A REFLECTION ON THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION
AND MAN’S TRUNCATED EXISTENCE

By

MARIA LYONS

March 2011
ABSTRACT

Today, in any part of Britain, it is hardly possible to open a newspaper without reading the word ‘crisis’ in connection to some aspect of public education. Within educational literature, many versions of this crisis have been recognised, debated and diagnosed. In an academic climate generally discouraging to ‘big picture’ research, however, comparatively few attempts have been made to interpret the contemporary crisis in education in terms of more profound social, historical and spiritual phenomena. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has sought to provide such an interpretation, drawing in particular on the anthroposophical worldview developed by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). In tracing the major political, economic and ideological factors that have shaped education in Britain since the end of the Second World War up to the present, the thesis has identified a set of recurring attitudes and practices which can be traced to their origins in the circumstances of the European Enlightenment. The most significant of these is the belief that the united power of politics and education can guarantee a healthy society. This enduring conviction fuels today’s politically-instigated ‘learning revolution’. The thesis has argued that the politicisation of learning is fundamentally at odds with human freedom, for it entails an externalisation of responsibility for self-knowledge and self-development. It is this tension which manifests as an ever-intensifying sense of crisis. The thesis has proposed that to address the crisis it will be necessary to move beyond both the idea of freedom as a state project and the prevailing conception of the human self as a politically realisable entity. Emphasising the personal rather than the political nature of the crisis, the thesis has striven to demonstrate that it is ultimately up to each individual, in his or her everyday thoughts and actions, to take responsibility for it.
# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Research Aim: 7
- Crisis-Talk: 10
- Conceptualising Crisis: 20
- Diagnosis and Therapy: 28
- Overview: 36

## CHAPTER 2: EXPANSION AND INTERVENTION

- The Post-War Consensus: 40
- The Move to Comprehensives: 46
- Critique from the Right: 51
- The Education Reform Act (ERA): 57

## CHAPTER 3: CRITICISMS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE ERA

- The Accountability Culture: 64
- The National Curriculum: 71
- Linear Models of Learning: 77

## CHAPTER 4: RECULTURING SOCIETY

- New Labour and the New Age: 86
- The Performatve Society: 94
- Higher Education and the ‘Learning Society’: 100

## CHAPTER 5: EDUCATION AND THE MODERN CRISIS SYSTEM

- Crisis as a Technical Problem: 110
- Ideology and the State Solution: 116
- The ‘Inevitability’ of Certain Realities: 120
- The Absence of Cultural and Historical Reflexivity: 123
- The Divorce between Theory and Practice: 128
- The Corruption of Language: 130
- The Loss of Reality and the Loss of Man: 131
- The Faith in Politics and Permanent Revolution: 136
- The Totalisation of Man and Society: 142
- Freedom and the Self as a Political Project: 146
- The Cycle of Crisis: 148
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 6: REGAINING THE WHOLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Self and the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evolution of Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling the Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy and the Possibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 7: RESISTING THE TOTAL ANSWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis and Social Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Threefold Nature of Social Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating Education, State and Economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| BIBLIOGRAPHY                        | 223 |
Chapter 1: Introduction

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the general process of life.

(Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1992)\(^1\)

RESEARCH AIM

Some years ago a friend brought to my attention a little book from the Study Guide series sold in Blackwell bookshops on university campuses around the country. The book is called *Taking Notes from Lectures* and offers the young person embarking on his or her university career advice on how to get the most from attending lectures. Prefaced with the statement “In all of these study guides, we emphasise that you have to do your own learning – it can’t be done for you”,\(^2\) it goes on to explain in detail how to become an “active listener” in lectures, and what clues one might receive to help understand what the lecturer is doing. The following hint is typical:

Sometimes the ‘signposts’ are non-verbal. For instance, when the lecturers write on the board or use an overhead projector, it is often because you are intended to copy down the information, though it may also be because a visual aid reinforces the explanation. If they say something more slowly, or pause, it is often for emphasis (although it may also be a sign of hard thinking!). You will be able to spot different non-verbal signposts in different lecturers.\(^3\)

---


\(^3\) Ibid., p.14.
The little book continues, under the heading “The Mechanics of Note-Taking”, to provide visual examples of how the student might like to lay notes out for clarity and precision, e.g. 1(a), 1(b), 1(c) etc..

In a simple and yet important way the desire to look more deeply into the question of education was prompted by meeting on a daily basis, both at university and in life generally, the seemingly self-refuting message epitomised in this guidance. What reasons, I asked myself, did the authors have for publishing this book? Is there a genuine need amongst students for such a book and, if so, does that imply something about the individuals being taught or does it say more about the kind of education being provided and the kind of learning encouraged in our schools and universities today? To extend the question somewhat, what are the connections between our attitudes as a society toward learning and the ways in which we see ourselves, interact, communicate, cooperate, what we prioritise; in short, how we live?

These are of course big questions and the more specific – yet no less far-reaching – research question that emerged from this interest has been shaped by the fact that a crisis in education is today so loudly and widely proclaimed, both publicly and in academic circles. Understanding the nature and causes of this crisis thus became the guiding focus of the project. As it turned out, after a long journey through the conceptual history and usage of the term crisis, as well as the theories, events and practices that have produced our contemporary education system, I ended up back where I started; that is, with the same contradiction that is so succinctly expressed within the pages of the study aid quoted above. The crisis reflects the fact that it is impossible to do your own learning and have your learning done for you. In other words, we cannot live both, for they ultimately represent mutually exclusive ways of being in the world. The crisis is, in one sense, the continuous re-experience of the tension that exists between these two ways of being. At the same time it represents a decision that is faced every day, at each moment, by every person: the decision about how one is going to live one’s life.

This thesis argues that the perceived crisis in education, in its various manifestations, is symptomatic of an ongoing attempt to conceal this tension, and in so doing, ultimately avoid the decision. Managing this involves the creation of what can be described as an increasingly sophisticated system of make-believe, for want of a better phrase. Living both answers is impossible, yet it is possible to live one while pretending to live the other,
even to the point where the pretence becomes more real than life itself. This pretence can be glimpsed wherever a statement about the world, or what is being done in it, is contradicted by the world, or what is done, as illustrated by the example above. The statement “you must do your own learning”, and any number of similar declarations, does not change the fact that our learning is continuously being done for us, something that is shown not just by the existence of the book itself but by the character of the whole education system, and indeed, our political system.

At an individual level if I say I am doing one thing and in fact do another, the reality of my actions is likewise not altered by what I say. However the statement – the *saying* – is significant, for it reveals either that I believe my actions to be otherwise, or that I aim to give the impression that they are otherwise, for whatever reason. In the former case, the pretence has become my reality. In the latter, appearing to be true to a certain principle, convention, or ideal perhaps, is more important than actually doing so. Whichever way we look at it, therefore, at the heart of this pretence is some form of dishonesty, whether it be a self-deception, a deception of others, or both.

Maintaining this pretence thus relies on greater and greater efforts to conceal the truth. These efforts consist not just in the development of personal mechanisms of denial – apparent in a culture where even self-reflection is externalised – but relationships, institutions and the whole social structure are recruited to the cause. The pretence, and as such the contradictions between word and deed, policy and rhetoric, language and experience, are projected and played out on a wider social stage, evolving into a system which both mirrors and reinforces the initial deception. Today’s ‘learning society’ presents clearly, and in its most intense form yet, how the principle of modern politics has become the facilitation of this lie: essentially, the lie we tell ourselves about how we are living our lives. As a consequence of its politicisation, the function of education too has become the perpetuation of various techniques of self-avoidance. This thesis aims to show that it is at this level that the crisis exists. It is only at this level, therefore, that it can be properly addressed.
CRISIS-TALK

We know the problems we face in education are a microcosm of the problems we face in all of British society.

(Michael Gove, speech to the Conservative Party Conference, 2009)\(^4\)

The pervasiveness of crisis-talk in the field of education and education policy is easily seen.\(^5\) Indeed, there can be little doubt that crisis-talk has become an all-embracing discourse within which a variety of issues relating both specifically and generally to education are brought together and presented as symptoms. Examples of this tendency abound, the most obvious being found in the popular media where it often happens that details of a specific controversy are identified and displayed as evidence for overall system failure and social breakdown.\(^6\) Whether the “funding crisis”, the “teaching crisis”, the “class war crisis”, the “marking crisis” or any other item taken from the long list of perceived problems, each particular “fiasco” is presented as yet another symbol for what one reporter labelled “the worst crisis in education for 50 years”.\(^7\) In many cases the crisis is referred to as a background reality that everybody knows about, simply a statement of fact. For example, an article in The Sunday Express stated that Britain’s schools were to be given more freedom as Government “lays out its plans for solving the crisis in education”.\(^8\) Another writes of the Government’s “denial of a crisis in education” that “not only exists but intensifies”.\(^9\)

The term crisis is also used by public officials and politicians, again with a tendency to draw attention to particular symptoms coupled more often than not with the identification of a specific cause or reason. Nick Clegg, at the time contender for leadership of the

---


\(^5\) Although the arguments made here apply to British and Western society generally, all quoted public documents and policy statements refer to education in England and Wales.


\(^8\) Tim Shipman, “Headteachers to Take to Tackle Crisis in Our Control in Bid Classrooms,” Sunday Express, September 2, 2001. See also Richard Garner cited in the Independent, November 4, 2000, p. 6

Liberal Democrats, is reported to have said in 2007 that the “crisis in education” was a “crisis of [inherited and permanent] disadvantage”.\(^{10}\) A member of the Opposition, then Shadow Education Secretary Damien Green, was quoted in 2002 detailing a list of failures (among them a shortage of teachers and problems with student support) signifying a “quiet crisis” in education which “needs tackling urgently”.\(^{11}\) Announcing that education would be a priority in the up-coming Conservative campaign, Green stated “we will not let the government escape its responsibilities for these crises...”\(^{12}\) Sir Claus Moser, who was to become Chairman of the Basic Skills Agency and author of the influential Moser Report on numeracy and literacy improvement strategies, explained in his address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1990 his take on the “deep-seated crisis in education”, both in terms of personal suffering and with regard to national economic competitiveness.\(^{13}\) He is reported as having proposed the set up of a programme of “crisis priorities” and warned Government against the dangers of too many and diverse policy initiatives: “There have been so many studies. No more studies, just action”.\(^{14}\) Gordon Brown, at the time Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and again in the context of an election campaign, wrote in 1996 that “Tough choices are essential if Labour is to solve one of the hardest social and economic problems of all: the crisis in education and employment faced by young people in Britain”.\(^{15}\)

In keeping with a natural interest in the creation and sustainment of spectacle, it is unsurprising that it is precisely such language that draws the attention of the media. In so far as the media serves as a “paper of record”\(^{16}\) for society, however, it is clear that a general sense of crisis exists. The belief that education is “fundamentally deficient”\(^{17}\) is a threat not only to the wellbeing of our children but leaves the impression that the very future of the nation hangs in the balance. The media coverage of the report of the Cambridge Review of Primary Education published in February 2009 provides some pertinent examples of this: “Generation of pupils let down by focus on tests” leads *The


\(^{12}\) Ibid..


\(^{14}\) Ibid..


Telegraph;¹⁸ The Independent heading states “Our primary schools are short-changing their pupils” and goes on to say the report is “right to raise alarm”;¹⁹ The Guardian’s Education Editor asks “Where now after damning indictment of education” and provides details of the Review’s “blueprint for a radical new kind of schooling”.²⁰ The general importance and perceived urgency of the education question contribute to an emphasis on immediate action to resolve these problems and the national discussion of education takes place in the context of a continuous process of critical reviews, “research-based” proposals, timetabled strategies and programmes of reform.

Crisis-talk is by no means restricted to the realm of public debate, reflecting as it does the complex interplay of media and political interests. While indeed a significant factor as we will see below, the phenomenon of crisis-talk cannot as such be explained purely in terms of political machinations during times of reform. Scholars commenting on education have regularly employed the term. The 1970s, marking the beginning of a sea-change in the direction of education policy within the wider context of a shift in economic and financial policies, saw an outpouring of criticism of education policy and practices. Crisis-talk with reference to both the economy and education was rife, particularly as the line between education and economic policy became increasingly blurred. Where education is constituted as economic policy,²¹ its successes and failings must always be determined in relation to the economy.

The series of pamphlets known as the Black Papers published in the late 1960s and early 70s, edited by Brian Cox and Tony Dyson, exemplify the controversy of the time. The essays called for, among other things, a return to traditional methods as a counter to the reputed moral breakdown and decline in standards that accompanied the “sentimental” child-centred methods of the “progressivists”.²² In the Letter to Members of Parliament that prefaces the papers, Cox and Dyson wrote

In this Black Paper, we again suggest that if informed, civilized, mature and well-balanced citizens are wanted for the future, we must scrutinise most carefully those educationalists who teach hatred of authority and contempt of

¹⁸ Ibid.
tradition; who nurture ignorance and self-indulgence as a point of principle; and who disregard the claims or indeed the realities of the social world.\textsuperscript{23}

This strong language, although based on somewhat dubious evidence,\textsuperscript{24} was enormously influential in terms of public perceptions of educational decline, contributing to national anxiety about standards which set the context for a heightened political interest in educational matters. The description of decline is followed by a call to parents, teachers and Members of Parliament to “speak out on the present day abuses in education”.\textsuperscript{25}

Also in the vein of moral and cultural degeneration, Rhodes Boyson (who later became Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department of Education and Science in Margaret Thatcher’s government) in a 1975 book titled \textit{The Crisis in Education} suggested one need not be a radical to “realise there is rising doubt about both the effectiveness and values of much modern education”.\textsuperscript{26} Against the long-term background of the Victorians’ optimistic hopes for education to not only eradicate innumeracy and illiteracy but bring about a profound cultural rejuvenation, he points out how many of these hopes have been disappointed. As with the independent reviews mentioned above, he proceeds with a list of the “objective evidence”\textsuperscript{27} of failure (the symptoms), the “reasons” or cause (diagnosis) and finally a detailed “plan for [the] revival” and healing of the education system (solution).\textsuperscript{28} In addition, therefore, to setting out the problems he attempts “to suggest what we, and others in Western Europe and America, must do to salvage our standards and to make our schools and universities more effective instruments in maintaining – or even restoring – a free, liberal and satisfying society”.\textsuperscript{29}

Like the Victorians, Boyson saw education in terms of its role in achieving specific wider social aims. The free, liberal and satisfying society is clearly seen as the end of education. As Boyson himself indicates, however, the question of what the ends of education ought to be is not the same as the question of whether education is actually achieving its currently specified objectives.\textsuperscript{30} The latter is obviously easier to answer than the former. It is

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p.15.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{26} Rhodes Boyson, \textit{The Crisis in Education} (London: Woburn Press, 1975), p.i.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid..
possible thus, and perhaps to be expected, for talk of “standards” (falling or otherwise) in connection to particular educational “objectives” to be ongoing without ever creating the need for a discussion about the overall aims of education, or indeed, determining whether there is any real connection between those standards and a free, liberal and satisfying society.

The criticisms made by Boyson and other Black Papers contributors formed part of the context for the increased intervention of government into schooling, particularly as education became harnessed to a large scale programme for social and economic restructuring. The catalogue of evidence for a failing education system, at least from a Conservative perspective in the 1970s and 80s, which included the general decline of culture and participation and an absence of social and national cohesion, along with the continuously stressed need to enhance competitive edge in a globalised world, show the level at which the crisis was understood to exist. Peter Scott observed in the 1980s that Britain’s traditionally benign public culture, even the British character itself, seems to be passing through a period of strain and crisis on a scale not experienced since the years surrounding the First World War – or even, some would argue – since the successful consolidation of industrial society in the mid-nineteenth century.

Crisis-talk in education is thus placed within a wider framework of crisis, that of British society as a whole. It does not, however, end here. Still in the context of rapid social and economic transformation post-World War Two, troubles in the British system have been described as an embodiment of a general worldwide crisis in education that was only intensifying in the 1980s and, presumably, continues for similar reasons to this day. Educational systems, despite numerous reforms, have “adapted all too slowly in relation to the faster pace of events on the move all around them….The consequent disparity between educational systems and their environments is the essence of the worldwide crisis in education”. For Coombs, the combination of high expectations in education and the existence of multiple and deep-seated obstacles to the processes of change and adaptation plays a serious part in preventing societies from “making the optimum use of education

32 Ibid., p.105.
and of educated manpower to foster national development”. The reference to “educated manpower” clearly points towards a conception of national development in economic terms. The relationship of educational goals and economic requirements here too has the important dynamic that it is professed factors of economic productivity which, as ends in themselves, determine priorities in education rather than educational and other perceived cultural goods directing the course and concerns of economic life.

We can see, therefore, that not only is the debate in education greatly influenced by the context of globalisation, but emphasis is placed (as with Cox above expressing the need to conform to the “realities of the social world”) on keeping the focus in education firmly grounded in the real, practical world. This world is one that acknowledges the superiority of market competition as an organising principle in social and educational relations. The European Commission, for example, found that

Whenever educational systems have been tempted to follow fashionable utopias that seek to break [the]...filtering mechanism that are founded in a form of individual competition, the experiments have failed: education has disconnected itself from the business world and, more generally, from our societies, which do not work that way.

The crisis discourse in education is thus intimately bound up with questions of identifying social needs and realities and finding practical ways of addressing them. Ways – whether fully realised or not – that take into account not just how business and society work, but given the field itself, how children ‘work’. The indication that these questions are not being adequately answered is hinted at by Coombs himself when he draws attention to a new dimension of the crisis in education emerging in the 1980s, that of “a crisis of confidence in education itself”.

While it is common for educational crises to be attributed to various socio-economic factors, often within the framework of prevailing political/ideological conflicts, there are observers who look for the causes deeper (and less temporal) in Western culture and civilization. Catholic historian Christopher Dawson also described what he saw as a moral breakdown in his book *The Crisis in Western Education*, but in a sense wholly distinct

---

35 Ibid.
36 Jones, *Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present*, p.150. (My emphasis).
from that referred to above as a key element in the Conservative reforms of the 1980s and 90s. For Dawson the crisis has a spiritual and religious dimension, as political colonisation of all aspects of education and culture coincides with (indeed, is largely responsible for) the secularisation of society and subsequent relegation of moral and spiritual matters to the confines of an ever-shrinking private sphere. The secularisation of Western society brought with it an end to “those objective and moral standards and values which provided a spiritual basis for social and political life”. A growing sense of spiritual unrest and maladjustment is the result. The modern state, more rich and powerful than any past community, is nevertheless “disturbed by an obscure sense of collective guilt which expresses itself in revolutionary movements and in the cravings of social idealism for some political or economic panacea which will automatically produce the perfect society”.

Dawson’s position thus pinpoints as cause the very notion that forms the basis of the solutions presented in the instances of crisis-talk mentioned above; namely, the belief that state influence in education is crucial to the resolution of society’s social, economic and moral problems. For Dawson, despite wide acknowledgement of deep-seated problems, the characteristically “modern” worldview seeks treatment in an overhauling of the machinery of civilization, that is to say, it expresses a belief that the cure lies in greater efficiency and ‘up-to-dateness’. He contrasts this with the view that genuine improvement requires a change not in form but in the spirit of civilization. This is, in essence, the Christian perspective, one which is bound to protest against any social system which claims the whole man and sets itself up as the final end of human action, for it asserts that man’s essential nature transcends all political and economic forms. Civilization is a road by which man travels, not a house for him to dwell in.

Religion, in Dawson’s view, ought not to be treated as a social tonic to be administered in difficult times, nor need it be allied with any particular social or political reforms aspiring to implement this or that vision of social improvement. Rather its power lies in the impulse for transformation which comes from altering the focus of human thought and

40 Ibid..
41 Ibid., p.vii.
42 Ibid., p.xv.
opening what has become the “closed house” of secular culture to the possibility of a larger world.\textsuperscript{43}

Coming from a similar perspective, Oxford historian Marjorie Reeves argued more recently that it is the “inner” or “hidden” areas of life and most profoundly the human personality which are the concern of the teacher. The failure to recognise this lies at the heart of the deep problems in education. In a work which again proclaims a \textit{crisis}, this time in Higher Education (HE), she writes of what is “essentially a crisis of spirituality” in the academic profession today.\textsuperscript{44} Dawson and Reeves thus formulate their account of the educational crisis in the context of a wider critique of modernity, modern trends and attitudes, as have others including for example Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s, M.J. Adler in his criticisms of American progressivism in 1939 and Hannah Arendt in a paper written in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{45} Crisis-talk specifically related to education is thus both pervasive and ongoing, with education in the Western world being described as in or facing crisis with some consistency throughout the twentieth century.

There are however still further steps backward, as it were, to be made, enhancing our perspective to include the nineteenth, eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. \textit{Crisis} used as a metaphor for social, economic, political and spiritual disorder dates to the middle of the seventeenth century when general ‘times of crisis’ were heralded, cries which have been echoing ever since in all manner of social criticism.\textsuperscript{46} In 1643 Scottish historical writer and clergyman Robert Baille noted in his \textit{Letters} that “this seems to be a new period and crise of the most great affairs”\textsuperscript{47}. In the eighteenth century Jean-Jacque Rousseau foretold centuries of political upheaval: “The crisis is approaching and we are on the edge of a revolution”.\textsuperscript{48} It was the French statesman the Marquis d’Argenson who, also in the

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p.123.
\textsuperscript{46} The Online Dictionary of Etymology says crisis transferred from its medical to more general sense in 1627; first as medical term c. 1425. Koselleck says, referring to Duden, that it began being used as a medical term in English in 1543.
eighteenth century, was apparently the first to write of *economic crisis*,\(^{49}\) a phrase which today inundates popular and scholarly discourses. Prior to that, *crisis*, it is asserted, existed as a purely technical medical term. Used by Hippocrates in his theory of crisis as a turning point in a disease, the term was given to Latin by Roman physician Claudius Galen (c.129-200 AD) and eventually the vernaculars with the returning interest in Greek medicine in the sixteenth century.\(^ {50}\) It began being used in English in the medical sense in the middle of the fifteenth hundreds.\(^ {51}\) Although *crisis* was used in ancient Greece in an extended sense by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, there were important differences from how it has come to be used today as we will see below.

While it is thus true that particular problems in a society’s education system have often served as an illustration or been explained in terms of a broader theory of crisis, it is also the case that the phenomenon of crisis-talk itself is a distinguishing feature of the modern period. What is more, there is no indication that crisis-talk is abating. On the contrary, it only seems to be intensifying. This persistence suggests continuities, ones which exist despite on the one hand the vast changes brought by the social, political and technological revolutions of the last few centuries, and on the other what is seen in the last few decades as an intellectual break with the Enlightenment project represented by various “critical turns”.\(^ {52}\)

Centrally important to the thesis, therefore, is the question of how the current crisis-talk in education, politics and economics is connected to a much deeper and ongoing sense of crisis in Western society since the seventeenth century. The persistence of this talk is even more intriguing given that all definitions (and present-day dictionaries offer no less than five) clearly emphasise crisis as a transient phenomenon. Of course, the transitional nature of the epoch as a whole is frequently pronounced. Hegel famously wrote that “ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era” and the Spirit is “in the labour of its own transformation”.\(^ {53}\) The persistence of crisis-talk is often viewed in connection with

---


\(^{50}\) Starn, “Historians and Crisis,” p.5.

\(^{51}\) The Online Dictionary of Etymology states the use of crisis in the vernacular as a medical term dates to 1424, probably referring to the French. Koselleck’s work appears to confirm this.


the sheer pace and extent of societal change and resulting experience of instability, uncertainty and anxiety, the latter incidentally being today increasingly recognised not just as a mental phenomenon of individual concern but as a more pervasive and general state or mood.\textsuperscript{54} Speaking of the unprecedented intellectual turmoil which commenced in the late 1600s with the rise of Cartesianism and spreading of the mechanistic worldview, Jonathan Israel talks of “a sense of shock and acute danger” penetrating Western consciousness.\textsuperscript{55} While this “crisis of the European mind” admittedly took place primarily amongst elites, amounting to a whole scale rejection of existing legitimisations of moral and political authority, “it was precisely these elites which moulded, supervised and fixed the contours of popular culture”.\textsuperscript{56}

The notion that this sense of shock and danger – or perhaps the less acute but nonetheless insidious experience of diminished certainty that is captured but not quite explained by the term \textit{anxiety} – reverberates in the contemporary world is supported by Koselleck’s study of the relationship between the phenomenon of crisis and the process of critique. A sense of being sucked into an unknown future at a breathless pace, combined importantly with the “pressure of our post-theological society to justify politics and morals without being able to reconcile the two”, these were the challenges faced by the Enlightenment “and they produced attitudes, mentalities and behavioural patterns which have survived the special circumstances of their birth”.\textsuperscript{57} If the unknown, or “nothingness” as Heidegger put it,\textsuperscript{58} continues to be a defining feature of modern existence, then there is understandably a constant demand for the creation of new certainties, new answers about self and the future.

Crisis-talk today thus represents at one and the same time something transitional and something ongoing. The constancy is the transition itself, the “permanent revolution” that Rousseau predicted.\textsuperscript{59} It is, however, within the concept of revolution – in the newer sense of the permanent re-creation of man and society – that the language of crisis returns us to the matter of discrepancy as well as that of spiritual substance raised by Dawson and Reeves above. The “spirit” is perhaps labouring to transform itself yet remains

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.5.
\textsuperscript{58} Heidegger, cited in Pietzner, ed., \textit{Aspects of Curative Education}, p.101.
\textsuperscript{59} See Koselleck in Chapter 5.
fundamentally fettered to forms of social organisation and practice which themselves derive from instincts and decisions of a past time. In this sense the crisis does consist “precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.

CONCEPTUALISING CRISIS

The ancients looked on each crisis as a blessing:
a liberation, the enforced breaking
of new ground.
Favourable to them was anything
that helped our progress
from darkness to light.

(Ann Henning Jocelyn, Keylines, 2000)

Concepts need not be fixed. The discussion in this thesis draws on the possibilities presented by exploring alternate meanings and connections for a concept that is used generally in a particular way or set of ways. The process may lead to new connections, or reveal half-forgotten ones, as well as emphasise the opportunities that are created or hindered by the meanings we give a word. Where crisis has become a label that applies to a specific set of circumstances delineating a specific set of responses or actions (as is exemplified in the logic of “crisis management planning”), the crisis-problem can only be that which is entailed within pre-existing solutions. Procedures become a substitute for decision-making. The aim here is to offer an account of crisis that does not contribute to the problem but maintains it as an ongoing problem itself. In other words, an account that leaves the relationship between the phenomenon and concept open to constant reinterpretation. Since crisis is a part of human experience, investigating the crisis in education is more of a process of engagement with this problem than the identification of a fault in the system. It is not therefore merely a matter of thinking differently about crisis, however, but a process that suggests crisis can help us think differently about thinking.

---

60 Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, p.276.
62 I came to this way of describing it after reading Claire Colebrook, Gilles Deleuze (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.17.
The word *crisis* derives from the Greek *kρισις* meaning decision, judgement, event, issue, or turning point, from *kρινει* ‘to decide’, relating also to ‘discern’. H.G. Liddell in a *Greek-English Lexicon* writes *kρισις* is a “separating, putting apart; a picking out or choosing; a deciding or determining; a judgement, sentence; a trial; a dispute or quarrel”.

*Crisis* encompasses therefore both the sense of the reaching of a crucial point in a situation (objective crisis) and the sense of making a judgement i.e. *criticism* (*Kritik*), the reaching of a verdict (subjective critique). ‘Critical’ is thus ‘of the nature of the crisis’ as well as the ‘ability to make judgements about’ something.

The connection between *crisis* and *disease* we have from Hippocrates who used the term in his medical science, stressing the ‘judgement’ aspect (*χρινω- judico*) of it. Crisis was both a turning point in the disease itself and the judgement made about the nature of the disease and its course. Redman Coxe notes in his translation of the writings of Hippocrates and Galen that

> By them [the ancients] a crisis was considered to be a sudden and unlooked-for change in a disease, pointing to recovery or death, occasioned by the contest between nature and the disease; wherein, if she was superior, the patient was preserved, otherwise death was the result. In a more limited sense, the term sometimes was applied to the secretion of some humour; but usually it was intended to convey the idea of a judgment formed on the existing disease.

The ‘discerning’ aspect of judgement, important as we will see for the discussion below, is contained in the word ‘diagnosis’ (the judgement is the diagnosis and the prognosis): *dia* which is ‘apart’ and *gignoskein* which is ‘to learn’, or perhaps ‘come to know’, indicate

---

63 C. T. Onions, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology; Ed C T Onions* (Clarendon Press, 1966). It also says *crisis* is a turning point in a disease; a vital or decisive stage in events.
66 Redman Coxe, “Hippocrates and Crisis” in Hippocrates and Galen, *The Writings of Hippocrates and Galen,* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1846). “A salutary crisis required the following circumstances. 1. That it should be attended by a train of the most favourable signs or symptoms. 2. That it should be manifest and clear. 3. That it should occur on a critical day. 4. That it should be trustworthy. 5. Absolutely certain and secure; and 6. Of a character befitting both the disease and the patient. The imperfect crisis consisted in its not producing a perfect termination of the complaint, but in part only, leaving this for a future recurrence, which might be for the better or worse. If for the better, although not entirely removing the disease, yet the patient was evidently benefitted by it; whilst, in the opposite case, everything became exasperated and more dangerous. Many considered a crisis as depending upon the motions and influence of the moon and stars. Others supposed it owing to the greater or less degree of maturation of the humours, &c.; whilst others ascribed it to a difference in the constitution of patients, and to the plan of treatment that was pursued. The term crisis is derived from *χρινω, judico.*” (Ibid.).
that learning, judgement and diagnosis are inseparable. In other words, inherent to judgement is learning, and inherent to learning is judgement. Learning, we might say, comes about through a process of distinguishing the course of events and the judgement is not ‘about’ them but ‘of’ them, as it were. Crisis therefore encompassed a seeking of causes, emphasising truth and discovery: “through the symptoms to arrive at a general description and thence to penetrate, if possible, to the true classification of the malady”.

In his History of the Peloponnesian War Thucydides ostensibly attempted to do for history what Hippocrates was attempting to do for medicine. In the Plague of Athens a feverish contagion is depicted which has both physical and spiritual dimensions. The shock of disease resulted not just in structural breakdown but the disintegration of law and order exposed passions, motivations and true desires, revealing much about man’s love of power, avarice, ambition, cruelty, rage and revenge. While these passages are usually interpreted as proof of the ultimately self-interested nature of human behaviour, attention can be shifted from what is revealed by the crisis to the fact of revelation itself. In the same way that Hippocrates was trying to raise the science of medicine above “mere empiricism” Thucydides tried to take history beyond the “mere chronicle of events”, beyond what is an account of purely outer circumstances. The application of the Hippocratic method led history for Thucydides to become “the semiology and prognosis of human life”.

Scientific history for Thucydides therefore was the diligent and unremitting search for truth, and, like medicine, it has its own standards of evidence. His research, however, unlike much modern historical study, was among people rather than papers, as it was for Herodotus before him. The truths of history consist of in the first place the actual transactions which have taken place. Where this was based in Thucydides’ case on first-hand experience, independent corroboration was sought wherever possible. In the second place, the truths of history consist of “formulations”. Formulations are at once summaries and interpretations, in so far as these interpretations enter into and affect the course of events. To modern historians, Thucydides’ method of interpretation may seem “a strange

---

68 See especially the description of the Corcyrean Revolution in Thucydides, De Bello Peloponnesiaco, English Thucydides: Translated into English, to Which Is Prefixed an Essay on Inscriptions and a Note on the Geography of Thucydides; by B Jowett (Clarendon Press, 1900), 82-83.
69 Cochrane, Thucydides and the Science of History.
70 Ibid., p.27.
kind of realism” but this “quaint literary convention” (carried over from drama and epic by Herodotus) offers a vehicle for the expression of the different points of view – partial and conflicting as they were – which determined the transactions.73 The device enables the historian to withdraw himself from the picture and let the reader judge for himself, having presented the facts as well as represented the points of view of the key players.

According to Cochrane, far from displaying a cold detachment, the fundamental feature of this method is the cultivation of “that mysterious power of insight, which science postulates as a natural endowment of individuals and peoples”.74 This process is neither passive nor mechanical. Semiology and prognosis are really two aspects of the same active mental process; accurate observation and intelligent appreciation of data. This capacity of intelligent observation and reflection is rare and as such in Cochrane’s opinion is cause for the highest admiration.75 Nevertheless, the good social physician “will, in prognosis, keep strictly to the task of writing the ‘history’ of his patients, and he will reserve his schemes of social therapeutics for special treatment later, if he himself essays the task of treatment”.76

The good social historian, therefore, limits himself to the study of the signs of the disease and forecasting of the course of events. He does not attempt to offer a system of therapeutics, a task that is best left to the political philosophers.77 Cochrane is here undoubtedly stressing the need to be careful to not confuse the ‘is’ with the ‘ought’ as social schemes can only fail if they address a reality that is merely supposed, in both senses of the word, to be there. However, in drawing too sharp a line between diagnosis/prognosis and therapy, in particular between those who offer diagnosis/prognosis and those who are best equipped to construct a system of social therapeutics, there lies a real danger of exactly that which Cochrane is keen to avoid: namely, that the system of therapeutics takes on a life independent from observation and penetration of the symptoms and, ready-made, comes to not only influence the judgement of the disease but conceal its true nature.

In the second volume of Eric Voegelin’s epic work Order and History we find support for at least part of Cochrane’s analysis. Thucydides “used the medical conception of disease

74 Ibid., p.30.
75 Ibid., p.31.
76 Ibid., p.32.
77 Ibid., pp.30-31.
as a model in conceiving his kinesis; he was in search of an eidos or idea of the kinesis as well as of its causes; he wanted to explore and define this essence in order to furnish a basis for prediction (prophasis) in the future. More than just a narration of events, the kinesis is a movement that had meaning beyond physical clashes and conflict of passions, extending into the realm of moral breakdown and transfiguration. At the same time the kinesis is a unit in that it is “the catastrophic drama of men who are caught in the bewildering dilemma of necessity and ethos”. This unit is created through the device of speeches “which, as a chorus in tragedy, raised the dilemma to lucid consciousness”. The drama of the human soul is thus made transparent.

What Cochrane referred to as that rare and “mysterious power of insight”, Voegelin takes further and describes as the gift and trained ability for “discerning the typical in human situations, functions and actions, and a willingness to stylize reality in the direction of the discerned types...” This artistic “heightening of reality” into archetypes was possible in a culture with a high sense of form, where the willingness to form life into a “drama of the typical” could be fortified and facilitated by the construction of great paradigms by the poets. Hellenic culture was pervaded by this “mimetic interplay between types of life and art”. This in effect was the “essence” of classical culture; the development of theory as a “subtle heightening of the typical in reality.”

Thucydides’ method is therefore for Voegelin a “profound realism” as the theorising and object become almost indistinguishable. This is clearly stressing something other than the realism that Thucydides’ History is best known for, which becomes prescriptive rather than descriptive when a set of hypostatized universal truths come to colour all observation of events. Commenting on the long-term value of the History, and perhaps we can say historical reflection in general, F.E. Adcock stresses again the faculty of judgement:

---

78 Eric Voegelin, Order and History (Baton Rouge, La.; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p.354. Voegelin uses the term kinesis to denote a feverish movement from order to disorder, a disintegration of the establishment.
79 Ibid., p.358.
80 Ibid., p.365. (My emphasis).
82 Voegelin, Order and History, p.367.
83 Ibid., p.368.
84 Ibid., p.164.
The reader is to be a man who, in his own day, faces a situation, and faces it better in act or speech because he can discover how, in the past, men of like passions to his own acted and spoke in comparable situations. The work will not tell him what is destined to happen, it will train him to use his judgement, and it may give him the courage to act by the knowledge how in like situations ‘it actually happened’.\(^{86}\)

It is as well that Adcock puts the last part in inverted commas, for as Voegelin points out, an account of events that ‘actually happened’ is not the true meaning of the History.\(^{87}\) What Thucydides portrays is rather an “apocalyptic nightmare”: “If we understood the “reality” described by Thucydides as an apocalyptic nightmare, we gain a first approach to Plato’s much-misunderstood “idealism” as the attempt to overcome a nightmare through the restoration of reality”\(^{88}\). The chaos encapsulated in crisis is apocalyptic in that it has the power to reveal man to himself. It is a striking disclosure which, in a certain sense, allows for a re-connection to occur between how we are and how we perceive and/or describe ourselves to be. It is the exposure, in other words, of self-deceptions, whatever form they may take. Far from closing the future by prescribing the pre-givenness of human nature and the inevitability of human actions, through honest appraisal it creates an opening and starting point for new possibilities. For the Greeks “crisis situations became moments of truth where the significance of men and events was brought to light”.\(^{89}\) This feeling for the revealing possibilities within crises, as well as the theme of truthfulness, was captured as late as the eighteenth century by Thomas Paine. In his Crisis Papers, talking of how all nations are at some time or other subjected to sweeping “panics”, he wrote:

> Yet panics, in some cases, have their uses; they produce as much good as hurt. Their duration is always short; the mind soon grows through them, and acquires a firmer habit than before. But their peculiar advantage is, that they are the touchstones of sincerity and hypocrisy, and bring things and men to light, which

\(^{87}\) See World of the Polis, p. 364 for details.
\(^{88}\) Voegelin, Order and History, p.164,(My emphasis).
\(^{89}\) Starn, “Historians and Crisis,” p.4.
might otherwise have lain forever undiscovered...They sift out the hidden thoughts of man, and hold them up in public to the world.\textsuperscript{90}

It is in direct contrast to this conception of crisis as signalling moments of awakened consciousness, thereby entailing the potential for both learning and transformation, that the modern crisis is understood and responded to. Crisis-talk itself today represents and becomes symptomatic of a closed system that does and can only perpetuate itself precisely because the “system of therapeutics” – the political answer tied to a historical question – has come to conceal the nature of the disease. The treatment, coming first and indiscriminately, gets in the way of genuine penetration of the symptoms and thus “true classification of the malady” as and when these maladies arise. This process is correlative to one by which judgements relating to different spheres of social activity are removed from the people engaged in those activities, severing the vital link between observer and observed, theoretician and practitioner. The discussion of education in Chapters 2 to 5 demonstrates how the set of theories and related practices that today comprise the political answer have become wholly disconnected from the social problems they are supposedly addressing.

At one level, the circularity inherent in the politicisation of crisis is already apparent in the survey of crisis-talk in education given above, specifically because it demonstrates the tendency for evidence, cause and solution to be presented together in a neat package. Identifying a cause alongside clearly specified problems/symptoms not only provides a strong rationale for a particular course of action, it sets to a significant degree the parameters of the debate to follow. Rather than a moment of revelation, therefore, a crisis becomes “a moment of decisive intervention”\textsuperscript{91} where it is invariably the state that is “reconstituted as actor, as agent, as process”.\textsuperscript{92} Indeed, Hay goes so far as to suggest that “the very identification of a moment of crisis is an integral aspect of the process of state transformation”.\textsuperscript{93} Mobilising the perception of crisis involves the “formulation and triumph of a simplifying ideology” which must construct and find points of resonance with multiple and different experiences of state and economic failure.\textsuperscript{94} “It is to this politically mediated and ideologically filtered construction of crisis, and not to the ‘reality’ of the

\textsuperscript{90} T. Paine, \textit{Selected Works of Tom Paine; Ed H Fast} (Bodley Head, 1948), p.54. (My emphasis.)
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.: p.339.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.: p.323.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.: p.333.
failures and contradictions that it narrates, that competing state projects must address themselves”.

The politicisation of the crisis in education thus has an interesting double effect. On the one hand, the sphere of politics is ever-broadening as a political cure is sought for all that is encompassed within the considerably broad sphere of education and learning. On the other hand, the possibilities for what the crisis (and as such education and learning and politics) can be are ever-shrinking, constricted as we are by the need for the identified problem to fit a pre-prescribed solution that is itself increasingly standardised even across the political spectrum. At the level of day-to-day or decade-to-decade politics the crisis may be constructed differently depending on particular policies, party manifestos or ideological outlooks; in other words, according to differing systems of therapeutics. However, these apparently differing systems of therapeutics are themselves just minor variations within the wider general and modern system of social therapeutics that is the phenomenon of the politicisation of crisis itself.

The crucial feature within this repeating cycle of crisis and intervention is that diagnosis, in the sense described above, is skipped altogether. The once and for all treatment is consistently reapplied, taking no account of changes in the course of the disease or the nature of the disease itself. The existing diagnosis consists of judgements that are always about life and never of it, both a cause and reinforcing effect of the tendency for theory to become divorced from practice. The system of social therapeutics has taken on its own independent existence, evolving into an abstract world that nevertheless gradually colonises all aspects of social and personal life and, at worst, represents a distortion of human experiences and relationships. No revelation, and therefore no real learning or transformation, occurs.

95 Ibid.: p.334.
DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPY

The blind spot of contemporary science is experience.

(Francisco Varela)\(^{96}\)

Breaking the cycle of crisis and intervention and restoring crisis as a revelatory experience thus involves re-creating the opportunity for diagnosis. Creating the opportunity for diagnosis, or re-diagnosis, means first and foremost suspending for a moment the existing system of therapeutics; that is to say, suspending faith in the political answer. This includes reconsidering the accepted dynamic of individual/society as patient and government as doctor that is the tacit social contract underpinning the politicisation of crisis per se. At the same time, providing space for a different diagnosis would clearly allow for the emergence of different therapies. These therapies can neither be objective (in the sense of value-neutral and universally applicable) or permanent solutions; neither can genuinely new therapies exist prior to the existence, and indeed practice, of a wholly new method of diagnosis.

To avoid clear-cut distinctions between social problem and social cure, which invariably leads to the pitfall of fixed systems of therapeutics, a degree of openness can be maintained by conceiving therapy and diagnosis as part of the same continuous process. As in psychological treatment, therapy is the search for diagnosis and the recognition and acknowledgement of the problem is in itself therapeutic. As such, there is no absolute separation between observing, understanding and healing. There is no cure after the fact, but an ongoing re-diagnosis, a permanent re-engagement with the crisis itself.

Because therapy and diagnosis are part of the same process, new therapies do not arise merely out of new diagnoses but, as indicated above, an entirely new type of diagnosis. Stepping outside of the existing system of therapeutics, in other words, requires a different form of judgement altogether, a different kind of perception and method of theorising than that which is inherent to the existing diagnosis. The aim of Chapters 6 and 7 is therefore not strictly an attempt to offer an alternative diagnosis of the social and educational crisis in the contemporary world, but to explore ideas and practices that relate to the capacity for

diagnosis itself, in the original sense of the term. Since different therapies are inconceivable except out of the practice of a different thinking (which also can be described as a way of relating or a way of being) it is the possibility of different practices that are of interest, not new therapies themselves proposed as abstract, comprehensive or purely theoretical systems.

Cochrane talked vaguely of a “mysterious power of insight” that is behind the human being’s capacity for scientific reflection, drawing attention to the ongoing debate surrounding the application of that power of insight to the human, social world. Voegelin suggested more concretely that that power of insight for the ancient Greeks was the ability to behold and articulate the archetypal in human experience, possible only in a culture with a wholly different relationship to artistic form than is common to our own civilization. The same themes are present in Nietzsche’s reflections on history and education. The significance of history, he wrote, is:

not in universal ideas, like some blossom or fruit, but that its worth is directly one which indicates a known, perhaps habitual theme, a daily melody, in an elegant way, or elevates it, intensifies it to an inclusive symbol, and thus allows one to make out in the original theme an entire world of profundity, power and beauty. What is appropriate, however, in this process, before everything else, is a great artistic potential, a creative hovering above and loving immersion in the empirical data, a further poetical composing on the given types – to this process objectivity certainly belongs, but as a positive quality.97

Re-invoking that artistic and intuitive aspect of the human faculty of perception, poets and literary figures particularly of the so-called Romantic period often alluded to a form of imagination that is a higher form of seeing, one that in Emerson’s words “does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucent to others”.98 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote of a “delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object,

thereby becoming true theory.” 99 While this reiterates Voegelin’s account of realism derived from the study of the works of Ancient Greece, Goethe saw it as an “enhancement of our mental powers” belonging not to his but to “a highly evolved age”. 100 

It is in his synthesis and development of these and many related perspectives that Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy speaks to the potential for a different form of diagnosis. 101 Building in particular on Goethe’s phenomenological approach, which he felt was done “in the spirit of Greece”, 102 Steiner suggested that an enhancement of the powers of perception is not just a fleeting gift of grace to the creative personality nor a quality of a bygone age denied to our own, but a fully realisable transformation in human consciousness. Although not an attempt to revive the Greek cosmogonies, anthroposophy is an invitation to re-enter the “spirit of Greece” in so far as it is an attempt to show how worldviews and social forms can be shaped and nourished by what is revealed in “living” processes. It is presented, in other words, as a method distinct from that form of knowing which relies on non-human instruments for observation, in particular instruments of measurement that create a degree of distance between observer and observed. 103 Steiner endeavoured to illuminate the “blind spot” of the contemporary scientific outlook by indicating ways in which the experiential and human foundation of thinking and knowing can be restored.

With regard to the organic natural world, Goethe believed in the possibility for a more qualitative and participatory relationship between man and nature that could complement, not necessarily replace, the experimental scientific method. In developing this he sought to capture the “archetypal patterns” in the organic world, in the same sense that the apprehension of scientific laws can be considered the result of an intuitive experience of archetypes in the inorganic world. 104 Steiner felt that Goethe had discovered “how thinking

99 Cited in Ibid.: p.3.
100 Ibid.
101 What makes it difficult to situate Steiner’s work within the history of ideas or an intellectual tradition is the fact that he synthesised Eastern as well as Western esoteric schools of thought, in particular the ideas of karma and reincarnation. Without wanting to downplay the fundamental significance of these concepts in his world vision, a discussion of these elements is simply beyond the scope of the present project.
103 Ibid.
has to be applied in order to understand organic nature”, indicating by this rather unusual mode of expression that for him thinking has a passive as well as active element. To put it another way, he suggested a form of thinking which although consciously developed entails nevertheless a kind of surrender to the meaning in the world. The active part is that of reaching a more finely tuned state of receptivity; a state of openness to reality. It is in this view quite literally through changing (i.e. quieting or cleansing) one’s mind that one can cultivate a different – more intimate and direct – manner of perceiving. As Lipson observed, it is not the unknown that presents the greatest obstacle for human understanding, but the mistakenly known: “Well-padded by pseudo-knowledge, we pass through the most glorious showers and downpours of meaning, without suffering the tiniest insight. We stand in desperate need of surprise”.

Social life likewise needs to be thought about, and importantly, felt about, in an uncustomary way to be experienced anew. Human thinking and feeling “can learn to sense the vital potentialities in contemplating the natural organism and then be capable of applying this sensibility to the social organism”. By this is not intended a transfer of facts and ideas, or what is thought to have been learned about the natural world, to the social world. What is meant again is an inner orientation. The heightened sensibility (also an ‘inward’ transformation, although ‘inward’ is a somewhat misleading term as we will see below) that leads to the appreciation and possible articulation of scientific principles and laws in the natural world where they were not previously perceived is the result of a change and growth in the faculty of perception. It is this faculty, or sensibility, not the laws themselves, that Steiner believed could offer greater understanding of phenomena in the social world.

In the matter of diagnosis, the crucial proposition in Steiner’s work is that true discernment cannot be regarded as a function of the intellect alone. The intellect in his epistemology is characterised as that which grasps abstractly what is material and static, whereas both feeling and volition are part of experiencing and conceptualising the dynamic realms of social life and human relationships. It is for this reason that his teachings both in the realm of personal development and pedagogy deal extensively with the nature of feeling and

willing and their relationship to thinking. More specifically, he suggested that through the cultivation of a thought-life penetrated and essentially vitalised by feeling and conscious will – a process which he described as a “training” of the “faculties of the soul” – the individual can learn how to engage with the world in a more complete way. One can learn how to form judgements, as it were, out of the whole rather than just part of one’s being. It is because of a preoccupation with the intellect and subsequent focus on increasingly limited dimensions of human existence and ways of interacting with the world that science has lost touch with reality.

In tracing the roots of this state of affairs, Owen Barfield drew attention to the fact that the greatest significance of the scientific revolution was not in the emergence of new theories, but a new theory of theory itself. Copernicus and Galileo were representatives of the birth of a new kind of thinking, in other words, not because they offered a different hypothesis of planetary movements but because they asserted the truth of this hypothesis. Prior to this, hypotheses were mere devices for “saving the appearances” and Greek and medieval philosophers were not concerned that appearances could be “saved” by more than one hypothesis. Hypotheses were assumptions made for the purposes of a particular argument. Originally, the purpose of these assumptions as but useful models was recognised; gradually however the distinction between a model that offers an explanation for reality and reality itself disappeared. If the hypothesis, or model, “saved all the appearances” (i.e. offered an adequate explanation for experienced phenomena) it was held to be the truth. This attitude – as a primary assumption – constitutes a defining feature of the modern Western mindset.

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, still at the height of the general influence of Newtonian physics, it was with the long-term consequences of this attitude that Steiner was principally concerned. He argued that faith in the possibility for final answers would have a profound (and limiting) effect on the human faculty of perception itself and, as such, would have huge implications for human development as a whole. The prescience of his work is highlighted by the fact that today collective understandings of the world continue to be fundamentally hinged (as is language) on the mechanistic models for explaining the universe that were adopted by physicists of the scientific revolution, in spite of a huge shift in paradigm within physics itself. Posited and popularly accepted once as providing a

109 Ibid., p.51. For a discussion of the differences between “knowing how” and “knowledge of” see pp.55-62.
thorough and objective account of man, nature and knowledge, the still dominant view “has shown a remarkable suppleness in its capacity to appear to change without fundamentally altering its identity”. 110 Although there is much talk about a “new science”, the “guiding images and metaphors remain throughout quantitative, reductionist and mechanistic”. 111 In other words, though many of the cognoscenti may have updated their models, the scientific method in a very specific and outdated sense of the term maintains its cultural status as the only source of knowledge; at least, as objectively meaningful and thus socially useful knowledge.

The increasingly recognised problem with this is that whatever does not fit into a definitive branch of scientific investigation is called into question, possibly simply by its neglect as a field of study or something that can be talked about. As Sloan put it, “a huge hole opens up in reality in the space once occupied by everything most essential to human experience.” 112 What is “most essential” to human experience are qualities: “qualities that involve feeling and awareness, including those complex webs of qualitative relationships that go under the names of life, consciousness and conscience”. 113 Of course, human beings cannot and do not function without these qualities. What has occurred, however, and this is something clearly illustrated by the discussion of education and politics below, is that the hole tends to be filled by excessive and again ultimately substance-less “value talk”: “As the reality of qualities fade, values pullulate”. Value talk becomes “increasingly popular as a way of seemingly being able to deal with the centrally important human concerns without challenging the quantitative picture of reality handed to us by our dominant and taken-for-granted epistemology”. 114

The distinctiveness of Steiner’s work does not lie so much in his having critiqued this epistemology, nor does it lie only in his identification of the need to return to precisely these essential elements of human experience, but rather in his development and detailed description of a method for doing so. Anthroposophy is explicitly meant to be understood as a path of knowledge rather than a theory of knowledge. 115 The “spiritual exercises”

---

111 Ibid..
112 Ibid..
113 Ibid.: pp.4-5.
114 Ibid.: p.5. See also Alasdair MacIntyre’s discussion of “emotivism”.
which make up the steps along this path are presented as a practical means for the individual to regain a sense for the objective validity of the qualities of existence and in so doing restore himself to a holistic appreciation of reality. The term “spiritual” must be used for, as Pierre Hadot observes in his account of similar practices in antiquity, no other adjective can capture all aspects of these exercises: they are psychic, moral, ethical and intellectual; of thought, of feeling, of sensibility and imagination.  

The exercises constitute an investigation of one’s own consciousness but one that it is claimed will lead to a transformation of our vision of the world and indeed to “a metamorphosis of our own personality”.  

It is in the fact that Steiner’s approach was to emphasise ways of knowing rather than knowledge itself that it is here taken to represent at the outset a different type of diagnosis from that embodied in today’s crisis-talk. Anthroposophy, in so far as it is practised, is a specifically contemporary example of diagnosis as a way of life. Therapy is first and foremost a way of orientating oneself toward the world. It is not dependent on the externalisation of responsibility, which manifests as a faith in politics and evolves into the permanent system of therapeutics described above, but is a continually renewed lifelong quest for personal conversion. As a form of response to social sickness, therefore, anthroposophy is not grounded in the principle of revolutionary change but in what McKanan called the notion of “transformative presence”: “the idea that society changes when small groups of people begin living in a new way”.  

It is for this reason too that it is felt that anthroposophically inspired social initiatives (seen in the most positive light) can be characterised as efforts to resist what is the at once totalising and debilitating effect on man inherent to the dominant social system of therapeutics.  

Clearly, the concept of personal conversion and the seemingly simple idea that it is possible to “begin living in a new way” return us directly to the matter of learning; indeed, they allow for a far more optimistic consideration of what the term ‘learning society’ could mean than is offered by prevailing discourses which present learning as “the acquisition of new knowledge”.  

For Steiner, learning is the ability to re-perceive oneself and the world.

---

117 Ibid..  
119 See Chapters 4 and 5, in particular discussion of the European Commission White Paper *Towards the Learning Society.*
It was also his argument that this very ability is stunted by educational practices which demand independent judgement, in the form of intellectual or purely conceptual thinking, too early on in a person’s development:

Man is not in a position to judge until he has collected in his inner life material for judgement and comparison. If he forms his own conclusions before doing so, his conclusions will lack foundation. Educational mistakes of this kind are the cause of all narrow onesidedness in life, all barren creeds that take their stand on a few scraps of knowledge and are ready on this basis to condemn ideas experienced and proved by man often through the ages.\footnote{Rudolf Steiner, \textit{The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy}, trans. George and Mary Adams (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), p.45.}

It is also thus in the context of the discussion about the capacity for a different type of diagnosis – or new ways of theorising – that Steiner’s pedagogical methods take on a specific relevance. In particular, his emphasis on art, imagination and the importance of cultivating \textit{qualities of the soul} in schooling. Art, because it has a profound effect on human feeling and social will, does not merely exist alongside or to provide a balance to intellectualism, but fundamentally shapes the way a person orientates himself toward the world and forms opinions about it. “Artistic feeling pierces through the surface of things, and by doing so reaches their secrets”.\footnote{—, \textit{Knowledge of the Higher Worlds. How Is It Achieved?} (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1969), p.50.} The “feeling for truth” that can be developed in part through artistic activities is the key to preventing the tendency for people, imagining they are ripe for judgement, to “spoil their own power to receive openly and without bias the all-round impressions of life”.\footnote{Steiner, \textit{The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy}, p.46.} A judgement that is not built upon a gathered knowledge and experience of soul “throws a stumbling block in the way of he who forms it...We no longer receive a new experience as we should have done, had we not already formed a judgement connected with it”.\footnote{Ibid.}
OVERVIEW

*Might not the role of philosophy be to bring us to a more complete perception of reality, by means of a kind of displacement of our attention?*  
(Henri Bergson)\(^\text{124}\)

A starting premise of this project is that the prominence of education on today’s political agenda has a significance that goes deeper than various attempts to adapt society and its institutions to (and take advantage of) the fast-changing realities of an increasingly globalised world. In fact, the notion itself (a popular one as we have seen) that the crisis in education is rooted in a “gap” between practical economic requirements and their fulfilment plays a large part in preventing meaningful consideration of problems in education, not in the least because it treats the matter as one of efficiency and as such resolvable by technical and/or procedural methods. Although a critique of the societal status quo, this project will not attempt to include concrete proposals for policy reform, for such an exercise would merely constitute an example of the externalised therapy which is being critiqued. The personal nature of the crisis means it demands a personal response. The core theme of the thesis is that for reality to be changed it must first of all be faced. As such, rather than prescribe what needs to be done in the future, it stresses the more primary need to take full responsibility for what we are doing now. It is only this presence and truthfulness at an individual level which creates the opportunity for genuine transformation at the social level.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 aim to map the debate in education since the end of the Second World War, drawing attention to the major social, political, economic and ideological contexts that have shaped education policy and practices. While the structure is historical and follows a chain of events in a fairly conventional way, the primary purpose of this account is to highlight the recurrence of certain themes, ideas and disputes, and in particular, perceived problems and solutions. The tensions and contradictions of contemporary social life and discourses in this way reveal themselves. More specifically, Chapter 2 describes the terms of the post-war consensus and developments up to and including the Education Reform Act of 1988. Chapter 3 pauses in this historical narrative to discuss the critical

\(^{124}\)Cited in Hadot and Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, p.254.
response to the Act and draw attention to some of the more fundamental consequences and lasting implications of the reforms. Chapter 4 picks up the story again with the coming into power of Tony Blair’s New Labour in the 1990s and the advent of both what has been enthusiastically heralded as the ‘age of learning’ and what has become rather pejoratively known as the ‘performative society’. We leave the account at the point of the Conservative Party’s controversial victory at the polls in 2010 and the subsequent establishment of a Coalition Government.

Chapter 5 re-examines some of these recurring themes from a more directly critical stance and portrays this linear progression in terms of a system that has a number of clearly identifiable and closely interrelated features. The intention is to show that the relatively brief period covered in preceding chapters conforms in a variety of ways to a more long-term historical pattern which is not entirely hidden by excessive legislative activity and an apparent preoccupation with both novelty and change. Indeed, that very preoccupation with change, specifically of the revolutionary kind, is a feature which makes it possible to characterise the system as a cycle. Crisis-talk itself is just one point (in fact, it is in a sense the trigger) in a repeating cycle constituting a closed system of attitudes and practices which can be explained in light of their origins in the circumstances of the European Enlightenment. These circumstances saw the simultaneous emergence of a ‘total’ conception of human freedom, connected to a rejection of the past and an open, permanently re-creatable future, and a ‘total' answer, where the future and along with it the human personality became subject to perpetual political reconstruction. Historical interpretations of the Enlightenment as such provide different explanations for today’s co-dependency of a certain understanding of freedom and a certain function of politics. Avoiding the ‘total’ answer, therefore, entails re-thinking the nature of freedom and both the role and realm of politics.

It is just such a re-thinking that the engagement with Rudolf Steiner’s thought in Chapters 6 and 7 hopes to stimulate. Born in 1861 in Kraljevec (now Croatia) and writing and lecturing till his death in Switzerland in 1925, Steiner tried to communicate what he perceived spiritually; that is to say, what he described as fully appreciable “spiritual impulses” that form the basis of all individual and social life.\(^\text{125}\) Every aspect of his work is part of a grand picture of cosmic and spiritual evolution, and each course of study aimed to

\(^{125}\) Although he is often referred to as a ‘mystic’, Steiner himself rejected the term. He felt that ‘mysticism’ did not capture the rigorous and precise method of spiritual investigation he was attempting to describe.
present it from a different angle or emphasise its significance in a different area of human activity. His vision was so expansive it included the whole of creation, and yet his extensive output of over 30 books and 6000 lectures describes it in such detail it touches upon almost every imaginable field of knowledge. This, not to mention the difficulties posed by issues of translation and transcription (many of his talks are published from notes unrevised by the author), the distinctions Steiner himself stressed between the spoken and written word, and the fact that many of his lectures were delivered to specialist audiences in unique contexts, pose considerable challenges in presenting and discussing his ideas.

Beyond that, an immediate danger in proffering some form of outline or conceptual framework in the usual way is that it risks representing his work as a fixed and purely abstract system of thought. Not only would this undermine the present thesis, but it was something Steiner himself was keen to avoid and why his writings often took the form of meditations instead of academic monologues structured with clear beginnings and definitive conclusions. With all this in mind, and in acknowledgement of the limitations imposed by both writing itself and the requirements of a formal dissertation, the somewhat selective treatment of Steiner’s epistemology, his path of spiritual development, his pedagogical methods, and finally his perspective on political and economic life, is an effort to indicate some of the core principles and implications of anthroposophy without in so doing misrepresenting the practical spirit in which it was intended.

As Steiner remarked in one of his talks, “pointing to the reality is something quite different from proving a thing”. Proof, in other words, is something that can only be had through personal experience. The most that can be aimed for in an academic treatise is to shed light on outwardly perceptible falsities and inconsistencies, and to represent the plausibility of other ways of knowing and being. At the very least, from the perspective of the individual reader, the value of contemplating both a broader and deeper picture can be considered a process which in itself acts as a counter to the superficial and fragmentary nature of current endeavours to diagnose the crisis in education. Taking a step back from

---

126 Anthroposophy today informs not only a worldwide educational movement but an enormous variety of other economic, curative, agricultural, business and artistic initiatives. A Directory published by New View magazine in 2010 contains approximately 700 listings of existing groups, organisations and ventures inspired by Steiner’s work in the United Kingdom and Ireland alone (Tom Raines and Rosemary Usselman, Purple Pages Directory, 4th Edition).

the everyday – momentarily “displacing” ones attention – may allow one to return to the everyday with a fresher mind.
Chapter 2: Expansion and Intervention

Then this turning around of the mind itself might be made a subject of professional skill [techne].... It would not be concerned to implant sight, but to ensure that someone who had it already was not either turned in the wrong direction or looking the wrong way.

(Plato, The Republic)\textsuperscript{128}

THE POST-WAR CONSENSUS

In 1987 Kenneth Baker remarked that the education system in England is not the expression of a single guiding principle but far more the result of a long process of addition, adaptation and any number of historical compromises: “In short, it is a bit of a muddle, one of those institutionalised muddles which the English have made peculiarly their own”.\textsuperscript{129} To say that it remains something of a muddle is to understate the case and the amount of legislative activity and supporting initiatives since Baker’s time only make the task of getting to grips with the system more laborious than ever. Indeed, the rate at which diverse educational policies have emerged from the department responsible for education, under its various names and guided by the personal vision of different Ministers of State, has been described as having an almost feverish quality.\textsuperscript{130} This observation alone raises important questions about the degree of long-term continuity, coherence, quality and stability of education policy and resulting practice that can be achieved if the present trend of playing constant “catch-up” continues.

As a starting point, the end of the Second World War is a context with a number of features that are worth drawing attention to as precursor to the argument set out in Chapter 5. First of all, we are talking about the aftermath of a crisis that shook humanity to its foundations – economically, socially, politically and spiritually. In our interpretation of crisis, therefore, this represents a moment of great possibility for self and social revelation.


\textsuperscript{130} See below.
Secondly, as a consequence of this crisis (and perhaps also as a cause), we are talking about a time of great openness to change and transformation, particularly taking the shape of demands for the rights of the individual and social justice/equality connected to a growing social consciousness and concern for human dignity. Because discussion about education is almost entirely consumed within a political discourse of ‘left’ and ‘right’, these trends in societal development are often, and mistakenly, presented as opposing rather than complementary.

Thirdly, we have a large scale political response to this will and demand for change. The aftermath of the war presented an unprecedented opportunity for a popular and extensive programme of social planning and reconstruction, and the success of the Labour Party at the polls, to which fell the task of implementing the 1944 Education Act, was heavily aided by their ability to both capture and capitalise on the new mood. The post-war settlement consisted of a threefold commitment to the welfare state, to full employment and the co-existence of large public and private sectors in the economy. It marked not the beginning but an intensification of the trend, begun in the nineteenth century, of state involvement in multiple dimensions of citizens’ lives.

As a central part of this programme of reform we have the fourth feature, namely the expansion of state-provided education to meet both welfare and economic needs. The Beveridge Report presented education, along with health, housing and the commitment to full employment, as a major plank in the new social security system being set up and an important factor in the drive toward “the permanent achievement of a fairer society”. This was to be but one aspect of a “comprehensive policy of social progress”. The significance of the simultaneous increase in state influence with the universalising of education cannot be exaggerated.

Finally, all of this takes place in the immediate context of the fight and, importantly, victory, of liberal democracy against totalitarian dictatorships. Freedom had won, tyranny had lost. It has been suggested that the almost universal view in the 1940s that teacher autonomy is an essential ingredient of democratic society was in large part a reaction to the

---

132 Ibid., p.17.
all-too-recent experience of fascism in Europe and what can be accomplished by authoritarian leaders through the rigid control of education. As such, a major feature of the so-called post-war consensus on education was the degree of power left in the hands of teachers, demonstrating a reluctance on the part of policy-makers to “lay down the law” when it came to the day-to-day processes of school life. This reluctance was to vanish almost without a trace only a few decades later, at least where elite and influential opinions were concerned, a dramatic about-turn made possible largely through the adoption of a new discourse of accountability and, by extension, the nature of democracy itself. It will be argued in following chapters that these discursive shifts lead only to a misrepresentation of the true functions of the state and the purpose of politics.

The 1944 Education (Butler) Act itself reflected the educational and political debates of the 1920s, particularly the question of raising the school leaving age, the problems of unemployment, the economic growth of the nation, and what had become glaringly obvious social inequality. The Act ensured compulsory, free and universal education from the ages of 5 to 15, raising the leaving age from 14. Although permission was granted as of 1947 to raise the leaving age to 16 as soon as adequate resources were available, this provision was not implemented till as late as 1972. The Act created the formal distinction between primary and secondary education, paving the way for the introduction of selection at the point of transfer between schools by means of what was to become the controversial “11-plus” examination. It also established the “tripartite” system of secondary education made up of Grammar Schools, Secondary Moderns and Technical Schools, although as it turned out the Technical Schools were hardly developed. Chitty observed that, by 1958, less than four percent of secondary pupils attended a Technical School.

The express aim of the tripartite system was to guarantee “parity of esteem” amongst schools and easy movement between the three types. This objective was however far from realised and the legislation was widely accused of reinforcing hierarchical relations rather

136 Ibid. See also Jones, *Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present*, p.54.
139 Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, p.25.
than challenging them.\textsuperscript{140} This is not to deny a genuine belief amongst Labour figures commonly identified with the policy that a differentiated secondary system represented the best chance for disadvantaged children, even, interestingly, in the face of widespread scepticism amongst professionals and experts.\textsuperscript{141} The Act was guided in particular by the findings of three reports: the 1931 Hadow Report \textit{(The Primary School)}, the 1938 Spens Report \textit{(Secondary Schools)} and the 1943 Norwood Report \textit{(Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools)}.\textsuperscript{142} All of these relied heavily on psychological theories of child development which subsequently became the basis for the differentiated secondary system.

The Hadow Report of 1931 stressed the differences in natural capacity of children from birth and thus emphasised the importance of classifying children into “(a) those that are highly gifted, i.e. super-normal, (b) those of average ability, i.e. normal, and (c) those whose ability is below the average, i.e. sub-normal”.\textsuperscript{143} The Report stated:

\begin{quote}
Recent psychological researches, based mainly on the application of standardised tests of intelligence, indicate that, as regards innate mental capacity, the differences between individual children increase almost in direct proportion to their age. For instance, a child who is backward by one year at the age of five will probably be backward by two years at the age of ten, and by three years at the age of fifteen. Throughout the child's school life the ratio of his mental age to his chronological age appears to be fairly constant. By the end of the primary stage the differences have so far expanded that after the age of eleven different types of education are urgently needed.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

The Spens Report published in 1938 expressed similar, re-asserting that the mental differences between one child and another will reach a maximum during adolescence. This made it evident that children from the age of 11, “if justice is to be done to their varying capacities, require types of education varying in certain important respects”.\textsuperscript{145} This sketch of three basic types of mind was concretised in the Norwood Report of 1943 into different “aptitudes” and subsequent groupings of pupils, corresponding to three types of curriculum.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{142} Trowler, \textit{Education Policy}, p.2.
\bibitem{144} Ibid..
\end{thebibliography}
which in turn corresponded to three categories of occupation. As an example, children who amongst other innate capacities are interested in “learning for its own sake” are those who have traditionally entered the Grammar School and go on to the learned professions or other higher administrative positions. The second group, being concerned with the workings of material things, will attend Technical Schools to prepare them for the crafts suited to their particular virtues and interests. Finally, the third group is rather vaguely defined in the Report. It includes children who deal more easily with concrete than abstract things, have limited horizons and perhaps little ability to make broad connections and generalisations. This group’s occupation is not clearly specified, rather it is distinguished in terms of it being indeed other than the other two. Foreshadowing difficulties to come, the Report merely states that the kind of education suitable for this group will be developed in the future.\textsuperscript{146} Given these innate differences, in a wise economy of secondary education:

pupils of a particular type of mind would receive the training best suited for them and that training would lead them to an occupation where their capacities would be suitably used; that a future occupation is already present to their minds while they are still at school has been suggested, though admittedly the degree to which it is present varies.\textsuperscript{147}

The emphasis thus of the 1944 legislation was on the early identification of presumed innate capacities and fixed character, and the linking of that character to specific tasks or occupations in society. Although the authors of the Reports, and Butler himself, emphasised the importance of constructing an education system around the needs and “natural differences” of children, those needs and differences were defined in terms of the requirements of the labour market and as such characterise a relationship between education and work that was in no way fundamentally altered by the so-called education revolution some years later. In this regard, commentators have pointed out that the education policies of the 1940s tended more toward the shaping of children than responding to them. Much more than the establishment of an institutional system was involved in the reconstructions of the post-war period, for “what was also at stake was the role of education in forming particular types of individual, imbued with particular


\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p.4.
intellectual and affective capacities”. Here the aims of opening up schools to the working classes and facilitating the breakdown of social hierarchies becomes indistinguishable from what one historian called “an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behaviour of the working class”.\textsuperscript{149}

Within the differentiated system set up by the 1944 Act, the rationale for distinguishing between pupils specifically at the age of 10 or 11 was based on evidence that special abilities and interests often reveal themselves at that age. This however not always being the case, the Norwood Report suggested close and early observation of classroom work, special interests and qualities in individual children. This process of differentiation was to begin in primary school and the judgement of the teacher was to be the most important factor taken into consideration in choosing an appropriate educational path. As an aid to the accurate and fair matching of children to a certain type of education, teachers were to be allowed to make use of then still experimental intelligence and other types of performance testing.\textsuperscript{150}

While the Norwood Report, as indeed did Tawney in the 1920s, stressed the suitability of these only as supplements to the record of progress compiled by the teacher, this period marked the beginning of the use of externally set examinations that was to increase steadily in English education in the next decades in a way that profoundly affected both curriculum and teaching methods. The popularity of performance testing with authorities was heightened by the image of fairness and credibility they lent to the process of differentiation. Critics however suggest that precisely by making it appear to be an objective and un-biased process, testing merely facilitated the preservation of an essentially hierarchical social system.\textsuperscript{151}

By the late 1940s most local authorities used Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests which included tests of attainment in English and arithmetic, becoming known generally as the 11-plus.\textsuperscript{152} On the one hand, therefore, the intention for the post-war system to be a partnership between central and local authorities and schools and teachers, captured in the

\textsuperscript{148} Jones, \textit{Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present}, p.21.  
\textsuperscript{149} Cited in Lowe, \textit{Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History}, p.15.  
\textsuperscript{151} Lowe, \textit{Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History}, pp.184-5.  
\textsuperscript{152} Chitty, \textit{Education Policy in Britain}, p.25.
slogan “a national system, locally administered”, was undermined in practice by the degree to which teaching of a narrow curriculum was pressured by the “ever-rising sovereignty of the test”. On the other hand, as it was noted above, specific requirements regarding the content of curriculum and teaching methods were noticeably absent from the Act. While governments had the power to shape the overall character of institutional provision and had considerable influence on which discourse would dominate the educational scene, the “details of process” remained largely beyond their control:

...the laissez-faire policies under which the grammar and public schools had operated had been extended to schooling as a whole; and particular interest groups – local authorities, educationalists advancing progressive ideas, some teacher unions – had established positions entrenched enough to make impossible nationally directed change on matters which had become the traditional preserve of local policy.  

This relative idleness of central government was to metamorphose into intense activity and involvement in the 1980s and 90s, but not before a grassroots movement had succeeded in bringing about considerable changes to the secondary school system.

THE MOVE TO COMPREHENSIVES

As long as learning is connected with earning, as long as certain jobs can only be reached through exams, so long must we take the examination system seriously. If another ladder to employment were contrived, much so-called education would disappear, and no one be a penny stupider.

(E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 1927)

While the upheavals and transformations of the war ended with an optimistic mood about the possibilities for breaking down class barriers and hierarchical social structures, much of the criticism of the system introduced by the 1944 Act centres around the fact that it was in fact quite conservative, tending to confirm existing practices and hierarchies rather than radically altering them. Contributing to this was the fact that the tripartite system never

154 Jones, Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present, p.52.
actually existed in practice. Few Technical Schools were built, and those that were tended to be modelled to a great extent on the existing Grammar School. At the same time, they were generally perceived as ‘second best’ to the Grammar. The Secondary Moderns, for their part, were at once catering for the majority of children yet had the lowest status, offering likewise a “watered down” version of the Grammar’s academic curriculum. In addition to this they suffered from poorer staff-student ratios, less qualified staff, inferior buildings and other factors that reinforced their low image. Neither the objective of creating diversity of curricula nor that of ensuring a parity of esteem were thus achieved. Faced with the prospect of either Grammar or Secondary Modern at the age of 11, most pupils headed to the latter where they were not prepared or encouraged to aspire to any significant activity in society.\(^{155}\)

In particular the selection process and 11-plus exam were increasingly shown to be biased toward the middle class, casting serious doubt on claims of a meritocratic system where each child’s individuality and potential is nurtured.\(^{156}\) A number of major reviews of the Act published from the early 1950s pointed this out, drawing attention to, among other things, the relationship between educational performance and class background, the deficiencies of schools in poorer areas, and the inadequacies of the selection process and criteria. The Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education chaired by Samuel Gurney-Dixon in 1954 (Early Leaving) concluded that:

> The great majority of boys and girls in the sample can be classified according to the nature of their fathers’ occupations; and, armed with this knowledge of circumstances which reflect the social background, we can see what relation it has both to the chances of admission to a grammar school and to a successful career in it.\(^ {157}\)

The authors of the Newsom Report (Half Our Future) published in 1963 similarly associated themselves firmly with those who argued that the progress of certain groups of children was hindered far more by social background than genetics and the tests used so far measured largely acquired and not innate characteristics. A great deal is made in the Report of the “unrealised talent” that could and ought to be made use of in the interests of

\(^{155}\) Lowe, Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History, p.46.

\(^{156}\) Trowler, Education Policy, pp.3-4.

both human justice and economic self-interest. It was however primarily to the economic case that they turned as being most popularly influential and persuasive. The authors put forward the case that the future employment pattern will require a much larger pool of talent, and it is those who were at the time deemed “average” or “below average” who would supply it. It was not simply a matter of needing more skilled workers, but an “intelligently adaptable” labour force which could meet the new demands of a changing economic environment.\(^\text{158}\)

The education debate at the time was especially influenced by the Central Advisory Council’s 1967 Report *Children and their Primary Schools*, informally known as the Plowden Report. The Plowden Report acknowledged that before the war streaming pupils was regarded as an effective device for opening Grammar Schools to talented working class pupils. In reviewing the differentiated system, however, the Report criticised its social divisiveness and its effect of giving children from middle-class backgrounds a better chance than working-class children to secure Grammar places. Likewise, Grammar School pupils had better career opportunities than children who attended the Secondary Moderns. There was evidence to suggest that “streaming serves as a means of social selection” as more middle-class children were found in upper streams and working-class children in lower than their test scores warranted.\(^\text{159}\) The Report queried how much of this might be due to assumptions made by teachers that clean and well-behaved children are abler than unkempt or rowdy children. Streaming, it concluded, is inevitably inaccurate. If the upper and lower ability streams were both of good quality and children stood equally high in the affection and respect of staff, it would not perhaps matter so much where children were placed. However, the authors of the Report found much to suggest that teachers were also being “streamed”, with the older, more experienced and better qualified teachers assigned to upper streams, with better classrooms, more generous supplies of equipment and so on.\(^\text{160}\)

The Plowden Report is best known for firmly placing the child at the heart of the educational process. Re-asserting an educational maxim with a long heritage, it stated that “No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable

\(^{158}\) Newsom Report in Ibid., p.280.  
\(^{159}\) Plowden Report in Ibid., p.321.  
\(^{160}\) Ibid., pp.320-22.
to him”.\footnote{Bridget Plowden, Children and Their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) (London: HMSO, 1967), p.7.} Attempting to take into account research (predominantly Jean Piaget’s) done on the physical, emotional, moral, imaginative and intellectual developmental stages of the child, as well as factors of upbringing and environment, the Report was widely considered to lend official support to the revival of progressive ideas about curriculum and pedagogy that were becoming increasingly popular in the 1960s, especially among primary school teachers.\footnote{Jones, Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present, pp.54 and 84.} Progressivism, or perhaps given the ambiguity of this term it is better to refer to “child-centred education”, takes as its starting point perceived learning needs of the child during different periods of growth and development rather than “beginning with the intention of transmitting that knowledge which is held to be most worthwhile at any given time by those with the power to define it”.\footnote{Kevin J. Brehony, “What’s Left of Progressive Primary Education” in Ali Rattansi and David Reeder, eds., Rethinking Radical Education: Essays in Honour of Brian Simon (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), p.198.} 

With the gradual weakening of the “stranglehold” of the 11-plus and streaming, and as the trend toward comprehensivisation gathered pace, there was relative space in schools for innovation and experiment drawing on different educational theories and learning psychologies. This opportunity was seized upon by child-centred teachers and supported by a loose but influential group of education professionals and officials both at local and national levels.\footnote{Jones, Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present, pp.54-5.} According to Brehony, the effects of this were cumulative, helping to create an impression that a revolution was occurring in English primary schools, at the centre of which was supposedly the child-centred ideology.\footnote{Rattansi and Reeder, eds., Rethinking Radical Education: Essays in Honour of Brian Simon, pp.211-12.} 

Despite this impression, and the popularity of progressive methods among certain segments of the teaching profession, it is doubtful that child-centred practices were as widely implemented as was asserted by a particularly vocal group of right-wing critics.\footnote{See e.g. discussion in Simon, Bending the Rules : The Baker ‘Reform’ of Education.} Teachers were continually constrained by both material and ideological conditions, meaning the opportunity to pursue alternative or creative teaching ideas was in reality rather limited. Although there was a popular belief that child-centred methods had not only been tried but subsequently failed, a real theory of learning adequate to the conditions of mass schooling, and taking into account classroom interaction and other complexities of
school life, was never fully thought through, let alone systematically adopted in practice.167 The success of the coming attack on child-centred methods can therefore be explained in part by the fact that a general under-development and incoherence within fashionable teaching trends did result in “some confused and absurd practices”.168

Whatever the extent of actual implementation, and the problems caused by both internal inconsistencies and the external conditions teachers found themselves in, what is interesting about this period is that the time of the highest influence of child-centred ideas in education also saw a growing disparity between the opinions of educators and those of political elites on the purposes of education as a whole. Where educators were seeking to foster autonomous learning and were concerned with the development of cooperative rather than coercive relations in schooling, political emphasis was firmly on expansion defined in economic terms.169 In spite of this growing divergence, and strong Conservative opposition, the swing to comprehensive reorganisation of the secondary school system that originated at the grass roots among local authorities in the 1950s only accelerated from the early 1960s. The movement represented, according to Simon, the determination of the mass of “ordinary people” to get rid of the divided system and all that it represented for their future prospects.170 The non-selective school seemed like the answer, and an official request for schools to reorganise along comprehensive lines came from Harold Wilson’s Government in 1965 with Anthony Crossland’s famous “Circular 10/65”. By 1982, over 80 percent of secondary school children were enrolled in a comprehensive,171 the movement having reached a momentum that even Margaret Thatcher was unable to reverse.

---

169 Brehony in Rattansi and Reeder, eds., *Rethinking Radical Education: Essays in Honour of Brian Simon*, p.217. See also Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present*, pp.54-5.
CRITIQUE FROM THE RIGHT

The comprehensive school did not turn out to be the solution hoped for. The troubles faced by the new system and the criticism it was subjected to increasingly in the 1970s – building up to the so-called “education revolution” of the 1980s and 90s – were influenced by a rather complex set of economic, political and ideological factors. Three key themes however emerged from this context: accountability, standards and choice are mantras which continue to dominate the educational discourse to this day. Importantly, these three words are conceptually linked, through populist appeal, to individual freedom in terms of both autonomous action and the possibilities for personal fulfilment. At the same time, this shift in the focus of education policy was accused of being accompanied by, or perhaps leading to, a decisive move away from the post-war agenda of creating a more just and equal society.

Within schools, one of the major problems already referred to was that changes in structural organisation from selection to non-selection did not go smoothly hand in hand with an appropriate re-thinking of the nature of education as a whole in the context of the new ethos, along with the important practical and methodological questions of teaching that could cater to classes of mixed ability. The new system moreover did not succeed in fundamentally altering what was essentially a three-tiered ordering of pupils, even without the actual existence of enough corresponding types of school. The new exam scheme supported the separation of pupils into three general groupings. The General Certificate of Education (GCE) introduced in 1951 was university-oriented, perpetuating the highly academic content of the curriculum in comprehensive schools. The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), introduced in the mid-1960s as an alternative to the GCE for those who were not considered able enough for it, was rather unsurprisingly perceived as second-class. A minority of pupils thus took the GCE and proceeded on to university and the more prestigious occupations. A larger group took the CSE, and the remaining pupils had, for all intents and purposes, nothing. It was perhaps inevitable that this ‘rest’ became a group with no clear purpose or valued role in society, fostering a sense of alienation amongst a significant segment of society’s youth. Bad behaviour, rising levels of truancy
and other related problems all contributed to the image of failure that dogged the comprehensive system and its teachers.\footnote{172} Whatever the reality and actual nature of problems in schools, the public impression of a general moral decline in society, combined with the allegation that schools were failing to prepare young people for the world of work and needs of industry, was hugely strengthened by a ferocious attack launched by sections of the right-wing press and influential Conservative opinion-leaders.\footnote{173} This campaign focused on a rejection of child-centred teaching methods, asserting that its promotion in schools was destroying the life and work chances of a generation of children.\footnote{174} The abandonment of the traditional curriculum in favour of experimental or “discovery” methods was considered both a retreat from authority and rejection of the past. Boyson suggested that the “malaise in schools in Britain has followed from the breakdown in accepted curriculum and traditional values. There was little concern about either political control or parental choice so long as there was an “understood” curriculum which was followed by every school”.\footnote{175} The erosion of a common set of religious and moral norms had thus left a vacuum that needed to be filled. For what was to become known as the ‘new right’ movement, therefore, a decline in standards was but part of a wider claim that the comprehensive school in its existing form was unable to transmit social values and maintain cultural order.\footnote{176}

Plowden, regarded as amounting to official endorsement of progressive teaching methods, became a term that encapsulated all these criticisms.\footnote{177} Perhaps most significantly, prominent newspapers repeatedly reported parents as blaming teachers for a breakdown in law and order, rising unemployment and a decline in the standard of basic skills.\footnote{178} In this respect the media played an instrumental role in creating a perception of a \textit{crisis of trust} that became and continues to be a powerful political tool and rationale in the process of public sector reform.\footnote{179} Founded on the idea that parents simply no longer trust teachers and other public figures to carry out their obligations to children and the wider community,
the crisis of trust presented a ripe situation for the introduction of national monitoring and accountability measures as a means to restore public confidence in the education system.

A central tenet of the criticism of teachers within this campaign was their responsibility for the politicisation of the school curriculum. Anti-racism, anti-sexism, peace studies, world studies, all were examples of so-called “new” subjects supported by the radical, left-of-centre ideologies that allegedly held sway in local educational bureaucracies. In contrast to this, Conservative opponents defended the “traditional curriculum as the only one based on genuinely educational principles”.180 Ironically, therefore, the assertion that the school curriculum had become overly political (meaning radicalised) was part of the argument used to justify a political intervention into education of unprecedented proportions.

The effort by the ‘new right’ to reinstate a standard curriculum and return thus to “genuinely educational principles” was undoubtedly a move of great political import. Described by Quicke as part of a wider “hegemonic project”, it aimed particularly at the construction of a political discourse that re-established the authority of the state and traditional social values. Like all such projects, it used

...the language of crisis to persuade people that something needs to be done urgently and that the moment is opportune due to the breakdown of consensus – in this case the liberal and social democratic consensus which has allegedly dominated the educational establishment. By such means, the impression is conveyed that a reconstruction is not only necessary but possible.181

The necessary, as we have already seen, was defined in terms of the above described problems, particularly a perceived decline in the standards and efficiency of schools. As Quicke pointed out, however, it is not just a case of the necessary but the possible. In conjunction with discrediting the existing system and expressing the need for urgent reform, a viable and publicly acceptable solution needed to be provided.182 The means to restore parental confidence in a system that had reportedly become monopolised by local education authorities and professional interest groups was to make them more responsive and accountable to the community by giving parents the right to choose the most suitable

181 Ibid.: p.5.
school for their children. The appeal of greater emphasis on the decision of parents is explained by the linking of the concept of choice to that of quality on the principle that “good schools drive out bad”; although as Simon noted, this is a reversal of Gresham’s Law stating “bad money drives out good”. The idea that schools, in having to compete for parents, would be forced to improve the quality of their provision brought the question of how to define and measure a ‘good quality’ education to the foreground of the discussion.

The simultaneous increase in state supervision of certain aspects of education (in particular curriculum, content and assessment) and deregulation in other areas (organisation, access and distribution) that occurred under Margaret Thatcher’s leadership were thus underpinned by seemingly contradictory ideological commitments. On the one hand, the call for greater economic liberalism stemmed from the perceived relationship between democratic socialism and a loss of individual freedom, incorporating as such an attack on bureaucracy and the inefficiency of big government which stifles individual initiative. The welfare system, and the post-war consensus it was founded upon, were painted as offering merely “standardised services for standardised people” as well as encouraging a dependency culture. Again, and in spite of the truth in much of this critique, the irony of its being used in support of a nationalised system grows only more apparent as the steady and world-wide homogenisation of education and education policy begun in the 1980s continues apace, promising “standardised solutions at increasingly lower cost for those desiring to improve school quality and effectiveness”.

At the same time as deregulating school organisation, access and distribution, the ills of the permissive society were to be remedied by bringing the school curriculum and the realm of assessment more directly under central control. As we have seen, the argument of a declining culture was frequently expressed in terms of a current prevalence of mediocrity measured against the glories of a superior past. In this way cultural degeneration was tied to the equality movement. Teachers, in extolling the utopian ideals of equality and

188 Jones, Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present, p.36.
diversity and everything else entailed in the politicised curriculum of the comprehensive school, were contributing to the destruction of tradition and therefore social cohesion. Since divisiveness was presented as the main reason for falling standards, we have what Jones describes as the powerful message that equality is the enemy of quality. Quality of education, and by extension culture, was thus to be determined by inherited social values and structures at the same time as it was considered dependent on freedom of choice in the market. This combination was maintained, despite the fact that as Giddens and others have observed, “nothing is more dissolving of tradition than the “permanent revolution” of market forces”.

All of this was taking place in the context of the need for education to be more congruent with the needs of the economy. The economic recession of the 1970s lent considerable support and credibility to Conservative claims of a failing education system, encompassed as they were within a wider critique of the welfare state and Keynesian macro-economic models. The assumptions of old-style social democracy were crumbling as it became more and more clear that the welfare state creates as many problems as it solves. As the social-democratic tradition faced these challenges and was put on the defensive against an increasingly powerful right, education was to become more and more a focal point as all parties saw it as fundamental to both economic and social renewal. This historical moment is thus varyingingly described as the end of consensus in terms of the disintegration of the post-war settlement, or the beginning of a new consensus in light of the eventual commitment by both major political parties to the central tenets of neo-liberalism.

Ideologically speaking, the ‘new right’ is most often described as a coalition, or amalgamation, of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. The key difference, Quicke and Gamble suggest, is that where for the former the prioritisation of the free economy is in order to secure the authority of the state, for the latter the strong state is but the means to achieve the free economy. Whereas thus for the Conservative, traditional values are the objective, for the new liberal the free economy is the endgame. Indeed, Gray went so far as to assert that neo-liberalism is the “political expression of the belief that market exchange is the primordial form of human freedom”. Albeit with a difference in emphasis and priorities, the New Labour Government of the late 1990s thus had at least one important

191 See e.g. Colin Crouch, "The Terms of the Neo-Liberal Consensus," Political Quarterly 68, no. 4 (1997).
thing in common with the Conservative Governments that preceded; an acceptance of the premise that the authority of the state had been severely weakened and that “radical measures” would be required to restore it which would “necessitate a break with the post-war consensus on what is politically achievable”.193

Put increasingly on the defensive, the response of James Callaghan’s Labour government – and no doubt in an attempt to re-capture some of the initiative – is conveyed in the Prime Minister’s famous speech delivered at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1976. The speech is said to have launched the ‘great debate’ on education, although as we have seen and as Callaghan himself observed, the debate had got underway well before that event. The Ruskin Speech not only acknowledged and addressed the major points raised by critics of the troubled comprehensive system, but it conveyed a broad, if cautious, acceptance of the underlying causes of failure identified by the right-wing movement. Echoing the line taken by the media and prominent public figures, Callaghan drew attention to the uneasiness felt by parents about “informal” teaching methods which “seem to produce excellent results when they are in well-qualified hands but are much more dubious when they are not”. Re-affirming the priority and terms of the quality question, the speech called for an examination of the “strong case for the so-called ‘core curriculum’ of basic knowledge”, how to monitor and maintain a “proper national standard of performance” as well as to secure as “high efficiency as possible by the skilful use of existing resources”. The other central theme of the speech was the need to re-construe the relationship between education and work. Greater emphasis in teaching and in the curriculum on practical and vocational skills would rectify the apparent shortfall in young people suitably equipped with the “basic tools” to make a living, especially in industry.194

Callaghan declared that Labour’s education programme would be founded on Tawney’s principle that “What a wise parent would wish for their [sic] children, so the state must wish for all its children”.195 With this rather paternalistic proclamation, the Ruskin Speech set the tone for education policy to follow over the 18 years of Conservative government that began just three years after it was given.196 It is widely regarded as providing the

195 Ibid.
196 Trowler, Education Policy, pp.3-5.
groundwork for the implementation of the National Curriculum and other changes that were to come, indeed representing a new level of what was deemed politically achievable.

**THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT (ERA)**

_The statutes are elaborate to the point of complexity; detailed to the point of unintelligibility; yet strangely uninformative on matters of principle._

(Sir Leslie Scarman, 1969)\(^{197}\)

Despite so often bearing the _revolution_ label (intended, presumably, to mean a break with the past) the social and political changes that occurred during Margaret Thatcher’s premiership were underpinned by a thinking that was at least in one important respect firmly consistent with the thinking that shaped post-war reforms: namely, in the belief that a society and its members can be improved – even perfected – by means of a centrally-driven political and economic programme and that education can and ought to be enrolled into this cause. Thatcher’s aim, she apparently informed her favourite editor, was the “elimination of socialism” and the establishment of a new political alignment.\(^{198}\) Her education programme was to be instrumental in the realisation of her vision. In her words it represented “the key to the future”.\(^{199}\) With what Tony Blair later described as a “complacent” first term\(^{200}\) where education was concerned, the most radical educational measures of Thatcher’s tenure came with Kenneth Baker’s time as Education Secretary starting in 1986. Baker ushered in a period where the Conservative Government seemed to be “gripped by a frenzied need to legislate on every aspect of education, with an Education Act arriving on the statute book almost every year”.\(^{201}\) During this time the relationship between central and local authorities, school structure and governance, funding and resources, curriculum and pedagogy, modes of assessment and modes of inspection,

---


teacher autonomy and training as well as the relationships of parents to schools were all scrutinised, criticised and subjected to legislation.\textsuperscript{202}

The extent of the new legislation relating to education is staggering and the 1988 Education Reform Act turned out to be only the beginning. 1989 saw the Children’s Act, 1990 the Student Loans Act, 1991 the Teacher’s Pay and Conditions Act. 1992 saw both a Further and Higher Education Act, which abolished the binary distinction between universities and polytechnics as well as setting up the dual-support funding system,\textsuperscript{203} and the Education (Schools) Act which established the now infamous Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted). 1993 brought with it the longest Education Act of the twentieth century, a massive document with 308 sections and 21 schedules.\textsuperscript{204} This was followed by a further Education Act the next year, and another one three years later in 1996, the same year in which the Schools Inspections Act was passed, primarily consolidating existing legislation. Finally, the Conservatives squeezed in one more Education Act in 1997 (just before Labour’s election victory), parts of which were implemented by the new Government.\textsuperscript{205}

Compared to the two other main education Acts passed in the same century (the 1918 Fisher Act and the 1944 Butler Act), the 1988 Education Reform Act was a piece of legislation rushed through with relatively little consultation and as such had a rather hostile reception.\textsuperscript{206} Fuelling the critics was the belief that the Act was expressly a move where political motives took precedence over educational ones, despite the obvious and widely accepted existence of severe problems with the education system. “Its primary objective was to act as a springboard for the return of a Tory government at the next election probably four years later – and the longed-for fourth term of Margaret Thatcher.”\textsuperscript{207} That the Act was primarily a political measure, wrote Simon at the time of its publication, is “recognised and even presented as such by the Prime Minister, and is now increasingly seen in this light by those directly concerned with education. Its aim is to achieve a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p.25.
\item \textsuperscript{203} For details on the dual-support funding system see the Research Councils UK (RCUK) website at www.rcuk.ac.uk.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Neville Harris, ”The Education Act 1993 and Local Administration of Education,” \textit{Modern Law Review} 57, no. 2 (1994): p.251.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Ibid., p.13.
\end{itemize}
decisive political advantage over other parties”.\textsuperscript{208} That the Education Reform Act was part of a deliberate and wider long-term political strategy provides one explanation for the urgency and speed with which the steps were taken. Summarising the aims of the legislation, and in so doing capturing the general tone of the critical response to it, Tomlinson stated that they included:

...consolidating a market ideology to be achieved by parental choice, establishing central government control over curriculum and assessment, further eroding the powers and responsibilities of local authorities, teachers and their trainers, demanding accountability from individuals and institutions, especially universities, and encouraging selection under a rhetoric of diversity.\textsuperscript{209}

The planned curriculum was an effort to “re-design the education service from top to bottom”.\textsuperscript{210} It marked a departure from a past in which the curriculum had developed more along the lines of a haphazard but ‘natural’ evolution, with teachers and schools responding to and reflecting (however imperfectly) the social, moral, political, economic and technological changes in society, as well as attempting to incorporate research in learning theories.\textsuperscript{211} Part of the rationale for the move toward more detailed curriculum planning and a focus on outcomes (i.e. student learning and school performance) was provided by that movement, growing steadily influential since the early twentieth century, which promoted the idea that by adopting exact and particular methods, social institutions could mirror the tremendous successes achieved in the technical and industrial sciences.\textsuperscript{212} Schools and universities were not to be exempt from this, despite the extremely complex nature of their ‘product’ and ‘services’, and the difficulties involved in defining and justifying the terms of their ‘success’.

The 1988 Education Reform Act had 238 clauses, 13 schedules and detailed an enormously wide range of stipulations covering the curriculum, admissions, assessment, finance and staff, governance, collective worship in schools and extending to the re-organisation of provision and funding in Further and Higher Education. The most significant features of the new legislation were the introduction of a National Curriculum; the introduction of national testing at ages seven, 11, 14 and 16; the move to Local

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{209} Tomlinson, \textit{Education in a Post-Welfare Society}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{210} Chitty, \textit{Education Policy in Britain}, p.51.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., pp.57-8.
Management of Schools; the option for parents to set up Grant Maintained Schools; the creation of City Technology Colleges; and finally the establishment of a new inspection regime which was to come into effect with Ofsted in 1992. These features in themselves illustrate how, on the one hand, the processes and outcomes of education were to be brought more firmly under the direction of the state and, on the other hand, within the influence of market forces.

The former, as we have seen, was to be achieved in the main by means of the National Curriculum. Detailing three core subjects (English, Maths and Science) and seven other foundation subjects, to be assessed at four “key stages”, the Curriculum would specify in relation to each subject:

(a) the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage [in this Chapter referred to as “attainment targets”]; (b) the matters, skills and processes which are required to be taught to pupils of different abilities and maturities during each key stage [in this Chapter referred to as “programmes of study”]; and (c) the arrangements for assessing pupils at or near the end of each key stage for the purpose of ascertaining what they have achieved in relation to the attainment targets for that stage...  

Furthermore, the Secretary of State was given the duty and powers to revise the Curriculum when he/she sees fit or if it is expedient to do so, as well as being able to specify the attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements considered appropriate for each subject. As will be shown in the next chapter, these three brief clauses alone embody the most deeply problematic aspects of the 1988 reforms.

Beyond the introduction of the National Curriculum, the other principle features of the Act – national testing, Local Management of Schools, Grant Maintained Schools, City Technology Colleges and a new inspections regime – were incorporated measures reflecting the idea that market forces could solve problems in the public sector in the same way they had in the private sector, particularly given that the mechanism of choice was believed to ensure high quality at the same time as taking care of the matter of teacher accountability. Choice of course requires both diversity (in the form of Grant Maintained

---

213 United Kingdom, Education Reform Act, 1988, c.40, ss. 2 (2a-c).
214 Ibid., ss.4 (1b).
Schools and City Technology Colleges) and information, the latter supplied by the publication of performance League Tables. The Act therefore “set out to create a market within the school system”\(^{215}\) with parental decisions as the new determiner.

Simply speaking, there were three main steps to this. First of all, the bulk of school finance was to be delegated from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to schools themselves, aiming to give head teachers, governors and parents the opportunity to improve the quality of their schools without LEA pressure.\(^{216}\) Among the advantages of Local Management of Schools was the fact that greater financial responsibility for individual schools meant a greater general cost-awareness and efficiency could in turn be reflected in decision-making. The potential for transparency across the whole funding chain was thus enhanced.\(^{217}\) However, the allocation of funding was based on a formula the largest element of which was pupil numbers, and schools were required to enrol up to their maximum physical capacity. This led to a situation where an individual school’s budget depended largely on the number of pupils it was able to attract, “creating a voucher system in all but name”.\(^{218}\) Schools were in this way encouraged to market themselves to parents, and inevitably a great deal of effort and resources within schools became devoted to increasing competitive edge.

At the same time as this change was made in funding arrangements, in order to enhance choice within the school system, the opportunity was provided for schools to opt out of Local Authority control altogether. The decision would be made on the basis of a parental ballot.\(^{219}\) These Grant Maintained Schools (or the rather unfortunately termed “self-governing state schools”) would become funded directly by central government and be managed by their own board of governors. To further “free up the supply side”, that is to say, break the monopoly of LEA-run comprehensives, as well as improve education in inner cities, the Act made the allowance for the establishment of privately funded City Technology Colleges, intended to be supported by private business sponsors as well as central government. These schools would teach the National Curriculum but with an emphasis on science and technology. The two new school options represented the attempt to provide greater diversity of educational provision while ensuring a national standard of

\(^{215}\) Barber, *The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution*, p.49.

\(^{216}\) Ibid., p.36 and Tomlinson, *Education in a Post-Welfare Society*, p.47.


\(^{218}\) Barber, *The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution*, p.49.

performance, a combination which led Stephen J. Ball to call it a “Kentucky Fried Curriculum”; the government’s message being “you run the restaurant, we set the menu”.220

Finally, concomitant with the provision of greater consumer choice is the need for widely accessible product information. In addition to diversifying educational provision the Act therefore introduced measures that, within the specified yet controversial definitions, gave parents the ability to distinguish the “effective” from “ineffective” schools. The publication of school League Tables, based on GCSE results, began in 1992 and was to become, as Tomlinson noted, a national media event. The aim was to allow for popular schools to expand and unpopular ones to close by means of a transfer of power from the ‘producers’ of education to the ‘consumers’ of education. This practice was adopted despite concerns that League Table results would be more representative of the social class composition of pupils in a school than the quality of education it provided.221

The 1988 Act thus represented a significant shift away from teacher centrality in the organisation of the school curriculum and replaced it with centrally directed reform (part of which was to emphasise nationally standardised teacher training). This was complemented by the establishment of a quasi-market where schools operated to an extent autonomously, led by managers whose main duty was to improve the market position of their schools.222 These moves were in keeping with the thinking that teacher professionalism lies in ensuring the efficient delivery of the curriculum rather than shaping the curriculum. The reasoning is expressed clearly by Michael Barber, a chief architect of New Labour’s education policy in later years. The new paradigm, after Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech, meant to discredit the “myth” that teachers know best, for “What is taught in schools not only helps to define the country’s culture and democracy; it is also a critical element in building the future. Why should teachers alone decide matters which are clearly relevant to every citizen?”223 As such “…it is proper in a democracy for the elected government to establish the broad thrust of policy for the curriculum, as for other areas of policy”.224 As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, this is a reversal of the post-war assumption that it is precisely because what is taught in schools helps to define a

---

220 Barber, The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution, p.50.
221 Tomlinson, Education in a Post-Welfare Society, p.50. See Jones, Education in Britain, p.134 for a discussion of how the ERA fuelled polarization.
222 Jones, Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present, p.133.
223 Barber, The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution, p.165.
224 Ibid., p.193.
country’s culture and democracy that the political selection of that content to be taught – and, not to be underestimated, the method by which it is taught – was felt to be a move with extremely serious implications.

The education policies that evolved out of this so-called new paradigm of teacher professionalism and public accountability, in the context of what Barber and other leading Labour figures believed “ought to be a widening and deepening democracy”, were underpinned by a number of key assumptions which were to become collectivised under the increasingly fashionable label *performativity*. Before going on to look at these policy developments, the next chapter will present some of the major reasons why the ERA “attracted more bitter and widespread professional opposition than any piece of legislation passed since the introduction of the National Health Service...”

---

225 Ibid.
Chapter 3: Criticisms and Implications of the ERA

*First give me freedom. Then I will give you culture.*

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, 1874)\(^{228}\)

THE ACCOUNTABILITY CULTURE

Questions about individual freedom (defined in cultural, political and economic terms) and social justice/equality are prominent themes in the education debate, resurfacing continuously in any number of different guises and variations. Unsurprisingly then, critical responses to new legislation or educational initiatives tend to revolve around these themes - more particularly, they are concerned with perceived threats to either one or the other or both. The debate thus takes place within the context of political shifts to the left or right of the ideological spectrum. As we have seen, one major criticism of Conservative-led education reforms in the 1980s was due to their being seen as part of a wider “regressive agenda” bringing society back to a pre-war state where social class determines educational opportunity and the dominant values were competitive individualism, separatism and exclusion.\(^{229}\)

Lending support to the step-backwards claim is the argument that the legislation paved the way for a revival of a faith amongst policy-makers in the notion of fixed, measurable and innate ability as a determiner of educational provision and future prospects. It is held that it is this assumption which underpins initiatives such as the “gifted and talented” programme and the increasing emphasis on grouping pupils according to ability decided by attainment tests, intelligence tests and/or teacher and parental opinions.\(^{230}\) Gillborn and Youdell draw attention to the fact that all the problems connected to the practice of “streaming” pupils during the post-war period of school reform attend to today’s practice

---

\(^{228}\) (No page numbers available).


of tailoring activities to learners separated out by their relative academic, practical, personal and creative skills at an early age, particularly with regard to how racial stereotyping puts minority ethnic groups at a significant disadvantage.\textsuperscript{231} Commenting on the proclamation in the 2005 Schools White Paper \textit{Higher Standards, Better Schools For All} that “we must make sure that every pupil—gifted and talented, struggling or just average—reaches the limits of their capability”, Gillborn argued in a memorandum submitted to Parliament in November 2005 that:

This is a particularly disturbing statement. It echoes a common belief that there are three types of children; in this case, the “just average”, the “gifted and talented” and the “struggling”. English education policy has continually returned to this belief since it was enshrined in the post-WWII system of selective entry to secondary schools and the use of the 11-plus exam. Although the Government has explicitly ruled out a return to such a system, the logic of the White Paper is that the selective system is re-introduced within an apparently more diverse arrangement. Although the Prime Minister’s Foreword speaks of “all-ability schools that retain the comprehensive principle of non-selection”... the reality is that the White Paper seeks to further strengthen the selection that already takes place within most state-funded schools.\textsuperscript{232}

Beyond claims that the 1988 changes to the school system did nothing to alter its essential function as a preparation for a divided and hierarchical society, it has been widely argued that the concerted effort to link education more closely to the political economy and global competition fosters a culture which undermines the very social consciousness and ethos that motivated the progressive/equality movement. The dynamics of competition, reliant as they are on both the concept and possibility of failure, inducts educational institutions into a culture of self-interest that is at odds with any number of conceptions of their social purpose, including those of the current political establishment. This dynamic, in other

\textsuperscript{231} David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, \textit{Rationing Education: Policy, Practice, Reform and Equity} (Buckinghamshire: Open University Press, 2000). The 2005 Schools White Paper \textit{Higher Standards, Better Schools For All}, while acknowledging unintended negative consequences nevertheless envisaged an expansion of the gifted and talented programme and an increase in differentiating pupils according to levels of achievement (p.59). The potential for educational disadvantage was to be mitigated by an intensification of “personalised learning”, a policy which itself has many problems as will be further discussed below. The Conservative Party also expressed an intention to encourage greater “setting by ability” in their election manifesto (p.50).

words, creates a “new moral environment” where the survival of the institution as an organisation is more important than the service it provides to its students and in turn the community. 233 In these arenas of competition, employees find that their job security is linked to their ability to contribute to the competitive quality of the service or product they provide. To compound this, administrative procedures and incentives are introduced to ensure that individual employees ‘want’ what the system requires for good performance. 234 The establishment of competitive, entrepreneurial regimes and various other mechanisms of “new public management” thus not only de-professionalises teachers by ensuring their judgement is replaced by the logic of accountants, lawyers and managers, but encourages organisations to evolve into what Ball called “chains of low trust relationships”. 235

If we recall, the introduction of market dynamics into the education system was presented as a solution to an existing absence of trust. It was designed to restore public faith in teachers and the school system as a whole. The so-called “crisis of trust” is a topic that was addressed by Cambridge professor Onora O’Neill in her popular Reith Lectures in 2002 in which she summarised what she considered the most worrying aspects of the “accountability culture”. Invoking again the theme of disease and health, she argued:

...that having misdiagnosed what ails British society we are now busy prescribing copious draughts of the wrong medicine. We are imposing ever more stringent forms of control. We are requiring those in the public sector and professions to account in excessive and sometimes irrelevant detail to regulators and inspectors, auditors and examiners. The very demands of accountability often make it harder for them to serve the public sector. 236

O’Neill noted that a “loss of trust” has become a cliché of our times, the standard account being that citizens no longer trust governments, ministers, the police and other public servants, just as consumers no longer trust businesses, patients no longer trust doctors, parents no longer trust teachers, and so on. The revolution in accountability and transparency is supposed to “fix” this problem. Although the diagnosis of the “crisis of trust” as a phenomenon is both complex and obscure, we are nevertheless all sure that

234 Wilmott and Lyotard cited in Ibid., p.46.
235 Ibid., p.48.
“prevention and sanction” are the most suitable remedy. In the public sector, this takes the form of “ever more perfect administrative control of institutional and professional life”.  

Questioning the reality of this lack of trust, O’Neill suggests that it is a discourse that contradicts simple life experience; the active trust that is necessary to go about the most basic and common activities of everyday life. As the sociologist Niklas Luhmann pointed out, without trust we would be incapable of even getting out of bed in the morning; men and women would be subject to paralysing fears.  

The implication is that this basic trust can be nourished rather than negated. “The ways of preparing for relationships of love and friendship, or more generally for all kinds of personal ties and deepening acquaintanceship, can be interpreted as the testing and learning of relationships of trust”.  

In drawing attention to connections between trust, love, friendship and learning, Luhmann’s words highlight the need to consider potential long-term consequences for children of spending their formative years in an environment in which, since the reforms, they are arguably as little trusted to learn properly as their teachers are to teach them properly. As teachers are subject to impersonal and regular performance appraisals, children are subject to a constant checking up on their learning, a practice which according to educationalist John Holt destroys the capacity to learn itself by destroying the process in which they “test their hunches” and gain confidence in their own judgements and ideas. Holt invites his readers to imagine what would happen if babies were “assessed” every time they experimented. “The worst damage we do with all this testing is to the children’s own confidence and self-esteem, the belief that others trust them to learn and that therefore they can trust themselves. For every unasked for test is above all else a statement of no confidence in the learner”. The suggestion appears to be, therefore, that a “crisis of trust” is indeed a real and significant phenomenon in contemporary society, however it is one that has been institutionalised rather than alleviated by the “accountability revolution”.  

While unconvinced of the existence of an actual crisis in trust, at least in the terms and for the reasons popularly proclaimed, O’Neill believes there is real evidence of a “culture of suspicion”. She suggests moreover that the claims of a crisis of trust are rooted in an unrealistic hankering for a perfectly safe world where breaches of trust are totally

239 Ibid., p.24.
What this amounts to is a picture of a culture which on the one hand promotes a faith that all human foibles can be ironed out – by means of “ever more perfect” administrative controls – and which on the other hand exaggerates human imperfections and thus expectations of duplicity. The latter suspicion in turn justifies more measures to guarantee trustworthiness, measures which themselves are counter-productive, and so a vicious cycle merely intensifies. The fact that every human relationship and encounter, from a simple transaction in a shop to complex involvements like marriage, involves a degree of trust, means that trying to guarantee trust is therefore something that must encompass the administration/management of all human relationships. This likewise must involve the categorisation of types of interaction as well as a means of quantifying their quality. Again, critics, in this case a Special Needs teacher, have pointed out the implications of this overall attitude for education: “...so much about teaching is about relationships and there’s something pathological about managing relationships...And what sorts of things can you measure? By and large things that don’t matter”.242

Despite being accompanied by an official rhetoric of choice and diversity, it is quite clear that the accountability culture places very real constraints on freedom. New legislation and regulation controls require detailed conformity to procedures and protocols, record-keeping, success in reaching targets, provision of information in specified formats and any number of other procedures that place distinct parameters on the behaviour of employees. Within this system the judgement of professionals is displaced by centralised monitoring systems. In theory, the new culture of accountability makes professionals and institutions accountable to the public; in reality, O’Neill asserts, it makes them accountable to scores of regulators, government departments, funders and legal standards.243 At the time General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, John Dunford noted in 2003 that headteachers were officially accountable to no less than 21 different bodies.244 The means by which these standards are identified with the public interest thus becomes a question of paramount importance.

A further problem with the accountability culture is that endless performance requirements reduce time available to actually do the job. Not only that, but they can, and often do,

243 O’Neill, A Question of Trust, pp.52-53.
244 Cited in Chitty, Education Policy in Britain, p.204.
provide perverse incentives. Discussing the phenomenon in the context of university life, Furedi argued that the new culture provides motivation for both arbitrary and unprofessional choices:

Academics are compelled to adopt practices that are consistent with the demands of bureaucratic institutions that audit their teaching and research, regardless of what they believe is in the best interest of their students or of university life, and, sadly, these externally imposed demands have encouraged practices that lead to formulaic teaching and superficial research.245

Lecturers publishing research prematurely to meet their department’s research rating or funding needs is one example given of such unprofessional choices. A measure such as the Research Assessment Exercise introduced to ensure quality of research thus can have the opposite effect, guaranteeing only a rise in the quantity of research. Similarly schools, especially when faced with the threat of closure or a status downgrade, may promote subjects which have easier examinations in order to boost their league table results. Again, the “standard” of the school is “improved” in a way that does not necessarily reflect the quality of teaching or the best interests of pupils.

Externally imposed auditing “diverts teachers away from pedagogic issues and toward a quantifiable territory”.246 Furedi states that quality assurance systems ensure merely that “systems of management” are being carried out, ultimately saying nothing about the quality of teaching or research. “The obsession with paper trails inexorably leads to the demand for more paper”.247 The content of teaching becomes subservient to its form and teachers and lecturers alike have far greater incentive to focus on how they are seen to be doing their jobs rather than what they actually do.248 Being truthful is as such not the point within this regime. The person or institution is more likely to benefit from creating “fabrications”, that is, versions of self or practices that exist only for the purposes of accountability and have little or no educational value. The performative culture creates what has been described as “pathologies of creative compliance”: “Performance improvements may become the only basis for decision-making. The heart of the

245 Frank Furedi, “The Bureaucratization of the British University” in Hayes and Wynyard, eds., The McDonaldization of Higher Education, p.34.
246 Ibid., p.37.
247 Ibid., p.38.
educational project is gouged out and left empty. Authenticity is replaced entirely by plasticity”.249

Their inherent counter-productivity thus emerges as a significant charge brought against the wholesale public sector reforms of which the 1988 Education Reform Act was an important part. O’Neill cut to the heart of it when she observed “If we want a culture of public service, professionals and public servants must in the end be free to serve the public rather than their paymasters”.250 As we saw implied in Barber’s statements in the previous chapter, the assumption that teachers, left to their own devices, will not put the learning needs of their pupils first (indeed that they do not know how to and thus need to be advised) is what underlies the system of accountability and state involvement in the curriculum. This raises once again the matter of trust as well as the question of what it means to be professionally competent. Houghton Budd proposed that allowing state, commercial or parental interests to dictate education is as unreasonable and socially damaging as it would be to allow them to control the judiciary, or say, the decisions of the medical profession. In this he does not deny the validity of these interests per se, or that schools need to be responsible and transparent to the wider community, but argues that the standards to which teachers are held accountable must evolve from within the profession, according to professional judgements, rather than externally devised and frequently arbitrary criteria.251

251 Christopher Houghton Budd, Freeing the Circling Stars: Pre-Funded Education (New Economy Publications, 2004), p.5. Houghton Budd essentially proposes that independent financial administration for schools and teachers could be taken much further than has thus far been envisaged and could become the only basis for a system of accountability. The issue will be returned to in Chapter 7.
THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

One general and universally acknowledged principle must be observed: the advent of the learning society involves encouraging the acquisition of new knowledge.

(European Commission, *Towards the Learning Society*, 1995)²⁵²

To these wider issues surrounding the implementation of the ERA and the reasoning behind it, the National Curriculum in itself adds its own host of problems and comes in for particular criticism from many sections of the educational community. Kelly writes that what informs official departmental statements and those of the “plethora of educational quangos” that have sprung up in recent years is the belief that curriculum planning involves little more than making statements of appropriate content and listing aims and objectives in relation to that content. Where references to ‘progression’, ‘personal fulfilment’ or ‘entitlement’ are made it is apparently in the expectation that they will be automatic by-products of exposure to this specific content. The National Curriculum is thus presented as:

a prominent and pressingly topical example of this view of education as transmission and of curriculum as content [as opposed to curriculum as process and education as development], but with the added dimension of a largely instrumental or utilitarian basis for the selection of the content to be submitted [making it an amalgamation of curriculum as content and curriculum as product]. And the major weakness we should note is that at no stage does one find any justification, or even any attempt at justification, for either the subjects or their content, except in vague or unanalysed phrases such as ‘what they need to learn’ (1987a:4), ‘relevant to today’s needs’ (1987a:10), or in overtly utilitarian considerations such as ‘practical applications and continuing value to adult and working life’ (1987a:4) and ‘the challenge of employment in tomorrow’s world’ (1987a:2).²⁵³

A model that treats education as transmission and focuses primarily on the content of the curriculum leaves out major dimensions of the educational process. Most significantly it offers little or no account of the child who is the recipient of that content, nor the impact that both the content itself and the method of its delivery has on the child’s intellectual, physical, emotional, moral and other forms of development. The children’s task in this model is to “learn as effectively as they can what is offered to them. If the effect of the process on them is of any significance, this model offers us no means of exploring or evaluating that effect, beyond assessing the extent of their assimilation of what has been fed to them, any other consequences of such learning being beyond its scope”.254 In other words, questions about the nature of the total experience of the child and how this experience affects and relates to their learning cannot be acknowledged, let alone answered, within this model.

The work of prominent educational thinkers throughout history has highlighted that it is precisely the more (or less) conscious efforts to influence that total experience that constitute what we call formal education. In other words, it is school life and environment, not merely the content of the curriculum, that form the knowledge, values, attitudes, morals, behaviour and expectations of the pupil, and as such, the next generation and the whole of society. It is for this reason that John Dewey, for instance, emphasised the need to understand the school as a community and the basis of education as social life, not as any particular subject or set of skills.255 This is especially important as traditional family and working communities disappear and children spend more and more time in the ‘artificial’ environment of educational institutions. For Dewey, it is through engaging with others in practical, artistic, craft, agricultural, scientific and other activities which have shaped the progress of civilization that the young person is encouraged to develop both the knowledge and social insight which will allow him or her to enter into any chosen occupation or specialisation with a broad perspective and social consciousness.256

In stressing that it is the life of the school that has the greatest influence on children’s learning, Dewey and others draw attention to the fact that the intended “learning outcomes” of the curriculum can be undermined or even totally contradicted by the overall method of teaching and/or the whole character and ethos of the education system. For example,

---

254 Ibid., p.53.
where lessons on the value of cooperation and group success are given in conjunction with assessment arrangements which measure only individual achievement, or where teachers are expected to encourage an inclusive and lifelong appreciation of learning in a syllabus which focuses overwhelmingly on marketable skills and short-term attainments. Likewise, taking into account the whole experience of the child suggests the futility of attempting to instil what are perceived to be desirable moral qualities or social and practical skills by teaching them as specific ‘subjects’ in designated periods once a week. The introduction of Citizenship into the National Curriculum in 2002, which among other things is intended to provide “opportunities for spiritual development” by “fostering pupil’s awareness and understanding of meaning and purpose in life”, exemplifies many of these tensions between official educational aims, methods and content.

Ignoring the unconscious or unintentional factors of the curriculum does not mean that they cease to exist. As we saw in the last section, the National Curriculum was introduced in part to bring about a cultural rejuvenation and restore traditional social and moral values. What the model based on content and outputs means however is that a great deal which profoundly affects values, expectations and the national culture is sidelined in the national debate as public, political and professional attention is most strongly focused on areas of education that can be measured and efficiently administrated. Deeming it highly unsophisticated, Kelly argues that while the model used for the National Curriculum might be suitable for certain kinds of vocational instruction, applying it to the whole of the education system effectively eliminates the difference between what is covered by the term ‘education’ and the term ‘training’.

Concerns that the emphasis currently placed on the content and outputs of education ignores the “hidden curriculum” form part of a general uneasiness about the bureaucratisation of social institutions as a whole, talked of above in terms of the accountability culture. Alasdair MacIntyre’s contention, for example, that the bureaucratic manager proceeds as if he or she were in possession of “morally neutral knowledge” has specific implications for education. If education is organised with the aim of transmitting a particular body of “morally neutral” knowledge, divided into subjects, the

---


content being chosen purely on the grounds of its purported utility for the child at some future date, again, the attitudes unconsciously learned are likely to reflect this. Education, from the point of view of students, becomes a series of hoops to be jumped through upon the road to employment, and financial success is the greatest expectation. The overpowering influence in state education of both democratic utilitarianism and scientific specialisation means young people are given little means or opportunity to develop broader horizons:

The mind of the student is overwhelmed and dazed by the volume of new knowledge which is being accumulated by specialists, while the necessity of using education as a stepping-stone to a profitable career leaves little time to stop and think. And the same is true for the teacher, who has become a kind of civil servant tied to a routine over which he can have little control.  

Another serious implication of this kind of bureaucratisation is thus the affect it has on the role of the teacher. Sloan suggests that like other social institutions, schools have been subject to a phenomenon described by MacIntyre and others as the replacement of those who would traditionally be regarded possessors of wisdom by two modern character-types: the manager endeavours to manage and direct, while the therapist ensures the smooth operation of the system “by taking the raw edges off the recalcitrant”. With the rise of the school administrator, school counsellor and any number of supporting specialists, the teacher’s standing, at least as a role model and guide in all aspects of the child’s development, sinks to near nothing. Added to that, the computerisation of all levels of schooling brings with it serious proposals that the teacher be redefined as “learning facilitator”.

Although many philosophers of education have described the teacher as a kind of facilitator, in the sense of nourishing natural development and making sure that the child is not “turned in the wrong direction”, where learning is defined in terms of the child’s ability to repeat specific information and perform set behaviours the “learning facilitator” is merely an instructor. Incidentally, that the teacher is conceived largely in instructing terms by prominent policy-makers today is illustrated by the Troops to Teachers

---

programme proposed by the newly elected Conservative-led Government. It is said that because “access to good teachers” is the key to successful education, getting professionals from the army “who know how to train young men and women” into the classroom will help to improve the quality of provision.\textsuperscript{264}

What has been extensively criticised as the overall de-professionalisation of the teacher can thus be considered part of a wider failure on behalf of policy-makers to appreciate the role of the teacher as a cultural leader. Teachers shape not only the mind but the psychology of the next generation. They have become, Dawson suggested, the spiritual leaders in a secularised society. “...it seems as though the school of the future must increasingly usurp the functions that the Church exercised in the past, and that the teaching profession will take the place of the clergy as the spiritual power of the future”.\textsuperscript{265} If, as has been suggested is the case, the teaching profession – pedagogy itself – is usurped by the rationality of the school administrator and counsellor (or even the drill sergeant), as archetypes that is, not individuals, the source of cultural authority becomes even more dubious:

In an education without culture there can be no teachers – only administrators, facilitators, and, of course, the ubiquitous operators. The teacher is a primary type of cultural authority, a meaningless concept in a culture-less society, where authority, like reason, is narrowed to mean the exercise of power. All that is then left for the teacher to do is organise. May not the disappearance of the student be next? A purely instrumental education – whether in the higher conceptual form intended for the professional, managerial elites or in the competency – also read, functional-survival form intended for the majority – such an education leaves its students with no sources of insight into themselves or society, and hence, divests them of any fulcrum for criticism and transformation of self and society.\textsuperscript{266}

The transformation of the teacher into “a kind of civil servant” whose professionalism lies in the effective delivery of a helpfully pre-packaged programme of study clearly has an effect on the type of interaction occurring between pupils and teachers. It was suggested above that teaching is mainly about relationships, and the quality of learning will mirror

\textsuperscript{264} Gove, "Failing Schools Need New Leadership."
\textsuperscript{265} Dawson, \textit{Religion and the Modern State}, p.55.
\textsuperscript{266} Sloan, "Knowledge, Values, and Educational History: "Once More Unto the Breach, Dear Friends”," p.9.
the quality of the relationship between child and teacher and between the children themselves. In the post-1988 school, teachers and pupils (the latter often through their parents) are explicitly encouraged and increasingly do see themselves in terms of purveyor and consumer. These circumstances undermine opportunities for the development of meaningful relationships and the mutual respect and understanding upon which they are founded. Likewise it works against a spirit of common enterprise and the enthusiasm that can be generated when learners, of all ages and stages, share both problems and discoveries.  

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whatever the inadequacies of his educational model, captured something powerful when he highlighted both the transitional nature of education and the formative and lasting significance of early relationships:

People do not see that a first impression so vivid as that of love, or liking which takes the place of love, produces effects whose influence continues until death. Works of education are crammed with wordy and unnecessary accounts of the imaginary duties of children; but there is not a word about the most important and most difficult part of their education, the crisis which forms the bridge between child and man.  

The poet George Santayana expressed the same idea when he stated that “half our standards come from our first masters, and the other half from our first loves”. In a certain sense, the teacher — or minder, tutor, mentor, instructor — takes on the role of both “first love” and “first master”, again especially as the time young people spend in the classroom or in some other type of formal learning setting only continues to lengthen. The teacher, being the most influential role model and authority figure after the immediate family, is the “source and exemplar” of all later habits, attitudes and judgements. Santayana’s work also points to the significance of early emotional and aesthetic experiences for later life, returning us to the idea that it is the total school experience rather than merely the content of the curriculum that matters:

Taste is formed in those moments when aesthetic emotion is massive and distinct; preferences then grown conscious, judgements then put into words, will reverberate through calmer hours; they will constitute prejudices, habits of

---


apperception, secret standards for all other beauties....Youth in these matters governs maturity, and while men may develop their early impressions more systematically and find confirmations of them in various quarters, they will seldom look at the world afresh or use new categories in deciphering it...Thus the volume and intensity of some appreciations, especially when nothing of the kind has preceded, makes them authoritative over our subsequent judgements. On those warm moments hang all our cold systematic opinions; and while the latter fill our days and shape our careers it is only the former that are crucial and alive.²⁷⁰

LINEAR MODELS OF LEARNING

In addition to viewing education as transmission rather than development, and curriculum as content/product rather than process, the planners behind the 1988 legislation were preoccupied with the question of evaluation. The thinking was that prescribing clear educational goals would make possible a proper assessment of results, which in turn would make possible an objective determination of the quality of the overall system. Drawing on the enormously influential *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* published in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues, planning lessons according to lists of “aims and objectives” became a real prospect for teachers in the 1970s and continues to be the key factor in the organisation of school, college and university curricula to this day.²⁷¹ Originally conceived as a “means of facilitating the exchange of test items among faculty at various universities in order to create a bank of items, each measuring the same educational objective”, the framework provided definitions of categories and sub-categories of learning in the cognitive domain ordered from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract and representing a “cumulative hierarchy”.²⁷²

The problems both educationally and socially speaking identified with the aims and objectives model are numerous. One criticism is that it adopts an essentially passive view

²⁷⁰ Ibid.
of humanity (that is, passive in the “empty vessel” sense). Treating education as a scientific activity similar to an industrial process assumes that it is legitimate to mould human beings according to a preconceived blueprint, a blueprint that most significantly is designed by politically commissioned advisors and is universally sanctioned. As Bloom himself pointed out, “intended learning outcomes” are essentially intended forms of behaviour to be demonstrated through the learners’ thoughts, actions or feelings. A statement of objective is useful for the same reasons, specifying what the learner must do to demonstrate a mastery of that objective. The success of any curriculum based on objectives is thus “gauged by an assessment of the behaviour changes the curriculum appears to have brought about” in relation to its stated intention.

This behavioural/technical method of making judgements about learning is exemplified by the “value added” programme introduced in the White Paper Schools Achieving Success in 2001. With regard to portraying the relative market attractiveness of individual schools, the Labour Government announced that it would “improve information to parents further” by publishing details about the “value each school adds to its pupils’ results”. The “value added” refers to the level of progress each pupil has made against past attainment instead of only against national standards. The performance standard of the school will thus be worked out by comparing the pupil’s expected outcome – based on the national median GCSE result for each level of the key stage – against their actual outcome.

In order to calculate this we use a median line approach whereby the value added score for each student is the difference (positive or negative) between their own ‘output’ point score and the median - or middle - output point score achieved by others with the same or similar starting point, or ‘input’ point score. In this way an individual student's progress is compared with the progress made by other students with the same or similar prior attainment.

These “value added” results were to be published alongside other results in performance league tables to provide a broader context for pupil achievement. It was heralded as being a more sophisticated measure of the performance of schools than the mere raw data of exam grades.

---

274 Ibid., p.61.
As we have seen in the discussion of the accountability culture, behaviour directed and monitored by means of assessment applies to teachers as well as children. The question of language and changes in discourse surrounding teaching and learning is a prominent theme in educational literature. Replacing that of the factory, the metaphor of the corporation now dominates educational rhetoric.\textsuperscript{277} School exercises have become ‘work’, classrooms are ‘managed’, teachers are rewarded for their ‘productivity’ and so on. The shift in professional discourse away from metaphors of growth, cultivation and caring to delivery, product control, and clients it is suggested is more subtle but shapes behaviour as effectively as the more obviously coercive measures such as financial sanctions, threats of closure, public “naming and shaming” and the activities of Ofsted.\textsuperscript{278} This not in the least because the way in which teaching and learning are understood by teachers themselves is gradually transformed. Ball and a number of others have argued that the “policy technologies” of education reform “are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organisations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher...”\textsuperscript{279} Like O’Neill and Furedi, he describes this as a process of reregulation under the guise of deregulation, albeit a “less visible...much more ‘hands-off’, self-regulating regulation”.\textsuperscript{280}

Narrowness and rigidity are further charges frequently brought against the National Curriculum. Emphasis since its introduction has been heavily on the so-called “core subjects” of reading, writing, mathematics and natural science, subjects which then themselves are further dissected for easy, step-by-step digestion. Elevated thus to primary status, largely for vocational and economic reasons, the ability to pass tests in these subjects becomes one of the most encouraged behaviours.\textsuperscript{281} This focus illustrates the phenomenon discussed above that curriculum planners tend to neglect that children are physical and emotional as well as intellectual beings. “Creativity expert” Ken Robinson, in a humorous and compelling talk at the Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) Annual Conference, put it in the following way:

As children grow up we start to educate them progressively from the waist up.

And then we focus on their heads. And slightly to one side. If you were to visit

\textsuperscript{279} Ball, “The Teacher’s Soul and the Terrors of Performativity,” p.217.
\textsuperscript{280} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{281} Sahlberg, “Education Policies for Raising Student Learning: The Finnish Approach.”
education as an alien and say ‘what’s education for?’ I think you’d have to conclude that the whole purpose of [public] education is to produce university professors [who] look upon their bodies as a form of transport for their heads.\textsuperscript{282}

Calling for a “fundamental revision of our expectations about what education is for”,\textsuperscript{283} Robinson challenges the assumptions of the “positivist worldview” and its effect of narrowing rationality and intelligence, resting on arbitrary divisions between the arts and science, reason and imagination, intellect and emotion, and so on. His work emphasises the centrality of music, drama, poetry, dance and other “arts techniques” in unlocking creative capacities and engaging the \textit{whole} of human intelligence:

The problem is not promoting academic ability itself, it is the obsessive preoccupation with it. Academic ability is a vital feature of human intelligence and in some respects is characteristic of it...But there’s much more to intelligence than academic ability and much more to education than developing it. If there were no more intelligence than this, most of human culture with its complex fabric of scientific, technological, artistic, economic and social enterprises would never have happened.\textsuperscript{284}

While the importance of the arts and creative projects in education is officially recognised, it is still largely seen by policy-makers as a means to balance the core curriculum, or even as “extra-curricular”, rather than integral to all learning and therefore all subjects. In response to independent recommendations for a more diverse education, provision for the arts and humanities are simply added to an already over-crowded syllabus. Moreover, they are the first to disappear in the event of spending cuts because of the assumption that prioritising science and technology will be more directly beneficial to the national economy.\textsuperscript{285} As Robinson pointed out, the error of this way of thinking is only made more obvious by increasingly urgent demands from companies and organisations for a more “creative, innovative and flexible” workforce.\textsuperscript{286}

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative (West Sussex: Capstone, 2001), p.91.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., pp.8-9.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., p.1.
According to studies done in 1967 and again in 2001 in which children were asked to describe their experiences of school and picture their ideal learning environment, young people themselves recognise the consequences of over specialisation in school subjects:

They question the divisions set up between the arts and sciences, the rural and the urban. They point out the disadvantages of society’s valuing more highly certain skills over others. In so doing, their perspective betrays their sense of a highly volatile and fluid world; a place where knowledge and understanding grounded in contemporary certainties might, overnight, become irrelevant.287

Commenting on the optimism of the 1960s, the compilers of the 2001 study talk of the hopes that had existed then that schools would be able to present material in ways that involve, interest and rouse enjoyment in the pupil, and where boundaries between subjects are freely crossed. They express their disappointment that a generation on, subjects have reached unprecedented levels of rigidity and organisation.288 The compilers put forward that rigid division of subjects – and a day broken up into arbitrary periods in which the child’s concentration is continually interrupted and re-directed toward something wholly unconnected – is as unconducive to integrative learning as the environment of anxiety and pressure created by repeated assessment. That a profound experience of anxiety, even fear, is a real feature of school life today is indicated by many of the statements made by children themselves who contributed to the book. A 14 year-old girl for instance, when asked to describe her ideal school, wrote: “I dream of happiness and learning united. I dream of no interruptions. If I went to my ideal school I wouldn’t wake up every morning and dread the next day, the next week, the next year, the rest of my life”.289

A curriculum driven by aims and objectives requires not only the “carving up of the corpus” of knowledge into “‘limbs’ and ‘joints’ which become dead when detached from the organic whole”,290 but it relies on a conception of learning as a linear process, one which has pre-determined steps or stages. Indeed, Kelly notes that the only way to make sense of the distinction between an ‘aim’ and an ‘objective’ is through a hierarchical scheme of learning. Overall aims are separated into intermediate and progressing consecutive goals.

288Ibid., p.58.
289“Maisie” in Ibid., p.133.
Detailed outlines of the kinds of behaviour expected at each step of this progression toward the overall aim are expressed in terms of intended “learning outcomes”.\textsuperscript{291} In this picture it is assumed that knowledge is acquired and then at some later point it is understood, or as A.N. Whitehead phrased it, it is based on the idea that the mind is a tool whose life can be postponed till sufficiently sharpened.\textsuperscript{292} Epitomising this approach to learning is the concept of the “basic skill”; that is, those skills which it is deemed need to be learned before anything else can be learned, understood or even enjoyed. In a statement that directly contradicts Robinson’s account of multi-faceted intelligence, the Government’s response to his recommendations was:

By getting the basics right [i.e. literacy and numeracy], we open access to opportunity to more pupils in more spheres of learning than ever before. Creativity and the basics are not in conflict. The ability to draw on a body of facts is an essential stepping stone to the development of creative thought which translates imagination into practical implementation.\textsuperscript{293}

Again, the idea that learning is linear and knowledge is a destination that can be clearly mapped out, an assumption which informs the planning and delivery of the National Curriculum, is presented in much of the educational literature (both historical and recent) as a drastic oversimplification of the development of understanding and child psychology. Challenging the ‘easy to difficult’ assumption, Jerome Bruner promoted the idea of a “spiral curriculum”, one which begins with an “intuitive depiction of a domain of knowledge” and circling back to it as needed to reinforce or formalise it. The object of instruction is “not coverage, but depth: to teach or instantiate general principles that render self-evident as many particulars as possible”.\textsuperscript{294} In Bruner’s view, educational encounters should lead to “understanding, not mere performance”; and “acquired knowledge is most useful to a learner...when it is “discovered” through the learner’s own cognitive efforts, for it is then related to and used in reference to what one has known before”.\textsuperscript{295}

\textsuperscript{291} Kelly, The Curriculum: Theory and Practice, p.64.
\textsuperscript{295} Ibid., pp.xi-xii.
Whitehead also argued that learning, like life, is cyclical and thus teaching ought to be a fluid and periodical repetition, a constant coming to fruition and starting afresh. Asking why it appears that educational attempts fail to achieve their goals relative to the “absolute success” of the natural cycles of infant learning, he concluded that it is because the tasks are set in ways that are unnatural, without attention to the “rhythm and character of mental growth” and above all, without concentration. Modern education, with its scraps of disconnected information, is the antithesis of the total absorption to the task demonstrated by for instance the young child learning to walk or to speak. The reality in itself that children master the complexity of language in their first three years presents as significant evidence against “basic skills” and “body of facts” models of learning. Asserting more recently that schools succeed not in teaching children how to think, but in teaching them how to “think badly”, Holt likewise emphasises the need for a more profound study and understanding of the child to be the basis of education. “When we better understand the ways, conditions, and spirit in which children do their best learning, and are able to make school into a place where they can use and improve the style of thinking natural to them, we may be able to prevent much of this failure”.

Children who are today classified as failing at learning because they are unable to perform specific target behaviours by a specific age may thus only be failing according to the limited conception of learning that targets embody and/or because the methods used to teach them are inappropriate and/or because the stage of development at which they are expected to learn them is inappropriate. Drawing on historical and comparative reviews of reading instruction programmes, as well as a study of the development and design of writing systems, McGuinness argues that the low literacy rates in English-speaking countries relative to other European countries is a product of both the complex nature of the writing system itself (i.e. it is an ‘opaque’ alphabet code rather than a ‘transparent’ one like German, Spanish or Swedish) and the way reading is taught in schools. McGuinness’ research results also expose as “popular myths” that young children cannot pay attention for more than 10-15 minutes at a time and that if kept at an activity for longer than that will become bored and frustrated. “When lessons are enjoyable; when children see that

297 Ibid., p.32.
they and their classmates are actually learning to read, they have no trouble paying
attention for more than 15 minutes”.

It was suggested above that what emerges in light of these criticisms as core characteristics
of the 1988 and subsequent reforms in education is their counter-productivity and internal
inconsistency. One of the problems the legislation was designed to respond to was a
perceived cultural degeneration and breakdown in social cohesion. Its effect appears to
have been however to foster divisiveness and provide disincentive for both individuals and
institutions to act out of a sense of community service and human need. The reforms
aimed to restore public confidence in the education system but again have had the opposite
result if continued denouncements and calls of crisis and failure are to be heeded. Another
fundamental concern motivating reformers was the need to meet the demands of an
economic environment where the most valued qualities are creativity and the ability to
adapt. The narrow curriculum and rigid definition of learning imposed by the 1988 Act
however is widely perceived to hinder the development of those very qualities. In the aims
and objectives model, where progress and success are judged by testing against very
specific performance criteria, children are not only discouraged from but can be penalised
for being creative, using their imagination, experimenting or expressing unsolicited ideas.
Examiners and teachers are often required to “overlook exactly those qualities [they]
should have been looking for” because there is no place to fit them into the structure of the
marking scheme.

Finally, the most profound contradiction between official political intentions and what
critics have demonstrated as the actual consequences of the legislation lies in the extent to
which the reforms provide opportunities for autonomous decision-making and action, in
the case of teachers, pupils and their parents. In his 1976 Ruskin College speech
Callaghan stated “If everything is reduced to such phrases as ‘educational freedom’ versus
state control, we shall get nowhere”. He was right up to a point, for expressed simply
this dichotomy can serve only to divert attention from the myriad ways in which control

299 Diane McGuinness, “A Prototype for Teaching the English Alphabet Code,” Reading Reform Foundation,
advocates a phoneme-based reading programme which among other things includes teaching an ‘artificial’
transparent alphabet and linking reading to writing/spelling at every level of instruction. Her research
supports insights by both Montessori and Steiner about the impact of focusing on writing and forming letters
on reading progress. “Synthetic phonics” was introduced to the National Curriculum in 2006.
See in particular discussion of the English GCSE marking scheme, pp. 128-132.
301 Callaghan, “Towards a National Debate.”
can be exerted beyond traditional mechanisms of the state, especially as its form and practices are being continuously transformed.

On the other hand, a very real danger lies in the implication – and this evidently is the implication – that the debate has somehow moved beyond the matter of state control vs. educational freedom. As the discussion above reveals, the theme is as relevant today as it was in the 1850s when J.S. Mill warned that a general State education would inevitably end up being a means of moulding citizens to suit the needs of the predominant power in government, resulting in a “despotism” over both mind and body.\(^{302}\) Treating this tension as a problem of the past is part and parcel of the same paradigm that constructs the political in terms of neutral problem solving, burying it under a deluge of fashionable “policy technologies” and bustling newness. Although outer circumstances, social conditions and institutional structures are in constant transition, the persistence of a sense of crisis itself indicates that the tension continues to exist in some form or another. It is precisely because the world changes so fast and dramatically that the question of the meaning of educational freedom, and freedom \emph{per se}, needs to be continuously posed anew. It is, in short, never an answered question, and crises have the potential to both reveal where the tension lies and keep it in our consciousness.

...when human voices prostitute language to the chanting of slogans, a wall of opposition is raised as terrifying spiritually as a row of guns is physically...

(Marjorie Reeves, *The Crisis in Higher Education*, 1988)\(^{303}\)

NEW LABOUR AND THE NEW AGE

According to Michael Barber, however tortuous a process it may have been, the Conservatives under the period of reform just described got four things fundamentally right: the delegation of financial management to schools, the establishment of national standards, the demand for public accountability and finally the loosening of the “producer stranglehold” on policy. The Tories thus provided the new Labour government with a platform to “build an education system fit for the twenty-first century”.\(^{304}\) We can see from this that a number of fundamental commitments were to be continued and strengthened under Tony Blair’s leadership. In addition to the determination to raise standards in connection with economic productivity, a quest to *modernise* educational systems, structures and practices via methods that emphasised new forms of management, and a commitment to promoting *choice and diversity* were among the dominant themes of the new administration.\(^{305}\)

Many of the key ideas which were to shape New Labour’s policy after 1997 are set out in the Report of the Commission for Social Justice set up in December 1992 by the then Labour Party leader John Smith. The Report was titled *Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal* and claimed to explain how the country’s strengths, in particular the “untapped talent of its people” (echoing the Newsom Report of 1963), could be the basis of national renewal. It presented a long-term strategy “designed to build a radical

---


\(^{304}\) Barber, *The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution*, p.68.

consensus for change.” Referring to the UK as a “tired, resentful, divided and failing country”, the Report stressed the capacity of the nation to “understand and reverse what seems to many people to be inexorable decline”. It boldly stated “Our aspiration is nothing less than the creation of a learning society...” and the authors presented the Report as “a call for urgent action”.

The evidence for national “failure” is provided in the form of statistical data of average income, unemployment levels, health and crime rates and results achieved in basic maths and literacy tests as compared with neighbouring countries. The Report identified as the “first and most important task” for government being “to set in place the opportunities for children and adults to learn to their personal best”.

In terms of diagnosing the sickness in society, the Social Justice Report pointed to the UK’s failure “to keep up with” certain dramatic (and inexorable) transformations occurring in the world. These changes take the shape of three great revolutions: the economic revolution with regard to the emergence of global finance, skills, technology and competition; the social revolution in which we see changing family structures, demographics, women in the workplace etc.; and finally, the political revolution which is challenging old assumptions of parliamentary sovereignty and the over-centralisation of government power. Political renewal requires both greater decentralisation and greater democratisation: “Employers and government need to catch up with the changes. Social renewal demands that we build an inclusive society, where rights carry responsibilities, and individuals have the chance to realise their potential”.

---

307 Ibid.
308 Ibid., p.141.
309 Ibid., p.398.
310 Ibid., p.2.
311 Ibid., p.120.
312 Cited in Jones, Education in Britain : 1944 to the Present, pp.148-49.
One of these responsibilities, we are repeatedly reminded, is to learn: to learn for ourselves and for our country: “People want to learn, our country needs them to learn, and government must help provide the opportunities for them to do so.”\textsuperscript{314} This statement heralds a tone and style of political rhetoric which has come to increasingly characterise the relationship between citizen and government as a partnership, a project of mutual involvement and benefit in which government takes on the role of the slightly admonishing yet encouraging parental figure whose only interest lies in aiding citizens to improve their world and be themselves. The ‘we’re all in this together’ and ‘it’s for your own good’ messages are, illustrated for example, in the forward to the 2001 White Paper \textit{Schools Achieving Success} in which Estelle Morris offers this response to complaints about the burden of performance criteria:

\begin{quote}
Sometimes those who work in our schools think that we ask too much of them. We have to ask a lot – and we have to ask even more if we are to solve some of the deep-seated problems and challenges facing education. But if we ask more of our teachers we must also ask more of ourselves, and we must match our demands with more support. And we will do.\textsuperscript{315}
\end{quote}

There is a further dimension to this tone and the relationship between government and governed. In addition to the industrial and/or corporate metaphors dominating official education discourse, there is a distinct military colouring to the imagery which permeates policy initiatives. While still in opposition as Shadow Education Minister, David Blunkett formed the Literacy Task Force, headed by Michael Barber, who was later to head the Standards and Effectiveness Unit which was to oversee the National Literacy Strategy, launched by the newly appointed Schools Standards Minister. “Education Action Zones” were to be created and a Standards Task Force was given the remit to carry “the crusade” to every part of the education service.\textsuperscript{316} The language of efficiency and precision, that these are serious measures to tackle serious problems, forms a strong impression that Government will use all the weapons in its (increasingly technologically sophisticated) arsenal to successfully resolve the situation, effectively waging a (“smart”) war on failure on behalf of the public interest. New Labour’s 2009 education White Paper exemplifies this picture of education as a procedure analogous to a military operation. Referring to the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[314] Ibid., p.136.
\end{footnotes}
teaching profession, it asserts that “It is only the workforce who can deliver our ambition of improved outcomes...this workforce will need to be well-led, highly-skilled, motivated and effectively deployed”.317

The key themes that emerged from the Social Justice Report were thus a need for: a balance between rights and responsibilities, the fulfilment of individual potential, and decentralisation and democratisation. The authors painted a vision which aimed to combine the “ethics of the community with the dynamics of the market economy”.318

Proclaiming that there is no opposition between social justice and economic success, specifically that success which can be guaranteed by market competition, the Report pointed to a politics that would attempt to transcend previous dichotomies. Having identified what ails society as, among other things, economic inequality, out-of-date social attitudes and political centralism, the Report asserted that although “the cure is not easy or quick” it is, however, “available”.319 Under the heading “Making a Good Society” the contributors went on to set out how the success story could be realised in practice.

Coming specifically to the matter of education, the authors of the Social Justice Report placed “lifelong learning” at the heart of their vision of a better country: “By investing in skills, we help people realise their potential, raise their capacity to add value to the economy, take charge of their own lives and contribute to their families and communities.”320 However, “if every child and every adult is to fulfil his or her potential, we need a social and economic revolution”.321 It is clear from this that many of the more questionable assumptions embedded in the 1988 legislation were to be not only continued but embraced with considerable enthusiasm by the new Government. Indeed, what by all accounts given in the previous chapter are deeply unsound pedagogical principles were elevated to over-arching political principles and made the basis for a programme of social, cultural and economic renewal:

Basic skills should be learnt young, when they are more easily acquired. Given adequate educational opportunity and investment, almost all children can learn to read fluently by the age of seven and it is essential that they should do so.

---

320 Ibid., p.5.
321 Ibid., p.119.
Because children who cannot read find it hard to learn anything else, they are more likely to be bored, disruptive or to play truant. Government and local education authorities should therefore commit themselves to the target of ensuring that every seven-year-old can read.\textsuperscript{322}

That these educational maxims were to be unquestioningly endorsed by the new Government is made clear by Tony Blair in 1996 when he stressed the importance of children leaving primary school with a reading age to match their chronological age.\textsuperscript{323} Hansmann suggests that one of the reasons for the rather extraordinary view widely held by policy-makers and advisers that unless children can learn to read, they can’t learn anything at all, is that the worksheet-oriented nature of teaching prescribed in schools makes it necessarily true.\textsuperscript{324} The belief in the basic essential skill and the narrow curriculum are, in other words, mutually reinforcing. A predominance of literacy-based activities means if the child cannot read he or she is unable to participate and demonstrate the desired kind of progress; yet the more focus is on reading instruction the narrower the curriculum becomes. The skills are “essential” only because of the way the curriculum is structured, performance criteria and the way learning is defined and measured at each “key stage”.

Evidence to support the idea that reading before the age of seven is essential for the child’s overall wellbeing and future prospects, outside the existing English system of formal education, is not provided. It may be the case, as McGuinness has argued, that children in some other European countries, who start on average years later, learn to read faster than those in England because of a less complicated alphabet code. However, there is no indication that they suffer any negative consequences, either educationally or generally, from not reading before the age of seven. On the contrary, the fact that the countries in which children consistently do better on literacy and numeracy tests than their English counterparts have much later compulsory schooling ages highlights the tenuousness of the theory that starting earlier and increasing the number of hours of formal instruction will

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., p.129. (My emphasis).
\textsuperscript{323} Blair.
\textsuperscript{324} Peter Hansmann, (Specialist Reading Tutor, Kingswood Learning), in discussion with the author, October 2009. In fact, Labour politician Lord Adonis was quoted as stating that very thing by the BBC on March 20, 2006. See “Teaching of reading to be revised,” BBC News Online, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4818516.stm.
have a positive influence on the quality of educational outcomes, even within the limited criteria of the system itself. ³²⁵

Labour leader Tony Blair reiterated the key ideas expressed in *Social Justice* in his 1996 Ruskin College speech, marking the twentieth anniversary of Callaghan’s speech. A focus on standards, especially in the basics of numeracy and literacy, the expectation of performance accountability for all public services, a balance of parents’ rights with a recognition of their responsibilities, all had one aim: “To improve the educational experience, and raise standards of achievement, for the majority of children.” Offering his Party’s take on the problem with British education, Blair asserted in his speech that it is a question of providing excellence for the majority and not just an elite few. For too long there have been low expectations for the majority of people, generating a culture of mediocrity: “Our job is to raise standards of the worst schools to that of the average, and the standards of the average to that of the best”. Under Labour every school will be “either excellent or improving or both”. ³²⁶

In this way the new Government planned to usher in an “Age of Achievement”. Speaking of the chance to forge a new consensus on education policy, Blair stated: “It will be practical, not ideological. And it will put behind us the political and ideological debates that have dominated for the last thirty years.” In this new Age, despite the commitment to decentralisation, the political direction of educational change is still paramount: “The third component of successful education reform, after good policy and the engagement of the teaching profession, is strong leadership from the centre.” Education, instead of being seen as belonging to a somewhat backwater department, will become “a leading office of state”; albeit, in a new kind of state. ³²⁷

New Labour’s whole-hearted dedication to improving educational standards was left in no doubt upon publication, just months after taking office, of its first White Paper *Excellence in Schools*. In it the new Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, asked the British people to join him “in making the crusade for higher standards a reality in every classroom and every household in the country”. ³²⁸ A core feature of the Government’s effort to improve basic skills was the National Literacy Strategy, a measure

³²⁵ See the findings of the Cambridge Primary Review and the Rose Report for more on the question of early reading instruction.
³²⁶ Blair.
³²⁷ Ibid.
which, among other things, highlights the degree to which the “details of process” had become subject to central influence in contrast to the *laissez-faire* attitude pre-1988. The strategy was a five to 10 year programme set up to ensure that 80 percent of eleven year-olds would reach certain standards of proficiency in National Curriculum tests by the year 2002.  

The document provided national guidelines for teachers recommending a minimum of one hour a day on reading instruction. Despite not being statutory requirements, most primary schools adopted the highly prescriptive model laid out for them.

To give an impression of the level of detail, the “literacy hour” was initially structured with the lesson broken into four sections and based on an objectives framework according to the principle that children learn things better if they are clear about the aims of the lesson and have the opportunity to review their progress. In other words, it will be beneficial for them to be presented with the ‘rationality’ of the exercise. As such, in the first 15 minutes the teacher was advised to make the aims clear, followed by whole class modelling of reading or writing. The second 15 minutes were again to be whole class, yet focused on word and sentence work. The third 20 minutes would be given to individual work, and finally, in the last 10 minute plenary session children would be encouraged to explain what they have learned.  

The model was revised in the revised *Framework for Teaching* issued by the Department for Education in 2006. Reflecting so-called new research and the findings of the Rose Review on early reading, in addition to prioritising the (by all accounts considerably better) phonics-based method of reading instruction, teachers were now encouraged to be more flexible with their activities and to make lessons enjoyable.

As well as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, the new Government launched the National Gifted and Talented Strategy, the controversial nature of which was referred to above in the discussion about fixed and innate ability. A Key Stage Three Strategy was introduced in 2001 and the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners was published in 2004. In 2007 the Department for Children, Schools and Families set out the Children’s Plan, described ambitiously as a “ten-year strategy to make England the best place in the

---

329 Ibid., p.19.
330 Ibid., p.20.
world for children and young people to grow up”. The Plan sets out a number of goals for all areas of children’s lives over the next decade, some more vague than others. For instance, at age five 90 percent of children will be “developing well” across all areas of the early years foundation stages; at age 11, 95 percent of children will have reached expected levels in literacy and numeracy, and so on. These goals were to be achieved by means of a range of policies, and the Government made available a “toolkit to help our partners communicate the Children’s Plan” and an “implementation pack of materials to help partners working with children and young people”.

In spite of extensive criticism of the belief that assessment is at the heart of learning, the Assessment for Learning Strategy was launched in 2008 with the aim to “link classroom assessment reliably to National Curriculum levels in order to track the progress of individual pupils and intervene accordingly”. According to the Chief Adviser on School Standards Sue Hackman, Assessing Pupils’ Progress (APP) is a “straightforward approach to making secure judgements about the standards of pupils’ work and what they need to do next....The bottom line is that when you make a judgement, you use national criteria, and keep a note of the judgements made over time so that you can see how pupils progress”. Crucially, thus, it is the fact that criteria have been “nationally developed and standardised” which means that teachers can have the greatest “confidence in the judgements made”. It is furthermore by “investing in assessment” that “schools can ensure that learning is meaningful for all pupils, teaching is effective and attainment outcomes are improved”.

Extending beyond formal education, the 2009 White Paper The Learning Revolution set out a national strategy on informal adult learning, explaining how the Government can act as enabler, capacity builder and connector to maximise potential benefits and help people lead more rewarding and fulfilling lives. That people in this country have “a passion for learning” is evidenced, according to the White Paper, by the boom in book-clubs, online research and blogging, as well as the continuing popularity of museums, public lectures

---

333 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
and adult classes. It is a “revolution” that the Government “is proud to foster and encourage”.

THE PERFORMATIVE SOCIETY

Bleak indeed is the desire for perfection. In this condition, the demands of performativity mean not the pursuit of educational ideals, like personal autonomy or emancipation, but, instead, the subsumption of education under the demands of efficiency for the total social system.


Referring to the apparent triumph of neo-liberal ideology over social democracy, sociologist Anthony Giddens remarked that “fifty years ago everyone was a planner, now no one seems to be”. The popularity amongst today’s policy-makers of comprehensive, detailed and step-by-step programmes for the organisation of social improvement like those described above however suggests that the last few decades have not been witness to a demise in planning so much as the evolution of a new kind of planning. The numerous education strategies reflect various aspects of the English version of the total “reform package” increasingly applied to public services worldwide, one that combines market mechanisms, managerialism and performativity. Ball describes performativity as:

a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons, and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). *The performances* (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.

---

Who controls the “field of judgement” is therefore vital. Phillips and Harper-Jones also argue that it is performativity that provides “the dominant metaphor for describing New Labour policies and priorities on education in the early twenty-first century”. This includes the following set of assumptions:

...that decisions concerning curriculum (inputs), pedagogy (process) and assessment (outcomes) should be centralized; that there are standards of ‘quality’ that can be objectively measured; that it is necessary and desirable to assess institutional quality according to externally defined ‘performance indicators’; that the punitive use of league tables and other publicly shaming devices will help to ‘drive up’ educational performance; that assessment is a ‘neutral’ measuring instrument that requires only further technical development to make it more effective.

The White Paper Schools Achieving Success published in 2001 defended the Government’s approach. In it was stated that the system is more accountable because more is known about the performance of individual schools. It claimed that the ambition to “drive up standards” is widely shared, and that teachers, heads and Government accept accountability for performance. Establishing clear targets means that schools and teachers have better evidence available to enable them to evaluate their performance and “challenge themselves to improve”. This notion of a calculable means to self-improvement is an illustration of what Rose described as a policy regime in which individuals, in this case teachers, are encouraged to be “‘enterprising subjects’, who live their lives as ‘an enterprise of the self’”. The quantifiability of personal success or excellence in teaching means, however, that within the regime there is a tendency for “value” to replace “values”; or, to return the question of meaningful relationships, “contract replaces covenant”.

The White Paper also announced that as a result of Government efforts, teachers will be both better supported and rewarded: “We have made it easier for some of our best teachers to maintain their focus in the classroom through performance-related promotion

342 Broadfoot cited in Ibid.: p.130.
343 Department for Education and Skills, Schools Achieving Success, p.8.
345 Bernstein, cited in Ibid.
and the Advanced Skills Teacher Programme”. Again, the statement is underpinned by a set of assumptions which, although taken as self-evident, are decidedly contentious. The first is the (what might be considered highly patronising to any adult) assumption that teachers, particularly “the best” need assistance in “maintaining their focus in the classroom”. The second being that if it is required, Government is the appropriate source of assistance. The third assumption is that teachers will ‘do better’ if they have the possibility of promotion and a pay-rise. The fourth and interconnected assumption is that teachers thus motivated are doing a good job, i.e. are (almost by default) acting in the overall best interests of pupils and their learning.

The White Paper goes on to say that a “genuine transformation in the basics” has occurred in primary schools due to the embracing of the literacy and numeracy strategies. Between 1996 and 2000 the percentage of pupils achieving level four or above in Key Stage 2 tests rose from 57% to 75%, meaning “an additional 150,000 pupils started secondary schools last year with the basic skills they needed…”. Children are leaving primary school more literate and more numerate “and therefore more articulate and more confident”. According to the authors, teachers can see that their pupils are better prepared and achieve more, and parents can see “the difference in what their children know, understand and are able to do”. While these general positive claims about results go unsupported in the document, evidence is cited to prove that “there are now far fewer unsatisfactory lessons in primary schools”. The evidence is that Ofsted deemed only four percent of lessons to be ‘unsatisfactory’ or ‘poor’ in 2000, as compared to 17 percent in 1995/6. This success story of the “revolution in skills” initiated by the Labour administration is re-told and re-embellished throughout their period in power. Improvement in the standard of schools, measured in the above terms, is repeatedly used to substantiate the much wider claim of progress toward the goal of making this country “the best place in the world to grow up”. By these reforms the Party will not only give children the greatest chance to make something of themselves in adult life but will help to “secure the future success of our country and society”.

346 Department for Education and Skills, Schools Achieving Success, p.8.
347 Ibid., p.12.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid., p.13.
350 Ibid.
The trend begun in 1988 of extensive legislation and centrally-directed change to all aspects of education and learning thus continued apace under the New Labour Government. Acts on or relating to education appeared in 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007 and 2008. The 2008 Education and Skills Act was especially significant in that it stipulated young people’s “duty to participate in education or training” up to the age of 18, thus raising the “learning” leaving age for the first time in over three decades. After completing compulsory schooling, the 16-year-old will have the choice between full-time education, a work-based learning programme such as an apprenticeship, or required part-time training alongside employment.\(^{352}\)

In 2008 the statutory framework for learning was also extended in the other direction. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provided a structure, a set of standards and a set of goals for children’s “learning, development and care” from birth to five-years-old. All schools, as well as registered “early years providers” in the private, independent and voluntary sectors are required to use the EYFS. This includes reception and nursery classes, day nurseries, childminders, playgroups, after-school and breakfast clubs and holiday play schemes. The EYFS will make certain that “children learn through play”, that “providers work closely with parents”, that parents will be “kept up-to-date” on their “child’s progress”, and finally it will ensure the “welfare, learning and all-round development” of children from all backgrounds and of all abilities.\(^{353}\)

The last major legislative proposals before Labour lost the General Election were unveiled in the 2010 White Paper *Your Child, Your School, Our Future: Building a 21st Century School System*. The White Paper sets out five broad ambitions for all pupils which capture the essential elements of what the Government envisaged as a “school system fit for the 21st century”, one which will offer every young person “the chance to thrive at school and to succeed in life” and one which the Government, most interestingly sought *to guarantee*.\(^{354}\) Presented as the culmination of the reforms of the previous 12 years, the document aimed to provide a “comprehensive account of what children and young people can expect from their school career”.\(^{355}\) Predominantly reflecting existing legislation, the

\(^{352}\) United Kingdom, Education and Skills Act, 2008, c. 25, ss. 2.


\(^{355}\) Ibid., p.6.
document codified expectations of schools as well as introducing new rights, such as “personalised” support for individual children or groups of children with particular needs or abilities. A “Pupil Guarantee” spelt out clearly what pupils are already or will be entitled to in each area of the general ambitions, what strategies will be employed to ensure delivery of these entitlements and what complaints procedures parents can follow if they feel they are “missing out” on any part of the Guarantee.356

The goals set out for the education system in the White Paper are grand and ambitious and reflect the concerns raised by the educational community over the last decade about exclusion, the narrowness of the curriculum, the burden of bureaucratic controls, limited decision-making powers of teachers and many other issues covered in the discussion above. The proposals for achieving them nevertheless embody all of the unfounded assumptions, dubious educational principles and controversial methods identified with the Education Reform Act of 1988. A central focus of the Paper, for instance, is how to deal with disruptive pupil behaviour and how to maintain order and discipline in classrooms, a preoccupation shared by the Conservatives. “Every pupil will go to a school where there is good behaviour, strong discipline, order and safety”.357 To secure what is presented as a right for children, essential for their wellbeing and learning, the Government would act on the advice of Sir Alan Steer’s National Review of Behaviour Standards and Practices in Schools, a 200 page document with no less than 47 detailed recommendations regarding the powers, duties and rights of teachers, schools and parents.

Rather than investigating the possible reasons for what is varyingly described as “poor”, “bad”, “unsatisfactory” or “disruptive” behaviour, the Review focuses almost exclusively on the implementation of commonly agreed behaviour management strategies for schools and behaviour management training and procedures for teachers and parents. The emphasis is thus quite definitively not on attempting to understand and respond to the needs and experiences of individual children, but on ensuring that children (and parents), regardless of their circumstances, conform to the structures and requirements of the school. The Review states “Where instances of bad behaviour occur intervention must be swift, intelligent and effective. This intervention must protect the interests of the majority while

356 Ibid., p.8.
357 ———, Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools System (Summary), p.3.
aiming to change the behaviour of those causing the difficulties.”

The general presumption appears to be that children are the problem, not the system. The smooth operation of the system will be guaranteed, as Sloan suggested, by “taking off the raw edges of the recalcitrant”. While the Review does recognise that so-called disruptive behaviour is often connected to a lack of engagement and interest on the part of pupils, this is not taken to be an indication that teaching methods and/or the curriculum need to be re-considered in any fundamental way. Instead, the document provides an extensive list of tips for teachers on how to liven up lessons, maintain pupil concentration and other practical classroom advice.

A second ambition of the White Paper was that every pupil will be taught a broad and balanced curriculum including “skills for learning and life”. However, it remains the “absolute priority” that children achieve well in the basics, especially in English and mathematics. Although one of the key next steps identified by the Government was to allow for more flexibility in the curriculum, this flexibility will enable teachers to “devote more time to English and mathematics for those who have fallen behind” the expected standards. As such, while in the new improved primary curriculum to be introduced in 2011 schools would be “given more scope to tailor provision to their own circumstances and the needs of the children in their care”, those needs would still be determined according to the child’s successes or failures in nationally prescribed performance targets. Described as a process in which children are “taught in a way that meets their needs”, “personalised learning” involves among other things regular checking up on pupil progress in Key Stage objectives, early identification and intervention where progress is not adequate, and entitlements to intensive “catch-up” tuition on a one-to-one basis.

Finally, the White Paper expresses the ambitions that “every child will go to a school where they take part in sport and cultural activities” and “every child will go to a school that promotes their health and wellbeing”. The former two will be delivered by a compulsory five hours of physical education each week and access to “a wide range of out-of-school activities, re-emphasising Robinson’s point that “culture”, or perhaps “creativity”, continues to be regarded as something extra-curricular. Promoting “health

359 Ibid., see especially Appendix B.
and wellbeing”, which includes equipping children to face a range of issues as they grow up, such as those relating to drugs, sex, alcohol, personal finance, relationships and emotional maturity, will be guaranteed by making Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) a statutory part of the National Curriculum. The latter demonstrates a continued faith in the notion that the qualities of emotional intelligence, acumen, a sense of responsibility and social values can be treated as a separate part of education and can be simply added to the core subjects which are considered the foundation of the school syllabus.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE ‘LEARNING SOCIETY’

We used to talk about education, education, education. If anything it’s excellence, excellence, excellence, for the next few years. Excellence for all.

(Gordon Brown, interview for the BBC, January 7, 2007)

Many instances and consequences of the performathe culture described above can be witnessed in Higher Education (HE). There has been a storm of work in recent years discussing the purpose of the university in the new environment where knowledge is a key factor of production and we are all encouraged to be “flexible learners” throughout life to ensure the nation’s global economic competitiveness. This concerted effort to create the ‘learning society’ is strongly initiated by international governmental organisations, including the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the European Union (EU). Although the term ‘learning’ has come to be synonymous with education and training that seeks to respond particularly to the demands of the information-driven economy, the creation of the ‘learning society’ is not just an economic policy. It is a large-scale programme that encompasses economic, political and cultural life, profoundly shaping both social relationships and personal identities. This, according to Jarvis, marks a clear break from even the recent past where educational policies were

361 Ibid., p.5.
distinct from policies relating to the economic and social order. Having said that, although the ‘learning society’ agenda is a complicated interweaving of the economic, political and cultural/educational, the fact that the perceived needs of the economy clearly win out in terms of over-arching goals demonstrates quite unambiguously that in the new society the political and cultural are profoundly in service to the economic.

The rationale behind the ‘learning society’ is clearly set out in the 1995 European Commission White Paper on education and training entitled *Towards the Learning Society*. According to the Commission, “Everyone's position in society will increasingly be determined by the knowledge he or she has built up. Tomorrow's society will be a society which invests in knowledge, a society of teaching and learning, in which each individual will build up his or her own qualification”. The political measures designed to foster the ‘learning society’ are presented in terms of the most effective response to three factors of upheaval in contemporary Europe. The first of these is the dawning of the information age which has transformed the nature of work and working conditions. In a society where knowledge and information have replaced capital and energy (which replaced land and labour) as the key factors of production, education and training take on wholly different functions and have new dimensions.

The second upheaval is the creation of a global employment market resulting from the internationalisation of trade, necessitating high levels of qualification to ensure competitive advantage. The White Paper suggests that high levels of qualification will also minimize social inequalities, that is to say, in an economy where one’s employability is increasingly connected to higher knowledge and education, “there is a risk of a rift developing between those who are able to interpret [information], those who can only use, and those who can do neither”. There are thus a number of interesting albeit rather confusing dimensions to the ‘learning society’ discourse. It is on the one hand a concerted effort to *adjust* the workforce to the transformed economy, harnessing education into the Government’s mission to “maximise competitive advantage by increasing the supply of reprogrammable labour...”. On the other hand, neo-liberal policies clearly contribute to globalising forces and the language of globalisation is as much about effecting change as

---

364 European Commission, *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*.
describing it.\textsuperscript{368} In spite of this, the \textit{inevitability} of these conditions is implied, and the ‘learning society’, although consolidating a specific economic order, is justified in terms of it being a means to counteract the increasing social exclusion and inequality that are the negative side-effects of that order.

The third upheaval identified by the Commission is the “relentless march of science and technology”, something that has led to many countries promoting a technical/scientific culture from a young age in order to allay any existential unease or “irrational misgivings in society” that may be a consequence of it.\textsuperscript{369} Advancing toward the ‘learning society’, argues the Paper, is again a way to address some of these more pernicious effects of ongoing global transformations, and it comes in the form of a twofold plan: building up a \textit{broad-based knowledge} and building up \textit{employability}. Although the broad knowledge base is defined initially as “the wherewithal to grasp the meaning of things, to understand and to create...”, it is from then on discussed in terms of “the acquisition of new knowledge”, particularly in relation to personal, technical and vocational skills that can be isolated and subsequently accredited.\textsuperscript{370}

The second factor in adjusting to the economic and employment situation is expressed as the need to “build up employability”. The traditional route, i.e. gaining a paper qualification, while still valuable, needs to be supplemented by other forms of accreditation for a number of reasons. Among them is the fact that the status of degree courses can devalue vocational programmes, that they often over-qualify people in relation to jobs available, or that they can become an elite standard which locks out potential talent from the employment market. To encourage more flexibility, therefore, a method needs to be developed for recognizing and evaluating the “core skills” an individual has, independent of any formal qualifications. A person’s general knowledge and abilities can be broken down and divided into categories such as writing, language and word-processing skills, or into specialist fields like law, economics or history.

Thus pin-pointed, systems of validation and acknowledgement can be devised for each, and internationally implemented. The White Paper states that this approach will provide individuals with greater independence since they can assemble their qualifications on the


\textsuperscript{369} European Commission, \textit{Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society}.

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., p.32
basis of “building blocks” of knowledge acquired in different times and situations. Furthermore it will “awaken a new thirst for education” in those less inclined to conventional learning settings.\textsuperscript{371} Perhaps needless to say, the world of difference that exists between the development of “the wherewithal to grasp the meaning of things, to understand and to create...” and strategies which promote the attainment of “key skills” is wholly glossed over by the Commission, as it is by the governments and policy-makers who have adopted these strategies. The assumption appears to be that where the profoundly complicated human qualities of understanding and creativity do not already exist, or exist to an inadequate level, generic or work-based skills training courses will be able to efficiently and straightforwardly rectify the situation.

In his introduction to the 1996 Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, called \textit{Learning: The Treasure Within}, Jacques Delors impresses upon us what is involved in lifelong education:

> There is a need to rethink and broaden the notion of lifelong education. Not only must it adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a \textit{continuous process of forming whole human beings} - their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community.\textsuperscript{372}

Like the European Commission White Paper, the International Commission on Education emphasised the need to advance toward a ‘learning society’. In discussing and outlining the policies that can achieve this, the Report serves to illustrate how the “continuous process of forming whole human beings” has grown from a domestic educational concern to a political project of international – even global – proportions.

The worldwide ‘learning society’ agenda is taken fully on board in Britain with both Labour and the Conservative Parties sharing the conviction that it is vital for all aspects of citizens’ lives, although as Jarvis notes, vague promises of “individual fulfilment” are rarely elaborated upon. For instance, the Conservative’s \textit{Lifetime Learning: A Policy Framework} (DfEE 1996) described learning as important to business, communities and

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., p.35
individuals, but in the following explanations eight out of 10 relate to workforce and employment. In his foreword to the Green Paper *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*, David Blunkett wrote:

Learning enables people to play a full part in their community and strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of art, music and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake and are encouraging adults to enter and re-enter learning at every point of their lives as parents, at work and as citizens.

Aside from creating the impression that learning is something that can be stepped into and out of at will, of the 82 pages only one addresses the social and cultural aspects of learning. Even more indicative of the conception of learning being officially adopted is the first Report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL), established in 1997 to advise the Government in preparing the document quoted above. Called *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, the Report asserts that it takes seriously the call for a “cultural revolution” in this country, “to turn the vision of a learning society into a reality”. It aims to make the case for the development of a culture of lifelong learning for all. It states that Britain is not at present a ‘learning society’; indeed “Only one adult in four describes him or herself as a current learner”. Although the “learner” is not explicitly defined, the evidence provided to back up the claim that our society is not yet a learning one takes the form of statistics showing a significant number of people are not taking part in some form of formal education or job-related training. They are, in other words, not “learners”:

This is not what we would find if we were already genuinely a learning society. *Radical changes will be necessary* if we are to construct a culture of lifelong learning for all.... The *scale of the task the Government has set* can scarcely be exaggerated. *For most people, and for many organisations (including some directly concerned with education), the case for a major cultural shift still needs to be spelled out.* We need a widespread understanding of the challenges the people of this country now face and genuine commitment to a new vision of lifelong learning to meet them. *But we also need action*, a start has to be made

---

374 Department for Education and Employment, *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain*.
to deliver the vision in practice, at all levels and in ways which people notice and appreciate. To start the process, the White Paper should set out a radical programme of reforms, to carry the Government through at least one term of office, and beyond.376

On the one hand the vision of the ‘learning society’ is clearly intended to exemplify the core values and ideals of a liberal democratic society. Indeed, as the European Commission White Paper indicates, it is treated as the next logical step in the development toward an ever freer society, or perhaps better said, it is the latest manifestation of our freely-expressing selves. An anti-paternalistic vision, the “learner” is identified with the autonomous individual, self-directed, self-responsible and self-improving. On the other hand, the benefits of being, as well as precisely what it means to be, a “lifelong learner” need to be “spelled out” to the people, and being a “learner” in the terms spelt out is not only a personal and familial but a national obligation. Young people are not only given “carrot and stick” financial incentives but are increasingly required to be what Gordon Brown described as continuously “contributing to their own training”.377 Implicit in the pledges to enable people to become self-reliant is the idea that they are not already, and cannot be unless they are so enabled by Government. In short, they need to be told what constitutes self-reliance before they can embark on a programme of becoming self-reliant. One’s education – or training – can no longer get in the way of one’s learning, for in the new society the two are indistinguishable.

The rhetoric of freedom, responsibility and individual initiative is thus here as misdirecting and deeply paradoxical as the purportedly liberating effects of the performative culture discussed above; indeed it is part of the same phenomenon. Rather than being a vehicle for the enrichment and empowerment of the population, the “lifelong learning” movement has been compared to Ivan Illich’s description of the movement for education permanente in France, essentially a compulsory contribution for the worker to take part in “training that he does not want, from which he hardly benefits, but which serves to adapt, integrate, tame

and dominate him”.\textsuperscript{378} The individual responsibility of learners in fact in this case means “the responsibility to make themselves employable”.\textsuperscript{379}

In \textit{Deschooling Society} (1971) Illich and Verne were concerned that lifelong education rather than being empowering would be “a permanent guarantee of human inadequacy and incompetency, so that the individuals become subject to instruction throughout their whole life”.\textsuperscript{380} An understanding of learning and self-improvement as a step-by-step process with a destination, one that can however clearly never be reached, contributes to an experience of constant failure to live up to expectations. Furedi and Hayes also offer a depiction of a “destructive contemporary state wishing to render its citizens weak, shy and lacking in will, thus encouraging a dependent personality”.\textsuperscript{381} Policies designed to build the ‘learning society’ can thus be said to merely reinstitute, albeit in a different and more personalised form, a situation that the so-called neo-liberal project and the neo-conservative one before it had all the intentions (and many outward appearances) of transforming.

The contradictions inherent within the ‘learning society’, both conceptually and as a programme of cultural and economic reform, are nowhere better illustrated than in universities. Here, as in the business world, highly qualified and experienced individuals are called upon to push the boundaries of human knowledge, creativity and originality in a harshly competitive environment. At the same time they are repeatedly invited (and often compelled) to attend self-development courses that claim to “empower” them to take responsibility for and charge of their own learning, career and teaching, the latter incidentally being one of the intended “learning outcomes” of the Associate Teacher Accreditation Programme.\textsuperscript{382} One postgraduate training course, for example, refers to the “transformational experience” had by some of its attendees, and offers challenging learning experiences although in “a safe environment”.\textsuperscript{383}

In its list of recommendations which were strongly endorsed by the Government and taken on board by universities, the Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing Report) in 1997 suggested that all HE institutions “with immediate

\textsuperscript{378} Jarvis, ed., \textit{The Age of Learning: Education and the Knowledge Society}, p.196.
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., p.201.
\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., pp.196-97.
\textsuperscript{381} Hayes and Wynyard, eds., \textit{The Mcdonalization of Higher Education}, p.7.
effect, give high priority to developing and implementing learning and teaching strategies which focus on the promotion of students’ learning”. This statement ought to raise the question of what the priority of HE institutions, lecturers and students themselves was presumed to be prior to the reforms. What is meant, evidently, is not learning in all its possible manifestations, but the acquisition of generic skills. The Report proclaimed that student learning will be promoted by the development of “programme specifications” detailing “potential stopping-off points” giving the “intended learning outcomes” of each programme in terms of “the knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have upon completion”. Key or core skills, cognitive skills and subject-specific skills should all be specified, particularly those most relevant to future employability. Further demonstrating the endemic penchant for lumping skills that can be taught (or acquired in the short-term) together with more fundamental habits of thought, attitudes and behaviours, the Report identifies “learning how to learn” as one of the “key skills” and lists it along with skills in communication, numeracy and the use of IT as a desirable “learning outcome” of university modules.

The skill of learning how to learn is, according to the Report, vital to the creation of the ‘learning society’ and those leaving HE will need to understand how to “take responsibility for, and manage their own learning”. To foster these capabilities, the authors recommended that HE institutions develop a Progress File which consisting of a transcript recording student achievement following a common format devised by institutions collectively. This would provide a “means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development”.

The classification of necessary skills thus goes beyond merely the need to enhance employability, becoming in some respects an instruction manual on how to be a human being and how to interact with other human beings. Or perhaps more accurately described, how to be a successful human being and how to interact successfully with others in the learning/working environment. It covers, in other words, all aspects of human relationships, experiences and behaviours, critical capacities, self-awareness, essentially breaking life down into sets of sub-activities considered teachable in formulaic, model-driven sessions

385 Ibid., p.372.
386 Ibid., p.134.
387 Ibid., p.372.
delivered by expert instructors. In this way “learners” beyond being potentially reduced to a dependency on a growing cohort of experts and consultants, are constantly advised to transform themselves not only into “effective” students or employees, but effective persons.388 “Learners”, and this is particularly significant perhaps for the younger and more impressionable, are even offered planning and management of their personal development, something which throughout history has been conceived of as a spiritual, intellectual, moral and emotional journey of an intensely unique and ambiguous nature. Within the conception of lifelong learning upheld by the contemporary British university, self-reflection is the monitoring and measurement of one’s accomplishments against a standardised set of performance criteria, and what counts as self-development is spelled out for one and all by a collection of both national and international bodies.

The skills agenda in HE thus offers yet another example of the contradiction between the overall aims of the education system professed by its devisors and its basic assumptions and methods; namely, between the portrayal of learners and learning and the aim of achieving a “culture of high expectations”. “Learners”, it is implied (academics, postgraduates and undergraduates alike), need assistance in identifying their “training needs” and personal “potential”, transferable skills courses will enable them to make “informed choices” about their future, and so on. In other words, within the “culture of high expectations” there is no expectation that students, researchers and academics will, in the course of their studies and careers, acquire important generic skills through their own initiative and in the comprehensive experience of their life, work and relationships. Moreover, there is no expectation that young people will be in the position by the time they reach university to decide what is valuable and what is not, what is worth pursuing and what is not; nor indeed is it expected that they will have mastered that core skill of “learning how to learn”. The latter, if nothing else, represents a serious indictment of the state school system.

These criticisms levelled at HE policies, with their emphasis on skills and employability, do not aim to deflect from the fact that what they are attempting to respond to is real and needs addressing. As the HE sector expands to include an ever greater proportion of society – and involves ever greater public expenditure – fundamental changes must occur not only within universities but in the nature of the relationship between universities and

388 See the Joint Skills Statement issued by the Research Councils UK in 2001 which sets out the “training requirements” for UK research students, including “personal effectiveness”.
the communities in which they exist. In particular it becomes important to establish what the connections are between the traditional concerns of the university in terms of promoting individual intellectual development and both the immediate and potential benefit this brings to the wider community. HE institutions clearly have a significant role to play in contributing to and sustaining the vitality of social life. This is forefront in the minds of today’s policy-makers, who are expressly concerned with bringing dynamism, creativity, initiative and development to communities and society generally through widening access to education. The question, as we have seen, is whether communities can be truly vital, that is, constantly transforming, if their members have neither the resources nor inclination for self-transformation beyond the ability to “update” themselves into the skilled worker or have attended enough training courses to be considered an “effective” person.

Reeves observed in the 1980s that, in the public investment in HE, if the return to the community is seen purely in economic terms then slogans like “widening participation”, “learning for all” or “creating higher aspirations” actually mean only widening opportunities for increasing income and the advancement of social position that is tied to this. She argued that equal opportunities can never be a reality unless “learning for all” means that genuine spiritual and intellectual pursuits are open to all.389 In the current paradigm it means merely that the majority are to be content with, in Habermas’ words, “a horizon of expectations determined by anticipated exigencies of the labour market”.390 Invoking the biblical aphorism man does not live by bread alone, Reeves suggests that now, when a revolution of thought has brought higher education within the range of the community, “it would be tragic if people were conned into demanding too narrow a range of objectives”.391 Three decades on, this is exactly what they have been conned into.

389 Reeves and Society for Research into Higher Education., The Crisis in Higher Education : Competence, Delight, and the Common Good, p.56.
391 Reeves and Society for Research into Higher Education., The Crisis in Higher Education : Competence, Delight, and the Common Good, p.56.
Chapter 5: Education and the Modern Crisis System

But from the point of view of the future, they had one great common denominator; this amounted to a virtual denial not so much of the existing political order, but of its human and social presuppositions. Instead of a God-ordained society they spoke of reason; instead of regarding sin as inherent in man, they pinned their faith in human perfectibility and believed that education could remould the human personality.

(Max Beloff, *The Age of Absolutism*, 1954)392

CRISIS AS A TECHNICAL PROBLEM

In Chapter 1 it was argued that crisis can be understood in terms of a revelation, which would make the point of recognition of crisis an opportunity for genuine transformation. On the other hand, where crisis is understood as a problem requiring a solution, and the experience of crisis itself is defined and explained in terms of a pre-given political cure, crisis-talk becomes a mechanism for social change where all the appearances of transformation serve only to conceal underlying continuities. This latter process, along with the increasing internalisation and intensification of crisis itself, is clearly illustrated by the discussion of the present education system and the way learning is conceived in contemporary society. That it is economic priorities which appear to dominate and increasingly define the field of education today merely reflects the fact that a particular economic approach has emerged as the all-encompassing political answer. It is, in Foucault's terms, an approach “capable in principle of addressing the totality of human behaviour, and, consequently, of envisaging a coherent, purely economic method of programming the totality of governmental action”.393 This kind of problematisation excludes from the outset any consideration of the possibility that it is faith in the political solution itself which perpetuates the crisis, whether it be a solution in the more traditional

post-war form of commands issued from Whitehall or today’s “new politics” with its emphasis on culture, values and individual responsibility.

Today, problems in education are frequently expressed in terms of many minor crises and various diagnoses and cures are put forward, as we saw in Chapter 1. One prominent example is the ‘crisis in trust’ and its cure in the form of the ‘accountability revolution’. A second is the question of a ‘crisis in basics’ which has prompted a great many strategies for improvement and is connected to a whole range of controversies from the concept of neutral and objective testing to the focus on increasing the nation’s economic productivity, arguably at the expense of fostering individual development and cultural enrichment. The perceived cures of these so-called crises have had a profound effect not only on education but the whole of society in recent years. It is in them, therefore, that we can identify some of the most significant features and consequences of the political problematisation of crisis; the act of externalisation which can be considered the ‘first step’ in the spiralling cycle that characterises the modern system.

As we have seen, much of education legislation in recent years is informed by the idea that processes of both learning and teaching can be perfected into a set of procedures with clear goals that produce measurable outputs, the huge increase in external public examinations being the most notable development in this regard since the end of the Second World War. In the simplest of terms, this tendency can be explained by the fact that the solution to problems in education must be in the form of a programme that can be implemented, across the board, employing the mechanisms of the state and must be capable of rendering objective, identifiable results if it is to be politically viable. These results retain the image of objectivity and, in so far as they inform policy, make reasonable the otherwise oxymoronic notion of neutral political decision-making.

In the fact that the dramatic increase of state intervention into education since the war has been accompanied by this kind of objectification of the processes of learning and teaching, we see quite direct examples of how science and technology take on the function of legitimating political power. The tendency in education today reflects a broader social phenomenon identified by Habermas as a defining characteristic of advanced capitalist societies emerging in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For Habermas, increased state intervention in all realms of social life is linked to the need to maintain the security and stability of a certain kind of system, and this is tied to the twofold phenomenon of
science becoming ideology and the overall depoliticisation of the population. Where it is
directed toward stability, government action takes on a negative function, that is to say, it
is concerned with the elimination of dysfunctional elements and threats to the system. Its
purpose thus becomes not the “realization of practical goals” in accordance with some
conception of the public good, but “the solution of technical problems”.

The solution of technical problems, as Habermas pointed out, is not dependent on public
discussion. Indeed, public discussion which potentially questions the framework within
which the problems are constructed and rationalised constitutes a danger to the stability of
the system. Hence this kind of politics requires a “depoliticization of the mass of the
population”. Within this there is an obvious tension between the ideal of mass
participation, from which the modern state derives its legitimacy, and a type of governing
increasingly reliant on specialist expertise involving methods which may be invisible or
incomprehensible to the layman, or may simply be totally removed from even a
professional sphere of influence. There must therefore be a constant process by which
these methods are identified with the will and interests of the people. Habermas asks,
“How will the depoliticization of the masses be made plausible to them? Marcuse would
be able to answer: by having technology and science also take on the role of ideology”.

Depoliticisation, strictly in the sense described above, combined with the rhetorical
identification of new government programmes with the will of the people, is particularly
evident in the policies surrounding the so-called ‘great debate’. The need to restore public
confidence in the education system was the dominant and legitimising claim behind the
reforms; to open up what was a closed (and sometimes hostile) world of professionals to
scrutiny and wider community discussion. An appeal to the public as the “authoritative
judgement of a collective conscience, the ruling of a tribunal to which even the state was
subject” was the general tone and function of Callaghan’s allegedly paradigm-shifting
speech: “What I am saying is that where there is legitimate public concern it will be to
the advantage of all involved in the education field if these concerns are aired and
shortcomings or fears put to rest”. Again stressing the national importance of the issue, he
stated: “I take it no one claims exclusive rights in this field. Public interest is strong and

394 Habermas, Toward a Rational Society : Student Protest, Science and Politics, p.103.
395 Ibid.
397 Habermas, Toward a Rational Society : Student Protest, Science and Politics, p.104.
legitimate, and will be satisfied”. While recognising the importance of keeping the teaching profession on board, he advised teachers “you must satisfy the parents and industry that what you are doing meets their requirements and the needs of our children. *For if the public is not convinced* then the profession will be laying up trouble for itself in the future”. 399

At the same time as expressing a faith in publicity as the “highroad to reform”, 400 the threat to the system this could potentially pose is neutralised by reconstituting the debate to fit within the terms of the pre-envisioned solution package. The problems identified in the 1960s and 70s by teachers and other members of the educational community revolved around questions of equality and the limitations placed on the potential and life-chances of children resulting from a rigid, class-based hierarchy. There was also an impetus at that time, albeit turning into something of a wasted opportunity as we have seen, to explore new ways of teaching and new ways of understanding both learning itself and student-teacher relationships. From more conservative segments of society and beyond the education community, as we saw, came concerns about moral, religious and overall cultural degeneration.

The political reaction – it can hardly be called a response in the true sense of the word – to these concerns succeeded by and large in sidestepping them altogether through the re-problematisation of the crisis in the terms outlined above. That is to say, questions about equality and freedom, about child development and psychologies of learning, as well as about the place of tradition and religion in modern society, were for all intents and purposes eliminated from the public discussion about education. Equality was redefined as equal opportunity to acquire certain skills and access information – no one is to be barred from achieving “full potential” as long as he or she does his or her duty, as we will see below. Teaching turned into instruction, and learning synonymous with training, renders them quantifiable and likewise therefore not contestable or value-laden. Culture, art and religion, along with moral sensibility and social responsibility, were to be restored and cultivated by the introduction of specific subjects – and today, “learning goals” – in a nationally standardised school curriculum. The contours of the debate thus were and continue to be set within a framework that is oddly both extremely restrictive and alarmingly comprehensive.

399 Callaghan, "Towards a National Debate." (All emphasis is mine).
Political opposition is not formed on the basis of alternative conceptions of the purposes of education or on any fundamental disagreements with these approaches, but focuses on the failure of Government to reach the objectives rationalised by the existing system. For instance, the key spokesperson for the Conservative Party’s education policy denounced New Labour’s achievements in the following way: “Over the last ten years we have been falling behind as a nation. We have dropped from fourth in the world for science standards to fourteenth. From seventh in the world for literacy to seventeenth. And from eighth in the world for mathematics to twenty-fourth.” In other words, opposition does not consist of challenges to the value of the vision for society painted by the administration in power, or the terms in which the success and failure of this vision are defined, but consists predominantly of political figures highlighting how their party and policies will do it better and get there faster. Paradoxically, how they will do it better and get there faster by using exactly the same overall methods. The same methods, that is, which were introduced by the Conservatives in 1988 and continued under the Labour government, but according to both parties have resulted in a “failing” nation.

The newly elected Conservative-led Government will thus attempt to raise school standards, which still “desperately need improving”, by guaranteeing tough discipline in classrooms; by a “renewed and relentless focus on getting children to read quickly and fluently”; by encouraging teachers through performance-related pay and by publishing school performance data in more rigorous league tables. Finally, by giving parents greater control over the money spent on their children’s education the Government will ensure that the “good sense of millions of parents determines our children’s future”.

What is presented as being a “radical shift of power” from central and local bureaucracies to parents is as much of an illusion now as it was in the 1980s since the standards and attainment targets to which parents must hold teachers and schools accountable continue to be centrally defined. Beyond that, it is not parents but political bureaucracies that decide, through the National Curriculum, what and how the majority of the nation’s children are taught. Allowing parents’ “good sense” to play a role, that is, creating genuine parental choice, could only be a reality if parents were actually free (that is, financially enabled) to choose between a variety of curricula and pedagogical approaches. The only thing preventing this is the persistence of the assumption that public provision of funding for

401 Gove, “Failing Schools Need New Leadership.”
402 Ibid.
education must be linked to state determination of the curriculum, a belief that is never questioned in the mainstream education debate. That it is by no means a practical or economic necessity is demonstrated, for instance, by economic historian Houghton Budd, who outlines a number of ways in which education could be made “free at the point of use” and independent of both political influence and parents’ financial status. The notion that state education as it currently exists is both an economic and democratic essential is a profound misconception, one which however needs to be continuously reinforced if the stability of the wider system is to be maintained.

The argument that the stability of the system relies on the depoliticisation of the population might appear at first glance to be contradicted by the emphasis in current political discourse specifically on re-engagement and participation, frequently evoked in the image of the active, responsible citizen. As the discussion of performativity above indicated, however, along with the transformation in methods of governing comes a transformation in what it means to be politically active or engaged. Today one is politically engaged in so far as one is willing to actively participate in a very specific politically constituted project of social improvement. Or rather, in prevailing official language, in so far as one conforms to the agenda by which we are going to achieve an “excellent” society. For today’s politics is the politics of “consensus”, a project in which we are all “partners” working toward the good of our country, “each doing what we can do together to advance our countries and our country’s [sic] best interests and ideals”. It is, in the words of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, a politics that has transcended the “sterile divisions” and “archaic battles” that “dominated the ideologies of an ever more distant past”.

Every British citizen with every chance to make the most of themselves – every community fair to every citizen – if you work hard, you’re better off. If you save, you’re rewarded. If you play by the rules, we’ll stand by you. These are for me the best of British values: responsibility required in return for rights; fairness not just for some but all who earn it.

---

403 Houghton Budd, Freeing the Circling Stars: Pre-Funded Education. See Chapter 7.
405 Ibid.
IDEOLOGY AND THE STATE SOLUTION

In official pronouncements on education, across all parties and both nationally and internationally, we find similar explicit rejections of grand ideas in favour of a commitment to “what works”, part of the broad spirit of pragmatism that is construed as the driving force of contemporary politics. The European Commission, as we saw in Chapter 1, dismisses “fashionable utopias” which simply ignore how society works in practice. We saw in Chapter 4 former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s statement that from now on education policy would be “practical and not ideological”, reiterating the notion that the old ideological underpinning of political decision-making has been replaced with a decision-making process drawing from a purely objective foundation. In the same speech, however, he went on to say that his Party would usher in an “Age of Achievement” and “forge a new consensus”, expressing a faith that society can be transformed through the creation of a “culture of high expectations”. The same deeply incongruous set of principles is at the heart of the Conservative Party’s vision and rhetoric: “Faddy ideologies” imposed by out of touch bureaucracies which ignore “what really works” are identified as responsible for the problems in education, at the same time as intricate plans are laid out showing the ways in which “we can use the state to help remake society”. 407

It is precisely in this faith in the powers of transformation that historians have identified the origins of ideological systems. Emerging in the eighteenth century as “constructs based on a seemingly comprehensive account of reality and the human’s place within it” they intended to “provide a programme for the transformation of society”. 408 Ideologies, it is argued, are not so much concerned with asserting propositions about the world but are efforts to “conjure up a new and improved world” reflecting the belief that “since we have made the world, we can remake it”. 409 Because these ideologies are constructed with transformation in mind, they are “inherently progressive and activist”. 410 For the same reason they will adopt the methods for social improvement that seem most promising at


409 Ibid., p.87.
411 Franz, Eric Voegelin and the Politics of Spiritual Revolt : The Roots of Modern Ideology, p.87.
the time. As Greenwald notes, the self-evident connection between economic well-being and technological development in our own time makes for a powerful argument for technical solutions to be sought in other areas of social life: “In the context of the twentieth century’s technical advances, the natural scientist’s detailed, knowledgeable approach seems superior to the passionate, adversary oriented methods still in use”.

An unwavering faith in these methods as a means to social improvement is of course not limited to the political establishment. Outside the realm of party politics what are termed “reviews” of the education system, both independent and commissioned by cabinet ministers, are often highly critical and clearly recognise and articulate deep-seated problems with practices and attitudes in education and policy. They are, however, at the same time firmly contained within and supportive of the broader ideological system in that they remain committed to the possibility of an over-arching, infinitely detailed, largely centrally directed and supposedly rationally grounded programme for the transformation of society.

The Cambridge Review of Primary Education, whose findings were published in 2009, is a case in point. In its 592 pages the final report of the Review addresses many of the issues that were raised in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, including the marginalisation of the arts and humanities, the consequences of starting schooling too young, the distortion of the curriculum and subjects by national strategies and the counter-productive effects of excessive micro-management. As a remedy for these failings, the Review offers proposals for the overhauling of the primary curriculum that encompasses no less than an account of the “purposes which the primary phase of education should serve, the values which it should espouse, the curriculum and learning environment which it should provide, and the conditions which are necessary in order to ensure both that these are of the highest and most consistent quality possible”. It is also keen to stress that conditions must address the “needs of children and society over the coming decades”. To this end the final report combines “evidence, analysis and conclusions together with recommendations for both national policy and the work of schools and other relevant agencies”.

The status of the report as an authoritative, objective and comprehensive analysis of children and their needs is allegedly assured by the fact that it is systematically researched and draws from a large

---

evidence base. This evidence base we are informed includes some 800 written submissions, “many of them from major national organisations”, reports on 87 regional and nine national sounding sessions including over 140 other meetings, 28 surveys of published research commissioned from “leading academics” and “drawing on nearly 3000 published sources”.

Robin Alexander, the director of the Cambridge Review, remarked in an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* that “There’s little point in reviewing the primary curriculum unless one asks what it is for. Start from first principles. Take a fresh look at the world in which today’s children are growing up. Look at their lives and their needs. Treat no policy or practice as sacrosanct”.

These comments in themselves epitomise some of the most telling characteristics of the wider system and the unclear thinking that underpins it. First of all, there is some confusion as to whether the purpose of the Review is in fact to ‘review’ or if it is to ‘redefine’. It is not possible to be both open to seeing things as they are and start from first principles about what the education system is for, what will be needed in the future, and so on.

Secondly, the intention of starting from how things actually are is hindered by the fact that the ‘reviewing’ is occurring at least one level (where consultations with parents and teachers are concerned) if not many levels (where organisational data, academic research etc. is concerned) removed from that which is supposedly being ‘reviewed’, namely children and their world. The final report does not as such present “a fresh look at the world in which today’s children are growing up”, a “look at their lives and needs”, but a fresh look at an existing body of research, a variety of opinions and a collection of data again about that world, those lives and needs. Children themselves are, in fact, nowhere to be seen or heard.

Finally, in so far as it is claimed that no policy or practice is to be treated as sacrosanct, there is one obvious exception and that is the National Curriculum itself. While it is true that the final report recommends a less centrally directed curriculum (that thirty percent of teaching time be allocated to programmes of study proposed by local communities, and that in general programmes of study be nationally proposed but non-statutory), it is proposed that seventy percent of teaching time be dedicated to a curriculum whose overall

---

framework will be nationally determined and statutory. This curriculum is “conceived as a matrix of 12 educational aims and eight domains of knowledge, understanding, skill and disposition, with the aims locked into the framework from the outset”. The limitations of the existing curriculum are acknowledged and the new “aims” therefore include for example wellbeing, engagement, empowerment, autonomy, encouraging respect and reciprocity, fostering skills and enacting dialogue. The “domains” include arts and creativity, citizenship and ethics, faith and belief, place and time, as well as more straightforward traditional subjects like mathematics, science and technology.

As with the Robinson Report, which included recommendations for a “wider national strategy for creative and cultural education”, the final report of the Cambridge Review thus presents a prime example of how criticisms of the National Curriculum are incorporated into the National Curriculum. More broadly, what this shows is how criticisms of the education system, and by extension the political system, are absorbed by it without there being any fundamental challenge to – and thus need to reconsider – the sets of assumptions and practices upon which it is based. The report states, quite correctly, that:

Putting right what has gone wrong requires not just a viable cure; it also requires an accurate diagnosis. The diagnosis on offer during the late 1990s and early 2000s focused almost exclusively on the so-called ‘basics’ of literacy and numeracy. Leaving aside until later in this report the question of whether standards have fallen, risen or stayed the same, there is little doubt that this exclusivity of focus frustrated alternative analyses of what was right in English primary education, what was wrong, and what was needed by way of improvement.

While the Review indeed represents a widening of perspective, it is an alternative analysis only in a superficial and limited sense. The Review itself is a method of diagnosis, and the very fact of it, along with its 78 conclusions and 75 recommendations for school policy

---

416 Ibid., p.52.
417 Ibid., p.53.
and practice, indicates the continuance of the existing therapy. Faith in the universal, state-directed solution remains intact.

THE ‘INEVITABILITY’ OF CERTAIN REALITIES

Within the ‘learning society’ agenda, as well as the National Curriculum, the priority is enabling people to both adapt to and manipulate the information-driven economy and consequently better position themselves socially. It is specifically in these terms that the notion of human empowerment is understood and reflected in education policy and it involves the promotion (by political and business spokespeople alike) of a curious blend of action and passivity. Learners, and it is an explicit political intention to include every member of society in this category as we have seen, are encouraged to take action to improve themselves and their lives through the acquisition of certain skills and information and the performance of certain behaviours. No one is to be barred from such opportunities and for this reason everyone is equally empowered (“excellence” as such can be had “for all”). At the same time, the emphasis on meeting the demands of global circumstances that underpins the market-oriented curriculum in both schools and universities construes learners as ultimately passive, faced with the inevitability of world events, powerless to change them let alone consciously and pro-actively shape them.

In the world presented by current education policy discourse, the learner is thus author of his or her own life, but only up to a point. That is to say, within a context of certainties that belies the notion of a genuinely open, intentionally forgeable future. The message to the young generation is that it is through capitalising on one’s potential to contribute to the national competitive edge that one does one’s civic duty, participates worthily in society and takes responsibility for oneself and one’s community. In a clear echo of the main theme of the post-war reports and the build-up to the ERA, Brown asserted in his first speech as Labour Leader that “As the world changes we must change too...Up against the competition of two billion in China and India, we need to unlock all the talent we have”.420

Having an education system that is number one in the world is fundamental to this:

---

So for every apprentice, a certificate of completion. For every college or school student, A-levels and diplomas and for all a clear pathway into skilled work...I want every young person in Britain to be able to say: this is my country. I contribute to it. I help make it better”. 421

The vision that today moulds much of school, university and increasingly working life is thus wrought with contradictions that nevertheless need to be constantly accommodated by the people living that life. We are participating here but passive there, empowered here but disempowered there, engaged yet alienated, unique yet standardised, the list could go on. The currently fashionable outlook that attempts to combine “the ethics of community with the dynamics of a market economy” 422 shows moreover how efforts to integrate changing human needs and ideals into an existing or pre-determined set of practices leads to a politics which has lost touch with human and social realities. Either that or it ends up simply at odds with itself. The outlook, and policies it leads to, ignores the considerable doubt that has been shed on the notion that a sense of responsibility for each other and the natural world – reflected for instance in a growing ethical and environmental consciousness – can be reconciled with a form of economic life which places human beings in isolation from and competition with each other and the natural world. Statements that these are not in tension does not necessarily mean that they are not. The statements merely highlight the fact that it is far easier to pay lip service to desirable social sentiment than it is to find ways of translating that sentiment into genuinely new institutions, in this case economic ones.

When a certain way of doing things – that is, a set of pre-given answers – is the starting point rather than individuals, it is people who are forced to fit the answers and not the other way round. Institutions, and as such the system which they are both product of and uphold, become more important than the people they are supposed to serve. Structures and procedures are held to be intrinsically valuable and the ideas, needs and circumstances that shaped them become irrelevant. Schools are no exception. Children are perpetually being enlisted as functionaries in political projects of reform that are of extremely doubtful benefit to their learning.

421 Ibid.
Although this is a general phenomenon, there are many individual examples today that illustrate this, for instance the ongoing controversy surrounding SATs in England which culminated in the recent boycott by teachers.\(^{423}\) The official claim that the curriculum is designed to meet the learning needs of individual children is made absurd by the practice of prepping and testing children specifically to make possible the assessment of the performance of the school. Children, as *The School I’d Like* study pointed out, see themselves as doing their learning for the school, and correctly so.\(^{424}\) They are however not just doing their learning for the school, but for the wider school system. The purpose of the testing is to assess the school, the assessment of the school is to make possible league tables, league tables are a crucial part of the effort to create a quasi-market in the school system. In sum, the learning needs of young children (as defined by anyone outside the DfCSF) are subordinate to the creation and perpetuation of a certain kind of social structure the existence of which itself is legitimised principally by the assertion that it is the best response to those needs.

The creation of a quasi-market in the school system is an example of reform that lends support to what Foucault and others have described as neo-liberalism’s effort to “render the social world economic”.\(^{425}\) Again, it is nowhere better illustrated than through education policy that governing today is as much a process of shaping and modifying social realities as it is a process of responding to them. The circular and as such ultimately closed nature of this approach is explicit in the statements and speeches of its most prominent and influential representatives. The “new politics” of New Labour, for instance, continuously highlights the need to meet the “rising aspirations” of the British people (we saw that with Blair it was creating the “culture of high expectations”). It is these aspirations, needs and interests which we are told will dictate a “new direction”, it is politics based on the “listening and learning” government.\(^{426}\) At the same time, however, in true *education permanente* style, “The Government cannot wait until 2013, when the


school leaving age will rise to 17, to change the expectations and aspirations of young people". According to Schools Secretary Ed Balls:

We need to start now by engendering a culture change in young people, their parents and the education and employment system through creating the balance of rights and responsibilities that underpin a higher compulsory leaving age...I look forward to a time when no young person will be a long-term Neet [not in education, employment or training].

This simultaneous top-down and bottom-up method of governing is not just a modification of the social world but, because policy is essentially administering a world that must be brought into existence first, it is an ongoing creation of new realities. We have seen in education that wherever an area or aspect of learning becomes linked to a specific political promise, learning and even the child are re-conceived to suit political rather than educational requirements. It is this re-conceived individual – largely an abstraction – which then becomes the target of education policy and constitutes the subject at whom improvement is aimed. For the aims and objectives model of curriculum planning to be both meaningful and judged effective, learning must be linear with pre-determined sub-levels toward a final destination, the child must be a being for whom this kind of learning is meaningful and so on. Importantly, all of this must be so regardless of any experiences to the contrary, which points toward the fact that to function within the system requires some form of dissociative behaviour on the part of education professionals. The greater areas of life to fall within the remit of political influence, the more areas of human activity undergo this re-problematisation and the more experiences are gradually displaced by these new versions of reality.

THE ABSENCE OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL REFLEXIVITY

That human experiences are to the contrary – i.e., that these politically constructed versions of the child and learning are fabrications – is shown not just by the criticisms covered in Chapter 3, or just by the essays and images of children themselves collected in studies such as The School I’d Like, but by a whole history of educational thought and

---

428 Ed Balls addressing the Fabian Society, November 5, 2007, cited in Ibid.
reflection. Not to mention cultural traditions that continue to exist across the world. Where certain principles about learning and education are expressed consistently over time, despite enormous differences in context and the philosophical outlook of those voicing them, the implication is that they are rooted in insights that bear a concrete relation to ongoing aspects of human experience. In other words, that a personal engagement with the processes of learning and human development was the starting point, and that these processes therefore have a degree of permanence and universality. Despite allegedly being based on extensive evidence and research, the education currently offered to the nation’s youth by the state is wholly uninfluenced by the wealth of insight contained in the history and philosophy of education.

The most obvious and recurring illustration of the fact that sustaining the system requires the elevation of one type of “evidence” to universal truth, and blindness to everything else, is the stubborn adherence on the part of policy-makers to overtly intellectual conceptions of learning and treatment of the child. Children continue to be perceived as ‘little adults’, just as in a sense the ‘learning society’ adults are treated like little children. Because everyone learns in the same way, regardless of age, stage of development, experience or circumstance, primary school children and university students alike are subject to training according to the linear, easy-to-difficult, skills and facts-based model. The importance of allowing for age differences in teaching methods, however, and studying the physical, emotional and intellectual changes that accompany growing up have been a central concern of educational theories throughout history. Likewise, the recent mainstream discovery of the benefits that doing art, music, drama, poetry, sport and dance can have on learning and child development has been fundamental to pedagogical ideas since the beginning of Western civilization.

Observing that young children are immersed in a world of sensation and passion, Plato argued that myth, music and poetry experienced early on have hugely formative effects not just on character, disposition and creative abilities, but on intellectual development:

> Because rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, bearing grace in their movements, and making graceful the soul of him who is rightly educated; and also because he who has

received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art or nature, and with a true taste, while he praises and rejoices over and receives into his soul the good, he will justly blame and hate the bad, now in his days of youth, even before he is able to know the reason of the thing; and when Reason comes he will recognize and salute her as a friend with whom his education has long made him familiar.\footnote{Plato, \textit{The Republic}, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Project Gutenberg, 1998. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1497), 401d-02a.}

Today’s focus on cultural education does not as such reflect new or emerging research, but knowledge that has been largely pretended out of existence by the political and much of the education establishment because it is at odds with the currently favoured programme of educational and wider social reform. Even now when the importance of the arts and humanities in education is publicly acknowledged, and the huge inadequacies of the state curriculum are widely debated, this is not taken as grounds to reconsider either the soundness of its educational principles or the overall wisdom of nationally standardised teaching and politically selected content. Rather, cultural education is taken on board as an explicit objective within the system and thus incorporated into the existing political project of cultural transformation. In response to the Robinson Report, for instance, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport stated that cultural education would be provided for by “embedding” creativity in teaching and learning. Indeed, it was to be “acknowledged as a central part of learning in the new Handbook for Teachers which accompanies the Programmes of Study and covers the breadth of study and skills across the Curriculum.”\footnote{Department for Culture Media and Sport, “Government Response to All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education.”} To redress the deficiency in cultural education the Government would enable teachers to become creative by offering new professional development programmes.

Not only does this reconfirm the ideological belief in a state solution to all things, even human creativity, but the point of making the arts an integral part of education is yet again entirely missed. ‘Creative teaching’ in policy-speak does not mean to teach creatively and with imagination, but is in this case redefined as the ability to teach specific “higher order” thinking skills like critical analysis and problem solving.\footnote{“We are piloting a professional development programme from this Autumn so that secondary teachers know how to teach higher order thinking skills through their subjects. This responds directly to your \textit{[the All Our Futures report]} recommendations aimed at helping teachers to develop their creative thinking and teaching skills”. Ibid.} The point made again and
again by educationalists that artistic and imaginative activities aid the development of critical awareness through enabling a better grasp of facts and concepts is turned on its head, and it is skills and facts which become the path to creativity. In spite of appearances and much rhetoric to the contrary, a close look at the education system thus reveals a politics that is neither open to change nor genuinely responsive to ongoing social, cultural and critical debates.

The lack of reflexivity inherent to modern political processes appears in its crudest form where the political answer to educational and wider socio-cultural questions is quite simply technology itself. In the European Commission White Paper *Towards the Learning Society* discussed in Chapter 4 we saw an explicit statement of the idea that anxiety and any “irrational misgivings”, caused by living in what is admitted to be a hectic and uncertain world, can be alleviated by ensuring both young and old are equipped with the appropriate technical skills from an early age. In a world, that is, where people are drowning in information they can make little sense of and faced with perpetual upheaval, lessons in Information Technology are offered as a basis for both material and spiritual security. The feebleness of this proposition and the kind of thinking it embodies is something that yet again has been pointed out repeatedly in history, perhaps nowhere more scathingly than by Dorothy Sayers in a lecture in Oxford in 1947:

> We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda with a smattering of “subjects”; ...We dole out lip-service to the importance of education...; we postpone the school-leaving age, and plan to build bigger and better schools; the teachers slave conscientiously in and out of school hours; and yet, as I believe, all this devoted effort is largely frustrated, because we have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.433

It is the attitude represented by the Commission – in so far as it epitomises the tendency to seek and supply external and technical answers to what can at best be described as internal, or existential, questions – that is most widely and consistently blamed for the short-sightedness and superficiality of modern educational curricula, and the hollowness of

---

modern culture that results from this. Tomorrow’s technology, as Roger Scruton observed, will soon be yesterday’s and is a totally inadequate substitute for “intelligent discipline which adapts itself to new and changing circumstances precisely because it is attached to none”. Drawing attention to this same phenomenon in education in the United States in the 1940s, A.J. Adler connected it to the “myth of progress” and a total loss of appreciation for the value of philosophy that is a dominant feature of the modern period: “The imminent tragedy of the contemporary world is written in the fact that positivistic modern culture has magnified science and almost completely emancipated itself from wisdom”.

The argument that science and technology can meet some but not all human needs has been well made and requires no lengthy discussion. That in state education today however the “tools of learning” can be happily equated with computer literacy only serves to highlight how politics remains immune to both past and present reflection on the human condition. Policies do not reflect human realities or needs but are devised and implemented independently of them. Education in its present form merely ensures that young citizens inherit an elaborate set of half-truths which, since they bear the stamp of authority, they are then more or less compelled to live out.

Even more significantly the fact that the technology/science answer continues to be so plausible to the masses, to use Habermas’ phrasing, merely emphasises how implicated educators have become in the perpetuation of a system which effectively denies the vast majority of people the opportunity to benefit from the collective wisdom and experience of their own civilization. Given the universal, ever-expanding structures of formal education, it is educators more than anyone who determine the horizons and expectations of the next generation and who therefore lay the foundations for what will be politically possible in the future. And plausible. By cultivating real relationships with the students in their care, and bringing to those relationships a broad and deep cultural/historical awareness, educators have it within their power to provide young people with enough insight to demand more meaningful answers from themselves and their society; and perhaps even with the means to formulate their own questions.

434 Cited in Reeves and Society for Research into Higher Education., The Crisis in Higher Education : Competence, Delight, and the Common Good, p.4.
THE DIVORCE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Chapter 2 described how after the Second World War attempts were made to base the school curriculum on psychological theories of child development and various problems with this were pointed out. Clearly, it is impossible for national legislation, necessarily one-size-fits-all, to take into account the diversity or complexity of pedagogical methodologies in existence. Beyond that, the theories themselves, as Brahoney suggested was the case with Piaget, tended to be based on the abstract individual and as such failed to translate practically into classroom realities. Today, even the efforts to base policy on a theory of child development have been abandoned. Policy – and the curriculum – is modelled not only on the abstract individual but this individual is as strange and unlikely a being now as it was in the post-war era when children were classified into three fixed types of mind. Where educational methods are based on theoretical models that have evolved out of practical experience, this is often experience drawn from other areas of life such as industry or business. In this way a set of principles that may be appropriate for one sphere of activity is transferred to another. Where the model becomes more important than the activity it begins to give the activity a totally new character, something which as we have seen has been widely blamed for the objectification of the learner and commoditisation of education as a whole.

What makes it hard, if not impossible, for educational methods to bear a concrete relationship to the practical realities of growing children is the removal of personal judgement from teaching, effectively denying the human capacity for discerning what is appropriate in a given field of expertise. Teachers are charged with the responsibility of looking to the child’s needs, stages of development and learning and yet must design all their activities in accordance with a set of principles that are dictated to them from outside. Schools, like universities, are subject to the affirmation that “the will of the organisation must be imposed from without to limit the arbitrariness of personal choice, since no common principles of interpersonal behaviour can be rationally grounded”.\(^{436}\) In many respect the people engaged in learning, both teachers and pupils, become irrelevant except as objects, for as Paulo Freire observed “...to alienate men from their own decision-making”

is to change them into such. The value of a teacher has nothing to do with her character, talents or intelligence but is determined by the state-accredited training she has undergone and her proficiency in both performing and eliciting pre-designated types of behaviour. The de-professionalisation of teaching is thus but part of the wider phenomenon of social diagnosis that fails to allow any observations of life itself to have an influence on therapeutics. Diagnosis, as it was suggested in Chapter 1, cannot really be said to take place at all. For conscience and prudence, in their original classical senses of ‘right seeing’ and ‘right acting’ are no longer qualities of the human being, but qualities of the system. It is the system that functions in place of individual conscience; it is the system that knows, discerns and judges and so directs the right course of thinking and acting in all spheres of personal and social life.

The removal of what is deemed “practical” decision-making from the sphere of personal/interpersonal judgement – essentially the elimination of the human being at the centre of social interaction – necessarily leads to a divorce between the so-called practical world and the world of human experience. In education, as we have seen, teaching methods and targets are chosen but then require the adoption of an oversimplified version of children to legitimise them. To put it another way, because they are not in fact grounded in practical realities, a reality must emerge in which the newly introduced methods and practices make sense. This is the “conjuring up” of new worlds. The word “practical” takes on a different meaning in terms of the way the educational problem is constructed within the context of the political problematisation of the crisis. For example, if the success and failure of the education system are defined in terms of the percentage of the nation’s eleven year-olds able to solve a certain mathematical equation or spell a particular word, then any method/set of procedures which increases that percentage is a practical way of improving the education system. No one can argue that these methods are not practical if they are delivering results, and that it is a practical way of improving education so long as those results are equated with success. Most importantly if those notions of success or any other examples we might take from the discussion so far were genuinely questioned, the whole edifice would come crumbling down.

THE CORRUPTION OF LANGUAGE

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

(William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3 Scene 3)

Questioning of a certain kind is thus a distinct threat to the stability of the system. It needs to be capable of appearing to be self-critical without being so in the manner already described. The system must be constantly reinforcing itself. A debasement of language is fundamental to this process, as we see with the alteration in meaning of the word “practical”. It no longer means consistent with the circumstances of everyday life within a given professional realm but consistent with a broader set of ideological propositions, “truths” that are universally applicable and not open to debate, regardless of the circumstances. George Orwell pointed out that “an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely”. So it is with bad language, which ultimately degenerates for political and economic reasons. “It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts”.

Language, as such, can become a means of concealing or even preventing thought rather than expressing it, for instance: “I have a very clear view of the right focus for education policy. It is to help build capacity at school level for effective education”.

Meaningless strings of phrases such as this are ubiquitous in today’s educational discourse and are by no means limited to politicians and public officials. Schools, universities and other self-declared sites of social critique and intellectual leadership, in embracing this language and the practices it rationalises, uphold these notions of success and thus play a crucial role in sustaining the fiction. Universities, for instance, commonly attempt to demonstrate the quality of their research in the following (literally) consciousness-deadening terms:

440 Ibid.
...the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 found world-leading research in all departments submitted, demonstrating the breadth of our excellence; our submission was nearly a third bigger than in 2001 – demonstrating growth of excellence; six subjects...were deemed to be among the top 10 in their disciplines – demonstrating the depth of excellence...

The reality in which excellence can be broad, deep and growing is the same reality in which spreading excellence means something. It is the reality in which “excellence for all” is not a contradiction in terms. It is the reality in which learning is quantifiable and children can produce the right outputs so long as the right inputs are made. It is also the reality in which learning is the kind of thing that can be “entered and re-entered”, with a clear destination and scheduled stops along the way. It is the reality in which all human choices and types of interaction can be captured by one form of decision-making. It is the reality in which job-performance, externally and non-professionally defined, is on a par with self-realisation, and compulsory skills training is the route to personal fulfilment and human emancipation. It is the reality in which the semantic distinction between “quantitative” and “qualitative” has all but disappeared. It is the reality in which “satisfactory” can in all seriousness be proclaimed as “not good enough”. It is, in short, not reality at all. Language has taken on a life of its own.

THE LOSS OF REALITY AND THE LOSS OF MAN

A loss of reality is again something that has been commonly identified as a feature common to ideological systems, in particular connected to totalitarian regimes. Koselleck, as we will see below, describes the task of the dictatorship in the “permanent revolution” as a constant correction of reality. Austrian authors Gutersloh, Musil and Doderer coined the term “second reality” in order to connote “the image of reality created by human beings when they exist in a state of alienation”. The state of alienation itself is

---

443 Referring to a comment made by Schools Secretary Ed Balls to the BBC concerning Ofsted’s rating of schools’ “overall effectiveness” in terms of inadequate, satisfactory, good or outstanding: “If a school is rated satisfactory and you actually look at the detail – I don’t find it very satisfactory to be honest”. Cited in the *Sunday Times*, April 15, 2009.
supported by the “imaginative construction of second realities in opposition to the reality of experience”. For Musil, human qualities can only be the expression of “spiritual substance”:

When nevertheless they [qualities] are developed through external activity, what emerges is the phenomenon of qualities without man....When the first reality, which is the expression of spiritual substance, cannot be developed because of the absence of such substance, in its place there will develop an artificial reality – that is, a reality that has the external form of reality but which is not substantially supported by the spirit. We enter here upon a realm of spiritlike nonspirit or antispirit, which finds it representation on the plane of politics in the ideological mass movements.

It was suggested in Chapter 3 that the logic of the accountability culture, in its effort to eliminate potential untrustworthiness in relations between the public and public servants, expresses an unrealistic hankering for a perfectly safe world. For Voegelin, like Musil and Doderer, a political system that takes a faith in human perfectibility as its starting point is firmly rooted in what can be described as an archetypal longing on the part of the individual to avoid confronting the problems of existence. The modern human being, conscious of uncertainty and the transience of his own self, finds the anxieties and troubles of his condition too great a burden and attempts to overcome both complexity and fallibility by “imagining” a new version of himself. The truly experienced self is replaced by what Voegelin calls the “deformed” “shrunken” or “contracted” self:

He will deny his humanity and insist he is nothing but his shrunken self; he will deny ever having experienced the reality of common experience; he will deny that anyone could have a fuller perception of reality than he allows his self; in brief, he will set the contracted self as a model for himself as well as for everybody else.

---

446 Ibid.
448 This is, needless to say, a very brief and simplified account of a complex argument.
The ‘second reality’ is thus constructed to hide the fact that this “rejection of the sense of existence” and the imaginary self is a farce and makes possible the prolongation of the illusion. When the ‘second reality’ becomes, through various means, shared by others, backed by socially authoritative institutions, figures and symbols (particularly the symbols of science and philosophy) and represented in mass politics, what has emerged is a society that has completely lost touch with reality.\(^{450}\) The relatively harmless *divertissement* has evolved into a collective, systematised fantasy of grand proportions.

The image of an individual act of creative avoidance, if it might be deemed thus, that has spiralled out of control is found in other interpretations of the modern crisis. Dawson, for instance, talks of “the age of Frankenstein”.\(^ {451}\) Martin Buber emphasises the element of will, or more accurately *will-less-ness*, involved:

> Man is no longer able to master the world which he himself has brought about: it is becoming stronger than he is, it is winning free of him, it confronts him in almost elemental independence, and he no longer knows the word which could subdue and render harmless the golem he has created.\(^ {452}\)

The golem, something that is “animated” yet “without a soul”, is an apt metaphor for the system we have been describing, and indeed the human being it represents. Today’s society is not “man writ large” but a caricature of man writ large. The realm of politics, which encompasses almost everything, supports a set of structures and social forms which must be in perpetual motion and give the outward impression of constant transformation to distract attention from their lack of substance, the void where human intelligence and human experience ought to be. The frenzy of education legislation and reform since the 1980s can be explained as part of this phenomenon. As forms decay inwardly, so must the intensity of activity to conceal this decay. Until, that is, a decision is made to acknowledge it.

The concept of ‘second reality’ clearly resonates with many of the themes that have so far arisen in the discussion of performativity, especially surrounding the question of authenticity. As it has been pointed out by Ball and others, being truthful is not the point in the performative society. To be effective and to function within the current education


\(^{451}\) Dawson, *The Crisis in Western Education*, p.189.

system, teachers, school administrators, headmasters and so on must live and act in accordance with the truths that rationalise the performance-based policy environment. They must keep up the act, play the game, participate in the ‘second reality’. To be successful they must ignore or even deny the arbitrariness, purposelessness and often direct counter-productivity of much of what they do on a daily basis. Counter-productivity, that is, against the stated or official aims.

While conceding the widespread and vocal dissatisfaction amongst teachers and academics with much current legislation, there is a simple fact that cannot be overlooked. The ‘second reality’, as we might characterise that which makes sensible the ‘accountability culture’ and the ‘learning society’, cannot exist without the willingness of education professionals, parents and others to tolerate it. In other words, without our behaving on some level as if it were true. The endurance of the closed system itself demonstrates that faced with the choice of being successful and being honest, or keeping up appearances and living an authentic life, or stability/security and changing one’s life, enough people invariably “choose” the second option. If this were not the case, the rationale behind current education policies would be exposed as patently ridiculous; a belief in the genuine practicality of all these national strategies for social improvement would become impossible to cling on to; and the truths from which contemporary politics derives its legitimacy could not but be fundamentally challenged.

While participating in the ‘second reality’ is ultimately a “betrayal” of oneself, a personal decision, it cannot be emphasised enough that it is children who pay the highest price for all this dishonesty. Those who work in schools may be aware, to varying extents, that they are acting, be it for the sake of survival, job security, professional reputation, inspection reports or for deeper emotional and psychological reasons: in Voegelin’s terminology they are “playing at insanity” rather than actually insane.453 That it is a case of knowing but not really wanting to know for many is suggested by more recent research exploring the day-to-day experience of teachers. The “heavy sense of inauthenticity in all this may well be appreciated as much by the Inspectors as the inspected; Diane is ‘playing the game’ and ‘they know I am’”.454 Young children, however, are not in the position to discern that much of what passes for their education is but a “spectacle” produced and enacted only for

454 Ball, “The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity,” p.222.
the sake of being “seen and judged” by performance managers.\textsuperscript{455} They will not yet, and perhaps never will, have the capacity to distinguish between authenticity and falsity, between relationships and transactions, between learning and performing to a script. They are presented with the spectacle as if it were reality and then expected to emerge from it all as well-rounded human beings equipped to lead personally fulfilling and socially useful lives.

In HE and academic circles the multiple ills of the performative society are well recognised and much lamented, a fact that nevertheless does not offset a general reluctance on the part of academics to turn our otherwise critical gaze upon ourselves. Political interference, neo-liberal ideology, bureaucracy, poor-quality students and any number of external factors are blamed for the “McDonaldization” of universities and accompanying distortion of intellectual values and learning experiences. A great deal less is said about why educational institutions are \textit{internally} so susceptible to these pressures. There are, of course, notable exceptions. Reeves suggests that HE institutions are vulnerable because of the absence of anything that can be genuinely called an \textit{academic community}. Instead of embodying communities of learners who share at least some common principles and goals, universities are “emporia where each snatches what he can of the shelves of knowledge”.\textsuperscript{456} As a mere collection of specialists, individuals and departments are open to “innumerable temptations because they do not really know what they would go to the stake for”.\textsuperscript{457} Individuals, in other words, are left defenceless principally by their isolation.

The implication that it is an alienation \textit{from one another} that makes people vulnerable to conformist tendencies and external demands points, yet again, to the central significance of relationships. The system, through all the various processes identified, undoubtedly undermines the quality of personal interaction by encouraging individuals to treat each other as objects; soulless competitors in a larger game over which no-one has any control. It is, however, at the same time \textit{reliant} on this. A conscious effort by members of learning institutions to form communities, to identify shared purposes and, most importantly, share responsibility for realising those purposes, would be an act of resistance of far greater power than any intellectual critique or political protest. For communities are built upon relationships, and relating to another entails recognising his or her humanity. Forging

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{456} Reeves and Society for Research into Higher Education., \textit{The Crisis in Higher Education : Competence, Delight, and the Common Good}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid.
meaningful relationships constitutes a refusal to participate in the ‘second reality’, for as we have seen it is not just our own but each other’s humanity that the ‘second reality’ attempts to deny.

THE FAITH IN POLITICS AND PERMANENT REVOLUTION

We are the optimists in politics today. So, let's be humble about our past. Let's understand the need to change. Let's inspire people with our vision of the good society. Let the message go out, a new generation has taken charge of Labour. Optimistic about our country. Optimistic about our world. Optimistic about the power of politics. We are the optimists and together we will change Britain.

(Ed Miliband, speech to the Labour Party Conference, 2010)\(^{458}\)

Underpinning all attempts to create and administer a cure for the crisis (or crises) in education today is the assumption of political responsibility. This, as we saw plainly in Chapter 2, is rooted in the reasoning that because the education of the young is of fundamental importance to the nation’s present wellbeing and future possibilities, it is in the public interest for major (and increasingly minor) educational decisions to be directed by the government of the day and democratically sanctioned. Following the troubled and relatively unstructured post-war period, the 1980s saw political intervention in and regulation of the processes and overall character of education firmly re-equated with the essentials of democracy; it became necessary for the freedom of the people. Within this attitude, beyond the supposition that political intervention can practically address educational matters without politicising them, is the recognition that it is through education that society is transformed. Hence the demand for strategies and plans specifically designed to tackle everything from short-falls in the labour market to inequality, poverty, gender awareness, physical health to more elusive things like fostering community responsibility and spiritual growth.

At the heart of the political problematisation of the crisis in education therefore we can identify two intertwined and foundational principles: that the education system is a tool of politics and that political leaders, predominantly using this tool, are equipped to resolve all

manner of human and social problems. Amongst all the change and upheaval in the historical period covered in this dissertation, these twin assumptions remain constant. It is these twin assumptions, moreover, which act as the catalyst for all the systemic problems we have been describing; they are inextricably linked to the divorce between theory and practice and corresponding loss of reality which is at the same time the evolution of a purely abstract world alienated from common human experience. They represent, to put it in terms of the core thesis, the social therapy which has become a permanent feature of modern society. Emerging in a specific historical context as the answer to new questions about self, freedom, morality and the future, the twofold faith in politics and education that has evolved into a fixed system of therapeutics not only failed to adequately address these questions but serves to conceal that failure to this day by obfuscating any serious attempt to pose them anew.

The optimism about the power of politics so prevalent today is quite undisputedly traced by historians to the European Enlightenment. In particular, to the decline in Church authority following the religious wars of the seventeenth century and the corresponding rise in popularity of the concept of the sovereign nation-state. The “liberation of men’s conscience” implied by the rejection of religious ethics and forms of “transcendental justice” left the State as “the sole source and sanction of morality”.459 In his study of the French Revolution, Francois Furet notes that it signals the appearance on the stage of history of “a practical and ideological mode of social action totally unrelated to anything that came before. A specific kind of political crisis made it possible but not inevitable; and revolt was not its model, since revolt was by definition a part of the old political and cultural system”.460 The distinction between revolt and revolution relates to the way in which revolt conceives of a return to an idealised past where revolution looks toward a utopian future.461 Furet uses the term ideology to designate two sets of beliefs that he thinks constitute the very bedrock of revolutionary consciousness: “The first is that all personal problems and all moral or intellectual matters have become political; that there is no human misfortune not amenable to a political solution. The second is that, since

everything can be known and changed, there is a perfect fit between action, knowledge and morality”.

In his work *Critique and Crisis: The Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, Reinhart Koselleck also explains the co-emergence of “the spirit of freedom” and this “total politics” in terms of the Enlightenment attempt to find a moral justification for politics in post-theological society. As Hobbes depicted it, the structure of the absolutist state was based on the subordination of morality to political necessity, the overall purpose of the commonwealth being to maintain peace and security: “It belongeth to him that hath sovereign power, to be judge, or constitute all judges of opinions and doctrines, as a thing necessary to peace”. According to Koselleck, it was through the denial of political power to its subjects that the absolutism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century sowed the seeds of its own destruction. Citizens will inevitably come into conflict with a state that subordinates morality to politics, for, having been “morally emancipated” from religious bonds, individuals will want to establish their own morality and will seek to assert their own autonomy. The question of the pre-eminence of the state or the “spirit of society” thus lay in the background of the Enlightenment challenge to absolutism. The bourgeoisie came to realise that the power of the spirit, man’s moral self, had grown so great that it could seek to proclaim itself in the political realm.

It was Rousseau, according to Koselleck, who more than any other thinker paved the way for revolution in his attempt to amalgamate enlightened morality and the state. In his *Social Contract* he conceived of a way in which the “new society” could exercise power yet, paradoxically, remain what it was. “In his quest for the true state Rousseau unwittingly unleashed the permanent revolution. He was looking for the unity of morality and politics, and what he found was the total state, that is to say, the permanent revolution in the guise of legality”. Rousseau’s vital step was to apply the concept of the *sovereign will* to the moral autonomy of society; he claimed the unconditional will, what had been the basis of the sovereign decision of the absolutist ruler, for society. “The result was the *volonté générale*, the absolute general will as a law unto itself”. The sovereign will is

---

466 Ibid., pp.153-58.
467 Ibid., p.163.
468 Ibid..
thus retained but transferred to society which, however, has no jurisdiction over it; it is a will that at the outset has no executor. The true sovereign is the will, striving for fulfilment. This anticipates both the permanent revolution and the total state, in Koselleck’s view, for it “depends on the fictive identity of bourgeois morality and sovereign decision. Every expression of the general will becomes a general law because its own totality is its sole objective”. Rousseau’s sovereignty turns out to be permanent dictatorship, which shares its origins with the permanent revolution into which the state has turned:

The citizen gains his freedom only when he participates in the general will, but as an individual this same citizen cannot know when and how his inner self is absorbed by the general will. Individuals might err but the volonté générale never does. The rational totality of the collective and of its volonté générale thus compels a constant correction of reality, namely of those individuals who have not yet become part of the collective.

Crucially, the functions of the dictatorship are carried out by those who execute the hypostatised general will, for even when in the majority, the people cannot truly know their own will. They require guides, leaders who rule not by virtue of their own decisions but because they are “better informed about the hypostatised general will than the sum total of individuals”. The head of Rousseauñesí democracy is thus under constant pressure to create ideology, which means ultimately, to “bring about the fictive unity of ideas and action”:  

The leader must forever instruct the people, who do not know their true will, by showing them things as they really are – or how they are supposed to appear....Since the Enlightenment had eradicated all distinctions between internal and external, unmasked all arcane, the public became ideology...in Rousseau, moral censorship is nationalised; the public censor becomes chief ideologue.

In Koselleck’s analysis, therefore, Rousseau makes clear that the “secret of the Enlightenment, the concealment of its power” has become the principle of politics. The

---

469 Ibid., p.164.
470 Ibid., pp.164-65.
471 Ibid., p.165.
472 Ibid., pp.165-66.
task of the new law-maker is to replace authority by the power of the public, but do it in such a way that the state appears to have no need of leadership. The Enlightenment thus “rules only by veiling its rule. The postulated identity of moral freedom and political compulsion, by which Rousseau hoped to root out the evils of the absolutist system, turns out to be the ideological dictatorship of virtue, which hides its dominance behind the mask of the general will”.473 The unity between the morality of the citizen and politics of the state is fragile, for the ideological cover of their identity is in constant danger of tearing apart, of being exposed as a fiction. To “make the appearance into reality requires the perpetuation of the means of identification“.474 For Koselleck, whose work initiated as an inquiry into the origins of twentieth century totalitarianism in Europe, it is terror and ideology which become this means, the “perpetuation of the state of emergency”.475

As it has been demonstrated throughout these chapters, a state of emergency is maintained in our (at least domestically) non-violent times through the continual political re-problematisation of crisis. Crisis itself is an integral part of state transformation and politics is an endlessly repetitive cycle of change and urgently needed action where a line is drawn under the past at least each decade and a seemingly fresh start is made on the project of the good society. Critically, the goal is always something just around the corner, the message being that this time we will make it happen; this time “the cure”, as it was put in the Social Justice Report, has been identified and will be effectively administered; the “broken society” will be “mended”; the “failing nation” will be converted into an international success, and so on. The tendency is, as Talmon noted in his description of what he referred to as “totalitarian democracy”, to precisely define a state of “ideal harmony” and treat it as “a matter of immediate urgency, a challenge for direct action, an imminent event”.476

Koselleck concluded that the Enlightenment became utopian and hypocritical because it saw itself as excluded from political power sharing. “The structure of Absolutism, rooted in the dichotomy between sovereign and subject, between public policy and private morality, prevented the Enlightenment and emancipation movement produced by it from understanding itself as a political phenomenon”.477 It identified itself with moral right,
with the spirit of the people, in opposition to the oppressive state. In condemning politics, however, it alienated morality from political reality, creating contradictions that could not be resolved in practice. This new, enlightened politics, in being expected to uphold utopian standards, could only flounder. This fact leads to the effort to make the ethical and the political appear indistinguishable, the creation of the fictive unity which defines the dictatorship and ultimately makes possible the moral justification of war and violence. In his Foreword to the work, Gourevitch describes it as a modern understanding and practice of politics that has become “dangerously depoliticised” as the differences between the “political realm proper” and other public but non-political realms become blurred. While Koselleck presents it as a subversion of politics by utopianism, a politics that is depoliticised because it takes on the demands of the cultural and moral realms is at the same time a society that has become totally politicised. Everything becomes subordinate to politics, albeit a politics that has lost touch with reality and replaced morality with ideology.

The greatest insight of Koselleck’s analysis (at least for the purposes of this dissertation) is in his interpretation of the Enlightenment as a set of attitudes and practices and patterns of thought and behaviour that have “survived the special circumstances of their birth”. In tracing these relationships it emphasises that understanding the answers we are living today requires revisiting the questions faced by the Enlighteners. Formulating new answers demands first of all the re-formulation of those questions, or perhaps even more crucially, a re-articulation of the experiences and sentiment that gave rise to those questions. In one sense, this entails reconsidering both the role and realm of politics. This becomes essentially a question about what kind of decision-making is appropriate in different areas of individual and social life; in a democracy, this means deciding what types of human interaction are amenable to majority rule and what are not. In another sense, it entails re-considering the foundations of morality and conscience and their relationship to politics. It is a question about how political and legal institutions can reflect

478 Ibid., p.vii.
479 Ibid., p.4.
480 J.H. Hallowell puts it best: “Too often the history of political ideas is presented as an on-going argument about commonly perceived problems of social order; it thus assumes a continuity of argument and a universal community of discourse which in fact does not exist. The sentiments, passions and experiences of which ideas are the crystallization tend to be ignored and arguments are generated about the validity of ideas as though the ideas had a life and a reality of their own. It is the experiences which give rise to the ideas which should engage our attention if we want to understand both the human promise and the human predicament.” J.H. Hallowell Foreword to Eric Voegelin, From Enlightenment to Revolution (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975), p.vii.
the “spirit of the people” without claiming that spirit, and distorting, even negating spirituality in the process. In short, how can the state become the *sanction* of morality without turning into the *source* of morality.

**THE TOTALISATION OF MAN AND SOCIETY**

The assessment that the Enlightenment in many respects removed impediments to new, subtle and evermore embracing forms of state control through the linking of political power to the will of the people is of course not new. While acknowledging that the evils of serfdom, the denial of human dignity, inequality and poverty that the *philosophes* were fighting against were real and upheld by eighteenth century absolutism, Beloff proclaims:

> But the notion that State action could sweep these evils away, that Power could be used for beneficent purposes as easily as it had hitherto been perverted for selfish ones was proved to be based on a misunderstanding either of human beings or of the nature of social cohesion, or both. Neither the heirs of the Enlightenment nor the reactionaries against it have yet explained precisely what went wrong.\(^\text{481}\)

The same “misunderstanding” was at the heart of the popular programme to rebuild society in Britain after the Second World War, when it was again the powers of the state that were employed to restore health to the social organism as a whole; it was state action that would liberate mankind from the “giant evils” of want, squalor, disease, idleness and, most significantly, *ignorance*. It was, as we saw in Chapter 2 a “comprehensive policy of social progress” which envisaged the “permanent achievement of a fairer society”. After a crisis of such huge proportions, it was a missed opportunity to re-think the viability of the total political answer.

The discrediting of the planned economy and break-up of the welfare state does not symbolise a loss of confidence in the power of politics but merely a shift in focus. The discussion of education policy in Chapters 2 to 4 clearly reflects an overall process of decentralisation, from the post-war welfare period to New Labour’s “new politics” which stresses that it is “increasingly the culture in which we live our lives that matters, our

\(^\text{481}\text{ Beloff, *The Age of Absolutism, 1660-1815*, p.180.}\)
beliefs and aspirations, the values and norms that shape our goals and the boundaries we set and are prepared to set for the way we behave in our families and communities”.

It will not be therefore “commands from Whitehall” nor simply the market, but “people who are engaged in changing the world as individuals, parents, neighbours and active citizens that will be the next momentum for change”. This emphasis on individual action and the “big society” rather than the big state is plainly set to continue under the new Government led by David Cameron.

There are a number of things to consider here. First of all, it is not insignificant that this is a process of centralised decentralisation, that decentralisation is itself a national political venture. Secondly, the recognition that it is “the culture in which we live” that matters the most is precisely the reason for such intense political interest in education and fields of learning. Shaping the beliefs, aspirations, values and norms of the population through influence on education is a more subtle yet no less effective way than direct “commands from Whitehall” for the state to bring about “momentum” for its next revolution. Finally, the appeal to individual responsibility and community action, apparently so responsive to the spirit of the times, is again deceptive. The individual remains an ideal, an abstraction, for the individual as a real human being is not trusted to make either rational or socially responsible decisions. The prevailing understanding of public accountability, the insistence on performance measurement and standardised regulation in both work and learning, the international political/economic mission to build the ‘learning society’ and the reliance on the market dynamic to determine inter-personal relations and priorities are all part of the “new politics”. They all represent, at the same time, a profound statement of no confidence in the prospect that the human individuality could truly be the impetus for social transformation. The idea is there but, and this goes back to the Enlightenment question, it remains powerless to effect life, to become lived.

Beloff, in referring to the “absolutisms” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, does not make a distinction between absolutism and dictatorship, or “permanent revolution”. It was noted in Chapter 2 that after the war, despite the expansion of state activity in all areas of social life there was at least a lingering sense of what the crisis revealed in terms of the power wielded by totalising forces, especially through the control of teaching and content

---

482 Brown.
483 Ibid.
484 See the Conservative Election Manifesto 2010, also David Cameron, “Let’s Mend our Broken Society”, speech delivered to the Centre for Social Justice, April 27, 2010.
of education. Dawson argues that the success of dictatorships in central Europe lay in the recognition that it is the life of society, not just the government of society that required re-ordering, that it goes beyond constitutional change, beyond politics in this sense. “They have not been content to govern and tax and legislate, they have aspired to change the spirit of the people, to rescue it from apathy and despair, to give it faith in its mission and hope in its future”.\(^{485}\) It claims, in other words, the whole man. It is this attempt to get hold of the private inner life that Koselleck identified as the difference between absolutism (rooted in the tension between morality and politics) and dictatorship (rooted in the postulated unity of morality and politics). To lead the people toward the good requires “...more than Absolutist rule, which encompasses only the external....Not only actions, but above all ideas, must be co-ordinated. Once the rule of the princely will is replaced by the rule of the general will, then logically the unity of interior and exterior must be forced”.\(^{486}\)

The statesman, as executor of this total politics, is therefore not only responsible for a range of sociological questions but “may even be expected to transform the whole structure of society and re-fashion the cultural traditions of the people”.\(^{487}\) The co-ordination of ideas and the attempt to re-culture society are as we have seen the explicit intentions of current education policy. That is to say, it is not a matter of a conspiracy against the public or a sinister agenda hidden behind a misleading rhetoric, it is the rhetoric, and political leaders proudly celebrate this aim, reflecting the popular certainty that it is their rightful duty.

The National Curriculum introduced in the 1980s was specifically designed to restore traditional values (read co-ordinate ideas) and secondarily to regenerate the economy. As shown, the policy was wrought with contradictory principles and aims. While compelled by a critique of the oppressive and stultifying state, culture in the revolutionised society was nevertheless tied firmly to central authority. This in spite of the fact that, as T.S. Eliot noted, the one definite known when it comes to culture is that it can never be deliberately aimed at.\(^{488}\) Individual freedom, on the other hand, was to be guaranteed through choice in the market, another fallacy for it constitutes a failure to perceive that without cultural and educational independence and diversity, economic liberties are in all important respects meaningless.

Today’s ‘learning society’ is likewise a cultural project, but one with an economic objective. The Government has set itself the task of creating the competitive skills-base for the knowledge economy and education is the means to this end. The result, as one commentator observed, is that “...we live in an economy, not a society”. What amounts to a “complete subordination of the individual to the state and to the economic process” is the basis for Dawson’s striking claim that liberal democracy, although by a different and no means equivalent path, ultimately has the same destination as that of both national socialism and communism. The destination being, we can presume, the loss of man altogether as a spiritual being and his truncation into a purely economic and political existence.

The internal aspect of today’s political project is specifically recognised in Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’, a term which semantically links governing with modes of thought. According to Foucault, the neo-liberal conception turns on its head the classical liberal model of the powerful state supervising the market (and by this means bringing about desirable social reform) and rather it is the market itself which becomes “the organising and regulative principle underlying the state”. In this way the “limiting, external principle” is removed and replaced by “a regulatory and inner principle”. Modern governmental rationality is thus “simultaneously about individualising and totalising, about finding answers to the question of what it is for an individual, and for a society or population of individuals, to be governed or governable”. This is as such not a process of decentralisation, but recentralisation, onto the individual. The neo-liberal strategy is to replace or supplement out-dated or discredited regulatory mechanisms by developing “new techniques of self-regulation”. The notion that it is the individual who is most implicated in his or her own domination, if it can be expressed thus, clearly returns us to the themes raised in the discussion of performativity and the construction of a ‘second reality’. It has been argued that the ‘self’ that the neo-liberal project postulates is nothing but a performance, a spectacle. The individual who self-regulates according to

490 Dawson, Religion and the Modern State, p.xv.
this model, who performs, participates in and upholds this spectacle. It is an externalisation internalised, as it were. The “techniques of self-regulation” are thus at the same time techniques of self-avoidance, an avoidance that it is the function of politics and ideology – the system itself – to facilitate.

FREEDOM AND THE SELF AS A POLITICAL PROJECT

What is the first part of politics? Education. What is the second? Education. And the third? Education.

(Jules Michelet, Le Peuple, 1846)

During the upheavals and crises of the European Enlightenment it was the “omnipotence of education” that was the people’s principle weapon against the power, prejudice and lies of absolutist rulers.495 It was education that was considered the key to emancipation. What started out as the basis of opposition to the state, however, metamorphosed into the raison d’être of the state. The growing political influence on education starting from the nineteenth century, sharply increasing after the Second World War, then again with the National Curriculum in the 1980s, presents therefore not just a repeating pattern of crisis followed by political solution via education, but an intensification of the phenomenon of emancipation being taken on as a project of the state. It is a cycle that spirals however as it becomes increasingly internalised and centred on the individual.

What is most striking about learning in today’s ‘learning society’, aside from it being indistinguishable from skills training, is that it is conceived in terms of the fulfilment of potential. “The moral foundations of our education programme are simple: every child is special and every child has the right to fulfil their potential”.496 In a speech Ed Balls stated: “Like you, we believe that every child has potential. And like you, we are determined to

495 McLellan, Ideology, p.4.
help them fulfil that potential”. The Government’s pledge is not merely to secure citizens’ right to be all that they can be, but to assist and guide them in that process of becoming. The “fulfilment of potential” notably re-invokes a classical understanding of freedom, that is, freedom as self-actualisation or self-realisation. The paradox is evident in the language itself. Where learning – or defining and enabling learning – is a political project, and learning is self-realisation, self-realisation is a political project. This is however clearly a contradiction in terms; it is not self-realisation but political realisation of self.

To reiterate, this is not strictly a question of domination, but reflection of the fact that the individual seeks self-realisation, along with the perfection of society, through politics. It mirrors the faith on the part of members of society, inherited from the Enlighteners, that all things, even the self, are politically realisable. Any apparent political alienation or civic disengagement amongst the population does not contradict this, for the depth of disenchantment with politics is merely proportional to the expectation of what is politically possible. The hope that this or that Government will fix society’s problems may dwindle, but the conviction that government in general can and ought to is what keeps the system aloft. It is the driving force behind each “new generation” of change, each new wave of educational reform, each new comprehensive plan for renewing society and once-and-for-all securing of the future.

If learning is understood as self-realisation, or the fulfilment of potential, then there must be a self to be realised, a potential to be fulfilled. The fact that political action can only incorporate that which is common to all by virtue of being human, not that which is unique, means that in the ‘learning society’ the self and human potential must be collectivised and standardised. “While never before has there been such sonorous talk of the “free personality,” [sic] we never once see personalities, to say nothing of free people, but only anxiously disguised universal people.” Speaking of his own culture in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche proposed that individuality had “drawn itself back into inner life: outside we no longer observe any of it”. In today’s world where politics lays even

498 Nietzsche, On the Use and Abuse of History for Life. (No page number available).
499 Ibid..
greater claims on inner life, in the continuing quest for a completely secular social morality, neither culture nor individuality can really exist.

Nietzsche defined “free personalities” as those who are “true to themselves and true with respect to others in word and deed”:

First through this truthfulness will the need, the inner misery of modern man, see the light of day, and art and religion will be able to enter as true helpers in place of that anxiously concealed convention and masquerade, in order to cultivate a common culture according to real needs, culture which does not, like the present universal education, just teach one to lie to oneself and thus become a wandering lie.  

The ongoing crisis in education reveals, if we are open to perceiving it, a paradox that is central to the experience of modern man: a consciousness which holds the human being as an autonomous, self-creating being and the simultaneous negation of that very possibility of being through the perpetual externalisation of responsibility for self, manifested socially as a faith in politics. Nowhere is this better illustrated than by our attitudes as a society toward learning, for as it was put forward in Chapter 1, it is learning that constitutes the “capacity to create”; it is learning which “gets to the heart of what it means to be human”. All talk of personal fulfilment is an empty conceptualisation of learning if it is grounded in nothing more than an abstract political notion re-constructed each decade to reflect the latest developments in science and technology. As a society of individuals, if we are going to be true to ourselves in word and deed, we either need to change the way we speak about both learning and individual freedom to fit the way we live, or change the way we live to fit the way we speak.

THE CYCLE OF CRISIS

The principle difficulty with debate in and about education, and why it tends to be cyclical, is that where a tension is identified it is usually between two fundamental social aims; that of achieving a more just and equal society and that of securing the greatest possible freedom of the individual; they are perceived to be mutually inhibitive. The discussion

---

500 Ibid.
takes on the form of opposing ideologies to the ‘left’ and ‘right’ of the political spectrum. This constant to and fro merely diverts attention from what the state and free market therapies, or any combination of the two, have in common, namely that they share a fundamental commitment to solutions that are external to the individual. On the one hand we have the impersonal, yet rational and, as we have seen, ostensibly objective public will, executed through the bureaucratic and managerial mechanisms of the state. On the other hand we have those intangible yet powerful forces, again impersonal, of the global market. In both cases, moreover, culture is made dependent on the state through the political monopolisation of learning.

The social representation of the sovereign self in charge of his own life and destiny, so much part of the now inseparable educational and economic discourse, is continually set against the reality of an existence largely determined by a multitude of external bodies, conditions and regulations. Herein lies a constant tension and as Sandel put it, the contemporary citizen of the liberal state finds himself “lurching between detachment and entanglement”.502 This is however but one level, representing the tension between internal and external, or individual and society. We come much closer to the real nature of the crisis if we perceive that this tension must exist, so long as the solution to the problem of human freedom is sought externally (either politically or economically). If the solution lies outside of myself, in the social world, I must conceive that the problem also lies outside of myself, and we are caught inexorably in the paradox.

Within the system we have been describing, therefore, the realm of political activity and debate merely serves to conceal – through constantly shifting attention elsewhere - what is essentially a decision faced by each and every person. The notion that this is a personal decision, one that can potentially be a conscious fact of everyday life, returns us to the ancient Greek understanding of crisis as an experience of heightened (self-)awareness and joins the theme of resistance to that of self-knowledge. The examination of self has long been considered fundamental in recognising and as such resisting (for diagnosis and therapy are part of the same process) forms of oppression, particularly when they are self-incurred, to use Kant’s term.503 To appreciate the centrality of the question of self-knowledge to our discussion we need only see how the system that is revealed through

looking at the contemporary politics of education is entirely dependent on ways of being that are the antithesis of the examined life, at least in the Socratic sense. It relies on participants adept at multiple forms of dissembling; it requires the cultivation of a kind of blindness to what would otherwise be blatant contradictions and untruths; since reflexivity would threaten to expose this, a certain dullness of mind and passivity of thought, combined with the increasing meaninglessness of language, become what can at best be described as techniques for coping with an incoherent world. That laborious task Kant talked of, rather than being the refusal to entertain illusory knowledge, becomes instead the task of finding ways to live with it. In so far as the condition of those complicit in the creation and sustainment of the system (and all are complicit to some extent) can be deemed thus fractured, we can say that the health of the system rests on the ill-health of its participants. The meaning of ‘healthy’ itself undergoes a transformation, from a striving for harmony to a striving to conceal disharmony.

The theme of health raises a further dimension of the original meaning of crisis and suggests a sense in which responding to crisis involves the restoration of health – or wholeness – to the human being and, co-relative to that, society. Health itself is never a static thing, but requires constant renewal, constant attention to and correction of imbalances. We are talking thus not just about ways of knowing but ways of being, for “Every way of knowing becomes a way of living...every epistemology becomes an ethic.” Responding to the crisis thus involves exploring other ways of knowing self and the world and, as such, opening up to the possibility for other ways of being in the world.

504 In another sense, of course, modern day life is super-examined. See discussion of the self-knowledge industry in Shillabeer, 2007.  
Chapter 6: Regaining the Whole

*Life is not a thing, nor the state of a thing. It is this limitation of physical science, its inability to understand life, that reveals to us the true sphere and the special task of philosophy. Physical science deals with the stable and unchanging, philosophy deals with life.*

(Herbert Wildon Carr, *Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change*, 1911)\(^\text{507}\)

**KNOWING SELF AND THE WORLD**

Albert Schweitzer, well-known humanist and winner of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize, described his one and only meeting with Rudolf Steiner in the following words:

> And then something remarkable occurred. One of us – I no longer remember which – came to speak of the spiritual decline of our culture as the fundamental, yet unheeded, problem of our time. With this we learned that we were both preoccupied with the same question. Neither had anticipated this of the other. A lively discussion then ensued. Each of us discovered from the other that we had set ourselves the same life task, to strive for the awakening of that true culture which would be enlivened and penetrated by the ideal of humanity, and to guide and hold men to the goal of becoming truly intelligent, thinking beings.\(^\text{508}\)

Whereas Schweitzer continued to seek answers to the question of cultural and spiritual crisis in the deepening of ethical thought, Steiner developed his own unique approach to the study of both the philosophical and practical problems of his time, one he came to call *anthroposophy*. There are two main reasons why this approach potentially breaks free


from the fixed pattern of diagnosis and therapy identified above. First of all, it represents an attempt to restore the human being as the bearer of the crisis and as such counteracts the tendency for both externalisation and avoidance. Anthroposophy, from *anthropos-sophia* which literally translates as *humankind-wisdom*, is a term that encapsulates an orientation to the world that aims not just to acknowledge abstractly but *come to know* the human being in all dimensions of his existence. Further, it aims to carry this holistic vision into all fields of knowledge and make it a real and practical foundation in all spheres of social life, including politics, economics and education. It represents, therefore, a concerted effort to move beyond the truncated version of man and the self that is sustained by the modern crisis-discourse.

Secondly, and intertwined with this, anthroposophy seeks to (re-)establish a “living” relationship between theory and practice. Steiner believed it possible to cultivate a kind of thinking that is “trained for life”, essentially by heightening awareness of our own participatory status in world-processes. He referred to this co-creativeness as the “activity of spirit”, an activity which is also conceived as providing the only basis for freedom and the true source of morality. Although at one level it offers a particular diagnosis of today’s crisis in education encompassed within a radical critique of modernity, anthroposophy is looked at here primarily in the context of the aim proposed in Chapter 1 to explore alternative *forms* of diagnosis. Since Steiner appears to have taken seriously the idea that philosophy is not so much about positing solutions as a process that itself can be a liberation from limiting forms of thought (i.e. this is reflected in the style and content of his writing), his vision, although comprehensive, nevertheless maintains an openness that stands in contrast to the largely systemic thinking underpinning today’s crisis-talk. Indeed, we might characterise the anthroposophical way of life as a striving to counteract that tendency of the human individual (exactly what the crisis reveals or where the tension is located) to close himself off to aspects of experience; to deny his whole self and exist in a ‘second reality’. Steiner’s purpose in his philosophy, lecture courses and meditative exercises was to open minds and hearts to both the need and concrete potential for “a true spiritual communion of humanity and union with reality”.

---

In Steiner’s account of consciousness, the depth of one’s experience of reality is dependent on the state and richness of one’s soul life, a life in which thinking is a crucial element. Since the world we perceive cannot be separated from the world we think, the possibilities for enhancing perception of reality rest on the extent to which set habits of cognition can be overcome. In saying this, Steiner was stressing the dangers of not fully appreciating the fact that the world we perceive in the future will be determined by the thought-processes and mental functions of today. In particular, the world of phenomena or our “collective representations”. Since “how we know our world determines what we can do in it and through it”, our task is firstly epistemological and only secondly political and social. Given that what Steiner presented was a path to be travelled rather than a theory or purely conceptual argument, the following is but an attempt to lay out some starting principles and indicate some first steps along this path. The limitations of such an exposition are clear and were acknowledged at the outset of this work. The only verification for Steiner’s claims is experience. His epistemology can be regarded, in a certain sense, as leading the reader to the point where he or she can consider the possibility of that experience.

The context for Steiner’s investigation of knowledge was an intellectual climate which imposed strict and un-resolvable limitations to what human beings can know about themselves and the world. Writing during the late nineteenth century when the optimism and excitement fuelled by the Enlightenment had turned into a general scepticism about the possibilities for knowledge, Steiner felt this to be of particular significance as an existential experience, one which found expression more widely in social and political conflicts. On the one hand philosophy could not escape the impasse of subject-object dualism and on the other the natural sciences were being forced to face up to the inadequacy of classical mechanistic models for explaining the universe. These are of course two sides of the same problem, and remain so, though today couched in terms of the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness. Although sense-data theories of perception have been largely abandoned, answers as to what we are to make of our subjective conscious

---

511 Our “collective representations” make up our picture of the world, are passed from generation to generation and like language gradually change with time since we perceive not just with our senses but memory, imagination, mental habits, feelings, beliefs and so on. See discussion in Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry, p.17.

experience remain elusive. Steiner claimed to offer, or at least point towards, a science of experience. His account of knowing is an attempt to demonstrate the potential for transcending the subject-object dichotomy without denying that we are confined to our own consciousness. The fact of being confined to our own consciousness, in other words, does not exclude the possibility of objective knowledge, for consciousness itself can be transformed.

Steiner set his theory of knowledge against what he broadly termed the “metaphysical realism” characteristic of his time. Metaphysical realism is necessarily dualistic, constructing on the one hand a reality which is sense-perceptible and in constant flux, and on the other hand an enduring imperceptible reality that is conceived on the analogy of the perceptible one. The metaphysical realist acknowledges the sphere of reality known through his senses, and the sphere of reality known through his thinking. The principle of perceivability is thus required for the world of percepts, and the principle of conceivability is required for the relationship between percepts. What he fails to acknowledge, according to Steiner, is that the mode of existence which thinking reveals, i.e. the concept, is as important as the mode of existence revealed by sense-perception. There is no room for a third sphere of reality in which percept and concept, real and ideal, are simultaneously valid. Metaphysical realism in this way postulates the existence of a reality completely independent of conceptual schemes, and conceives ‘truth’ as a belief’s correspondence to that reality. Steiner, on the other hand, asserted the now uncontroversial position that reality does not exist independently of the thinking mind. The very notion of a ‘thing-in-itself’, a transcendental ultimate foundation of things, is an illusion. Steiner argued that there is no reason to seek the foundation of things outside of the given, experienced world. Since the thinking mind participates in the reality it observes, it has a direct access to the essential nature of things:

The object of knowledge is not to repeat in conceptual form something which already exists, but rather to create a completely new sphere, which when combined with the world given to our senses constitutes complete reality. Thus

---


man's highest activity, his spiritual creativeness, is an organic part of the universal world-process. The world-process should not be considered a complete, enclosed totality without this activity. Man is not a passive onlooker in relation to evolution, merely repeating in mental pictures cosmic events taking place without his participation; he is the active co-creator of the world-process, and cognition is the most perfect link in the organism of the universe.\textsuperscript{515}

In his investigations of nature, Goethe, it is said, remained true to the principle of experience. Since we are not capable of getting ‘outside’ of nature, we must seek our explanations ‘within it’. The human observer has the potential to become aware of his participation with the organic processes being observed as a quality of his own consciousness. In this way he gave clear expression to “the Romantic desire to merge self and object not as an ideal, but as a state attainable through practical exercises in phenomenological observation”.\textsuperscript{516} These exercises entail the development of an “exact sensorial imagination”, an activity which aims to occupy the middle ground and thus bridge the divide between the ideally and empirically perceived.\textsuperscript{517} It is a starting point which rejects the notion that what is measured by instruments, in the manner of conventional science, is more primary than what is experienced by the human senses. Human senses, being the most accurate and immediate instrument of perception, can be cultivated both systematically and rigorously to perceive nature more fully. Taking this further, Steiner suggested that the same principle can be applied to the other “pole of knowledge”, namely consciousness itself. “Senses” can be developed to experience more fully that which has no physical manifestation and exists only as the content of human consciousness.\textsuperscript{518} He proposed a science of the non-physical, or spiritual, based purely on

\textsuperscript{515}———, \textit{Truth and Knowledge: Introduction to Philosophy of Spiritual Activity}, trans. Rita Stebbing, 2 ed. (New York: Steiner Books, 1981), preface. In more particular terms Steiner placed himself in firm opposition to Kant, who continued to dominate the philosophical stage at Steiner’s time of writing. He denied first of all that \textit{a priori} judgements are possible (even pure mathematical principles are grasped experientially) and secondly that judgements based on experience only have approximate validity, i.e. have no absolute or universal truth. In his view, experience itself has a characteristic feature which ensures the validity of the insights gained by it. Kant does not prove that synthetic \textit{a priori} judgements are possible, and that they form the foundation for all mathematics and pure science, he \textit{presupposes} that this is the case. A theory of knowledge has to be “absolutely without such presuppositions.” Ibid.


\textsuperscript{517}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{518}Though this may invite confusion given his use of term ‘supersensible’ to denote the non-physical and inter-changeable with ‘spiritual’ and ‘occult’, Steiner in certain contexts used the word ‘sense’ to describe the mediator for both the outer and inner perception of an object, both the physical and the ideal or conceptual.
human experience. He was of the opinion that it is due to misunderstandings of its own nature that science imposes limitations on itself.

Steiner began his investigation into the nature of cognition with what he refers to as his epistemological starting point, a (hypothetical) point before any act of cognition has taken place and the world is experienced as “directly given”, an undifferentiated, unintelligible content. Experience here is characterised as that in which thought plays no part, and this thought-free world is his starting point. This directly given world includes everything that enters experience – sensations, feelings, opinions, dreams, imagination, even hallucinations. All experiences are equal in this given world; there is no cause or effect, no mental or physical, subjective or objective, since these distinctions are made only through the act of cognition. Steiner refers to this form of reality as “manifestation to the senses”, where “senses” means the mediators of both the outer and inner world (here he is already referring to both ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ organs of perception), and “manifestation” means a thing or process perceptible in space or time.519

The question is, how do we get from this passive experience to the designation of one thing as perception and the other as conception; ourselves as subject (I) and the rest as object (not I)? In order for cognition to be possible there must be something in this world content that is not purely given. Cognition could not begin anywhere because the world content is completely undifferentiated, there is nothing to designate one thing as more important than another. In short, in order for cognition to be possible (and even necessary) there must be something not given to think about the given. If this “first form” of observing revealed how things actually are, if what belonged to their very nature was experienced in this way, it would be impossible to transcend this stage of knowing. Cognition thus depends on a sphere “somewhere in the given where our cognizing activity does not merely presuppose something given, but finds itself active in the very essence of the given”.520

We can form an image therefore of both physical and non-physical “organs of perception”, although one must be conceived on the analogy of, not equated with, the other. For instance, in the act of hearing he proposed that three senses are involved: The sense of ‘hearing’, the sense of ‘becoming aware of words’ and the sense of ‘comprehending thoughts’. The reason that we fail to make this distinction is that the organs of ‘being aware of words’ and ‘comprehending thoughts’ are not outwardly perceptible like the ear as the organ of ‘hearing’ and eye of ‘seeing’. In other words they are purely psychic. Steiner suggested that through conscious use of these organs, human beings have the capacity to become aware of them. Rudolf Steiner, The Case for Anthroposophy: Selections from Von Seelenrätseln, trans. Owen Barfield (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1970), c.8.

520 Steiner, Truth and Knowledge: Introduction to Philosophy of Spiritual Activity, c.4.
The only part of the given world where cognition finds itself active is in the concept. The concept is the only thing which is produced before it is given. Steiner in this way rejected the notion that the concept refers only to objects. Cause and effect must be sought in the given world, but the concept ‘causality’ must first be produced by thinking before it can be used to define or explain anything in the world. The principle of causality therefore, has a purely conceptual aspect, it is only in relationship to the given world that concepts become organising principles. This is not dualism, i.e. concept versus the rest of the world, because the concept is also initially part of the given, undifferentiated unity of the given world. Cognition is only active within one aspect of that given, and for this reason the initial unity is torn up. It is the task of knowledge to restore that unity, in other words, knowledge always consists of something that is given (the percept) and something that is produced (the concept), yet these are merely two sides of the same whole.\textsuperscript{521} Both are grasped as experience.

When we are confronted with the world in its “first form”, thinking is included in the perceived, undifferentiated whole. Thinking, however, contains something that the rest of experience does not – it is apprehended in consciousness in its full form, and is used to overcome the first appearance of everything else. It is the manifesting of this thinking factor that Steiner calls the \textit{activity of spirit}. Because we “stand inside” thinking, we can know its essential nature. In this way thought-content can enlighten us as to “both the nature of itself, and as to the essential being of what manifests itself to the senses”.\textsuperscript{522} Steiner thus held that his theory of knowledge transcended the one-sidedness of both empiricism and rationalism by uniting them at a higher level. “Empiricism is justified by showing that as far as content is concerned, all knowledge of the given is to be attained only through direct contact with the given. And it will be found that this view also does justice to rationalism in that thinking is declared to be the necessary and the only mediator of knowledge”.\textsuperscript{523} In other words, the fundamental laws of the universe are discovered in the nature of knowledge itself.

This can be described in a slightly different way. With most experience, the lawful interconnectness of that experience comes from thinking. We perceive, and apply concepts which arise in our thinking. With thinking, however, the whole manifests itself to

\textsuperscript{521} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{522} ———, \textit{The Science of Knowing}, c.8.
\textsuperscript{523} ———, \textit{Truth and Knowledge: Introduction to Philosophy of Spiritual Activity}, c.7.
consciousness all at once – nothing needs to be added to thinking as the laws of connectedness are inherent within it. Science needs to hold fast to experience, and yet it must also seek out the inner lawfulness of experience. At some point, this inner lawfulness must appear “in experience as experience”. In other words, one form of experience (perception of the given world) is deepened by another form of experience (the laws of connection grasped in thought). Steiner claimed that the observation of thinking is the observation of experience in its highest form.

The scientific method calls for the observation of objects in the first form they appear (i.e. without adding anything subjective) and aims to make these the objects of investigation. Importantly, no content of observation is prescribed, only a method. The objects of science, however, must have a form suitable for the purposes of scientific endeavour – and that is precisely what sense-perceptible (i.e. physical) objects do not have in the first instance. They only become suitable after thinking has applied the laws of connection. In other words, it is thinking which determines how one experience is connected to another, not the object. “If one demands of a “strictly objective science” that it should take its content from observation alone, then one must at the same time demand that it should forgo all thinking. For thinking, by its very nature, goes beyond what is observed”. The only object that is suitable in the first instance is thinking itself, since the laws of connection are directly apprehended. Steiner in this way argued that the principle of experience in its most extreme form can be applied only to thinking. This is not to say that the rest of the world is not experienced, it is simply experienced in a different way.

Thinking is thus conceived of as an organ of experience, and concepts are the content of that experience. Concepts are not gained by observation, rather they are added to observation:

When I hear a noise, I first look for the concept which fits this observation. It is this concept which first leads me beyond the mere noise. If one thinks no further, one simply hears the noise and is content to leave it at that. But my reflecting makes it clear to me that I have to regard the noise as effect. Therefore not until I have connected the concept of effect with the perception of

524———, *The Science of Knowing*, c.8.
525———, *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception*, p.42.
526———, *The Science of Knowing*, c.8.
the noise, do I feel the need to go beyond the solitary observation and look for the cause.\footnote{527} 

Where Kant and those who followed in his footsteps went wrong was in the assumption that the difference in principle between the content of sensation and the laws of connectedness lies in the way things are connected i.e. in the designation of one as ‘content’ and the other as merely a ‘connecting’ principle. In Steiner’s account, it is only the abstracting intellect that can separate light, warmth, sound, colour and so on from the concepts of spatial order, cause, effect and so on. These are two elements of knowledge, simply communicated along different paths. The two elements belong together, they are not artificially coupled by the intellect. To state it concisely, thinking has as much real content as perception.\footnote{528} The content of thinking appears inwardly, or intuitively. If we think of observation being the form by which one apprehends the content of perception, the content of thinking is grasped by intuition.\footnote{529}

In this account of knowing, therefore, reality is accessible through the uniting of concept and percept. Human consciousness is “the stage upon which the concept and observation meet and become linked to one another”, or to put it slightly differently, it is “the mediator between thinking and observation”.\footnote{530} The connection of things or unity in the world is interrupted merely by the human mode of perceiving; the fact that I, as subject, perceive the world as object (or the fact that cognition finds itself active within the concept). In observation I experience phenomena according to my physical make-up, my sense-impressions, my position in relation to the phenomena, etc.. This is one half of the picture. By thinking about what I have observed I restore the objective element and have the whole picture, that is, knowledge of reality. To this description Steiner adds that it is irrelevant that the world would appear different to a being constituted differently (say for example an alien that could perceive infra-red but had no sense of touch). For such a being, the unity of reality would merely be interrupted somewhere else, and reconnection would have to take place in accordance with its physical nature. “A differently constituted being would

have a differently constituted knowledge. Our own knowledge suffices to answer the questions of our own nature”. 531

The notion that thinking has both an objective and universal content is the crucial point in Steiner’s epistemology and the prerequisite for the possibility of a science of consciousness or a “science of the spirit”. In considering the question of the subjectivity of thought, a distinction needs to be made between the stage upon which thoughts appear and the element which determines their content or inner lawfulness. In his view, the human subject provides the opportunity for thought-content to unfold “according to its own nature”: “Just as a mechanic brings the forces of nature into material interplay and thereby effects a purposeful activity and a release of power, so the thinker lets the thought-masses enter into living interaction, and they develop into the thought-systems which comprise our sciences”. 532 It is not our own spiritual individuality that brings thoughts into a particular connection, but the content itself. This is not to imply that thoughts are contained in factual reality, they are indeed the content of consciousness alone, but that even as such they do not forfeit their objectivity. It is, as we will see below, through human acts of will that thoughts are translated into factual reality and it is in these acts that individuality expresses itself.

Thinking is thus envisaged as an activity which transcends both subject and object. In directing our thinking on objects, we become conscious of them. In directing our thinking on ourselves, we become self-conscious. Human consciousness must of necessity be a self-consciousness, because it is a consciousness that thinks. When thinking contemplates its own activity it makes itself object. Subject becomes object. This again can be put in another way: thinking cannot be seen as purely subjective, because it is through thinking that I determine myself as subject in contrast to objects. The concepts ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are produced by thinking, just like all other concepts. When I refer to an object as an object it is not purely subjective because it is thinking that makes the reference. “The subject does not think because it is a subject; rather it appears to itself as subject because it can think…I ought never to say that my individual subject thinks, but much more that my individual subject lives by the grace of thinking”. 533 If thinking is not purely subjective,

531 Ibid., p.102.
532 ———, The Science of Knowing, c.9.
533 ———, The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception, p.43. (My emphasis).
then the relationships (between concepts) established by thinking do not have merely subjective validity.\footnote{This is not to deny the obviously individual element of our observation. Steiner acknowledges that our percept-pictures are at least in part determined by both our physical organisation (what he calls qualitative dependence) and our perspective (mathematical dependence). We only see the colour red if we have a particular set of sensory organs, we see the stars from the perspective of standing on the earth and so on (\textit{The Philosophy of Freedom}, p. 46). However, he rejects that it follows that we must then doubt the correspondence of ‘the-thing-in-itself’ and our picture of it. The belief that we cannot observe objects directly, since it is merely the changes in our condition which we observe, leads to the search for causes which exist outside consciousness, independent of ourselves. If mental pictures are considered as merely subjective, then they are skipped over and the \textit{causes} of them are sought, leading inevitably to various forms of metaphysical speculation (\textit{The Philosophy of Freedom}, p. 61).}

As well as asserting an objective element in thinking, Steiner emphasises its universality. What differentiates one personality from another is not their thinking, but their feeling, willing and sensing. Self-perception confines the individual within the sphere of his personality, and yet the individual is the bearer of an activity which, from a higher sphere, defines that limited existence. Thoughtful observation brings unity to the “manifold multiplicity of percepts” and it is this same unity “that man’s need for knowledge demands”\footnote{Steiner, \textit{The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception}, p.211.}. Through thinking, the individual self works his or her way into the thought-centre of the world, transcending the boundaries imposed by individual experience. In other words, there is only one thought-content, and personality is the result of individual feelings and sensations becoming related to that content in a unique way.\footnote{Ibid., p.69.} It is the “sum of ideas which are \textit{effective} in us” that constitutes our individuality and it is which ideas and how they motivate the will that determines the moral quality of each individual action.\footnote{Ibid., p.134.} Life itself is a “continual oscillation” between this universal and individual existence. It is the very fact that thinking reaches beyond individual experience that leads to the desire for knowledge.\footnote{Ibid., pp.86-7.} In feeling life we have that element which shapes our personal and to an extent moral being, in thinking we have the element which welds our separate individuality into one whole with the cosmos:

This is the deeper meaning of our two-sided nature: We see coming into being in us a force complete and absolute in itself, a force which is universal but which we learn to know, not as it issues from the centre of the world, but rather at a point in the periphery. Were we to know it at its source, we should understand the whole riddle of the universe the moment we become conscious.
But since we stand at a point in the periphery, and find that our own existence is bounded by definite limits, we must explore the region which lies outside our own being with the help of thinking which projects into us from the universal world existence.  

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also, consciously or unconsciously, the life of his epoch and his contemporaries.

(Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain, 1928)

Steiner’s method of investigating the second pole of cognition, that is, the penetration of consciousness, rests on this notion that because thinking has its own content which is not derived from sense-perception, thinking can itself become the object of observation. This, as we saw above, is what he referred to as being true to the principle of experience in its highest form. In the act of thinking about something we are ordinarily unaware of thinking itself, of that predominantly instinctive or subconscious element which is the establishment of certain relationships between concepts. It is an inner, intuitive activity of the psyche correspondingly objective to outer experience which determines the truth of judgements in the sphere of sensory perception, which in other words determines the reality or existence of a thing. For Steiner, the key to enhancing the collective content of experience is first and foremost learning to distinguish between this “positively psychic” aspect and that which the psyche experiences only in connection with physical sensation.

539 Ibid., p.79.
541 The designation of one aspect of thinking as having its own, independent and objective content rests on a development of Franz Brentano’s distinction between the ‘purely psychic’ and the ‘extra-psychic in terms of the psychic having an ‘intentional relation’. Brentano argued that “It is necessary to distinguish between the act of sensing and that upon which the act is directed…” (cited in The Case for Anthroposophy, c. 1). In any judgement there is, as well as the representation (the formation of an inner image) a repudiation or acknowledgement of that image. There is the representation ‘green tree’ and the acknowledgement of the fact that ‘there is a green tree’. What is it in the psyche that brings about the judgement ‘there is a green tree’ in addition to the image ‘green tree’? This experience, according to Steiner, cannot be located in the representational activity of ordinary consciousness – i.e., ordinary consciousness is just that representational activity. “When someone has the visual perception ‘green tree’ the fact of the judgement ‘there is a green tree’ is not to be found in that relation between ‘tree’ and ‘eye’ which is visible to either physiological or
when it comes to properly making this distinction is that we are generally incapable of confronting the “positively psychic” while remaining alert. It is this which explains the tendency to deny the purely psychic altogether:

The faculty of ideation only operates vigilantly with the somatic component of representation, the sense-impressions; the concurrent psychic factor is present in consciousness only to the feeble extent of experiences had during sleep. The stream of experience comes to us in two currents: one of them is apprehended wakefully; the other, the psychic, is seized concurrently, but only with a degree of awareness similar to the mentality of sleep, that is, with virtually no awareness at all.\textsuperscript{542}

Steiner contended that it is possible through practice, in particular disciplining thinking and acquiring that rare and difficult skill of \textit{paying attention}, to focus exclusively on the purely psychic. The content of thinking can be experienced independent of any relationship to the external, physical world, which means, independently of the physical body which ordinarily mediates or is the condition of our consciousness. Becoming aware of this intuitive activity itself is a whole transformation of consciousness which restores unity to knowing, for as we have seen, consciousness is characterised as the meeting place of concept and observation. The unique quality of thinking when taken as a percept is that while everything else appears at first dualistically to the observing individual, the observation of thinking requires no mental picture between the observer and the object. “When we observe our thinking, we live during this observation directly within a self-supporting, spiritual web of being. Indeed, we can even say that if we would grasp the essential nature of spirit in the form in which it presents itself \textit{most immediately} to man, we need only look at the self-sustaining activity of thinking”\textsuperscript{543}.

Although the “essential nature of spirit” is said to be grasped through cognition, it ought to be clear from the above that ‘spirit’ in Steiner’s vision is not presented as merely the concept we are familiar with. For Steiner, the main question was how to proceed beyond the phase of “mere thought experience”, in Hegel’s sense, to an “inner participation in psychological explication.” The experience had by the psyche which amounts to this judgement is an additional relation between ‘man’ and ‘tree’, other than the relation between ‘eye’ and ‘tree’. This additional relation is not experienced in ordinary consciousness, rather it happens subconsciously. It only comes to light in its product i.e. the judgement that the ‘green tree’ exists. There is, therefore, in every perception that involves a judgement, a “double relation to objectivity” (\textit{The Case for Anthroposophy}, c.8).\textsuperscript{542} Steiner, \textit{The Case for Anthroposophy: Selections from Von Seelenraetseln}, c.1.\textsuperscript{543} ———, \textit{The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception}, p.121.
thought that has come to life”. Rather than equate ‘spirit’ with ‘mind’ or ‘idea’, he suggested that the part of mankind which thinks is that part which is connected to – which participates in, albeit subconsciously – the eternal, or what might also be called the cosmic or divine. It is thus through investigating one’s own thinking experience that one can come to an appreciation of self as both a transient and intransient existence. Spirit is regarded as the active or creative principle of the universe. The human mind is but the passive reflection of it, necessarily so in order for the world to be understood through it. In his autobiography he stated:

For me the life of the spirit was behind ideas; ideas were but the manifestation of the spirit within the human soul. At that time I could find no other expression for this way of thinking than “objective idealism.” By this I wished to express that, as I experienced it, the essential thing about ideas is not that they appear in the human subject, but that they appear on the spiritual object somewhat as colour appears on physical objects, and that the human soul – the subject – perceives them there, as the eye perceives color on a living being.

To reiterate this most salient of conclusions, the content of mental life is here presented as something that proceeds ‘outside’ of the body rather than being produced by it. In any sense perception, such as upon hearing a sound or seeing a colour, the sound and colour are not the result of the physical body, but one is connected to the sound and colour as a self-conscious ego ‘outside’ of the body. In other words, the ego lives so to speak with colour “within the general order (Gesetzmässigkeit) of the things themselves”, but through the activity of the eye, the nervous system and so on, the colour is transformed into a conscious perception. The physical body functions as a sort of mirror which conditions but is not cause. Normally, mental life does not exist without this reflection, except perhaps in the

544 Rudolf Steiner, The Riddles of Philosophy, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1973), p.256. Steiner felt the greatness of Hegel’s world conception to be that he depicted the soul as rising, in true thought, to the creative principle of existence (The Riddles of Philosophy, p.249). Its limitation, however, is that the soul is forced to regard itself, in its inner substance and essence, as thought. According to Steiner, if one seriously accepts this picture of the cosmos, the individual soul life dissolves into thought, its significance does not rest in its individual experience but in the fact that it is contained in the general thought world. The soul life, for Hegel, sheds all its individual traits as it is absorbed into the general thought process of historical evolution and the spiritual-intellectual world process (The Riddles of Philosophy, p.248). If thought is used as an explanation for the world, it must sacrifice its own continued growth. Thought cannot go beyond itself if it is the foundation of everything.


547 ——, The Riddles of Philosophy, p.454.
vague and unreliable images retained from dreaming. As we have seen, Steiner asserted that this form of consciousness, reliant on the organic processes of the body, is but an intermediary stage in human knowing in the same way that, to allude to the much larger picture with which he was ultimately concerned, physical existence itself is but an intermediary stage in human evolution.

In this picture of human and world evolution – itself but an evolution of consciousness – the central premise is that the psychological nexus between man and nature or mind and matter has not always been the same and, as such, need not necessarily be in the future what it is today.\footnote{See Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry.} The key to understanding the thought-systems of civilisations past is to recognise that they were dealing with a different world of phenomena, itself the consequence of a different thinking experience or what Steiner termed “state of soul”. The explanation for the great mythologies of old, for instance, is that they emerged from a consciousness which did not experience thought as corresponding to external objects in the form of abstract concepts. People apprehended spiritual content directly or instinctively “in their own being” and thus felt themselves to be essentially one with natural phenomena, something which found linguistic expression in the description of elemental beings active in nature, the weather and so on.\footnote{For a depiction of these different stages of consciousness, see Rudolf Steiner, ”Man in the Past, Present and Future,” Lecture delivered in Stuttgart, September 15, 1923, http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/ManPast/19230915p01.html. Barfield argued that the notion that mind and matter were, at some time in history, in fact experienced as one, can be illustrated by looking at the history of language and in particular our ideas of metaphor. Language itself is an “archaeology of consciousness”; the fossils of which remain in our own speech. He takes the example of the word ‘spirit’. A conventional interpretation of how the Latin word \textit{spiritus} acquired both a literal and metaphorical meaning is that at an early age, when the word still denoted ‘wind’ or ‘breath’, it was deliberately employed as a metaphor by the people of the time to convey “the principle of life” within the human being or animal. In keeping with the idea of an evolution of consciousness from participatory to non-participatory, however, a study of the history of meaning demonstrates that a distinction between on the one hand a purely material content ‘wind’ and purely abstract content ‘principle of life’ appears only much later. The main contention being that in this period the term \textit{spiritus} contained both the concrete and abstract meanings within it. Barfield suggests that an analysis of many words with such a split meaning (blood for instance is an interesting one) can reveal a similar process. (Owen Barfield, Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning, London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928, p.65).} These phenomena today are put down to superstition or even the deliberate use of metaphor because they constitute no part of our collective representations. The transformation of thinking transforms the appearances of the world and so too the content of experience.

Crucially, the notion that in the absence of knowledge of how things work supernatural beings were invented as it were out of the imagination, assumes that those doing the
inventing required explanations. In other words, it assumes that they doubted the appearances of things and as such felt the need to postulate causes, inventing gods of thunder, giants of frost and other entities consistent with their belief systems. In Steiner’s account of human evolution, questions about the relationship between thought and world only arise much later and only in connection to the experience of subjectivity. The whole development of Western philosophy is a reflection of a gradual process of separation, a process in which the human being begins to feel himself as distinct from the natural world. Even the ancient Greeks, whilst laying the foundation for modern thinking, felt no need to seek the material origin of things because for them thought had a direct relation to truth:

The ancient Greek's experience of thought is comparable to our experience of a perception, to our experience of “red” or “yellow.” Just as we today attribute a color or tone percept to a “thing,” so the ancient Greek perceives thought in the world of things and as adhering to them. The experience of thought as received from the world means no impetus exists to look beyond the realm of ideas for explanations of the world. The objectivity of thought, in other words, is never doubted. The modern era signifies, in many respects, a complete reversal; from the absolute faith in the ideal as a world unto itself to an absolute faith in the physical. What Steiner terms “ego-consciousness”, born in the Middle Ages and epitomised in the philosophy of Descartes, entails the experience of self as an entity separate from nature, which is at the same time the experience of thought as entirely originating in human individuality. It is this experience which leads to efforts to seek support for worldviews in observations of nature, the turn ‘outward’ as the only source of objectivity in knowing. It is such a profound experience that it permeates even the religious outlook, which from the Middle Ages rejects the notion that human thinking can reach the highest realms of a spiritual truth it nevertheless claims to acknowledge.

551 Plato, for instance, took the single human activity of thought and set it over humanity as a necessity which must be yielded to. “That is what is so remarkable in the development of man, that he unfolds his powers, that he fights for the existence and unfolding of these powers in the world, but that he is far from being able to acknowledge these powers as his own” Plato created a “bold and wonderful system” out of this self-deception, in his belief that it is the idea that is real, the physical being but a copy of it. “Everything that Plato believes to be present as the world of ideas in the beyond, outside things, is man’s inner world. The content of the human spirit, torn out of man and pictured as a world unto itself, as a higher, true world lying in the beyond: that is Platonic philosophy”. ────, *Individualism in Philosophy*.
From the anthroposophical perspective, then, the strengthening of the natural world-picture is co-relative to a weakening of the impression that “the self-conscious ego must recognise itself in the natural world”. The gaining of one reinforces the loss of the other. While this loss is a state of affairs which can and must be overcome, it is nevertheless presented as a necessary stage in man’s evolutionary development. Without the experience of external objects devoid of their essential spiritual content, consciousness could never have become a consciousness of self. In other words, the birth of self-consciousness was dependent on the human being becoming unaware of his participation, as both natural and spiritual being, within all things. The human ego “owes its own self-knowledge to the veil being put on knowledge of the world”. Modern consciousness is thus characterised by a “shadow” cast over the link between ego and objective world, and it is precisely this which enables a strong experience of ego and simultaneously makes it possible to study nature scientifically.

The limitation of scientific thinking is that since it is a product of detachment, it can only serve to emphasise detachment. It was Steiner’s assertion that, through the unfolding of “a creative inner life” which “lifts from the depths of his soul the forces that lie dormant in them” the human individual can return the “half-reality” to its whole. It is in this creative inner life that he located the potential to move beyond mere knowledge of nature to a comprehension of man. To remain convinced of the complete subjectivity of thinking, and hence to persist in the pursuit of external or physical explanations for all things, is to move further and further away from any principle of unity in the cosmos. It is a movement which has much more than abstract significance. It is the “steering toward” a different kind of perception altogether, which means ultimately, a transformed picture of the world. “We are moving toward a time when the outer world will be far more bleak and empty. Nowadays when a person looks at nature he believes it to be green and the vault of heaven to be blue. He sees nature in such a way that he believes the colors to be the outcome of a natural process.” The perception of colour as part of the world gives it, in human minds, a valid status, just as for the Greeks thought itself was felt to have a direct relation to truth. In the future, Steiner predicted, mankind will no longer believe in the colours of nature; they will be regarded as having been invented to make up for insufficient knowledge of

553 Ibid., p.10.
555 Ibid., p.448.
physical structures and processes measurable ‘behind’ appearances, just as modern man no longer believes in spiritual beings moving the elements.

What the physicists dream of today will come true. People will no longer be able to distinguish properly between a red face and a pale one. They will know that all those things are caused by their own organism. They will consider it a superstition that there are colors outside that tint objects.\(^557\)

In the same way that the capacity to see colours outside will no longer have any objective significance, so will many other inward experiences that give a richness of quality and texture to the world. Most significantly, the greater the content of experience relegated to the personal and private, the less grounds exist for communication between intelligences, a fact which has enormous implications in the field (even for the possibility) of ethics.\(^558\) In short, the whole direction of natural science, and by extension the social and human sciences, is painted as a movement toward limitation and obfuscation; a closing off to aspects of reality and meaning. The acquisition of new knowledge in one direction is the gradual truncation of experience in the other.

In setting out a practical and highly individualised method of restoring balance to what is considered a lop-sided human development, Steiner described a series of steps predominantly constituting meditative exercises, to be practiced over the long term, daily, or weekly as the case may be. At a most basic level, these exercises are designed to help the individual gain mastery over thinking, essentially to develop the faculty of concentration.

Anyone who is able for months at a time to concentrate his thoughts daily at least for five minutes upon an ordinary object, for example a needle or a pencil, or any other simple object, and during this time to exclude all thoughts that have no bearing on the subject, has achieved a great deal in this regard...If we ask ourselves: What really composes a pencil? How are the materials for it prepared? How are they brought together afterwards? When were pencils invented? and so forth, we then adapt our thoughts more to reality than if we

\(^{557}\) Ibid., p.100.  
\(^{558}\) Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry, p.145. Cf. discussion in Chapter 1 of the pullulation of “value talk” as correlative to the fading of the qualities of experience, also in Chapter 5 Musil’s “qualities without man”. See also MacIntyre on “emotivism”, the doctrine that posits all evaluative and moral judgements as mere “expressions of personal preference” (After Virtue, p.12).
reflect upon the origin of man, or upon the nature of life….For in the first place it is not a question of thinking about this or that, but of thinking factually by means of inner forces.\textsuperscript{559}

Although described as thought exercises, these meditations are not intended as merely a means to school the intellect as the final sentence suggests. The ability to take hold of an object (or concept or symbolic image) in one’s mind and hold it there to the exclusion of all associations and influences from daily life is no small feat in itself and entails a powerful act of will using what Steiner describes as all the forces of the soul.\textsuperscript{560} The strengthening of thinking and that of willing thus go hand in hand, and exercises are detailed for both. In learning to will one’s thinking and think one’s willing, so to speak, to the point where thoughts are conditioned neither by experiences in space nor time, the individual prepares himself for the emergence of a new type of thought-life altogether. This thought-life, Steiner claimed, would have a vitality, intensity and formative quality equal to but completely distinct from that of physical sensations. It is this vitalised, pictorial thought that he termed imaginative thinking, a step toward a different kind of perception and thus a ‘deepened’ experience of the outer world.\textsuperscript{561}

While this path clearly lays emphasis on self-mastery and development as an active process, the gradual awakening of human faculties which lie dormant simply because they are unused, the process is simultaneously a movement toward silence, tranquillity and in a certain sense, self-surrender. It is a gradual shutting out of the sensory world and all that is connected to it, including the thoughts, feelings, memories and impressions that usually fill and distract waking existence. The purpose of “emptying” consciousness in this way is not to close oneself off to experience (nor fall asleep), but to open oneself to a completely new form of experience, the “spiritual reality of being” which is in all things and entirely present with us – immanent - at all times.\textsuperscript{562} Man, in his intuitive thinking, can lay hold of “the universal primordial Being which pervades all men. To live in reality, filled with the content of thought, is at the same time to live in God”.\textsuperscript{563} This world thus has the foundation of its existence within itself, not in an inferred beyond. The human being

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{560} Ibid., pp.202-07.
\item \textsuperscript{561} ———, “Knowledge and Initiation.” Lecture delivered in London, April 14, 1922. http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/KnowCognit/19220414p01.html.
\item \textsuperscript{562} Ibid. See also Steiner, \textit{An Outline of Occult Science}, p.196.
\item \textsuperscript{563} Steiner, \textit{The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception}, p.215.
\end{itemize}
participates creatively in the universe within his intuitive thinking. Crucially, to come to understand that kind of thinking through experiencing it amounts to knowledge of the possibility of acting out of it, and this, as we will see below, is how Steiner approaches the question of what it means to act both morally and freely.

It is this form of experience, and all that can be learned from it, that natural science has refused to, indeed cannot, acknowledge. Purely intellectual knowing, which abstracts and analyses, cannot reach the profoundest truths of humanity because the human being is not only a static and material being but is living, becoming and ultimately, creative. Creativity, within this epistemology, is not a principle that can be ascribed to natural processes. Only human actions can be deemed purposeful and human actions (beyond the purely instinctive) always have a conceptual motive and thus a spiritual foundation. The fact that there are “life forces” or principles at work in the universe which do not come under the laws of natural science does not however mean that they cannot be known scientifically. That they can be known, and known about exactly, this was the core of Steiner’s message. It is what he argued was the potential, at any rate, for human consciousness. He aimed to demonstrate that scientific principles and research methods can be freed from their focus on the purely physical, without in so doing losing those very characteristics which make the scientific approach so valuable and successful. His was a science of the super-sensible, the polar opposite of natural science, one which sought to pursue “what is unconditionally universal in the spiritual order with its own elements and its own laws”. In shifting attention from the material (dead) to the spiritual (living) origin of things, science can be transformed from a quest for a completed world view and final truths to a “participation in the coming-into-being of truth”.

---

564 See discussion in the Philosophy of Freedom, especially Chapter 9.
565 Steiner, An Outline of Occult Science, p.27.
SCHOOLING THE SOUL

We cannot say: “I shall make myself into a different person”; we can only say: “I will give up this bad habit, and endeavour to contract this good one.

(T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, 1949)  

Anthroposophy, it has been put forward, is an outlook which aims to study the human being in all dimensions of his existence. It is with this in mind that we can understand why Steiner talks of man in terms of his physical nature, his soul nature, and his spiritual nature. Body, soul and spirit are not presented as distinct entities but rather are used to express three different modes of being, or perhaps better said, modes of relating. Life itself is characterised as a continual threefold interaction which finds expression in the three sides of man’s nature. The type of interaction that occurs between man and world through the senses is but one dimension, the means by which things in the natural environment are revealed to him. A second type of interaction is characterised as the impressions left by these sensory experiences, i.e. whether they arouse pleasure or disgust, joy or sorrow, are considered useful or harmful and so on. It is in this life of feeling, as we have seen, not thinking, that a person becomes connected and responds to objects of experience in an individual way; the world becomes a personal affair. It is in thinking that man relates to the world in a third way, in knowing about the objects of sensory experience, in memorising, in the realms of science, philosophy and so on. In thinking, man looks upon things as a “so to speak divine being”.

It is through this terminology of body, soul and spirit that Steiner speaks of physical, individual and universal aspects of human existence, of the bonds between man and nature, between man and man, and between man and the cosmos. In the phrasing of the epistemology outlined above, it is through the combination of the purely given percept and purely ideal concept that reality is made intelligible. The essence of reality cannot be argued out through conceptual hypotheses but “in so far as we find the ideas that belong to

---

570 Quoting Goethe. Ibid..
the percepts, we are living in reality.”\textsuperscript{571} The percept is perceived outwardly, mediated by the senses, and the concept is intuited inwardly, by means of thinking. Thinking is not seen as something separate to experience, on the contrary, thinking is an experience and the agent of that experience is spirit. It is in the soul that what is experienced through the senses and what is experienced through thinking come together. To put it slightly differently, the soul is that which unites these two types of relationship, forming, we might say, a third. The grasping of reality is then the activity of the soul and the soul-element of man exists in “the very process of acquiring knowledge”.\textsuperscript{572}

To speak about consciousness is thus to speak about the condition of the soul, if the word condition can be used to refer to a living interaction. Perhaps quality is more apt. To school the soul is, in a certain sense, to seek to know the world differently by consciousness entering into a different kind of relationship. As we have seen, the evolution of consciousness is viewed as a transformation of soul, for it is the soul-life which determines individual experiences of the world. Modern man has a quality of soul which Steiner described as “awake” in thinking, “dreaming” in feeling and “asleep” in willing life. Life is full of clarity and light in our thoughts only, not so much in our feeling and even less in our willing. Our feelings are fuzzy and ill-defined, surging up from unknown depths within us. The will, despite begin such a prevalent theme in today’s society, is the least understood of the faculties of the soul.\textsuperscript{573} Indeed, it is because there is little direct understanding of how impulses for action arise within, and little effort to make motivations conscious, that freedom remains but an abstraction in modern society; an idea as yet unrealised.\textsuperscript{574}

The purpose of meditation and inner training is to awaken the life of the will and that of feeling to the point where they are as clear and defined in consciousness as thinking.

\textsuperscript{571} Steiner, \textit{The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception}, p.214.

\textsuperscript{572} \textit{———, An Outline of Occult Science}, p.27. (My emphasis).

\textsuperscript{573} \textit{———, "Knowledge and Initiation."}

\textsuperscript{574} Steiner’s case for the potentiality of freedom centred around the idea that although it is undeniable that the causes of desires are frequently unknown to actors, this is not the same as saying that an individual cannot know the causes of his desires and critically evaluate them. The error, he claimed, comes from the tendency to lump all desires and motivations into the same group, when in fact they ought to be separated. An action which is motivated by the purely ideal (in the sense of the concept independent of any physical counterpart) is not a compulsion in the same way that a child crying out for food is one (\textit{The Philosophy of Freedom}, p.7). His discussion of free will thus focuses on the motivations for action and not, as was more common amongst his contemporaries, on the issue of choice or ability ‘to do otherwise’. “The question is not whether I can carry out a decision once it is made, but how the decision comes about within me.” (\textit{The Philosophy of Freedom}, p.10). He was not interested so much in distinguishing knowing from doing, but in the possibility of being a ‘knowing doer’.
Intellectual knowing is considered one-sided for the intellect is only one function of thinking, the activity of making distinctions\(^{575}\) between concepts derived in connection to the natural world:

A materialistic way of thought is so easily led to believe that any further penetration into things, beyond the intellectual concepts that are as it were extracted from them, simply does not exist; and only with great difficulty will it fight its way through to the perception that the other forces of the soul are at least as necessary as the intellect, if we are to gain a comprehension of things. It is no mere figure of speech to say that man can understand with his feeling, his sentiment, his inner disposition, as with his intellect.\(^{576}\)

If we can think of training the muscles to achieve higher performance, or training the ear to a greater musical appreciation for instance, we can form an analogy of training the “faculties of the soul” to an enhanced awareness of reality. If the world is approached with clarity in thinking, feeling and willing, Steiner proposed, a world-picture will be based on the whole and not just part of our being. In other words, the human individual will be participating in fullness and not limiting experience by emphasising only one kind of relationship.

To say that modern man is awake only in his thinking is to say that modern adult consciousness is predominantly a thinking consciousness. Contemplating this image-filled description of the experience of growing up provides further insight into what is intended by the terms soul-nature and transformation of soul:

The brighter the lamp of the mind became, the more the colours of the soul fade away. The reality of the outer world assumed more and more importance, and a cloud started to shroud our inner experiences. Our fantasies became less vivid and our sentiments less apparent. Just as the growing light of the sun extinguishes the sparkling starry sky at dawn, so does our mind in the course of childhood and youth obliterate the colourful life of the soul. But the stars, although they disappear during the light of the day, still follow along their courses. In a similar way do the faculties of the soul continue to live and work

\(^{575}\) Steiner, Truth and Knowledge: Introduction to Philosophy of Spiritual Activity.
\(^{576}\) ———, The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, p.36.
behind the sun of our mind. To get to know ourselves means to learn to
discover again the starry realm of our soul.577

For a child, the experiences of pleasure and pain, guilt, fear and excitement, as well as
imaginary worlds, fantasies and dreams, are all far more vivid and consuming than for an
adult. In other words, they are more real. It is not a question of children not ‘knowing’ or
‘understanding’ what is real, but that their knowing and understanding is altogether of a
different nature and, as such, so is there phenomenal world. This gradual alteration that
occurs in the transition from childhood to adulthood is described as a change in the
relationship between soul and world, in the same way that human evolution is such.
Where for the child perception is mediated more powerfully by sensory, emotive,
imaginative and artistic experience, the adult constructs a picture of the world based
predominantly on his or her intellectual faculties. The child, to put it another way,
experiences as one in his or her own being (which can also be described as completely
‘outwardly’, for there is no distinction) what only in adulthood becomes divided into
‘inner’ and ‘outer’, self and world. In this way child development mirrors the
development of human consciousness as a whole.

The problem as we have seen is not itself the growing and natural curiosity in the outward
physicality of things, but the simultaneous loss of interest (for to be interested in is to be
conscious of) in the inner world, reinforced by an educational and social environment
which neglects its relevance. Its absolute relevance in Steiner’s epistemology means that
discovering the “starry realm of our soul” is not just to become re-acquainted with
ourselves, but to make possible our re-encounter with the world. Introspection is the root
of knowledge, for the human self is conceived as having its essence in the world and the
essence of the world, we might say, is beheld within the human self. Balancing the
intellectual outlook – preoccupied with thoughts about the world rather than experiences
of it - thus involves striving to become in certain respects “as little children”.578 The
extensive powers of imagination, the infinite capacity for wonder and astonishment, as
well as the complete dedication to surroundings that are natural amongst the very young,
are qualities which, if cultivated, can reward the individual with a higher state of
receptivity to what the world has to reveal.

578 “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter
into the kingdom of heaven” (The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 18:3).
We have seen the importance ascribed to disciplining thinking in Steiner’s method of developing a new or higher kind of experience. It is *feeling*, however, which gives vitality to the faculty of cognition. A “fundamental attitude of veneration”, of devotion to truth, is the means to knowledge, for it is only in one’s complete devotion to something that it truly becomes known to one.\(^5^7^9\) Consider, for instance, when we are thinking about something, we forget ourselves, the thinker. We are devoted at that very moment to the object of thought, yet we are unaware of this devotion. We are conscious only of the knowledge about the object which arises from our thinking. We are completely immersed in it. It is because of the presence of this unconscious element of devotion that *love* is felt to be the foundation of all knowledge. We can recall from Chapter 1 Emerson’s depiction of the poet who “lovingly” goes along with objects, or Nietzsche’s notion of a “loving immersion in empirical data”. To illustrate the revealing power of love is to reverse the popular phrase “love is blind” and say that in actual fact the lover perceives in the beloved what remains hidden to everyone else:

It is well known to everyone that in love there inevitably exists a special *idealization* of the beloved object, which presents itself to the lover in a completely different light from that in which outsiders see it. I speak here of light not merely in a metaphorical sense; it is a matter not only of a special moral and intellectual evaluation, but also of a special sensuous perception: the lover really *sees*, visually perceives, what others do not. And for him too this light of love quickly disappears, yet does it follow from this that it was false, that it was only a subjective illusion?\(^5^8^0\)

That hidden truths of the world are revealed through love is a first principle in Steiner’s path of personal spiritual development. Consciousness is attentiveness, and there is no greater attention paid than to that which is loved; indeed, the most selfless love represents the highest knowledge.\(^5^8^1\) It is thus not the sharpness of one’s intellect but the intensity of one’s feeling that has the greatest positive influence on powers of observation in both the


\(^5^8^1\) Solovyov, whose work influenced Steiner, argued that the falsehood of egoism is not in the absolute self-consciousness or self-evaluation of the subject, but “in the fact that, ascribing to himself in all justice an absolute significance, he unjustly refused to others this same significance” (p.43). “A human being..., being in fact only *this* and not *another*, may become all, only by doing away, in his consciousness and life, with the internal boundary which separates him from another. “This” may become “all” only *together with others...*” (Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*, p.44).
natural and human sciences. A loving attitude is again presented as a “quality of soul” that can be strengthened through practice, just as self-control can be exerted over thinking and will impulses. Educating one’s life of feeling entails, for instance, striving for “positivity in judgement”:

The erroneous, the bad, the ugly should not prevent the soul from finding the true, the good and the beautiful wherever it is present. This positivity should not be confused with non-criticism, with the arbitrary closing of the eyes to the bad, the false and the inferior. If you admire the “beautiful teeth” of a dead creature, you also see the decaying corpse. But this corpse does not prevent your seeing the beautiful teeth. It is not possible to find the bad good and the false true; but it is possible to attain the power of not being deterred by evil from seeing good, and by error from seeing truth.  

If love is the root of knowing, then it is likewise “the secret of remembering” As when loving another person we take a part of their being into ourselves, the other gains an absolute and ongoing meaning for us, so when acquiring knowledge we take the impression of an object in and make it a part of ourselves. Knowledge acquired without love, without interest, is knowledge that will be forgotten. The idea that what has been loved is best remembered also indicates why it is understood to be the foundation of all learning. “...every time we say of someone, “she has grown,”, “he is wiser now,” “they have learned a few things,” we are saying that they have somehow allowed themselves...to be conquered by a greater truth than they previously embodied. In the vicinity of all learning, we can notice the footprint of this selfless love.” Here again we are presented with the seeming duality of self-mastery and self-surrender. To clear away the knowing that prevents perceiving – this is the difficult part, the part which requires discipline and practice. To learn is to learn to see again. For Steiner, lifelong learning is the continual effort to bring about change in oneself through the power of love; it is allowing oneself to be “conquered” by a truth which we are always somehow (albeit usually subconsciously) partaking in. It is in turning from this quest of empowering oneself to the task of empowering another that one moves from the sphere of personal development to that of education.

584 Lipson, Stairway of Surprise: Six Steps to a Creative Life, p.79. (My emphasis).
PEDAGOGY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FREEDOM

Pedagogy, which literally means the art of guiding the child, can only be founded on “love for man resulting from knowledge of man”.

Indeed, given the intimacy between love and knowledge in Steiner’s account of knowing, this statement could easily be reversed. We have seen how knowing is expressed as an activity of soul; the way a person engages with the world through his thinking, feeling and volition. Learning, therefore, is a transformation of soul – in a very particular sense. Understood in these terms, to overlook the soul is to overlook the daily reality of the child’s experience. It is to deny their existence in its entirety and educate them according to abstractions. A first thing to disappear from education if the child is seen in an anthroposophical light is the idea that learning can be made meaningful through the practice of explaining the objective of an exercise to children prior to them carrying it out. Projecting adult logical consciousness onto children is of as little value as projecting modern logical consciousness on to the past and so attempting to derive explanations for the thought-systems and beliefs of our ancestors. From this standpoint, meaningful learning is achieved through teaching what corresponds to the child’s experience of the world at different stages of soul development and, most importantly, nourishing that development in every way possible. More than a matter of matching lesson content to chronological age, the approach necessitates paying particular attention to the way things are taught; that is, the nature and quality of the interaction between child and teacher.

In Steiner’s developmental psychology, the child passes through phases loosely grouped into seven-year periods. Before the age of seven, the child can be pictured as “a bundle of sense organs” in the sense that his whole being is focused on absorbing all that is encountered in the environment, without conceptualising or differentiating it. The early stages of childhood are characterised as being of a religious nature, necessitating the adoption of a similar reverential attitude on the part of the educator. The term religious is used to denote the extent to which the child is devoted to his surroundings, especially to the actions and behaviours of the people in his surroundings. Where for the adult “the religious relationship is a self-surrendering to the universe, a prayer for divine grace in the surrender of the self” in which the soul and spirit are completely yielded to the surrounding

---

spiritual element, the young child is “surrendered to the environment and lives in the external world in reverent, prayerful devotion...” 586

Because the child at this time is so enormously influenced and absorbing of his physical environment, from an educational perspective the most important thing is to take care with this environment, to the point of being aware of the colour on the walls of his living space, the aesthetics of buildings, sound, light, texture, and so on. “...everything acting as a stimulus in the environment continues to vibrate in the child. We must be very clear that, in this sense, we are dealing with imponderables”.587 Teaching at this stage consists of providing certain kinds of stimuli for the child. In this the character and temperament of the teacher is the vital factor, for the child is aware of and absorbs all expressions of feeling, behaviour, reactions, gestures, tone of voice and so on. It is not dictates, but example which is fundamental here, since imitation is the main orientation of child to world. The key point is not to think about what children have the capacity to comprehend, but what will continue to exist in them which they might come to comprehend. If enough depth is instilled early on, it can be “infinitely revitalizing and rejuvenating” in later life.588 We could say that the essence of the anthroposophical method is that everything is done with a constant imagination of the whole life of the child in mind, not merely a particular age.589

After the age of seven or so, the child begins to live in a world full of fantasy and pictures. No longer passively surrendered to the world of the senses, he begins to “take up” these experiences and form images from them. Children are at this point in a sense like artists. When knowledge and facts become the object of the lesson, therefore, it is not enough for the teacher to have knowledge and impart it. Since this period of childhood (roughly between 7 and 14) is characterised by an artistic relationship to the world, interaction between child and teacher needs to take on an artistic form. By this is not meant that the teacher must teach art, but that whatever is taught, about geography, or botany or history, is taught in a way that is creative and alive, so that it can “rise into the soul of the child”.590 The teacher, in other words, needs to be able to transform the facts she has learned, in a

587 Ibid., p.27.
588 Ibid., p.76.
589 Steiner went so far as to identify the root of chronic illnesses in later life in the under-cultivation of feeling in early education. All diseases are spiritual in origin. See e.g. Curative Education, (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1972).
590 Steiner, The Essentials of Education, p.29.
course of study at university perhaps, into something that the children can participate in; for instance, through engaging their imagination in myth and storytelling, through dramatic reproduction of historical events, through planting and growing in nature, through craft and construction, and so on.\(^{591}\)

This ability to teach facts in an imaginative way is difficult in our time again because “our civilization and the culture all around us have reached the point where they are geared only to the intellect, not to the artistic nature”.\(^{592}\) The result of trying to ensure children assimilate sharply outlined ideas and definitions too early is often that gifted children become accomplished mimics and the less gifted are simply left behind (becoming assigned, perhaps, to that ever-extending category today called “special needs”):

> ...it is necessary that, through the medium of flexible and artistic forms, we give children perceptions, ideas and feelings in pictorial form that can metamorphise and grow within the soul, for the soul itself is still growing. But before this can happen, there must be a living relationship between child and teacher, not the dead relationship that arises from lifeless educational concepts.\(^{593}\)

In the early stages of education it is the teacher’s “own being” and what she brings out of her own creative sensibilities and cultural awareness that counts more than the information possessed about a subject. This is particularly significant when it comes to moral development, codes of behaviour and the degree of social consciousness that will be present in adult life. The teacher is the greatest role model and, in exemplifying pleasure in goodness and displeasure in immorality, can provide the opportunity for children to develop a feeling for these things before they are mentally scrutinized. Again sharing Goethe’s view, Steiner believed that duty must arise from goodwill, not subjection, and as such cultivating good will is more important than teaching rules. When duty becomes “a deep inclination”, this is when moral life arises in human nature. Duty is “where people love what they tell themselves to do”.\(^{594}\) Highlighting the relationship between this delicate treatment of the growing soul and the potential for freedom, it is also only when “people love what they tell themselves to do” that they can truly be considered to be acting

\(^{591}\) Ibid., p.15.  
\(^{592}\) Ibid., p.30.  
\(^{593}\) Ibid., pp.31-32.  
\(^{594}\) Quoting Goethe, Ibid., p.72.
out of themselves. To act freely and to act morally are presented as one and the same. In doing anything “I am influenced by a moral maxim in so far as it can live in me intuitively; it is bound up with my love for the objective that I want to realise through my action. I ask no man and no rule, “Shall I perform this action?” – but carry it out as soon as I have grasped the idea of it. This alone makes it my action.”

The early years, as we described, are devoted to sensation. The next phase is one which is characterised by an artistic relationship to the world, not yet an intellectual one. It is in this that we return specifically to the question of judgement raised in Chapter 1 and the tendency for education to spoil the capacity for judgement before it has had the opportunity to mature. If the child’s feeling life is neglected in early life “whole aspects of the world’s existence...of necessity remain hidden from him”.

Thought in its proper form, as an inner life lived in abstract concepts, must remain still in the background during this period of childhood. It must develop as it were of itself, uninfluenced from without, while life and the secrets of nature are being unfolded in parable and picture. Thus between the seventh year and puberty, thought must be growing, the faculty of judgement ripening, in among the other experiences of the soul; so that after puberty is reached, the youth may become able to form quite independently his own opinions on the things of life and knowledge. The less the direct influence on the development of judgement in earlier years, and the more a good indirect influence is brought to bear through the development of the other faculties of the soul, the better it is for later life.

Within this philosophy of education as a study of the soul, it is only after puberty that the child becomes able to “claim what the teacher has learned”, that is, what the teacher knows about a subject and skill in elucidating theoretical content becomes of paramount importance. At this point the child begins to understand intellectually what earlier was both presented and received pictorially or is deeply rooted in memory. It is after puberty, too, that the young person experiences an “awakening of self-consciousness”, essentially the becoming aware of oneself as a free individual. Steiner describes this moment of

595———, The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception, p.135.
596———, The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, p.42.
597 Ibid., pp.43-44.
598———, The Essentials of Education, p.15.
awakening self-consciousness as a kind of rebirth, recalling the sense of a “birth of ego-consciousness” referred to above. The labour pains of this rebirth are outwardly witnessed in the typical adolescent period of self-absorption, rebellion against authorities previously unquestioned, a need to set the self apart from the structures and guidance that have thus far been totally forming one’s life. Education up to this point has been but a preparation, the creating of fertile ground in which the “free individual” can come to experience himself:

As a teacher, I must say, I cannot pass on freedom to another human being – each must experience it individually... I educate everything in the human being except what belongs to the self, and then I wait for it to take hold of what I have invoked. I do not coarsely handle the development of the I, but prepare the soil for its development, which takes hold after puberty. 599

Clearly, for Steiner, freedom is something that the individual can only grant himself and it is dependent on the recognition of an essential self or ‘I’. This recognition is not purely an intellectual one, or something that is taught, but an experience predominantly of will. “The fact that we are able to will makes us aware of being an I”. 600 The assertion that it is “in the will that we become conscious of ourselves” explains why such emphasis is placed in early education on laying the foundation for a “strong and healthy Will”. 601 Again, this is primarily through ensuring the child has the opportunity to receive certain kinds of impressions. In the case of the will, and a true consciousness of self, it is the religious experience which is deemed most formative:

Never will a man’s will, nor in consequence his character, develop healthily, if he is not able in this period of childhood to receive religious impulses deep into his soul. How a man feels his place and part in the universal Whole, – this will find expression in the unity of his life of will. If he does not feel himself linked by strong bonds to a Divine-spiritual, his will and character must needs remain uncertain, divided and unsound. 602

599 Ibid., p.66.
600 ———, Necessity and Freedom, p.95.
601 Ibid., p.96. ———, The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, p.41.
602 Steiner, The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, p.42.
The notion that the profoundest experience of self is to be had in the will also sheds further light, from a slightly different angle, on the importance given to the will in the spiritual exercises. As we have seen, modern man is characterised as being conscious in his thinking but almost completely asleep in the realm of his doing; more specifically, in the why of his doing. To neglect the will, both in the formative years of education and in daily adult life, is to allow others (in the case of children) and oneself again to live one-sidedly in the realm of abstract ideas and largely unable to realise ideas practically in the world. It is in terms of this growing paralysis of the will that what we might call the emptiness of the word in modern society is understood; the excess of “value talk” which has no substance is part and parcel of the same phenomenon which sees philosophy lose its living cultural role and become marginalised as a merely academic subject. In Steiner’s terms it is a question of a culture that has been “debased to slogans” as the source of all spiritual life in the social sphere is “crippled”. The consequences of not seeking to know – in the above sense of deepen experience of – this vital dimension of human existence are again spelled out in a prediction that resonates with much that has been discussed in previous chapters concerning the externalisation and institutionalisation of both conscience and prudence in today’s society. In the future:

What is willed out of the I will only have a very faint effect on a person... in order to do anything at all people will need either long practice or outer compulsion. People will not get up of their own accord, but will have to learn it until it becomes a habit...People will have less belief in moral ideals. Outer dictates will be necessary to activate the will.

In the same way that meditative exercises are presented as a means of counteracting the “constant dispersion” of thoughts that is a feature of modern life, and the cultivation of feeling is expressed as a means to restore a depth of quality to perception, working against the “paralysis of will” is also in anthroposophy a matter of daily personal practice. The soul can become “ruler in the sphere of will” as she is in the world of thought and feeling.

603 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p.50.
605 Steiner, Necessity and Freedom, pp.100-01.
606 Nietzsche wrote: “Is it not the case that all human institutions” – to which we might add: “as well as the whole of modern life” – are intended to prevent mankind from feeling their life, by means of the constant dispersion of their thoughts.” (Cited in Hadot and Davidson, Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault, p.325.
Events themselves usually determine what actions are carried out on a day-to-day basis, urging us toward this or that, creating the circumstances which stimulate certain needs, desires and habits. Through practice the individual can become “accustomed to obey strictly his own commands”; he can learn to distinguish between the essential and non-essential and become less inclined to desire things which he does not know how to realise. Deciding, for instance, to carry out a purely arbitrary (i.e. not done for any other reason than the doing of it, like opening and shutting the kitchen window three times) action at the same time every day and repeating it with regularity and precision for months at a time brings mindfulness to the will. This mindfulness can, in time, be extended to other areas of life. “Thus we lift ourselves above the damaging attitude of mind: “I should like this, or I want that,” in which we do not at all consider the possibility of its accomplishment”. Goethe wrote that “to live in the idea means to treat the impossible as though it were possible”. Steiner maintained that this can only be fulfilled by one who has “trained himself to desire what is possible, in order then to be able, through his strong will, to treat the “impossible” so that it is transformed through his will into the possible”.

Distinguishing between different epochs of consciousness, Steiner calls attention to a past in which it was social grouping, rank, class or station in life which determined men and women’s thoughts, actions and appropriate ways of behaving toward others. The noble acted as befit a noble, the priest a priest, the townsman a townsman and so on. Modern man is distinguished by the fact that he no longer accepts this, and by the desire to break free from traditional structures. As with the “birth of ego-consciousness” in the young person upon reaching puberty, this is not conceived as a breaking free from subordination or the sudden realisation of the actual falsity of all previously held beliefs, but the feeling of subordination itself only arises as result of change in relation of soul. The experience of independence is simultaneously the loss of a sense for what unites one with both nature and other human beings and what as such holds objective and universal value. As with the adolescent, sustenance and guidance from the environment, family and community are no longer felt to be sufficient. Unwilling to take direction from external authorities, modern man “has something to find within himself” as the basis for his social and moral actions.

607 Steiner, An Outline of Occult Science, p.216.
The paradox in Western development is that an increased consciousness of self is accompanied by an ever firmer denial of the self; at least, a denial of the self as a source of truth. This as we have seen is because man is unable to recognise himself – and indeed his will – in the world, but only as cut off from it. To be concerned with the self, however, is to be concerned with the whole. It is, in Seneca’s words, “plunging oneself into the totality of the world”.\(^{609}\) In anthroposophical terms, the return to the self is clearly necessitated by that fact that it is thinking which “leads all perceiving subjects to the same ideal unity in all multiplicity”.\(^{610}\) Intuitive thinking is “man’s inwardly experienced spiritual activity”,\(^{611}\) an activity which is at the same time the creative principle of the world in which man is participant. To become conscious of one’s intuitive thinking is to live in an activity in which every other kind of activity has retreated, including as we have seen, the physical processes of the body and all representations and impulses that of necessity arise in connection with it; “nothing else is at work but its own self-sustaining essence”.\(^{612}\)

It is thus, seemingly antithetically, only when a person can grasp the universal that he can be said to experience his individuality (indicated already by the focus on the religious experience in early education). For Steiner, an act is individual – which is the same as to say free and moral – when its motive is an image of an intuition derived from this purely ideal realm at a given moment; i.e. it is not felt to be influenced by any natural compulsion, social obligation or even any pre-existing ethical ideals. Morality, however, is not itself presented as something universal and here we come back to the seeming antithesis of individuality and universality. “In the act of knowing, man…lives his way into something which is the same for all men, but that when…he derives intuitions for his acts of will, he individualizes a part of this world….\(^{613}\) It is only after an ideal intuition – what we might also say constitutes a spiritual truth – has been transformed by the human being into a specific impulse that shapes the external world, in accordance with physical and practical circumstances, that it can be called moral.

Within this outlook, therefore, thinking maintains an element of individuality and at the same time morality does not lose all trace of universality. Again we come back to the

\(^{609}\) Hadot and Davidson, Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault, p.208.
\(^{610}\) Steiner, The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception, p.215.
\(^{611}\) Ibid., p.219.
\(^{612}\) Ibid., p.173.
\(^{613}\) Ibid., p.153.
sense in which inner and outer, concept and percept, spiritual and physical reality, are restored to a whole only through humanity. Freedom exists as a possibility because within every individual there lies the potential to join the concept of himself – his spiritual essence laid hold of in his intuitive thinking – with the percept of himself; in other words, man can bring the idea of his own self as a free and moral being to expression in his outward existence. “The perceptual object “man” has in it the possibility of transforming itself…” Whereas with natural organisms transformations from one state to another (such as seed to plant) occur because of objective laws inherent to them, the human being can seize the “material for transformation within him and transforms himself through his own power. Nature makes of man merely a natural being; society makes of him a law-abiding being; only he himself can make of himself a free man.”614 This, it may be said, is the ultimate reunion.

614 Ibid., p.142.
Chapter 7: Resisting the Total Answer

...the advance [in empirical sciences] would be genuine until the point of diminishing returns was reached at which the hypothetical construction prevented the digestion of facts and even their observation.

(Eric Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, 1956)\(^{615}\)

DIAGNOSIS AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS

Anthroposophy is rooted in the idea that a deep study and understanding of the human being, in all dimensions of his existence, is the key to understanding the true nature of the social problems we are faced with today. For all social life and conditions, either consciously or unconsciously, reflect the thoughts, feelings and desires of men. It is thus here that both explanations for the existing situation and the impetus for change are to be discovered. Writing during the aftermath of the First World War, and anticipating a second war, Steiner was concerned with what lay behind both calls for democratic political representation and a socially structured economic system. While the “social question” is never discussed in quite the same terms or from the same angle, two related themes provide a central thread to his critique. The first of these is the phenomenon of man’s alienation from his work; more generally, the issue of the meaning and value of *human labour* in our time. Secondly, intimately connected to the experience of alienation, is the fact that for a large proportion of the population spirituality has come to be regarded as ideology. In other words, inner life is considered a mere reflection in people, or perhaps better said in *minds*, of outward circumstances, rather than itself being understood as a creative force in the social order:

The proletarian is convinced of the ideological nature of spiritual life, but becomes steadily unhappier as a result of this conviction. The effects of this

\(^{615}\) Voegelin, *Order and History*, p.356.
unconscious misery, from which he suffers acutely, out-weigh by far in importance...the justified demands for an improvement in external conditions.616

For Steiner, and this comes back to Schweitzer’s comment about “true culture”, a healthy social life today is thus one that provides a space for the development of an autonomous and strong spiritual life. In this broad context, spiritual life refers to “everything which is based on the natural aptitudes of each human individual”,617 both physical and non-physical. Where culture, particularly education which is the foundation of culture, is shaped by political and economic considerations, this development is smothered. This in turn limits the possibility for individual spiritual creativity, from which all moral and practical insights derive, to have a meaningful influence on political and economic institutions. It is for this reason that Steiner identified the greatest social problems, including those related to economic chaos and political power struggles, as originating in a pathology of spirit and not in economics or politics per se.618

As we have seen, in Steiner’s account of human knowing the intellect is treated as only one aspect of thinking. Its content is the abstract concept and it grasps that which is static in both nature and the human organism. Social life, however, is alive, in constant movement and transition and thus requires a thinking which is likewise “alive”:

We must have flexible points of view, we must use flexible sentences, we must create flexible forms. That is why ...we should not consider simply a change in particular conditions, but, instead, we must get used to rethinking and relearning the innermost connections of our thinking and reflecting.619

The need for “flexible forms” in social analysis exists precisely because it is impossible to say man is entirely a product of his circumstances, or social circumstances and institutions are entirely controlled by men. There is never a direct causal relationship but both are cause and effect, the beginning is the end and vice versa. Man is influenced by this

616 Steiner, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.41.
617 Ibid., p.59.
618 In emphasising cultural/spiritual life, the intention was not that all aspects of social life be subordinated to certain ‘cultural goods’, or to suggest that political and economic life exists only to serve the individual. Rather than being viewed as intrinsically more important, the emphasis on cultural freedoms, and spirituality as a vital and formative force, is explained by the fact that they were both under-appreciated and under-discussed in comparison to economic and political reforms after the war. When it comes to the matter of social change today this is evidently still true.
619 Steiner, Education as a Force for Social Change, p.100.
constant interaction, and to get hold of this interaction one needs to be able to “dance” in one’s thoughts.\textsuperscript{620} Step-by-step programmes of social reform reflect a linear thinking. If thinking is un-lifelike and concepts are fixed, the actions they result in will gradually lose their practical relevance.

Taking the example of women’s emancipation, a public question of growing import in the interwar years, Steiner pointed toward the sterility of theories when it came to the question of the feminine and how feminine qualities and experience might be genuinely allowed to both influence and be reflected in social institutions. “...in the question of women’s emancipation the point is not to form a theoretical judgement, but to listen to real women. For it is reality which is at stake”.\textsuperscript{621} Similarly with all social questions, “we do not need a theoretical answer concerning the totality of the social question”.\textsuperscript{622} Goethe observed that in modern scientific thinking there is a tendency for experience to be replaced by intellectual notions (a hypothesis), words are then substituted for these notions, and the words become the subject of hypotheses as if they were the objects themselves. Things are thus replaced with signs: “And yet, how difficult it is not to put the sign in the place of the thing: how difficult to keep the being always livingly before one and not slay it with a word”.\textsuperscript{623} Steiner described the same phenomenon in social science, claiming that what is generally referred to as ‘theorising’ today does more to “kill reality” than express it.\textsuperscript{624}

The failure of social policies, whether they be dreamed up from behind a desk, within academic papers or have a presumably pragmatic basis, is always thus to be explained by the simple maxim that wrong thinking leads to wrong action. Not wrong thinking in terms of opinion or mistaken theory, but an inability to think in a certain way: to distinguish the course of events; to remain with the phenomena. Steiner’s focus on the potential for heightening artistic awareness and developing the life of willing and feeling – what he called soul faculties – was an attempt to overcome the divorce between thinking and life which he considered the consequence of a modern over-emphasis on intellectualism. Drawing more consciously on intuitive and emotive appreciation enables a deeper penetration of and insight into social phenomena, especially when dealing with the intangible and unfixed. Having arrived at judgements about social needs, transforming

\textsuperscript{620}———, Threefolding: A Social Alternative, p.43. (My emphasis).
\textsuperscript{621}Ibid., pp.22-23.
\textsuperscript{622}Ibid., p.23.
\textsuperscript{623}———, “Goethe and the Evolution of Consciousness.”
\textsuperscript{624}———, Threefolding: A Social Alternative, p.19.
these perceptions into truly practical initiatives relies on creative and imaginative capacities, an ability to see beyond the immediate present without losing sight of its realities. To carry them out into new social forms and actions, moreover, requires a strong will.

Clearly, to accurately distinguish the course of events an observer must also be a participant. A prerequisite for diagnosis is thus the restoration of human beings as the only source of judgement. It was argued above that today’s push for standard procedures (or in currently fashionable parlance, “best practices”) is part of a wider effort to absolve the individual of both prerogative and responsibility in organisational and institutional decision-making. Steiner’s approach was not so much to detail answers to specific moral, practical and social questions, but can be considered a detailed re-statement of the conditions in which the questions are asked. Or at least, ought to be asked. His concern was with the types of arrangements that could exist to ensure that appropriate people are in the position to ask appropriate questions and as such arrive at “partial” answers within the context of actual circumstances. Much of the discussion, therefore, deals with who is considered ‘appropriate’ and for what reasons.

Again, there is an element of circularity in this: “What kind of institutions must exist for people to be able to have the right thoughts on matters of social concern, and what kind of thoughts must exist that these right institutions can arise”. Although he did not specifically use the language of crisis in the way it has been used throughout this work, Steiner spoke of society in terms of health and sickness (never ‘good’ and ‘bad’), suggesting that social organisms pass periodically through states of order and disorder. While this precludes any notion of a universal panacea, it does not mean that men and women cannot “enter into communities in which they would be able to continuously direct their activities in a social direction”. It is, in other words, the kinds of relationships which are cultivated and formalised which determine the extent to which diagnosis can become a continual, living process within different spheres of social life.

What is meant by a kind of thinking “trained for life” is best indicated by Steiner’s approach to economics. The need for a form of “imaginative ideation”, such as was described in the previous chapter, only increases as it becomes clear that the forces driving

625 Ibid., p.44.
626 ———, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.16.
economic life are not physical ones. The natural economy has given way to financial and credit-based systems, where knowledge and information are the key factors of production. It is certainly no longer possible to count on the solidity of commodity exchange for like commodity. Steiner characterised a core problem with economic science as the tendency to try to “observe at rest things that are always in a state of flux”. 627 A state of movement cannot be observed by composing a multitude of tiny states and jumping from one to the other. If it were possible to determine one thing as ‘money’, another as ‘commodity’ and so on, fixed concepts would be suitable. This, however, is not the case. Money changes continuously, as do the values of products as they move through the process from production to consumption. 628

Although modern theoretical economics is increasingly complex, there remains an instinctive element to economic transactions which Steiner suggested needs to be cultivated rather than eliminated from economic dealings. The peasant, for instance, who has no familiarity with economic theories, nevertheless knows instinctively what is a good price for a plough. He creates an image, derived from his direct involvement in the process of buying and selling and the concrete experiences of his industry and needs, which allows him to calculate what it is worth his while to pay. Steiner considered this largely sub-conscious image-forming activity, occurring in the process of exchange, as a form of perception in its own right. He presented the sharing of these kinds of perceptions, or “sensibilities”, as the foundation for decision-making in the realm of production, consumption and trade. 629

It is just this notion of “thinking in pictures” which, however, “makes the learned world so uneasy today”. 630 A further problem identified with conventional economic science is that it is preoccupied with defining events rather than narrating them. To illustrate how a description of economic processes can change the decision-making scenery, Steiner took the question of price and the notion that price regulates of its own accord due to the law of supply and demand. Observing what actually occurs in economic transactions, he argued, exposes this as a significant over-simplification. Rather than one relationship, that between supply and demand, there are three relationships to consider.

628 Ibid.
629 Ibid., pp.130-31.
630 Ibid., p.130.
In coming to market, the consumer is not just a demander for products, but a supplier of money. Likewise, the producer in coming to market to sell is not just a supplier of products but a demander of money. Supply and demand thus exist in the case of both consumer and producer.\(^{631}\) In exchanging, the consumer will consider the relationship between what he has and what he gives; i.e., the interaction between demand and price will determine his estimation of the value of the product. When the price is high he demands less and vice versa. The producer, on the other hand, will consider the relationship between supply and price; when the price is high he supplies more and vice versa. It is only the trader, the middleman, whose standpoint is truly conditioned by the interaction of supply and demand. Price, therefore, ought not to be seen as a function of supply and demand but is rather an independent factor, equally primary. A “true” price only emerges when values are commensurate, in other words, when both parties consider the exchange to be advantageous. In exchanging, the consumer will be operating under the influence of his equation \(S = f(P, D)\), the producer under his \(D = f(S, P)\) and the trader under his \(P=f(S, D)\).\(^{632}\)

In challenging the adequacy of the concept of supply and demand in understanding price formation, Steiner was not suggesting that Adam Smith was wrong, but rather that he observed the economic process from only one perspective, namely that of the trader. He then applied this equation to the system as a whole.\(^{633}\) In Steiner’s view, to make accurate economic judgements and sensible decisions, the perspective and particular expertise of all three parties needs to be taken into account. It is not possible, however, for one party in isolation (e.g. a farmer) to fully appreciate the needs and experiences of another (e.g. the distributor or consumer of his goods). That is to say, while one individual is perfectly capable of having a broad theoretical grasp of the processes of production, consumption and trade, the point in practical economic life is “not that we should know about things in general” but that we should know about something in particular.\(^{634}\) Only the person engaged in trading on a daily basis can completely understand the circumstances of trade for a particular commodity within a particular region, only the producer can be fully aware of the factors of production in his location, and so on.

\(^{631}\) Ibid., p.97.
\(^{632}\) Ibid., pp.98-99.
\(^{633}\) Ibid., pp.99-100.
\(^{634}\) Ibid., p.107.
It is for this reason that Steiner felt the economy should be managed by “associations” made up of representatives from all three branches, making decisions on a consensual basis. Economic life is “striving to structure itself according to its own nature, independent of political institutionalisation and mentality”.\(^{635}\) Associations could be established according to purely economic criteria, for instance, their size would be determined by cost and manageability and so on. “Not laws, but men using their immediate insights and interests, would regulate the production, circulation and consumption of goods”.\(^{636}\) Importantly, this type of cooperation needs to be distinguished from labour unions. Labour unions, although operating in the economic field, are based on political principles. In associations there would be no such thing as “wage earners” demanding higher wages through their collective strength. Rather, “artisans” would determine reciprocal outputs through price regulation, a price arrived at together with management and consumer representatives. Both the insights of workers and interests of consumers would be reflected in the association’s decisions.\(^{637}\)

It would thus be the task of committees, representing the three elements and communicating their different perceptions, to monitor economic trends, allocate resources, harmonise consumption and production, deploy manpower, and so on.\(^{638}\) As we have seen, the question of price is the most crucial. Price is the “barometer” which makes visible what is required in economic life as a whole.\(^{639}\) When prices are left to the vagaries of supply and demand, the ill-effects of fluctuating prices are felt long before producers have had a chance to respond and re-allocate resources. Steiner essentially proposed that the distance between the three parties be bridged through the more direct formation of contractual agreements. Prices can be regulated intelligently and with foresight by people observing what is happening on a day-to-day basis. By this is not meant simply legally requiring people to spend more or less money on a particular commodity; i.e., altering the price-tag. Trying to bring about changes in economic circumstances by tinkering with price-tags applies the same logic as one would in trying to change the temperature in a

---

636 Ibid.
637 Ibid., p.18.
room by fiddling with the thermometer rather than tending to the fire. It changes nothing in real terms.\textsuperscript{640}

It is the conditions \textit{behind} the fluctuating price that need to be addressed. As such, if members of an economic association observe that a certain group of producers will soon be unable to survive due to the cheapness of their product, measures can be taken so that fewer workers are assigned to that particular field and therefore that the price of the product rises. The excess capital generated from this can be used to train and educate workers in other areas. Not only does this mean more skilled workers are available to be assigned where prices are too dear for consumers to meet their basic needs, but it has the added social benefit that individuals are less likely to be “restricted to one solitary manipulation” throughout their lives.\textsuperscript{641} Thus the associations will be concerned with “a proper employment of men in the several branches of economic life” and within different social spheres. In fact the question of price is always a question about “the distribution of men” engaged in certain kinds of work.\textsuperscript{642}

It was Steiner’s claim that it is only state intervention that prevents the natural formation of such economic communities, for “nature determines needs.” “All that stands in their way is modern man’s obsession with the external organization of economic life. Free association is the exact opposite of this external organizing for the purposes of production”.\textsuperscript{643} The notion that this, essentially \textit{altruistic}, form of economic arrangement is a “natural” consequence of modern economic life again rests upon that basic description of the process of exchange given above. In any transaction (freely and willingly entered into, of course), both the buyer and seller in real terms make a profit. The buyer wants to buy advantageously, the seller to sell advantageously. The buyer, in his particular economic situation, has more use for the commodity than the seller; the seller, in his particular economic situation, can do more with the money than the buyer. In other words, for the buyer the commodity has the greater value, and for the seller the money has the greater value. As such, the value of both commodity and money has been increased

\textsuperscript{640} Ibid., p.71.
\textsuperscript{641} Ibid., p.70.
\textsuperscript{642} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{643} ———, \textit{Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question}, p.19.
simply by having been exchanged. The real exchange is not between commodity and money but between commensurate values.\(^{644}\)

Rather than being regarded as a competition, therefore, with each party trying to do better out of the trade than the other, the relationship between buyer and seller can be understood in terms of mutuality. In exchanging, the immediate need of each party is being met by the other party.\(^{645}\) In Steiner’s characterisation, the tendency to the division of labour, beginning only in the last few centuries, means that people are more and more dependent on this principle of mutuality in economic relations. The economic significance of the division of labour has a very particular and much broader social significance, for it entails in the last resort the phenomenon that “no one uses for himself what he produces”.\(^{646}\) In the overall system, more and more interconnected through the division of labour, it no longer makes economic sense for any individual to provide for himself. A tailor, for instance, who sells most of the clothes he makes at market but keeps some for his own personal needs, will in fact in the long-term be ‘paying’ more for the clothes he makes for himself than if he had bought them in the market. “If the division of labour in conjunction with the process of circulation has a cheapening effect, [the tailor’s coat] will, for that reason, cost him less at the tradesman’s. He cannot make it as cheaply for himself.”\(^{647}\)

As the division of labour advances, therefore, what it means in practice is that no one works for himself at all. All that the individual produces by his labour is passed on to other men, and what he himself requires must come to him in return from the wider community. “Economically speaking”, thus, “egoism is impossible”.\(^{648}\) In Steiner’s view, many of the problems in modern social life are caused by the fact that this “summons to altruism” has come about more quickly in economic fact than it has been adequately conceptualised. “Human thought on Ethics was far from having arrived at a full appreciation of altruism at a time when the division of labour had already brought about its appreciation in the economic life.”\(^{649}\) It is misplaced egoism (‘misplaced’ because, as we

---


\(^{645}\) The same principle applies to more complicated economic processes. In a financial system, for instance, “interest” on a loan is but “mutuality realised”, i.e., transformed into money. (*World-Economy*, p.129).


\(^{647}\) Ibid., p.41. For a detailed argumentation of this claim, see pp. 41-2, pp.47-49 and p.187.

\(^{648}\) Ibid., p.42.

\(^{649}\) Ibid., p.43. This ought not to be mistaken for a suggestion that human thoughts are a mere reflection of material realities. The division of labour itself is perceived as a *spiritual* phenomenon since it is purely the result of human intelligence and ingenuity being applied to the economic process. See the discussion of capital in the following sections.
will see, egoism does have a rightful place in social life) that causes people to interfere with the economic process in “clumsy” ways. Because egoism is a part of human nature, and it stirs in human feelings wherever and whenever people live and work together, the assumption is made that the community as a whole will be best served by institutions which allow “the individual to reap and garner the full – or the largest possible – proceeds of his own labour”. According to Steiner, the logic of the division of labour itself means that the exact opposite is true:

In a community of human beings working together, the well-being of the community will be the greater the less the individual claims for himself the proceeds of the work he has himself done; i.e. the more of these proceeds he makes over to his fellow workers, and the more his own requirements are satisfied not out of his own work done, but out of work done by others.

The egoism that obscures the fundamentally altruistic demands of modern economic life manifests itself in the practice of having labour tied to wages. To work for wages is to provide predominantly for oneself, that is, in contradiction to the logic of the division of labour. In other words, one sees oneself as working only to earn a living and not to meet a social need through the production or manufacturing of certain goods for the general community. The difference is more than theoretical. To earn ‘wages’ means that the remuneration one receives has nothing to do with what one creates or produces. The worker is ‘selling’ his labour rather than the products of his labour. In principle, this can have the same result as the example of the tailor who continues to make his own clothes within a system of divided labour. The tailor ‘pays’ more than the market value for his clothes, that is to say, he ultimately does some work for no gain. Likewise the worker, whose wages bear no relation to the work that he does, can end up doing something for nothing. If the worker considers himself to be selling his labour, the sense of injustice that arises from having to do some work for nothing is translated into demands for higher wages. That is to say, it evolves into a dispute about rights and as such becomes a political concern.

651 Ibid.
If, on the other hand, it is perceived that the worker is selling not his labour power but the products of his labour, the matter of his remuneration takes on altogether different connotations. Rather than being exploited because he is working for too low a wage, the worker’s exploitation consists in the fact that he is being forced to sell the products of his labour at too low a price. In the exchange that occurs between worker and enterpriser, which in itself can be viewed as a kind of market, the worker is selling at a disadvantage. To look at it from the perspective of price is to treat remuneration as a purely economic matter and not a political one. As we have seen, in Steiner’s terms a “true” price only emerges when the values being exchanged are commensurate. He argued that if the principle of ‘working for a living’ is not removed from the economic process as a whole, prices will always be falsified. For although labour is not in fact being sold, the impression that it is means that all sorts of non-economic considerations are allowed to enter into the question of price formation and prices cease to accurately reflect the fluctuation of economic values.

It was described above how associations, taking into account the big picture and what might be called the community interest, could be in charge of monitoring and regulating prices. Beyond the practical economic case for such arrangements, the principle of associative working is clearly understood to have a broader social meaning, one which returns us to the matter of diagnosis. Associations would function, in a certain sense, as the consciousness – or conscience – organs of society as a whole. ‘Right acting’ depends upon ‘right seeing’. In making economic realities transparent to everyone, either through membership or representation in various economic communities, the responsibility for one another that is a fact of modern economic life would also become transparent. No one can act economically without having an impact on someone else, and the notion that exploitation is the preserve of the rich is nothing but a comforting illusion. “Whether I be

---

653 Ibid., p.104.
654 Ibid., p.45. In actual fact, Steiner defined a “true price” as being “when a man receives, as counter-value for the product he has made, sufficient to enable him to satisfy the whole of his needs, including of course the needs of his dependents, until he will again have completed a like product” (World-Economy, p.72). The formula points to the future rather than the past, for economic life is ultimately about setting future processes in motion. It is, as such, not the time it took a cobbler to make a pair of boots that needs to be considered in determining the value of the boots, but the time it will take him to make the next pair of boots. Since the economic environment is constantly changing, if the cobbler is compensated only for the product he has already finished, it may be that he has too little to survive on until he has completed the next pair of boots (World-Economy, p.73).
655 There are only two ways in which economic values can arise: when nature is transformed by labour, and when labour is directed by human intelligence, i.e., “when Labour is acted upon by the Spirit” (World-Economy, p.32). It is impossible to define value, since it is ever-changing, but the value-creating factors will always be at the two poles of “Nature” and “Spirit”.

poor or rich, I am equally an exploiter when I purchase things which are underpaid." In his account of associative working, Steiner was essentially trying to show that modern economic demands (i.e. of capitalism) are not in conflict with modern social demands (i.e. of socialism) in the ways commonly – habitually – perceived.

THE THREEFOLD NATURE OF SOCIAL LIFE

The famous triad of revolutionary France, ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, has failed to preserve its hypothetical unity.

(Max Beloff, The Age of Absolutism, 1954)

In a lecture at the Charities Aid Foundation in 1999, Anthony Giddens made the following statement:

To have a decent society you have to have a balance between three things: you need government; you need the market; you need civil society. If any one of these gets to dominate over the others then, as a society, you are in trouble. We need to find a new balance in a globalising era between these three.

Directly facing the challenges of reconstruction after the war, Steiner was also preoccupied with the question of balance between three domains of social life; in his terms, the economic sphere, the legal/rights sphere and the spiritual/cultural sphere. Like Giddens, and many other contemporary reformers, he was especially conscious of the significance of the fact that we “stand before a world economy”. He was wary, however, of any effort to organise economic forces into an abstract world community. For him, ‘globalisation’ would be essentially an economic reality, not a political one, for “the political states are not merely the products of economic forces and the attempt to transform them into economic communities is the cause of the social chaos of modern times”. As attempts to do just that have continued apace, to the point where economics is popularly perceived to be

656 Steiner, Anthroposophy and the Social Question.
657 Beloff, The Age of Absolutism, 1660-1815, p.17.
659 Steiner, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.16.
660 Ibid., p.17.
“capable in principle of addressing the totality of human behaviour”, 661 Steiner’s warnings seem especially prescient: “As though hypnotized by the power of modern economics, all eyes are focused on what it alone can accomplish.” 662

Standing alone, the economy cannot generate a healthy political and cultural life. It was Steiner’s claim that the realms have become confused and entangled in inappropriate ways, in large part because instincts surviving from former ages continue to influence current thinking. The key point is not to set the realms apart, but rather to discover how they are connected. 663 In his account, the division between the three spheres of social life is not theoretical but exists as “historical fact”. As we have seen, historical events and processes are always understood in terms of the “evolution of consciousness” and it is thus the deeper impulses behind social ideas that need to be considered if history is going to shed any light on the needs of our own time. As Hallowell expressed it, it is the “sentiments, passions and experiences of which ideas are the crystallization” that “should engage our attention…” 664

The emergence of today’s tri-formed social organism is described in terms of “three strongly different currents” which can be observed in the course of the development of Western civilization. 665 In Ancient Greece and early Rome, social life was unified by a divine moral order which underpinned all structures and directed all human activities. In theocratic society, guided by the vision of initiates, men’s relationships not only to God but to each other and to nature were determined by this moral order. Where the economy is based predominantly on agriculture, it is easily and naturally integrated into this overarching spiritual world conception. For the person who has spent his whole life close to the soil, land and its bounty is “a gift of God”: “What lies on his table you see connected to the theocratic principle through the very words he is using.” 666

In later Greek and early Roman life, a social order arose rooted in trade and craftsmanship, leading to a new concern about the rules governing relations “between man and man”, a concern which had simply not existed in the hierarchical theocratic society. It is in this context that a consciousness of an independent sphere of human rights emerged, illustrated

662 Steiner, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.50.
663 ———, Threefolding: A Social Alternative, p.16.
664 J.H. Hallowell, Foreword to Voegelin, From Enlightenment to Revolution, p.vii.
666 ———, Threefolding: A Social Alternative, p.25.
by prominent historical figures like the Grachi brothers and other Roman lawyers and politicians. The concepts of labour, property and equity all acquire a logical and legal character. In buying, selling and trading each other’s creations, it is no longer exclusively Divine Will but human agreements and human feeling which form the foundation of social interactions. The whole of the Roman period is permeated by this legalistic picture. Jurisprudence enters all things, including religion, “which became a feeling for what is just and what is unjust, for good and evil, and how this is to be rewarded and punished. The cosmic vision of the old theocracies metamorphosed into a “cosmic jurisprudence”.

To these two currents co-existing in the social organism a third is added in the context of industrialisation. It is only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that a consciousness develops of commerce as a distinct form of social activity, existing independently of both spiritual life and legal administration. The division of labour frees the human individual, or rather, the human spirit, from both nature and traditional social ties. The creativity and productiveness of human spiritual faculties becomes outwardly expressed in “the manifold formations of Capital”. This emancipation, however, also represents the loss of the existential framework that the former social orders provided. In ancient theocracies, spiritual sustenance was intimately bound up with earthly sustenance. In Roman times, the warmth and strength of interpersonal relations, also imbued with a religious element, was enough to give people working together a sense of their value to the community and equally a sense of personal dignity. “More than anybody”, however, “the man who is placed within the world of the machine is torn away from those earlier relationships”. Stripped of his traditions, alienated both from society and from his work, “what is left to him is but his own humanity”.

In the new order, therefore, means of production are not enough to provide the worker with “nourishment for his soul”. He needs, in addition to this, “the world of free spirituality” from which to derive an inner content. It was this desire for a renewed connection to spiritual and cultural life which, according to Steiner, was behind the demands of the modern proletarian movement, however unconscious this may have been. The advancement of technology and capitalism broadly coincided with the development of the

669 ———, Threfolding: A Social Alternative, p.27.
671 ———, Threfolding: A Social Alternative, p.29.
new mode of scientific thinking, and it was this science which attracted the faith and confidence of a working class “in search of a new consciousness and new values”.  

Modern science, however, has bequeathed to the mass of the population a cultural life which is completely devitalised, for it is rooted in a type of thinking which “no longer possessed the spiritual impact necessary to satisfy the manifold needs of an expanding human consciousness”.  

It was for this reason, as we saw in Chapter 6, that Steiner felt the new times required not only a new way of living but a new type of thinking: “The scientific outlook will become life-sustaining only if its manner of dealing with the questions of a fully human content to life attains a force equal to that which animated old conceptions.”

The reason why in the modern world cures for social crises are almost always looked for in the realm of politics and economics, rather than in the realms of science, art or religion, lies in the fact that the proletariat developed an entirely different relationship to the new science than the leading classes from whom they had inherited it. While learned members of society adopted an intellectual outlook in accordance with scientific convictions, because they retained many traditional structures and had religious, aesthetic and other cultural sources independent of that science, they did not need to adapt their whole psychology to it in the way the proletariat was obliged to. “The educated person has taken science and pigeon-holed it in a compartment of his mind”, but the proletarian, who may not have learned science theoretically, has nevertheless “turned it into the basis for a conception of the essence of man...”.

Crucially, the great part of the population embraced science at a time when it had reached the conclusion that man is a purely natural being living in a purely natural order, that is to say, when it had ceased to recognise its own origins in the human spirit. The working classes, more than at any time in history, thus came to orientate their whole existence according to a system of thought at the same time as they became unable to acknowledge thinking, the life of ideas and spiritual creativity, as a force capable of affecting their

---

672 672 672 672———, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.36.

673 673 673 Iibid., p.35.

674 674 Iibid., p.39.

675 675 Iibid., pp.37-38.
material circumstances. “Contemporary society has become ill due to the impotence of spiritual life – and the illness is aggravated by the reluctance to recognise its existence”.676

The three currents of social life developing in the course of human evolution found conceptual expression during the French Revolution in the calls for liberty, equality and brotherhood. In Steiner’s argument, the error of the Enlightenment was in the attempt to unite the three principles within one over-arching parliamentary body. The revolutionaries failed to perceive that the three principles characterised three different types of social activity (reflecting three different dimensions of human existence) and as such already existed to a large extent in the social organism. They did not need to be established or imposed, but made fully conscious and allowed to develop into a natural equilibrium. Rather than adopting one or the other of the three principles as the basis for social organisation, a principle needs to emerge that can capture the interaction of all three. Steiner called this principle social threefolding. The problem is not that the unity of liberty, equality and brotherhood is a hypothetical one, but that the unity is conceived as being in the social order rather than arising from the human individual. Instead of starting with an abstract totality, unity “must derive as a result of activities streaming together from various directions”.677

Steiner believed that history clearly reveals where the three principles are inherently at work in the different spheres of social life. In discussing the legacy of the French Revolution, Beloff noted that there appeared to be little scope for ideals such as ‘brotherhood’ among the nation-states, empires and races battling for hegemony in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.678 As we have seen, Steiner suggested that ‘brotherhood’, far from being a utopian ideal, is the defining feature of modern economic life. It only needs to be recognised as such and worked with rather than against for economic life to constitute a harmonising influence in international relations.

Freedom, on the other hand, and the principle of competitive individualism, ought to guide the organisation and administration of cultural activities, not the economy. The individual as a whole cannot be liberated from external and collective influences, for political and economic life are essential dimensions of his existence as both a material and social being. His spiritual life, however, can develop an independence from political and economic

676 Ibid., pp.46-47.
677 Ibid., p.110.
forces, and this is primarily achieved by ensuring that educational and other cultural institutions are able to determine their own values and methods.

Finally, the legislative bodies of the state should be structured to reflect the “human-rights awareness” of the community of people at a given time. In today’s world, that awareness translates into the demand for equal participation and universal representation. The political realm is concerned exclusively with matters about which every member of society, having reached the age of discretion, is equally qualified to form a judgement. If society is seen as a uniform system, however, then “no matter what the elective process is”, individual interests, human rights interests and economic interests will come into conflict in representative institutions. The three spheres each require their own institutions which, although closely interwoven, function autonomously.

All that is related to law, politics and the affairs of state should be administered in a democratic parliament. Everything relating to the spiritual department of life should be detached from the political or equity state, and the spiritual organisation should be independently administered in freedom. The economic organisation, separated from the political and legal body, should form its own administration [according to] its own conditions and necessities, founded upon expert knowledge and technical capacity and skill.

Steiner was keen to emphasise that in describing a threefold social order he did not envision a division into three classes of people. “We are dealing with institutions in which anyone can take his turn, because in the modern age our concern is with men, not with classes”. Everyone participates, to different extents depending on occupation, interests, talents, age and so on, in all three spheres, and they intersect and are carried, as indicated above, in every member of a community. The threefolding principle therefore, again, is best understood as an inner orientation – one which by informing individual actions shapes external social realities – rather than the basis for a programme of political reform.

680 Ibid., p.80.
RELATING EDUCATION, STATE AND ECONOMY

...financial markets are like the mirror of mankind, revealing every hour of every working day the way we value ourselves and the resources of the world around us [so that] it is not the fault of the mirror if it reflects our blemishes as clearly as our beauty.

(Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money*, 2009)\(^6\)

The principle reason for the impoverishment of education is that it has lost its connection to life. An impoverished education for Steiner, as we have seen, meant one-sidedly educated individuals. The result is not only a limitation of the experience of each child, who in growing up with no sense for art and music are closed off to whole realms of existence, but it also divests the next generation of their power and opportunity to bring something new to society; to culture through the individual talents of their spirit; to politics and law through a mature feeling life; and to the economy through well-developed practical abilities and a firm grasp of practical realities. Today’s education has entirely lost an appreciation for what one *individuality* can bring forth from another:

The loss of any real knowledge of man has produced that dreary, barren effort that is a branch of what is called experimental psychology…The so-called intelligence tests are a horrible travesty of what is really beneficial in the sphere of education… This is a symptom of how the direct relationship between people – which alone is profitable – is a forgotten factor in our culture… Until people see how necessary it is to return to a direct intuitive knowledge of man by studying the human being himself, particularly the growing human being, until we get rid of the unhappy gulf in this sphere between man and man, we shall never be able to understand how to lay the foundations for an education that is really alive and for a life of the spirit that is free.\(^6\)

One of the main reasons for education becoming divorced from life is because it has developed an unhealthy relationship to the state. While it is necessary to cultivate a healthy respect for authority in children at a certain stage in their development, if the

---


\(^6\) Steiner, *A Social Basis for Education*, pp.21-22.
teacher is seen as an authority figure only within the overall structure of the state, he is robbed of his personality – his individuality. What enters the child’s head comes purely from regulations and targets set by the state, and people emerge from their schooling fit to do little more than serve that state. In Steiner’s terms, the foundation for judgement in the question of teaching is a “continuous watchfulness” on the part of the teacher, from “the living nature of the instruction itself”.

It was his argument that political and economic considerations should not only be excluded from teaching and curriculum decisions, but from the administration of educational institutions altogether, including their financial affairs.

People think that the state can provide the educational facilities and that the teachers who occupy them can develop culture and spiritual life ‘freely’ in them. This opinion ignores how closely related the content of spiritual life is to the innermost essence of the human being in which it is developing, and how this development can only be free when it is introduced into the social organism through impulses which originate in spiritual life itself, and through no others.... Although the content of mathematics and science cannot be directly influenced by state requirements, what develops from them, what people think of their value, what effects their cultivation can have on the rest of spiritual life, and much more, is conditioned by these requirements when the state administers branches of spiritual life.

To allow educators to manage all aspects of education would be to allow “what is experienced in the teaching process” to “flow naturally into the administration”. Steiner suggested that the idea of full administrative autonomy for teachers is rejected because of an unconscious assumption that teachers, as specialists in fields of knowledge or certain arts, crafts and skills, will be generally impractical individuals. It is deemed necessary, as such, that they organise their activities within the terms of reference given them by those who are professionally occupied with practical and bureaucratic matters. This, however,

---

684 Ibid., pp.209-10.
685 Ibid., p.40.
686 This, of course, is not to suggest that they do not have to operate within the law. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure that educators are acting in accordance with the rights and obligations agreed upon by the whole community through the democratic process. The point is to leave educators free in areas which concern their professional competency.
687 Steiner, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, pp.75-76.
688 Ibid., p.12.
ignores the fact that it is precisely when teachers do not have responsibility for determining their own functions that they become impractical and removed from reality. It is not just economic structures which lead to anti-social situations, for a person’s degree of social sensitivity is first and foremost a product of his education. “It is anti-social to allow youth to be educated by people who themselves have become strangers to reality because the conduct and content of their work has been dictated to them from without.”

It is in this context that we can illustrate a direct connection between the spiritual exercises discussed in Chapter 6 and a very contemporary theme discussed in earlier chapters. Trust, in Steiner’s view, is something that can and must be practiced. In trivial situations and day-to-day experiences we have an instinctive confidence in each other, we trust, for instance, that the person driving the car is not going to run into us while we are crossing the street, and so on. If this basic trust did not exist, all social life would be completely impossible. Steiner emphasised the possibility of cultivating this instinctive human quality until it becomes a more conscious factor in all affairs, the significant as well as the trivial. “Trust must reign in interpersonal relationships. In this trust – what a golden word – in the education for this trust, in this belief in the single human being, in the education for this belief in the single human being, lies the impulse, the only impulse for the social life of the future.” It is this trust that “will lead the single human being into the community”.

It was pointed out in earlier chapters that today a particular economic approach has emerged as the all-encompassing political answer to the question of social transformation. The enormous intervention of the corporate state into education is justified in terms of enhancing the overall productivity of the nation, just as it was in previous decades. The curricular changes and training measures designed to foster competitive advantage in the “knowledge economy” are also presented, as illustrated by the European Commission White Paper discussed in Chapter 4, as a means of minimising social inequalities. In Steiner’s view, the modern tendency to focus on the economy is rooted in the belief that, since economic conditions have lead to anti-social ones, it is a re-organisation of the economy – in his time equalising economic relations – that can lead to a fairer society. This ignores, however, two important things.

The first of these is that the modern economic order does not and cannot of its own accord lead to the establishment of labour relations and conditions which correspond to the modern sense for what is right and fair. Economic transactions no longer naturally retain a ‘legal’ or ‘human’ element to them, any more than they retain a ‘spiritual’ element. The core characteristic of the modern economy is that, strictly within its own sphere, it only recognises commodities and their respective values.\textsuperscript{691} This is not to say that economic life does not have human and spiritual dimensions, but these are dimensions which, so to speak, transcend the economic sphere and become the concern of the political and cultural spheres. In Steiner’s terms, the ‘human’ aspect of communal activity and work is represented by labour and the ‘spiritual’ aspect is represented by capital. Neither of these are commodities.\textsuperscript{692}

Anything incorporated into the economic sphere, however, must take on the nature of a commodity, including labour power. As it was described above, labour itself – a person’s capacity to work – cannot represent an economic value. It is the way in which labour enters into the economic process that creates economic values, i.e. in transforming natural materials into particular goods or in being organised in such a way to make production more efficient.\textsuperscript{693} Labour itself, and the value that is assigned to this or that type of work, is a purely human factor. In being able to ‘buy’ labour through payment of wages, the person with capital means is essentially able to buy the right to put the worker to work at anything he sees fit, regardless of the worker’s personal situation and feelings towards that work; the worker is wholly delivered up to the economic process because his rights are circulating within it and subject to the same forces which determine commodity values.\textsuperscript{694}

While abhorrence of this very phenomenon was the main impetus behind the modern socialist movement, Steiner’s point was that solutions cannot be looked for purely within the realm of economics. Whether in a command, a free market or today’s so-called “mixed” economy, labour power will always be used in the most expedient way so long as it is treated as a function of economics. Labour power will only lose its commodity

\textsuperscript{691}———, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.48.
\textsuperscript{692}———, Education as a Force for Social Change, p.44.
\textsuperscript{693}———, World-Economy: The Formation of a Science of World-Economics, p.31.
\textsuperscript{694}———, Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question, p.50.
character if a way is found to extract it from the economic process;\textsuperscript{695} which means, as we have seen, if a way is found to separate work from payment.

This applies equally to the person working in industry as it does to a person working in a school, using predominantly what Steiner called “spiritual faculties”. He argued that the evaluation of teaching must be independent from the potential for earning a living, for what is accomplished in a school is independent of individual teachers’ needs as consumers.\textsuperscript{696} To ‘pay’ a teacher for his abilities is to exchange a commodity (or rather, its money value) in this case for spiritual faculties, and again these things are mutually incommensurate.\textsuperscript{697} Both true values and true needs are obscured. In other words, the value placed on the teacher’s teaching is determined by his salary, not educational criteria, at the same time as his salary is not determined by economic criteria but is arbitrarily tied to his abilities. Or, even more arbitrarily, indications of his “performance”.

The second thing which is ignored in the preoccupation with economic solutions is that since the economy’s greatest resource is the spiritual capacities of individuals – never more so than in the “knowledge economy” – the more independent education is from political standardisation and market pressures at the outset, the more it will be able to contribute to economic productivity. Mathematicians, scientists, teachers, students, philosophers and other workers in the cultural sphere are consumers with regard to the past, but they are tremendously productive with regard to the future. They have “the peculiar property of loosening and liberating spirituality, the “gumption” of the others. They make their thinking more mobile, and these others are thus able to work the material process more effectively”.\textsuperscript{698} The most fruitful thing in economic life are “free gifts” – that is, capital without strings attached – given to cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{699} Spiritual life declines, and as such so does the potential for economic revitalisation, when capital is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{695} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{696} ———, A Social Basis for Education, p.206. A teacher’s income, just as the factory-worker’s, can be provided by the community in the associative way described above, or by arrangements made by individual institutions. See Chapter 7 for more on the concept of ‘shared returns’.
\item \textsuperscript{697} ———, World-Economy: The Formation of a Science of World-Economics, p.103.
\item \textsuperscript{698} Ibid., p.82. Leibnitz, for instance, is still ‘helping’ to build the tunnels which rely on his discovery of differential calculus. (World-Economy, p.76).
\item \textsuperscript{699} “Free gifts” are a fundamental part of economic the economic process – everything given to children, for instance. Taxes are also essentially a form of ‘gift’, but where the capital raised for educational purposes is administered by the state it is not ‘freely’ given but is tied to political interests.
\end{itemize}
prevented from flowing freely to activities which foster the “inventive gifts of mankind”.700

It is in a discussion of the nature of capital, therefore, that we come to the key question of how education may best serve the economy and how the economy may best serve education. To understand what Steiner perceived as the social role and potential of capital, we must again return to that description of the basic process of exchange given above. In every transaction, profit is generated. As we have seen, in the case of the worker and enterpriser surplus value is not something that arises from the labour-wage nexus, but results from the fact that the enterpriser is, indeed, enterprising. Likewise in the case where a commodity is exchanged for money, the value of the money increases if the person with it is able to put it to greater productive use. Capital is thus dependent on human faculties; its value will increase or be wasted depending on the knowledge, skill and intelligence of the person who is managing it.701 Money, in Steiner’s terms, is “the true and proper representative of economic values created by the Spirit”.702

There are only two things that can be done with capital: it can be used to further exploit natural resources, i.e., become united with labour and re-enter the productive cycle, or it can be consumed.703 The idea that capital can be conserved, in land for instance, is presented as an economic fallacy in the same way that the idea of buying and selling labour is presented as one. Values can only be created and used up, they cannot accumulate. This is true regardless of what it might say on one’s deed of ownership or bank statement. To unite capital with land is to give it a “semblance of a value”.704 The more a piece of land is mortgaged, the more it appears to increase in value and the more in the end will have to be paid for it. Yet the only way economic values can arise is through labour transforming the land in some way; it is the products of labour which create values, not the land itself. As such, economically speaking, it makes no essential difference whether, for example, I issue money which has no foundation in reality but represents a mere increase in the amount of paper money, or whether I assign capital value to the land. In

---

702 Ibid., p.53.
703 Steiner in fact talks of capital in terms of ‘purchase’ capital, ‘loan’ capital and ‘gift’ capital, since there are only three things one can do with money: buy something, lend it or give it. (*World-Economy*, pp.78-79).
both cases I am creating fictitious values. By inflating the currency I increase prices of things numerically, but in the reality of the economic process I effect absolutely nothing except a redistribution which may do immense harm to individuals.\textsuperscript{705}

The more surplus capital is invested in land, the more prohibitive land prices become and it is ultimately tenants who pay this in the form of rents. Enormous gains are made by landowners (and speculators) not by creating economic values, but merely by sitting on assets.\textsuperscript{706} When capital is allowed to become an “unused deposit” rather than re-enter the economic process, or be used up in consumption, it “sickens” the economic process as a whole.\textsuperscript{707} For it is only human qualities which carry forward the economic process in a genuine way; that is, in today’s terms, in a way that ensures financial markets maintain a connection to the ‘real’ economy. It is the treatment of economic values as something that can be stored or ‘owned’ in a fixed sense which makes it possible for individuals or organisations, through amassing or inheriting assets, to incur a degree of power and social authority that is completely unrelated to their actual skills, knowledge or contribution to society.

The origin of capital always lies in the division of labour – it is “the concomitant” of that division.\textsuperscript{708} In Steiner’s argument, since the formation of capital is a synthesis of all economic aspects of the community, it should be put to work for the community. This is not to say that it ought to become controlled by the state, but rather that legal arrangements should be made which facilitate the flow of capital according to the differences in people’s talents and abilities. There will always be those who generate surplus value but have no use for it, and others who have initiative but are under-resourced. “We cannot arrive at a healthy economic process unless, in the first place, it is made possible for people to have something to give and, in the second place, unless they have the goodwill and intelligence to give what they have.”\textsuperscript{709} ‘Ownership’ in fact means an exclusive ‘right of use’ and Steiner’s proposal was that ‘rights of use’ could be established on a temporary rather than permanent basis. The duty of the state would be to ensure that means of production remain with an individual (or group of individuals, institution etc.) only so long as this is justified

\textsuperscript{705} Ibid., p.67.
\textsuperscript{706} See discussion in Assenza, \textit{Beyond the Market: Economics for the 21st Century}, p.58.
\textsuperscript{708} Ibid., p.50.
\textsuperscript{709} Ibid., p.112.
by expertise and level of success. In this way objects of ownership “cannot be administered by a private individual for his private interests to the detriment of the community; but neither will the community be able to administer them bureaucratically to the detriment of the individual”.  

The move away from the notion that capital is a commodity (which gives the owner certain rights over the users) opens up a number of different possibilities in the matter of financing schools and universities. For instance, capital could be transferred according to arrangements similar to copyright laws, where after a certain period of time wealth amassed by an individual passes to cultural institutions where it works for the benefit of the community. Another option, proposed by Houghton Budd, is that funds currently paid to the government in the form of taxes could be paid directly to schools, or to independent trusts created specifically for the purpose of allocating educational resources. However capital is raised, the key point is the separation of decision-making powers from the provision of funding. If funding streams are made available which are not tied to government requirements (or parental or business interests), schools would have the opportunity to determine their own curricula, set their own aims, cultivate their own ethos or specialisation, and so on. Parents could exercise choice by sending their children to a school most suited to their particular outlook or needs.

Steiner suggested that giving teachers the responsibility for running schools would allow teaching priorities and learning experiences to flow into the administration of schools. These priorities and experiences would also, therefore, be directly reflected in the administration. It is in this way that schools can give an account of themselves to the wider community. Nothing exposes an institution’s objectives, methods, achievements and failures better than its budgeting and bookkeeping. “It is the very fact that one can render the field financially visible that gives it its right relationship to society. Here one can speak of accountability in a way that has the deepest possible meaning. Inner and

710 ———, *Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question*, p.113. Again, coming to these sorts of contractual agreements could be the task of associative communities able to perceive which areas of both business and cultural life are over or under-resourced.  

711 ———, *Threefolding: A Social Alternative*, p.49.  

712 Houghton Budd, *Freeing the Circling Stars: Pre-Funded Education*.  

713 This is not to suggest that schools need not engage with the wider community, or that parents and businesses ought not to become involved in school activities and be represented in school management. The purpose is to transform the dynamics of their interaction, from relationships of power to associative relationships.
financial independence are of a piece.\textsuperscript{714} As we saw in the previous chapter, Steiner felt that it is only when people \textit{love what they do} that they can be said to be acting out of themselves, and it is only when people are acting \textit{out of themselves} that their actions take on a real ethical significance. In the same way, it is only when people have full responsibility for their work that they can develop a real sense of responsibility for the impact their work has on the community as a whole.

\textsuperscript{714} Houghton Budd, \textit{Freeing the Circling Stars: Pre-Funded Education}, p.5.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

For a long time one has known that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is hidden, but to make visible precisely what is visible, that is to say, to make evident what is so close, so immediate, so intimately linked to us, that because of that we do not perceive it.

(Michel Foucault, paper delivered in Japan, 1978)\textsuperscript{715}

This thesis began with the aim of exploring what underpins the crisis-talk that has pervaded public discussion of education in recent decades. It has concluded that a crisis indeed exists, but it is a crisis in man, not in education per se. The crisis is given loudest voice in the realm of education, albeit frequently in a distorted or misleading way, for it is here that certain tensions of modern existence are most profoundly experienced. (It is likewise therefore here too that the most energetic efforts are made to overlook them.)

Crises always reveal some kind of inconsistency or disharmony. Embedded in the discourses and practices of learning in contemporary British society is a contradiction that is daily staring us in the face. In fact, there are many contradictions, and these can and have been expressed in a number of different ways. Ultimately, however, the crisis has been located in the friction that is necessarily created wherever learning is defined in terms that are even vaguely suggestive of self-creation and personal fulfilment at the same time as priorities in learning and teaching are politically determined. Modern British politics lives and breathes by the maxims of personal responsibility and individual freedom. The faith in political resolutions in the sphere of education, however, represents socially what is essentially an individual externalisation of responsibility for self and hence a renunciation of that very freedom the political system claims to uphold.

The thesis has argued that this deeper crisis is avoided at the same time as it must be perpetuated because the political answer has become a fixed answer. In other words, the crisis in education is always diagnosed within the context of a pre-given system of therapeutics. As such, although the crisis is real, diagnosis never is. In the brief survey of crisis-talk in Chapter 1 we witnessed how the media, the “paper record” of society,

\textsuperscript{715} Cited in Marshall, “Performativity: Lyotard and Foucault through Searle and Austin,” p.309.
consistently blames education for various problems in society and lays the blame for any deficiencies in the latter at the door of the government of the day. This merely served to illustrate superficially a more fundamental and persistent faith in the combined power of politics and education that has been traced to its roots in the European Enlightenment. The language of crisis itself, in its newer conceptualisation, points us to that period of upheaval. Historians and philosophers have explained it in terms of a breakdown of religious and absolutist forms of authority in connection to an emergent sense for both the potential and need for self direction in matters of understanding and conscience (again, in its newer connotation of a ‘feeling for right and wrong’). At the same time as the concept of individuality is affirmed, however, the experience is practically denied as humanity turns outward in the search for truth and a source of morality. Knowledge is to be only that which is found in the external natural world, and reason (now held to be the only acceptable foundation for doing) is looked for in the public; that is to say, in the generic.

Although this is to state things simply, and despite the many and varied interpretations of that complex historical period, we know that these were the answers that emerged during the Enlightenment for we are (quite demonstrably) still living them. We also as such continue to live with the paradox that these answers give rise to. Indeed, perhaps there is an odd sense in which the very obviousness of this paradox – its visibility in our institutions and society at large, especially in the divergence between language and practice – contributes to the readiness with which it is generally and collectively ignored. It is simply sidestepped, eyes are averted, and reasons for the crisis are sought elsewhere. The only way to genuinely address the crisis, however, is to confront this paradox directly and personally. In one respect, confronting it entails the question of whether it is possible for me to live the way I speak; that is, to bring together the much articulated concept of the self as an individual and autonomous being with the reality that is reflected in social relations and institutions. Whatever the answer to this question, to acknowledge it as a question is to stop living (and thus sustaining) the pretence that it has already been answered. It is to prevent oneself becoming, as Nietzsche so bluntly put it, nothing but a “wandering lie”.

Describing historical development as an evolution of consciousness, Rudolf Steiner identified the reason for the turn ‘outward’ in the very phenomenon that led to the awakening of self-awareness: namely, the loss of a sense for the unity of existence, for the profoundly integrated nature of human and cosmic life. In other words, the same
experience of isolation from the world that renders man conscious of himself as a distinct entity is also what makes him lose faith in the powers of his own experience to reveal the whole of reality. For Steiner, therefore, restoring faith in ‘inward’ experience, and the self as a source of truth, demands first and foremost the recognition that the single individual “is not actually cut off from the world.”716 Purely separate existence – truncated existence – is but “an illusion” produced by the predominantly cerebral manner in which modern man perceives.

As we have seen, Steiner proposed that this mode of perception can be transcended. Through personal effort, in the form of spiritual exercises, the essential unity present in knowing can again become a direct fact of experience. The path of inner growth and discipline which he described was put forward as a way for the human individual to gradually re-discover “his full and complete existence”, within the “totality of the universe”.717 With regard to the question posed above, therefore, the core message derived from Steiner’s worldview is that to act individually one must first participate consciously in universality. Since it is only in this participation that one can have a true experience of self, it is only through this participation that self-directed action becomes a real possibility. To put this yet again in slightly different terms, man’s potential for freedom does not lie in emphasising separation and distinction, but in the very capacity he retains to overcome both. It is this deliberately counterintuitive proposition that forms the basis of the anthroposophical way of life and why it has been considered a unique response to the modern crisis.

One of the key notions influencing this project has been that the strongest impetus for both individual and social change comes not from normative statements, nor new plans and ideas, but a simple shift in perspective. What seems like a reasonable course of action in any given situation is determined by how the reality of the situation is presented. Redescribing that reality can at once expose the irrationality of a certain way of doing things and provide the rationale for an alternative way of doing things. The principles of “social threefolding”, sketched in Chapter 7, can be considered a tool for doing just that. Although Steiner’s observations were made almost a century ago, their relevance has only increased with time as many of the trends he identified have not only continued but intensified.

716 Steiner, The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception, p.211.
717 Ibid., p.212.
Steiner’s social analysis pointed towards what has become a common practice of distinguishing between three independent yet interconnected realms of social life; a political realm, an economic realm and a rather loosely and broadly defined “civil” realm. “Liberal democracy”, said a Commissioner on a recent inquiry into civil society in the UK, “is a three-legged stool – though, at present, it is a pretty wobbly stool....To get things back in balance, the third leg needs strengthening.” Although this statement captures Steiner’s sentiments exactly, remarkably almost word for word, there are important differences in his characterisation of these spheres and their interaction from how they are represented today in mainstream sociological and academic discourses.

The most important difference, in light of the core theme of this thesis, concerns the role and realm of politics. As we have seen, from the threefolding perspective, politics deals with the relationships between “man and man” and the sole responsibility of government is to guarantee the rights of individuals in the context of those relationships. The awareness for and expression of particular ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’, something that is in constant flux as individual and social consciousness develops, is “kindled out of the interchange of human feeling in public life.” The task of a democratic parliament is to translate these feelings (also described as what “lies unconsciously within the character of [a] people”) into legal concepts and concretise them in constitutional arrangements. The guiding thought in determining what belongs in this sphere, and thus what falls within the majority decision-making process, is that there are some things about which all men and women are equally capable of forming judgements simply by virtue of being human adults.

Crucially, included in the domain of politics is something which it is at present customary to treat as part of economics; namely, the question of labour. Allowing labour to circulate in the market place is to allow for commodities to be exchanged for rights. Commodities have to do with the natural world, rights with the human, and as such these things are “mutually incommensurable”. What is bought through wages is not actually labour itself, but the result of labour, i.e., the worker’s products. While what occurs between wage-labourer and owner of capital is a kind of market, it is not necessarily a competitive

---

720 Steiner, The Science of Knowing, c.18.
one. In a factory, for instance, it is the joint enterprise of the worker and the entrepreneur that creates the value from which the worker’s wages and the entrepreneur’s profit eventually come. As Houghton Budd noted, the fact that one is considered ‘wage’ and the other ‘profit’ is not a reflection of economic realities, but rather social context and perceptions. “Economically speaking”, it would be more accurate to treat the factory as two businesses; one of workers, who transform natural resources into goods and sell them to the entrepreneur; and the business of the entrepreneur who, in a more favourable market position, finds outlets to exchange these goods. Profit thus applies in both cases.

The concepts of labour and wages are as such presented as misconceptions which do nothing but “falsify” the economic process. They are misconceptions which have serious practical consequences. For the employee who is merely a supplier of labour “it is as if his very self is being bought”. His physical body may not be for sale, but “something deeply connected to his identity clearly still is.” It is this which Steiner saw as the cause of a deep sense of injustice in modern economic life, reflected in all sorts of industrial disputes, the phenomenon of employee alienation and de-motivation, poor leadership amongst management, and so on. Today, efforts by businesses to create a “corporate identity” and other programmes designed to engage employees with “company ideals” go some way to addressing the issue. Indeed, the growing interest in profit-sharing schemes suggests a clear movement in the direction Steiner was indicating. They do not, however, deal with the real problem as he identified it. As long as the employer sees labour as a cost of business, he will seek to minimise wages while demanding maximum work. On the other hand, as long as the employee sees his labour as a saleable commodity, he will only feel himself to be a skilful participant in the market and worthy member of society if he minimises his work and demands maximum pay.

To counteract the conflict inevitably arising from this situation, Steiner argued that the concept of earning a wage – working “for a living” – needs to be taken out of the equation altogether. Instead of selling labour for wages, the employee could become a genuine partner in the productive activity and share in its returns on a contractual basis.

---

722 Ibid., p.104.
725 Ibid., p.69.
726 Ibid., p.67.
727 Steiner, World-Economy: The Formation of a Science of World-Economics, p.44.
The effect would be a fundamental alteration to relations between employer and employee, from antagonism arising from naturally divergent interests to a spirit of cooperation and trust arising from mutual interests. If the employee is paid for his labour, this payment will be his main source of motivation. If on the other hand he is jointly responsible for the enterprise, able to influence its course as well as benefit from its successes, he is far more likely to identify with the overall ideals of the organisation in which he works, whatever his specific role or task.728

As such, while most of the discussion has focussed on where the political state has overstepped its boundaries, the failure to distinguish clearly between legal relationships and economic relationships means modern democratic government is unable to carry out one of its most basic aims: preserving the dignity and rights of individuals in their mutual meeting of each other’s material needs. The arrangements for market regulation are unsuitable for rights regulation. What is not included in the political domain is anything to do with the production, consumption and trading of natural goods. It is nature which determines material needs, and meeting these is the function of economics. The principle behind this distinction is that in keeping the state autonomous from the economy, its laws will reflect rights and not economic interests; and regulating economic life independent of state interference will enable it to reflect economic realities and not become distorted by political interests. Of course, economic activity must be subject to limitations. In Steiner’s description, economic life takes place within two givens: the conditions of nature, including resources, geography, climate and so on; and the conditions imposed by the state regulating the interaction of individuals partaking in economic activity.729

What is also not perceived as part of the political domain is anything to do with the organisation of learning and teaching, the arts, science, religion and any other creative or cultural activities. Equality is not something to be strived for where capacities and talents vary. The political state cannot fulfil the spiritual needs of individualities; neither, however, can the economy, if understood purely in material terms. Adam Smith himself observed that, while specialisation in economic life makes possible an enormous increase in productivity and release of creative potential, it also had “benumbing” and “degenerating” effects on the inner life of “the great body of the people” and, therefore, culture as a whole. “[T]he understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary

728 Assenza, Beyond the Market: Economics for the 21st Century, p.68.
729 Steiner, Threefolding: A Social Alternative, pp.50-51.
employments.” Being confined to a few simple and repetitive tasks, the industrial worker has little opportunity to “exert his understanding”, “exercise his invention” and generally develop, through diversity of experience, the capacity to engage with and form judgements about affairs beyond his immediate occupation. “His dexterity at his own particular trade seems...to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social and martial virtues”.730

It is just this phenomenon which, according to Steiner, made necessary the development of a vibrant and independent spiritual life in technologically advanced societies. In his terms, while not criticising capitalism itself, the modern capitalist order has “torn man” from earlier spiritually nurturing relationships and provided nothing to take their place. In Smith’s time it may have made sense for government, by “instructing” the minds of the people, to take on responsibility for addressing some of the spiritual costs of industrial and technological progress. In today’s circumstances it quite evidently does not. The growing popularity of plans designed to foster “civil society” is perhaps a dawning recognition of this fact. The Commission inquiry quoted above stated in its final report that “civil society” encapsulates the kind of activity which “reaches parts of our lives and souls that are beyond the state and business.”731 It thus occupies that “space” between the public and private sector. What is fascinating, however, is that schools are not assumed to fall within that category of institution described as neither governmental nor for-profit. In calling for a self-governing spiritual organisation, Steiner was drawing attention to the fact that there can in reality be very little of the people’s “lives and souls” beyond the reach of the state and business as long as schooling is a branch of government.

The differences in the threefold picture of social life as Steiner presented it clearly challenge many of the assumptions shaping and legitimising contemporary social forms and practices discussed in Chapter 5. One of these is the absolute necessity, in democratic society, for the standards, methods, content and funding of education to fall within the remit of government. The rationale behind centralised control and standardisation is that there is no other practical way of guaranteeing that what goes on in classrooms serves the best interests of society as a whole. Steiner’s work, and the work of others who have built upon his insights, suggest that the greatest obstacle to the establishment of genuinely

---


autonomous educational institutions is a lack of imagination.\textsuperscript{732} Self-administration by teachers, and regular financial auditing could, for instance, be a way to ensure that schools can maintain their integrity at the same time as remaining transparent and accountable to the wider community.

Likewise, in the matter of funding, mechanisms could be set in place to facilitate the free movement of surplus capital to educational and other “spiritually productive” enterprises instead of being allowed to become congested in property, as tends to occur under existing economic arrangements. Admittedly, these and the other practical proposals touched upon in Chapter 7 rest upon a fundamental and complex re-examination of many accepted economic principles, including in this case dominant ideas about public and private ownership.\textsuperscript{733} This merely provides an opportunity, however, to restate a key argument of the thesis. If the pressing and topical questions surrounding educational funding today are not treated as part of a comprehensive and critical assessment of the economic system generally, the solutions that emerge will be short-lived and, quite possibly, counterproductive.

Which brings us to a second assumption challenged by Steiner’s depiction of the three realms: namely, the inevitability of the global competitive market and the corresponding need for all aspects of social and individual life to be reformed in accordance with its demands. The theory that the dynamics of competitive individualism constitute the most efficient means of economic regulation is undermined by the facts of economic life. Tendencies in corporate life toward merging and acquisition, the growing worldwide interdependency in financial affairs, the very fact of the division of labour itself, all suggest that \textit{reciprocity} is the distinguishing feature of economic relations today. Moreover, globalisation means that price imbalances can no longer be corrected simply through import and export; “We cannot import things from the Moon.”\textsuperscript{734} In Steiner’s view, therefore, the freedom that applies to the realm of economics is not the freedom to compete, but the freedom to associate.

\textsuperscript{732} For an example of an approach to Organisational Development and Quality Assurance linked to Steiner’s social ideas currently being used in schools, hospitals, kindergartens and care homes in a number of European countries, see “Ways to Quality” at http://www.wegezurqualitaet.info/.
\textsuperscript{733} For a detailed contemporary discussion of these principles see Udo Herrmannstorfer, \textit{Pseudo Market Economy: Labour, Land, Capital and the Globalisation of the Economy} (2009).
\textsuperscript{734} Steiner, \textit{World-Economy: The Formation of a Science of World-Economics}, p.156.
As we have seen, Steiner presented this growing distance between theory and fact in economic dealings as an example of where ideas about the world having come to prevent observation of the world. His notion of “imaginative ideation” – involving the sharing of insights and experience – as a method for perceiving economic realities in the intangible and fluid world of finance and money comes closer to the type of theorising as ‘discernment’ discussed in Chapter 1. The principles of associative economics, moreover, point to a way in which judgements and decision-making can be restored to practitioners without sacrificing overall objectivity or disadvantaging any individual or group in society. We are all consumers, and many are at some point producers, whether it be working with physical materials or spiritual faculties. Friedrich Hayek’s famous assertion that the most favourable social conditions are reached through human action but not design\(^\text{735}\) captures perfectly the persistently pessimistic attitude concerning what individuals can accomplish through mindful cooperation.

Market economics holds that producers, distributors and consumers are unable to communicate otherwise than through the bridge of the market. Associative economics, in contrast, sees the three as the different agents of the one process, thus combined in the common aim of facilitating the exchange of goods and services. It is in this way that associative economics achieves the very self-regulation that the market is supposed to bring about, but does not, and that the state then intervenes to put right.\(^\text{736}\)

What is most interesting about Steiner’s outlook is that it has stimulated a worldwide movement whose participants see themselves as striving, in one field or another, for the social and spiritual renewal of modern man. Anthroposophy today informs not only an international educational impulse but an enormous variety of other economic, therapeutic, agricultural, business and artistic ventures. A Directory published by *New View* magazine in 2010 contains approximately 700 listings of existing organisations and activities inspired by Steiner’s work in the United Kingdom and Ireland alone.\(^\text{737}\) Ample opportunity thus exists for observing and assessing in practice the ideas discussed in these final chapters. It was suggested in the Introduction that these initiatives represent attempts by individuals and groups of individuals to resist the totalising effect of the political answer.

simply by choosing to *live a different* set of answers. More important than the details of their efforts, therefore, is the fact that in acknowledging themselves as part of the crisis they have taken responsibility for themselves and their world.

As perhaps the most widely known and well established of these initiatives, Camphill and the Waldorf School movements best illustrate this. Founded in Scotland by a group under the guidance of Austrian paediatrician Karl Koenig, the network of schools, villages, care homes, and further education and training centres collectively known as Camphill are communities in which individuals with developmental difficulties learn, work and live together with their therapists and teachers. Starting out in the 1940s, Camphill aimed to offer mentally and physically disabled children a quality of life that at that time was still largely denied them by mainstream society. As well as therapy and medical treatment, this included opportunities for learning skills and crafts, taking part in agricultural, domestic, cultural and artistic activities, and generally to feel respected as both individuals and contributing members of a community. Today, the 60 or so communities in the UK and Ireland vary greatly in size, setting and focus, catering to different age-groups and to different social needs.  

Their mission, however, extends beyond being high-standard and specialist “service providers” within the voluntary-care sector, as they are officially categorised. It is no coincidence that the founders of Camphill were refugees from Nazi-occupied central Europe. “The great evil of fascism...was the way it collapsed the economic, political and spiritual spheres into its own totalitarian system”. The first Camphillers were consciously trying to create spaces where the distinctive elements of social life could evolve correlativey, complementing rather than subsuming each other. Mirroring this, all members of the communities were to be recognised and attended to as beings of body, soul and spirit. It was Koenig’s view that the starting point for any kind of healing is the formation of meaningful and reciprocal relationships: “Simply the meeting, eye to eye, of two persons creates that curative education which counters, in a healing way, the threat to our inner humanity”.  

---

740 Karl Koenig, cited in Ibid..
Waldorf Education took its name from the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Company whose one-time director, Emil Molt, established a school for the children of his employees run under the leadership of Rudolf Steiner. The first one opened in Stuttgart in 1919 and today there are over 1000 schools and 2000 “early years” centres around the world based on the initial model. In England and Wales there are presently 23 independent Waldorf Schools and one with Academy status. As with Camphill, Waldorf Education is more than an “alternative approach to mainstream schooling” with an emphasis on the arts, crafts, and languages. In its restoration of the child to the centre of education, as a whole and experiencing person rather than a theoretical construct, the Waldorf method of education can also be seen as a particular kind of resistance. Steiner envisioned the purpose of a school as being to create an environment which nourishes the potential in each of its pupils to “receive openly and without bias the all-round impressions of life”. In other words, the purpose of schooling is to encourage a capacity for diagnosis. Preoccupied with the “acquisition of new knowledge”, and busy encumbering young people with that knowledge, today’s ‘learning society’ does not equip the next generation to meet tomorrow’s challenges but rather dooms them to repeat today’s mistakes.

Of course, to say that this is the deeper significance of Camphill Communities and Waldorf Schools is not to say that they always achieve these aims, or that their participants necessarily understand their own work in specifically these terms. Like all organisations, they are not immune to the tendency for form to take precedence over substance, or to put it another way, for traditions to become confused with principles. Answers are never permanent. Principles need to be constantly re-interpreted in light of new circumstances, and translated into forms appropriate to changing social contexts. Exploring the extent to which these and other anthroposophically inspired social initiatives manage to work against the ongoing “threat to our inner humanity” is a project for the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Reeves, Marjorie, and Society for Research into Higher Education. *The Crisis in Higher Education : Competence, Delight, and the Common Good*. Milton, Keynes ;


Scott, P. *The Crisis of the University*: Croom Helm, 1984.


———. "Goethe and the Evolution of Consciousness." Lecture delivered in Dornach, Switzerland, August 19, 1921, [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19210819p01.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19210819p01.html).


———. "Knowledge and Initiation." Lecture delivered in London, April 14, 1922, [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/KnowCognit/19220414p01.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/KnowCognit/19220414p01.html).


