



Democracy and Education: About the Future of a Problem *

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Abstract. In 20th century's European theory of education there was little interest in philosophy of *democracy*. John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* was translated in nearly every European language but did not become the center of discussion. Even "radical education" was much more child-centered than open to radical questions of political democracy. This article discusses the problem in two respects, first the tension between neo-liberalism's concept of individuality and public education, and second the future problems of a theory of "democratic education" *after* Dewey. The aim is to overcome traditional European dualisms like that of "citizen" *or* "man" i.e. to pave the way for a post-Rousseauian theory of education.

In February 1915, John Dewey held three public lectures at the invitation of the John Calvin McNair Foundation at the University of Chapel Hill. These lectures were published a few months later under the title of *German Philosophy and Politics*. In the context of the war propaganda by German philosophers from Natorp to Scheler,¹ Dewey attacked the "*a priori* philosophy" based on the doctrine of "innate ideas". This doctrine had already worried Locke, and not only, according to Dewey, in his critique of platonic philosophy but also on the basis of a political suspicion. The aspect that must have worried liberal philosophy "was the readiness with which such ideas become strongholds behind which authority shelters itself from questioning" (Dewey, 1985, pp. 159–160). Thus critical philosophy would not have been really critical and its rigid system of ethical duty accompanied by the ideal of inward integrity (*op. cit.*, p. 163) had made it authoritarian and believing in the state, as Dewey tried to demonstrate principally in connection with Fichte.² (*op. cit.*, pp. 172 *et seq.*) He marked the beginning of the transformation of critical into authoritarian and nationalistic philosophy (*op. cit.*, p. 172) which prevented any democratic concept of German philosophy from ever coming into being.

Fichte's speeches, according to Dewey, justified authoritarian state education and draped it in a national humanism which turned the meaning and opportunity of modern education on its head. It was said in this way:

Education is *the* means of the advancement of humanity towards the realisation of its divine perfection. Education is the work of the State . . . But in order that the State may carry on its educational or moral mission, it must not only possess

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organisation and commensurate power but it must also control the conditions which secure the possibility offered to the individuals composing it. (*op. cit.*, p. 174)

The result, according to Dewey, is State Socialism (*op. cit.*, p. 175) which controls property and education in equal measure. The prerequisite for this is authority and the *appropriate* philosophy, which regards education as “inward” and thus removes the state from control by its citizens. Indeed, *nationalisation* was the basic process of the development of the European schools system in the 19th century, and the Prussian school organisation was the finest example of educational efficiency; thus a *socialisation* of education developed which still to this day determines the supply of education. Democracy is not relevant, or to be more precise is only marginally relevant, and it is no accident that it was formulated in the crisis years of the century: 1848, 1871, and just before the First World War.

This could account for the official writing of history. It forgets all about anarchists, pacifists, the women’s rights movement, the avant-garde of educational life-reform, experimental school republics, non-German conditions, and a great deal else as well. Little attempt is made to examine the educational concepts and the practical efforts of these groups or cultures,³ and historical education researchers are only just beginning to take an interest in these experiments which contradict the theory that democracy, in its broadest sense, has *never* been the subject of any educational theory that has been determined *completely*, at least in Germany, by Fichte’s speeches. On the other hand, the reality of the discussion is such that the “Speeches to the German nation” from 1808 onward have *always* been a reference-point in political educational science in Germany, quite regardless of the caesurae in society and the constitution. They were attractive to the discussion of education for three reasons: they made a radical distinction between “old” and “new” education, they defined a *national* educational mission, and by referring back to Pestalozzi’s theories and the concept of institutionalised education they represented a realistic opportunity for this mission. National Renaissance seemed to be feasible with the education of *one single* new generation, provided it was universally available and the state would provide the necessary compulsion.⁴

I am interested not so much by a “special German route” but by the *pattern* of this argumentation: the educational mission has taken control of the international reform of education in the 20th century, which wanted to achieve the education of “new people”, was infected with enthusiasm for the emancipation “of the child”, and hoped thereby to renew society completely. On the other hand, “democracy” was banished to the margins of discussion, and this is true even if one grants more weight to outsiders like Alexander Neill or Jean Piaget than is usual in most of the historiography on this first half of the “century of the child”. The “new education” was still mainly concerned with the inward definition of the child or else with state socialism in one form or another. In Europe, at least, reform in education has never felt itself to be under any obligation to democracy, although this does not mean that democratic societies such as that of Switzerland were able to develop

an educational system that could be regarded as republican. What, however, is meant or not meant *exactly* by “combining democracy and education”? This is a surprisingly vague and somewhat neglected theoretical problem which has taken on a new impetus in recent years, and it is no accident that this impetus has come mainly from Britain and America.

In this lecture, I will be making an attempt, based on Dewey, to go into more detail on this problem and to show why it will become an urgent one in the future. Of course, what I have to offer you today is the only a sketch or a blank, and not a programme that is finished in every detail, as this would already have had to solve too many theoretical problems or at least to have started to deal with them effectively before it could dare to venture out in public. My sketch starts with Dewey’s essay, “*Democracy and Education*”, published in 1916, one year after the criticism of the German philosophy and bearing the heavy stamp of this criticism (1). In a second step, I will deal with the theorems of *liberalism* which have resulted in the present-day tension in the relationship between democracy and education (2). Finally, I would like to express my views on the *future* of the problem, meaning the prospects for the development of general education in a democratic society (3). My dissertation will go far beyond that which Dewey defined in 1916 as the cornerstones of the problem, and I will also attempt to demonstrate that “democracy” cannot be defined merely as a *form of life* and that education cannot simply be its correlation. Democracy is the *politically* controlled process of change and a *socially* participative exchange, which means that it represents mobility of communication and form for which there is not simply school equipment available. On the other hand, the relationship between democracy and education cannot be defined just as a simple and endless learning process either; it requires emphasis in its contents, and this cannot be justified any longer in terms of ethical philosophy. The problem is that democracy has something to do with public actions and must therefore exclude authoritarian morals, although on the other hand it is dependent on virtues and requires loyalty.

1. Democracy and Education

At the end of his argumentative essay in 1915, Dewey expressed his view of the European category of “Americanism”, which everybody in those days would have understood to be an aggressive and pejorative term used to set a cultural distance between the “old world” and the “new world”. This makes a link, long before Spengler’s day, between “culture” and “civilisation”, and creates the demarcation between the *external* and thus superficial aspects of American life and the *inward* and thus genuine aspects of German education. For those responsible for European education, Dewey said, “Americanism” was concomitant with “crude empiricism” and “material utilitarianism”, and totally lacked transcendental philosophy and thus also idealism. Dewey went on to assert that anything that could be called *American* philosophy and could be distinguished from continental [European] philosophy

was concomitant with a theory of *learning* which had to be regarded at the same time as a theory of *life*. Learning is “experimenting” on the basis of “trial and error”. Following the teaching of Darwin, *life is learning*, and thus means learning to adapt intelligently. Democracy reacts to this exactly:

Our social organisation commits us to this philosophy of life. Our working principle is to try: to find out by trying, and to measure the worth of the ideas and theories tried by the success with which they meet the test of their application in practice. Concrete consequences rather than *a priori* rules supply our guiding principles. (*op. cit.*, p. 200)

Passages like this have earned Dewey the negative label of “instrumentalist”, and this lasted for a particularly long time in German education philosophy, which looked in vain here for the secure basis of values and did not want to dispense with the absolute. This is why the approaches of Plato, Hegel, and even Kant dominate the discussion, whilst “pragmatism” is tarred with the same brush as instrumentalism and rejected for educational purposes. Admittedly, Dewey regarded the learning process of science as a prerequisite, which has been mainly characterised at least since Giordano Bruno’s day⁵ by *intellectual curiosity*, to borrow Hans Blumenberg’s phrase. It must avoid respect to *every* absolute value if it is to be successful. A successful experiment can contradict all previous assumptions, but at the price of itself being contradicted by a later experiments. References to this learning theory can be found in the 18th-century English *liberal education* (Rhyne, 1997) and for instance in Joseph Priestley (1993, pp. 39 *et seq.*), where, on the basis of Locke, *civil liberty* and a liberal education were meant to be connected, provided that an experimental learning process was available; it is no accident that this was exemplified by the example of the *practical arts* (*op. cit.*, pp. 42 *et seq.*). They release *individuality* and thus avoid uniformity, because the application of rules always has something to do with *one’s own* practical experience, but without allowing *one single* method to be applied exclusively.

This criticism of the ideal of a uniform method precedes many of Dewey’s views, but it was not possible to put them into practice, because in the 19th century there was a ceaseless search for the *one true* method in education and teaching. Priestley, admittedly, realised as long ago as 1771 that:

One method of education . . . would only produce one kind of men; but the great excellence of human nature consists in the varieties of which it is capable. Instead, then, or endeavouring, by uniform and fixed systems of education, to keep mankind always the same, let us give free scope to everything which may bid fair for introducing more variety among us. (*op. cit.*, p. 45)

This evolutionistic view of education and teaching was *not* able to gain ground in the 19th century. Priestley, an eminent scientist and researcher of European rank, who was responsible for one of the first lay curricula in England,⁶ was condemned to complete and instructive oblivion, in that it made the selection filters of educational historiography perceptible. The factors that determined the discussion of

education in the 19th century and thus the basic processes for nationalising the educational system are theories, and with these theories the authors who placed *human education* at the focal point rather than the civil society or even experimental learning, the opportunities and risks of which were either not perceived or were deliberately ignored.

Accordingly, Dewey begins *Democracy and Education* with a radical criticism of the educational theories of the 19th century and of educational reflection in general. He describes it as being dominated not only by the authoritarian philosophy of people like Fichte and Hegel (Dewey, 1985a, p. 102), but also as missing its target because it misunderstood the object or subject of *education*. Education, he claimed, had something to do with development and growth, and must therefore require plasticity and learning but without being able to give either of these *one single* direction that would *definitively* fix the limits of education (*op. cit.*, p. 49). Ultimately, the child *learns to learn* (*op. cit.*, p. 50), to use Dewey's famous phrase which turns up here for the first time.⁷

"Learning to learn" calls for controlled and intelligent processes in adapting to changing situations and not for a movement that has a fixed goal and remains unaffected by learning (*op. cit.*, p. 55).

However this is exactly the distinguishing feature of educational theories which aim:

- to equip children in the way described in standard schoolmaster literature with a predefined package (*preparation*)
- like Froebel or Rousseau, see education as the organic unfolding of innate potential
- like Locke, regard education as writing on the blank sheet of paper of the mind (*training*) or,
- like Herbart, use psychology for "educational teaching" (*forming*).

Dewey rejected all these aims, and for convincing reasons. Modern education dispenses with the "package" because on the one hand the uses to which it might be put cannot be foreseen and on the other hand the development of universal schooling abolished the closed and narrow dimensions of elementary education. In this respect, education is not "preparation", but then it is not "organic unfolding" either, because this Romantic-Age idea cannot understand continuous growth but only the unfolding of latent forces until a predefined goal is reached (*op. cit.*, p. 61), and this means that it misses exactly the point that was central for Dewey: *learning*, a process that must always take account of consequences so that the child and later adult can correct itself. The romantic concept of "development" fulfils Nature's plan, which accordingly has to be kept free of learning. At the same time, Dewey rejects the idea of the *blank sheet of paper* which had formed the basis for the force of educational theory in the 18th century. Children are never passive, and they learn in their own way without any *method* being able to have developed on the basis, as Herbart believed, of the "physics of the spirit" to circumvent this independent-

mindedness or being able to use the activity purely for the *purposes of education*, or as it was later and even more narrowly defined the “educational teaching” of the school. John Stuart Mill, an authority whom Dewey respected, had pointed out in his logical teachings in 1843 that education has to be designed in terms of its *feedback*, meaning of that which the pupils *give back*. It is only in the illusions of teachers and educators that children are passive or resemble a blackboard upon which absolutely anything can be written.

In his concept of learning, Dewey was basically following William James, who in his *Principles of Psychology* had overturned three theories that had been principally responsible for the definition of “education”: the theory of the *automaton* (because learning is not a mechanical process), the *mind-stuff* theory (because the mind is not merely filled with material), and the theory of the *psyche* (because there is no “internal space” which can store the values or desires of education (James, 1983, pp. 148–182). Those teaching theories of the 19th century, as Dewey found it, were basically psychological theory which could be interpreted, as one chose, as being *organic* (as in Froebel), *mechanical* (as in Pestalozzi), or *formative* (as in the followers of Herbart). In addition to Puritanical sources, Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Herbart were the main sources of American educational theory at the end of the 19th century, and they were abandoned completely. What alternative did Dewey have? Although the 19th-century approaches were all very different from one another, they had one failing in common: they did not include any concept of democracy. The *political* side of “human education” was either the human community that the Romantic Age had envisaged, or the hierarchical society, the ideal state, and to a certain extent the Republic of Virtues, and not any modern form of democracy which defines the relationships between the *public*, *participation*, and *education*. This was exactly what Dewey was attempting to do, with a number of comprehensive definitions that were intended to cover the concept of democracy independently of any kind of authoritarian philosophy or teaching theory.

Democracy fundamentally rejects any principle of external authority, and relies on the free, deliberate decisions for which public education is a prerequisite. In Dewey’s view, democracy is more than a *form of government* – it is a *form of life*, “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1985a, p. 93), which has to fulfil *two* criteria⁸ in order to be of any value, namely the participation of citizens in the common good and the free exchange of views between the groups within a society. The famous definition of *democracy* is thus worded:

A society which makes provision for participation for the good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through the interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. (*op. cit.*, p. 105)

This definition is linked with *education*, but without the connotations of the corresponding German word *Bildung*. For Dewey, in fact, the term also relates to personal interests in social relationships and “habits of mind” attuned to change

but not provoking social unrest.⁹ However, the general run of criticism levelled at Dewey by everyone from Maynard Hutchins (1936) to Jacques Maritain (1943) is that education is more than, and is different from, provocative learning and coping with change in conditions of democratic exchanges of opinion.¹⁰

This brings me to my second point, which relates to the limits of Dewey's concept, and this, curiously enough, can be linked with the problems of liberalism.

2. Problems of Liberalism

The idea of defining democracy as a *form of life*, and thus regarding the *form of government* as secondary or even superfluous, is present at a number of points in 19th-century British and American political discussion and in writers from Walt Whitman to Edward Carpenter. One particular influence on Dewey was his reading of Emerson (Garrison, 1998), who described the ideal of *domestic life* in his essay *Society and Solitude* (Works, 1912, pp. 101–129). The home and its immediate surroundings are the educational forces (*op. cit.*, p. 104), and “public events” can be brought into connection with it (*op. cit.*, p. 105) without really determining the child's personal life history (*op. cit.*). Institutions such as the political Senate or the Courts of Justice and Chambers of Commerce lie outside that which Emerson calls the “way of life” (*op. cit.*). They force individuals to imagine and evaluate things which lie outside their own sphere of experience. Accordingly, the rule has to be: “The *great* facts are the *near* ones” (*op. cit.*, p. 106, emphasis added by the present author). The main factors in “education” are thus the home and the neighbourhood, the social experience of the *community*, and the shared environment (*op. cit.*, pp. 106–107). School is one of the focal points of the community (*op. cit.*, p. 116), but it is not “cosmopolitan” in orientation; it represents the *locality* (*op. cit.*, pp. 120–121).¹¹

The concentration of the educational theory on the *direct* community and the differentiation between *near* and *far*, and between *inward* and *outward*, is one of the fundamentals of the history of educational theory (Oelkers, 1993). This fundamental notion seems to be closely connected with the object of the *child*, because children can only come to terms with that which is near to them and affects them directly. It is therefore no accident that the locality concepts of ideal education relate to *gardens*, *villages*, *communities*, and *neighbourhoods*, meaning dimensions which are small enough to understand and which Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel always regarded as paradise in miniature: enclosed, guaranteed, and happy. In this respect, Emerson and Dewey take over existing expectations and consider that, ultimately, it is the immediate environment that educates, and it can do so all the better if it is directly accessible. Dewey's formal criteria for democracy – “participation” and “flexible adaptation” – do not necessarily relate to actions in the immediate environment, but the basic conception of *school education* in which schools represent the “embryonic society”,¹² the miniature society synecdochically representing adult society, is exactly obligated to the theoretical fundamentals of

history. The *University Elementary School* managed by John and Alice Dewey in Chicago was very much in line with the *Community* ideal, even if in many ways it was more conventional than legend would have us believe (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936).

Dewey declared his views on liberalism in 1935, in his *Page-Barbour* lectures. In the historical definition, the English “liberalism” of the 17th and 18th centuries is equated with *individualism* and set up in contrast to state and government. In the 19th century, Dewey stated, this resulted in the antagonism between individual and society (Dewey, 1963, p. 5), which led in turn to the socially irresponsible “*laissez-faire* liberalism” of the economy (*op. cit.*, p. 11). Dewey interpreted “liberalism” in the context of American natural philosophy, which tries to reconcile freedom with community without needing a government, divided powers, or, as in Locke and Adam Smith, any political public. It is therefore no accident that individualism or economic egoism is replaced by a *new, organised* form of liberalism which anywhere else would have been given the name of social democracy (*op. cit.*, pp. 54 *et seq.*). Its prime task is *education*, meaning altering the old mentality and radically changing the institutions that attack the *status quo* of society (*op. cit.*, pp. 61 *et seq.* and p. 65). All this was stated in the context of the New Deal, which was the first major state intervention in American history and was very closely associated with educational programmes. When Dewey says that *liberalism* is irrelevant without *radicalism* (*op. cit.*, p. 62), then he is referring to expectations which were specifically connected with these programmes.¹³

The forecast was not wrong, even though state educational policies as continental Europeans understand them did not start to take hold until after the Second World War and in response to dramatic demographic changes (Zilversmit, 1993; Gibboney, 1994). It was exactly this that brought *liberal* criticism, initially so weak, leaping into action because it feared that the planned economy would be transferred into the education system. What is now confusingly called “neo-liberalism” has its origins in the criticism of the planned economy and its attendant centralisation of the educational system. The critical group was organised in 1947 by Friedrich Hayek as the *Mont Pelerin Society*,¹⁴ and included not only the young Milton Friedmann, Karl Popper, Bertrand de Jouvenal, and G.J. Stigler,¹⁵ but also Michael Polanyi. Polanyi, who submitted a criticism of “USSR economics” in 1936, and had held the chair in physical chemistry at the University of Manchester since 1933, provided one crucial key word: *self-government*. The example came once again from science. Learning science, it was believed in 1942 (Polanyi, 1998, pp. 59–82).¹⁶ cannot be prescribed by any authority, nor can any authority take over responsibility for it. It has to be conceived as “a loose system” (*op. cit.*, p. 63), one that must constantly be redefining its task and always doing this for itself (*op. cit.*). What applies to the sciences must ultimately also apply to any kind of learning; it is not just an “experiment”, but requires a social organisation, and must never allow itself to become centrally controlled in any way. This applies all the more to the economic organisation: small groups with a higher level of autonomy, loosely

connected to one another, work more successfully than a large, centrally controlled corporations (*op. cit.*, p. 141).

The basic assumption therefore has to be the vague “superiority of a system of spontaneous order” (*op. cit.*, p. 145), the superiority of the learning unit which organises its order for itself. This is the only kind of organisation that can handle the *risks of inconsistency*,¹⁷ meaning that it can react quickly and appropriately to new situations which in a centrally *managed* system of learning can only be perceived as an analogy with the previous situation. It is no accident that Leo Trotsky, from his place of exile in 1931, called for a “universal spirit”, following the example of Laplace, to rescue the Soviet economy, which was to be judged not by its disastrous results but intensified in its centralism on condition that the right spirit spread out in all directions (*op. cit.*, p. 154). Since Friedrich Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* (1944) and Ludwig von Mises *Planned Chaos* (1947), criticism of central planning and the replacement of the market by the plan has been submitted convincingly but without initially having any effect on the education system. Economic criticism of the school seemed to be superfluous in light of the philanthropic justification of education, while the *de facto* expansion of education did not need to bother itself with Polanyi’s forecast of “Self-Government”. It would actually have been an alternative to *planned* education in the way that Dewey and other *radicals* had imagined it in the 1930s; first, however, the philanthropic justification and a vague but attractive benefit promise ensured *expansion*, or at least that which Polanyi in 1948 had called *The Span of Central Direction*.¹⁸

It is a great temptation, as Friedrich Hayek wrote in 1960, to consider that a *deliberately achieved* result is always better than one that has *come about accidentally* (Hayek, 1971, p. 467). In the organisation of education this resulted in the attempt to eliminate chance, meaning an attempt to bring equality of opportunity up to the level at which everyone could make the best possible use of their right to an education and would have access to the very highest qualifications. If selection were still to be used, this would require a test machinery which would involve “an official categorisation of human beings into a rank order, with the officially certified genius at the top level and the officially certified blockhead at the bottom” (*op. cit.*, p. 473). *Equality*, in this sense, makes free access impossible, but where free access is possible *inequality* has to be assumed. The principle of “equality of opportunity” thus either leads to a bureaucratic limitation of freedom or refuses to accept the assumed effect, because chance *cannot* actually be eliminated (*op. cit.*, p. 471) – otherwise, the planned economy would have had to have been successful.

In 1960, the media campaign entitled “Sputnik Shock” was just three years old. The *inferiority* of the Western, and particularly the American, educational system had never been proved empirically, although it had been communicated successfully in rhetoric, and this led to efforts towards a planned change in the educational area which led in turn to expansion and loss of control. It was once again economic criticism (Hanusek, 1981, and various others), that pointed out the limits of saturation which must have existed if only because the educational

system has no notion of marginal benefits and is thus only capable of producing *more of the same*. It is noteworthy that concepts of democratic theory were *only now* being brought into play that went above and beyond the ideas that Dewey had been expounding in 1916 – without, incidentally, having any great practical influence. It is also noteworthy that Polanyi’s ideas of self-government were transferred into the educational area but without so far connecting of the one with the other. “Self-government” is regarded as a *liberal* idea, and “democratic education” as a *community* idea, without simply applying the doctrines of communitarianism. Most of the concepts based on Dewey’s ideas provide for variants of the *civil society*, meaning that they turn the theoretical decision back to Priestley and the spectrum of discussion following Hobbes (Tuck, 1993). Alasdair MacIntyre (1992) has pointed out in this connection that “liberal education” can no longer be defined in terms of the educational and social pattern of the Scottish Enlightenment because the locally defined educational environment has disappeared. But what then? How is the relationship between “democracy” and “education” to be conceived when the civil society is not being created simply by an increase in the proportion of young people qualifying for university entrance, the average member of the public does not need education, and democracy is open to *every kind* of education because “lack of education” does not violate any civil rights?

My last point will not answer these difficult questions but it will go into the theoretical design of “democracy and education” in the hope that the future problems will thus become visible. The existing design, meaning basically Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, is attuned neither to the media society nor to forms of particular emancipation, neither to various cultures nor to the large and shallow areas of discussion, neither to self-confident individuality nor to the status of customers who are learning to obtain the education that they consider they need.

3. Topics of the Future

The liberal *criticism* of the educational system is better than the liberal *alternative*. Friedrich Hayek, in 1960, looking at general schools, insisted that the main point was to improve the *individual’s* ability to make use of opportunities, conscious “that an improvement would benefit everybody but mainly those who are most capable of making use of it, and this will often initially increase inequality” (Hayek, 1970, p. 474; the reference is to Young, 1958). There is no *systemic* alternative apart from Milton Friedmann’s 1955 idea of *education vouchers*, and criticism has tended to be polemic, meaning that it has concentrated more on accusations than on a close consideration of the education system. The central theme was the contradiction between freedom and the state, and the contradiction between democracy and education took second place. However, this relationship must be seen against the background of a systemic history which cannot be simply dismissed and was not simply a great failure. Since the early 19th century, public education has been entrusted to a specialised institution which cannot be changed overnight, which

learns from its own assumptions, and which is highly inventive in its ability to circumvent ignorant attempts at reform. Education is still essentially a personal resource, one that is dependent on *pleasing* or *displeasing*, and is therefore impervious to pure output control. The power of the teachers, to put it unkindly, arises from the dependency into which *they* bring education expectations without having Trotsky's "great spirit" available to them. As Dewey perceived (1985a, pp. 113 *et seq.*), it is not possible to deduce the course of the process from its goals.

Uncertainty remains, and it is presumably the very openness of the situation that stimulates demand, not only because opportunities can be seen but also because they can be related in real terms to the user. On the other hand, democratic education systems *increase* the uncertainty in a number of respects:

- they mobilise educational expectations
- by releasing aspirations they increase the risks
- by making education successful they increase dependency
- by increasing demands they have to accept vague and disconcerting uses and
- they are not capable of resolving their manifest paradoxes.

Hayek's criticism of the concept of "equality of opportunity" only serves to formulate one dilemma which ideology disguises without ending its existence. The opening of higher education to many or indeed most social levels is accompanied by increased competition, which has to be understood in philanthropic terms. However, selection does not disappear but is only shifted to a different position, whilst, as studies into the willingness of parents to invest have shown (Helberger and Palamidis, 1992), the opportunities are exploited, apparently taking competition into account, which can only be discounted in the idyllic world of educational experts. There is therefore no alternative to opening up, and it is no accident that Hayek does not mention one.

The real question is a different one, and it takes us back to Dewey: does the democratic society demand *democratic* educational institutions constructed to the same pattern as political democracy? Or is "general education" in a democracy meant to mean *schooling* in preparation for life of a form that demands neither participation nor public control? Maynard Hutchins, who set off a great debate in 1936,¹⁹ looked at the curriculum of the University of Chicago and argued in favour of the second version, in the same way as Maritain (1943, p. 115), who saw a link between education and "natural faith of reason in truth". This assumes that there will be a humanistic curriculum which is not negotiable. The *inner structure* of the curriculum,²⁰ at least in higher education, is not available for amendment (*op. cit.*, pp. 55 *et seq.*). Anyone who reveals it dissolves the relationship between the subjects, must accept every possible demand, and thus cannot give any further guarantee for the standard. Education would have no cohesion, and would dissolve into separate, individual interests, everyone would pick out the education he or she needed but would not be *educated* – in the sense of a curriculum – and would never have been subjected to the standards that a real education demands.

The *deliberative* idea of democratic education along the lines suggested by Amy Gutmann (1987/1999) has tended if anything to weaken this emphasis on the practicality and structure of education. On the other hand, the communitaristic criticism of a *procedural* republic (Sandel, 1996), which is more or less equivalent to that which Helmut Schelsky indicated against the discussion theory as *permanent reflection*, is not even approximately close to a proper education. It appears to be superfluous, for apparently good reasons, as the American curriculum discussion in the 1990s showed (Carnochan, 1993; Graff, 1992; and various others): the school-education canon, if it represents anything, only represents the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the form of the middle and upper classes. The education *they* are demanding is on offer, whilst other cultures, minorities, groupings remote from education, and also the opposition to education are given *no* consideration. They are not excluded structurally, but their interests are also not served. This can be said again in general terms: in the educational system there is no *customer* principle; children are not given the education they want, but have to take what is offered by schools in public, meaning usually state, control. Anyone, therefore, who goes through the nine or ten years of compulsory general education and expects to be taught the basics of *esoterics* is bound to be disappointed, just as anyone will be – a far less obvious point – who is expecting any elementary knowledge of *medicine*, *Chinese literature*, *medieval music* or modern *Islamic* writings. They will be more likely to learn at school about the art and craft of producing web-sites than to come into serious contact with social geography; on the other hand, however, in physical training lessons they are sure to be confronted with medicine-balls and climbing-ropes.

This curriculum has never been democratically decided in the sense of having been discussed and put to the vote. In multi-cultural, open, rapidly disintegrating societies, however, these historical educational convictions are disappearing, meaning the opinions held constantly between the generations about what belongs in a curriculum and what does not. The latest canon discussions will not prevent this erosion, which is closely related to *participation* and a strengthening of *public control*. Public conviction is the only effective form that needs transparency and continuity at the same time. Radical system changes, as developments in Great Britain since 1987 have shown,²¹ are risky, or at least riskier than a democratic opening-up of schools to make the education they offer transparent and accessible to public discussion. Hybrids have arisen in Great Britain, half-private and half-state, with more autonomy but at the same time more bureaucracy. Schools the way I imagine them will no longer be institutions protected by the state but public learning-places, and they will have to prove that they really do fulfil their basic legitimacy: the fairest possible distribution of education as a *public good* (Winch, 1996). Perhaps it is no accident that in Switzerland this discussion is being conducted particularly in Zurich, where there is an outstandingly liberal and public school structure which has existed since the 1830s.

The justification of *public* and, with an increasing minimum, *equally* distributed education can be based on contractual theory (Gauthier, 1990), if and to the extent that a contract can be assumed to exist *between the generations*. The contract exists *de facto* since the early 19th century, and provides for each subsequent generation to *take over* the level of education achieved so far and *not to fall below it*; if possible, its own learning processes should *raise it further*. The contract allows every possible differentiation upwards but what it *immediately* ensures is the rising minimum, meaning the successful access to a historically constantly rising level of school knowledge for the largest number of schoolchildren and with rising standards. How this generations-contract "education" operates can be seen absolutely authentically in that the *attained* level, for instance of literacy, determines not only public expectations but also the criticism of a school. In this sense it is absolutely right to talk about feedback-orientation; if the schools do not learn from their *customers* they will not be able to meet the requirements of the generation-contract. Their output, in fact, is not identical with the marks they give their pupils. This explains why public schools will increasingly have to put up with democratic questions about their efficiency.

This appears to be taking us away from the great theories and to immerse the subject in the depths of school politics. However, grand theory was never particularly successful either, between the extremes of Fichte and Dewey, in providing a basis for the *pragmatic* aspect of the problem. We can hardly ever arrive at very good decisions on the structural dilemmas of the system, but we are very well accustomed to avoid them. One difficult American example is whether, and if so how, to reject the demands of *creationists*, who want to influence the teaching of biology, when creationists are citizens, and compulsory schooling applies to all other citizens, but the educational interests of all citizens are not being taken into account in the school curriculum. References to the binding rationality of the Enlightenment is seen by citizens' interest-groups as paternalistic. Esoterics, magic, and probably also Bible lessons can also present themselves as demanding disciplines, whilst the school would dissolve into popularity if it were to meet all the demands that are in any way connected with "education". The reduction of the grand theory is also connected with the fact, before and after Humboldt, "education" was regarded as the amalgamation of the *human* and the *world* which can only generate randomness if it is not bound by canon, because *every* demand has to be accommodated without creating a paradox.

The school as a specialised institution thus fulfils its democratic task in securing an educational programme for future citizens. This programme must be subject to public control, but there is no automatic argument in favour of subjecting schools to excessive supervisory stress unless it makes sense. They really do operate best in the form of *self-government*, although this does admittedly assume that they can avoid the trap of *self-aggrandisement*. Democratic education must implement the principles of democracy but at the same time meet the requirements of education. A reduction of education basically to social experience or experimental learning is

not tenable. The decisive aspect of education is subject-related learning, meaning the point at which the knowledge and ability of third parties is translated into one's own experience, so that the standards become individualised. This also serves *democracy*, because, according to Condorcet, this requires critical citizens who can show solidarity not with the ruling classes but with democracy, meaning the disputable exchange of arguments in the sphere of the political public which have to be binding on any government if it is to be legitimate. The virtue required here is called *moral courage*, and its characteristic is that it requires *education*.

Back to theory for a summing-up: schools are *not* the “embryonic society”; their *small* space does not correspond to the *large* one; otherwise “education” would have to be conceived as spatial transport, although this would require a large number of well intended concepts. With Dewey, the theory is vague at a central point, and unexpectedly unclear. The problem is determining the relationship, meaning the question as to *how* education is to relate to democracy if there is no longer an automatic and simple relationship such as Emerson conceived (and presumably never has been). Dewey assumes *one and only one* relationship, that of the school to society in the sense of the metaphor of the small and the large. The theoretical challenge of the future consists of assuming multi-linear relationships between education and democracy, linked together in different lengths, paradoxical and just as much open as concealed, all of which cannot be easily defined. No such theory is available, and I cannot provide one either, but it is high time that one should be developed. This is the only way in which the educational theory of the “well intended concepts” can be put into perspective.

Notes

¹ Max Scheler, “The genius of the war and the German war” appeared (in German) in 1915, the same year in which Paul Natorp’s “The day of the Germans” appeared (also in German) as a collection of 1914 texts. Dewey’s source is Friedrich von Bernhardt (1914).

² “Kant was enough of a child of the eighteenth century to be cosmopolitan, not nationalistic, in his feeling. Since humanity as a whole, in its universality, alone truly corresponds to the universality of reason, he upheld the ideal of an ultimate republican federation of states” (Dewey, 1985, p. 171).

³ For the latest state of research, see: Kerbs and Reulecke (1998), and also Kamp (1995).

⁴ The aim of *civil responsibility* (Fichte, WW VII, pp. 416 *et seq.*) requires state totalitarianism and thus implies the *removal of responsibility* from the parents (*op. cit.*, pp. 434 *et seq.*). This can be compared with “compulsory war service” (*op. cit.*, p. 436). “Only a *total* change-over, only the beginning of a *totally new* spirit, can help us” (*op. cit.*, p. 476, emphasis added by the present author).

⁵ *De gli eroici furori* (1585).

⁶ *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1764) (Priestley, 1793, Vol. I, pp. 2-38).

⁷ “The infant has the advantage of the *multitude* of instinctive tentative reactions and of the experiences that accompany them, even though he is at temporary disadvantage because they cross one another. In learning an action, instead of having it given ready-made, one of necessity learns to vary its factors, to make varied combinations of them, according to change of circumstances. A possibility of continuing progress is opened up by the fact that in learning one act, methods are developed good

for use in other situations. Still more important is the fact that the human being acquires a habit of learning. He learns to learn" (Dewey, 1985a, p. 50).

⁸ The criteria are defined differently: the *democratic ideal* envisages the building up of mutual interests and the free exchange of views in a process of constant adjustment to new situations (Dewey, 1985a, p. 92). *Democratic education* as "a social process" relates to the exchange of views and participation in decisions under conditions of equality (*op. cit.*, p. 105).

⁹ "Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure and social changes without introducing disorder" (Dewey, 1985a, p. 105).

¹⁰ The contrary view comes from Ulich (1940).

¹¹ "We never come to be citizens of the world, but are still villagers, who think that everything in their petty town is a little superior to the same thing anywhere else" (Emerson, Works, 1912, pp. 120–121).

¹² *School and Society* (1899).

¹³ The justification relates to the effect of public education: "Without a back-ground of informed political intelligence, direct action on behalf of professed liberal ends may end in the development of political irresponsibility" (Dewey, 1963, p. 16).

¹⁴ Friedrich Hayek, who had taken up a professorship in Vienna in 1929, held four lectures at the invitation of Lord Robbins in the winter of 1931 at the London School of Economics, and was promoted to the position of Faculty Professor not long after that. Louis Rougier, influenced by Walter Lippman's book *An Inquiry into the Principles of a Good Society*, organised a meeting in Paris in 1938 of liberal philosophers and economists which was attended, among others, by Ludwig von Mises, Hayek himself, and Michael Polanyi. Hayek's Society was founded in 1947 to continue this group's work.

¹⁵ Stigler, as well as Friedman, influenced the education economy or in other words the transfer of market theory to the educational sector.

¹⁶ *Self-Government of Science*, address to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (February 1942).

¹⁷ *Perils of Inconsistency* (Polanyi, 1998, pp. 115-113).

¹⁸ *The Span of Central Direction*, The Manchester School (1948).

¹⁹ Van Doren (1943) and various others.

²⁰ Designed to follow the example of the *artes liberales*, meaning the *trivium* consisting of Eloquence, Literature, and Poetry, plus Music and the Plastic Arts, and the *quadrivium* consisting of Mathematics, Physics and Natural Science, and Philosophy, plus Ethics and Social Philosophy. *Prior to all this* the student first has to learn Grammar, Logic, Languages, History, and Geography (Maritain, 1943, pp. 56–57).

²¹ The 1987 *Education Act* for the first time allowed market-like conditions. As a result, a *national curriculum* was introduced for the first time in Great Britain which increased bureaucratic costs and intensified the control exerted by the Schools Inspectorate. The earlier form of local autonomy was abolished, for political reasons, and replaced by a *formal* degree of autonomy (as with the budgets) which further increased costs.

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