induction. The best possible arrival point is that of logical conviction—especially formulating the presentation in as clear a manner as possible so that what is perceived is that of impact or objectivity. A philosophical analysis cannot be objective in the sense of the empirical testing of a null hypothesis and that is essentially its advantage. Philosophical pursuits need not carry the extreme delimiters that are the very genesis of scientific and statistical endeavors.

Second, the possible results of such pursuits may not be presented prior to the com-

“The final step in the evaluation of a philosopher or philosophy is one which is the most difficult, and is in fact not last at all but must be ubiquitous: Contemplation.”

mencement of the study, for to do so would be to restrict the perspective from which the whole study is to be done and prejudice those results. For this reason, philosophical predecessors and critics should not be set apart or considered prior to the philosopher's own work, but in conjunction with the chronology of philosophical development.

The final step in the evaluation of a philosopher or philosophy is one which is the most difficult, and is in fact not last at all but must be ubiquitous: contemplation. The philosophical realm is not possessed of the qualities which engender quick answers to so-called pragmatic questions. This is undoubtedly why philosophy is in such low demand today and why its practice and advocacy is often seen as esoteric and essentially unnecessary. Today, concern seems to be not the establishment or examination of conceptual structures and meanings but of the most efficient—and least painful—way to accomplish practical goals. Such pragmatic concerns obviously need to be addressed by any field, but the conceptual work must be done in conjunction with it, if not prior to it.

Philosophical Validity

There is a danger inherent in philosophy which is done *in vacuo*, for then there is little against which the conceptual structures may be checked. This does not imply that all philosophy must possess so-called practical examples of all concepts, but it does require that those same concepts need to find support in the intellectual field from which they are drawn. The relevant perspective must be recognized and acknowledged. But what does it mean, for example, to have music education as a perspective? What is involved in the philosophy of music education or education in general?

Susanne Langer presents a significant analysis of the danger of philosophy done *in vacuo* and of the role of philosophy in education in an article in the *Harvard Educa-*

tional Review:

A philosophical thinker has to know the field from which he takes his departure; and no philosophical construction is absolutely final. It is, at its best, sufficient. The sign of its sufficiency is that its concepts can be progressively elaborated to articulate more and more detailed problems. A philosophy invented *in vacuo* does not furnish such basic concept; it allows one only to translate any previously posed questions and their previously given answers into a new, more satisfying language.¹⁴

Many attempts to make psychology, sociology, or education, “scientific” have yielded little more than a translation into the language of some “ism”—empiricism, pragmatism, behaviorism, operationalism. The process of establishing a philosophical grounding for a field such as music must be more involved than the establishment of a connection to another area of intellectual endeavor. There is a need to establish new conceptual structures relevant to that field and not translate the concerns of one field to that of music. Music must be the external validation of a philosophy of music education.

Conclusion

In music education philosophy, there is a necessary connection which must always be made between philosophical structures and the fields of music and music education; to externally validate a philosophy through an application to music itself. There is a need of chronologically following the work of a philosopher, finding the initial questions and problems, and determining its internal validity and cohesiveness in terms of its own conceptual constructions, not those of its advocates and/or critics. There is a need to recognize the role played by the structure of questions in the predisposition of their answers.

Philosophical paths are filled with a variety of ever-expanding concerns and questions, and the degree to which they achieve cohesiveness and internal validity is a standard by which the usefulness of their constructs may be measured:

To determine the aims of education is probably the most urgent philosophical problem in the whole pedagogical field today; and it cannot but draw in vast further questions of the aims of human societies, the ultimate values that set up these aims, our basic ideas of society and individual life. Seriously pursued, it may lead to entirely new definitions of "society," "life," "individual," "purpose," "action," and other terms, to unpredictable numbers and perhaps in startling ways. . . . Then it may well appear that this branch of philosophical study, the analysis of pedagogical ideas, is not a branch of a greater discipline at all, but a source, as every beginning from realistic problems is: that indeed, Philosophy of Education is simply Philosophy.¹⁵

A philosophy of music education must be first and foremost a cohesive and integrated general philosophy. The second criteria is of equal stature: It requires as its validation the art of music.

Conceptual structures, by their very nature, have implications and this is where philosophical effort must be centered. The realm of conceptual implications is virtually infinite and the impact of philosophy may follow these same dimensions. Concepts are as intertwined with each other as an organism is with the organs and organic systems which comprise it. The very fact that humans have a mental life makes all components of that life interdependent. Philosophy, by studying those conceptions, is involved with any and all aspects of that mental life. Just as Aristotle was a philosopher whose thoughts found their inception in science, so too modern physicists like Einstein are as much philosophers as mathematicians.

A direct result of the interdependent nature of conceptual implication in philosophy is that any conceptual structure can eventually be found to imply all others. This can obviously create enormous problems for initial attempts at philosophy and is one of the reasons that philosophy is an intellectual procedure to which entire lives are devoted. The stature and voluminous output of many of the great philosophers is intimidating to anyone, but need not be so to the point of inaction. In actuality everyone seeking meaning in words and concepts is practicing philosophy. Perhaps all that is needed is that recognition and a willingness to devote the time necessary to be truly involved in a contemplative process.

Footnotes

- ¹ It must be recognized that this list of options is by no means exhaustive, but merely functional. There is no way to portray all of the possible avenues used to organize thought processes; delimiting the parameters of contemplation.
- ² Cedric Davie, *Musical Structure and Design*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 9.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ⁴ Stewart MacPherson, *Form in Music*, (London: Joseph Williams, 1915), p. 259.
- ⁵ Ian Spink, *An Historical Approach to Musical Form*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1967), p. ix.
- ⁶ Hugo Leichtentritt, *Musical Form*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. v. This emphasis upon style is one which is shared by Leonard Meyer in much of his work; see "Process and Morphology in the Music of Mozart," *Journal of Musicology* 1 (1982).
- ⁷ Leichtentritt, *Musical Form*, p. 454.
- ⁸ Felix Salzer, *Structural Hearing*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), p. 223. See also Burt Levy, "Aspects of a Systems Approach to Musical Analysis," (D.M.A. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1972).
- ⁹ Siegmund Levarie and Ernst Levy, *Musical Morphology*, (Kent, Oh: Kent State University Press, 1983), p. 3.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ¹³ Susanne Langer, *Philosophical Sketches*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), pp. vi-vii.
- ¹⁴ Susanne Langer, "On the Relations between Philosophy and Education," *The Harvard Educational Review* 26 (Spring, 1956), p. 139.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

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