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## **Resisting the enormous condescension of posterity: Richard Henry Tawney, Raymond Williams and the long struggle for a democratic education**

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### **An abstract**

Peter Jarvis emphasised relationships in education: people in the West assumed we were born as individuals but we are relationally embedded from the outset and learn to become social beings. This paper is concerned with how we learn democratic sensibilities with a prime focus on ‘liberal’ workers’ education in the United Kingdom and the building of social democracy. It helps us to think about present crises of representative democracy and troubled relations between different ethnic groups. Strengthening our humanity by cultivating I/thou experience, across difference, was the contribution of forms of workers’ education in the United Kingdom. This involved an unusual alliance, in European terms, between progressives in universities and workers’ organisations. Tawney, a Christian Socialist, and Williams, a humanistic Marxist, have more in common when rescued from the condescension of certain historical analysis, and when their contribution is interrogated through life writing, auto/biographical research and the psychosocial concept of recognition.

Keywords: learning democracy, relationships, recognition, psychosocial

### **Introduction**

Peter Jarvis, in one of his most influential books (Jarvis, 1983/2010), stressed the importance of relationships in human experience. He wrote that people in the West assumed we were born as individuals and then learn to become social beings. He insisted instead that we are always embedded in relationship as part of families, groups, cultures and societies. The socio-cultural lies at the heart of who we are and may become; they lie too at the core of our psychological being, and of our self formation in intimate relationships. Quoting Martin Buber, Peter insisted that we begin in relationship not as isolated, solipsistic beings. And that the key to human flourishing lies in having sufficient I-thou experience, of mutual recognition, rather than dehumanising I- it objectification. Of being recognised in our humanity and potential by others, and thus becoming better able to recognise that other in turn (Jarvis, 1983/2010: 138). ‘When I and the other are face to face, the distance between the Stranger and me potentially recedes’. This paper focuses on one aspect of being in relationship, and of learning and asserting our place in the world, through I-thou interactions in educational settings. It has to do with how we learn, or not, democracy or democratic modes of being; of how democratic subjectivities are cultivated, and how we can become more cosmopolitan, less defended psychological subjects. Human flourishing and social solidarities depend on strengthening these processes of mutuality. I examine the historic contribution of forms of workers’ education in building what was called an ‘experiment in democratic education’ (Tawney, 1964). Here was an unusual alliance, in European terms, between progressive elements in universities and workers’ organisations and I consider its relevance to present times.

The title of the paper draws on Edward Thompson’s great rallying cry (1963/1980) ‘to rescue the poor stockinger, the utopian artisan, and even the deluded followers of Joanna Southcott,

from the enormous condescension of posterity. <sup>1</sup>If their crafts and beliefs had died, or their hostility to industrialism was backward looking', he argued, 'and their communitarian ideals were fantastic' (Thomson, 1980: 12), they nonetheless lived through times of immense social and economic and social disturbance, and might have things to teach us today. Under the enormous condescension of particular Marxist historians and sociologists, in the 1970s and beyond, Tawney (not so much Williams) was dismissed as pious, anachronistic and hopelessly idealistic, (in a philosophical sense); and lacking a strong theoretical base. If he had been a saintly figure among some adult educators, the canonisation, it was suggested, obscured how much his kind of adult education inhibited rather than facilitated fundamental changes in capitalist society.

Some critics of Tawneyite workers' education argued that potentially radical proletarian and autodidactic energies were channelled into the calmer waters of university scholarship and a kind of national consensus. This was to the detriment of the struggle for a truly economic, socialist democracy. Stuart Macintyre (1980) wrote that the Workers Educational Association (WEA), of which Tawney was a pre-eminent leader, 'was the chief instrument of state policy' (p89). Its educational objective 'was to break down the isolation of working class students and to integrate them into a national culture; in political terms the proletarian intellectual was encouraged to widen his narrow class horizons for a broader progressive policy; in cultural terms the old dogmatic, autodidact knowledge was discredited in the light of university studies' (Macintyre, 1980: 89-90). It should be acknowledged that Macintyre values aspects of the WEA tradition and Tawney's work, and insists that he and others like him were honest and sincere in their commitment to the labour movement. But the criticism remains. If Tawney was described as the patron saint of British adult education, he was disparaged as an empty relic of past pieties in the eyes of critical sociologists and particular historians (Dennis and Halsey, 1988). If Williams fared better, in the judgement of radical critics, he too was considered insufficiently political and materialist (McIlroy, 1993).

I suggest that Tawney, the Christian Socialist, and Williams, the humanistic Marxist, had more in common than what divided them, seen through the lens of the neo-liberal heteronomy of 2016, and through diverse life writing and auto/biographical research. The educational spirit they shared - of determined scholarship forged in relationships of fraternity, of struggles for a better and more democratised social order, of the fundamental importance of students making up their own minds rather than being led to predetermined truths; and of profound opposition to fundamentalism of whatever kind, including on the left – needs rescuing from condescension. Their spirit can speak to our present struggles to reinvigorate democratic forms of education and also the public sphere. The spirit of Tawney and Williams also connects us to the social and cultural ideals of Peter Jarvis: of how each of us is a social and relational being, (or what I prefer to call psychosocial); embedded in relationships, for better or worse, that either stifle or liberate. That either create a liberal spirit of openness to experience and questioning, and the capacity to live in uncertainty or not knowing; or defensiveness and insistence that we are bearers of the truth and nothing but that truth. Jarvis himself taught university liberal adult education classes and also understood the cultures of older industrial towns in England, and the 'liberal', fraternal, self-help but contested traditions which shaped workers' education. He was a Methodist minister too, in Sheffield, an old industrial city in the north of England, and was aware of the city's struggles and

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<sup>1</sup> Stockingers operated stocking hand looms which were expensive machines. They worked in their own homes or in small workshops, but after 1800 they came more under the control of speculators leading to wage cutting and greater exploitation. Joanna Southcott was a prophetess whose appeal was to supernatural agency. She published a pamphlet in 1801 during the Revolutionary Wars. She was a peasant's daughter and embodied the idea that revelation might fall equally on her as upon a King. See Thompson (1963/80: 579-580; 420-422).

strengths and how working class people created collective resources of hope in churches, trade unions, mutual societies, politics and adult education. But these have weakened in processes of deindustrialisation and the rise of individualistic, materialistic cultures. The issue is less to do with disputes between various forms of Marxism and Christian Socialism, but more about the quality of people's relationship to knowledge and to the other and otherness; whether this was enlivened by a spirit of curiosity, openness and even humility in contrast to defensiveness, dogmatism and omniscient fantasy.

My central argument is a product of historical reappraisal alongside in-depth, auto/biographical narrative research into racism and fundamentalism in a post-industrial city similar in many ways to Sheffield: Stoke-on-Trent, in the English Midlands, where I was born and grew up (West, 2016). The research has included in-depth narrative interviews with particular autodidacts. I revisited the history of workers' education, including my own work, in the light of the City's post-industrial distress, encompassing racism on the public housing estate where I lived. Tawney had strong connections with Stoke, as the tutor of the first ever university/workers' tutorial class held in the city in 1908. Present troubles led me to re-interrogate my earlier historical, and, as I now see it, overly critical judgement of Tawney (West, 1972; West, 2016 a&b). The process was stimulated by Jonathan Rose's reassessment of workers' education (Rose, 2010) and its place in the development of British social democracy, alongside the insights of the historian Lawrence Goldman (1995; 2014). Rose drew on diverse personal testimonies and forms of life writing in his re-evaluation of the WEA while Goldman interrogated the historical interpretation of historians like Roger Fieldhouse and Stuart Macintyre. I was once modishly dismissive of Tawney and the tutorial classes. But I was a child of the 1960s where space opened up for critical thinking but also for hubris and dismissiveness towards what previous generations had achieved. This is a central theme of a new book (West, 2016a).

### **Learning democracy**

Democracy is in crisis in both its representative and more informal, participative guises. Problems are well documented and there is abundant evidence of the concern in many quarters about the health of representative democracy, especially in 'post-industrial' contexts like Stoke (Biesta, 2011; Alexander, 2014). There are indicators of increased alienation and cynicism among people towards conventional politics, which can be especially strong in marginalized, multicultural communities (Auestad, 2012; 2014; Friedman, 2013). If widespread citizen distrust or disenchantment with formal democratic institutions, local and national, is well chronicled, so too are patterns of minimal engagement in voting, especially in local elections, in the districts where poor people live (Goodwin, 2011).

There is associated anxiety about young people and their seeming disinterest and alienation from representative politics (Biesta et al., 2014; Biesta et al., 2009). Some of the concern finds expression under labels like 'community cohesion', and there is fear that young Muslim people, especially, in certain communities, can be deeply alienated from the values of the host society. From a different perspective, there is hostility among some white working class people towards immigrants and people not like themselves, and the rise of racist politics (Auestad, 2014). The strengthening of racism and xenophobia and the emergence of violent organizations like the English Defence League is well chronicled (McGhee, 2005; Harris and Young, 2009; Goodwin, 2011; Ford and Goodwin, 2014).

Moreover, while the most powerful in society get a great deal of support for their involvement in politics, through access to education and the wider resources of the corporate world, those with least power get little or none (Alexander, 2014). There is growing

economic and social inequality too and the decline of participation in a range of community and voluntary activity, especially in distressed areas struggling with persistent intergenerational unemployment, poverty, social fragmentation and an epidemic of mental illness (Li et al., 2003; Latham, 2011; Layard and Clarke, 2014). The demise of manufacturing and extractive industries in places like Stoke has weakened the self-help traditions of working class life: trade unions, co-operative and mutual societies, non-conformist churches, and bodies like the WEA. More generally, in what the sociologist David Marquand (2004) calls the 'revenge of the private', public space in civil society has diminished, frustrating experiments in deliberative forms of democracy. Public engagement can also be considered too demanding, best avoided, especially in confusing multicultural contexts where there is no common agreement over the nature of problems or cultural assumptions. This is reinforced by neo-liberal ideological imperatives that the private self is or should be omni-competent and omniscient, in ways that undermine and inhibit collective life. The neo-liberal project in such terms is anti-democratic and anti-educational. Moreover, certain kinds of intellectual and aesthetic learning can be seen to belong to elites rather than the masses. The latter have to be inculcated into selfish, narcissistic desire and discontent, so as to consume more, in the interests of economic vitality and the relative freedom that material resources bring. Too much thinking and critical awareness can get in the way of market 'efficiency' (Lefebvre, 2008; Harvey, 2010; Couldry, 2012; Mirowski, 2013).

Of course, explanations for the distress of democracy vary as does understanding of the role of education. It depends, as always, on how people define the problem. From some perspectives political apathy is a consequence of growing social and moral deviancy, of the decline of the family as a socializing and civilizing institution and the failure of particular cultural groups to sufficiently embrace Western values (Peterson, 2011). Programmes of civic and character education in schools are considered to provide possible solutions to a more fragmented society (Peterson, 2011). The community cohesion narrative focuses on an absence of common values and the importance of inculcating 'British values' in schools. For some educators, this means that religious education, for instance, or building a Christian ethos, can help fill the moral vacuum in parts of society (Arthur, 2010). The problem is that the solution is too easily limited to narrow notions of civic instruction or vague ideas about ethos. Andrew Peterson (2011) notes that civic education programmes often degenerate into pupils collecting waste paper in schoolyards, as teachers struggle to make meaningful connections to children's lives and backgrounds; or fail to find time in the overburdened, centrally prescribed English national curriculum. Ralph Leighton (2011) notes how civic education can induce passive acceptance of givens rather than any more philosophically minded questioning of why things are as they are, and how life in the school – and more widely – could be democratically different. Talking truth to power in such terms is largely absent from most articulations of 'British values', while adult education is barely mentioned.

Gert Biesta (2011; 2014) sees the problem as stemming from a socialization concept of civic learning, in which learning is the vehicle by which children or adults become part of an existing socio-political order. He offers an alternative concept of 'subjectification', which has to do with learning from, not about, experience, in relationship. His challenge is to create spaces in which dialogue and respectfulness are encouraged and there is healthy challenge to authority and established beliefs. The socialization/moral character view of education is about learning of something that is to happen, of preparation for the future, rather than building understanding and action in the present. Learning from – rather than about – experience is a crucial psychoanalytic distinction in thinking about significant learning. Bidy Youell (2006) suggests it is the difference between amassing lots of information about a subject – in ways that lack any genuine emotional commitment – and learning from experience, where there

can be a relatively strong emotional attachment to an activity because of its meaningfulness in the present. This echoes Peter Jarvis (1983/2010) himself, in the importance given to emotional attachments, to the quality of our relationships both to academic subjects as well as to each other, in educational settings.

Biesta (2011) talks of the stultified experience of citizenship in many schools and communities and of the absence of space where democracy is learned in relationship across difference. This is Anthony Giddens' (1999) territory too, of the 'democracy of the emotions', in which citizens experience relationships of respect and mutual recognition in more open forms of dialogue and exchange, whether in families, intimate relationships, schools and or adult education, as an alternative to the 'sedimented power of tradition'. For this to happen there has to be minimal conditions of trust and reciprocity (Giddens, 1999: 61–5). We come very close here to Peter Jarvis' writing on the importance of good enough emotional relationships and we straddle overly rigid distinctions between the public and private, inner and outer worlds, in cultivating democratic subjectivities; in which – to use the language of psychoanalytic object relations theory – a diversity of good internal objects comes to mirror diversity without. We project parts of ourselves, in other words, into ideas or literatures that resonate and the changing quality of our understanding can alter the dynamics of inner life; as can our relationships with significant others when we feel listened to, understood and recognised. They become part of our inner object relational life (Frosh, 1991; Samuels, 1993; Honneth, 2007; 2009).

Democracy, in these perspectives, is about far more than the right to vote, the rule of law or freedoms of speech and association, important as these are. It represents much more than what happens in representative institutions we call parliaments or Congress, although this is part of the concern (Freidman, 2013). The perspective on learning democracy in this paper is rooted in the Republican tradition and the ancient ideal of an active citizenry, which practices and learns communicative competences and cooperation across difference. Historically, we could argue that adult education in the UK did some of this rather well, culminating in the post-Second World War settlement. In fact, I suggest that part of our contemporary crisis is a crisis of adult education and the absence of suitable space where people can learn together, across difference, in a spirit of relational fraternity. I argue that the health of states and parliaments in multicultural societies depends on the vitality of democratic life in spaces like adult education; public as well as private spaces beyond the reach of the market and the state, where it is possible to cultivate I-thou sensibilities.

### **Tawney and the tutorial classes**

Workers' education in the UK was characterised by a mix of Enlightenment idealism, the aspirations of democratic socialism and, for many, a religious belief in the potential divinity in everyone. It was a social as much as an educational movement. Jonathan Rose (2010) argues, that it played a key role in creating the welfare state after the Second World War. Moreover, adult education could model, in microcosm, the good, fraternal and equal democratic society, as Tawney (1964) framed it. These adult classes represented a social and educational experiment open to the marginalized, with an equality of status between students that encouraged freedom of expression and enquiry, tolerance and respect, alongside the turbulence that can be generated in the clash of ideas and difference. But difference and dispute did not, in general, degenerate into I-it objectification, at least in any permanent way. At their best the classes were communities of imaginative, caring, committed and thoughtful students, in which all could be teachers as well as learners. In the light of our present culture of excessive individualism and the commodification of education, such ideals might seem anachronistic and overly pious. Notwithstanding, revisiting the history offers glimpses into

how previous generations of working-class people learned democracy. If their struggle is largely forgotten by mainstream historians, or disparaged by some on the political left, it could have much to teach us in our present discontent.

Workers education, in the form of tutorial classes, once thrived in Stoke. As noted, the first ever university tutorial class took place there in 1908 when 30 or so worker students met on Friday evenings for 2 hours, over a period of years, with their tutor, R.H. Tawney, a subsequently distinguished economic historian, representing the University of Oxford. The tutorial classes constituted an unusual alliance, by reference to European popular education, between progressive elements in universities and workers' organisations. The classes were free from prescribed curricula and its members were encouraged to explore issues in their working lives from the perspectives of history, politics, economics and literature. Fortnightly essays were required, and the standard of some of these was high (West, 1972; Goldman, 1995). There were no formal examinations or qualifications due to a desire to eliminate competition and vocationalism from the classroom (West, 1972; Rose, 2010).

The first students met in the pottery town of Longton, that was soon to become part of the new city of Stoke-on-Trent. They were potters, miners, clerks, shop assistants and elementary school teachers, women as well as men (West, 1972). Many came from non-conformist backgrounds, from families, in short, that could encourage them to think for themselves. The Marxist Social Democratic Federation made up the nucleus of the first class. The Social Democratic Federation was formed in 1883 under the leadership by Henry Hyndman who was the son of a business man and became a journalist and political agitator (Macintyre, 1980). The Federation was strongly opposed to the British Liberal Party of the time, and its programme was progressive, calling for a 48-hour working week, the abolition of child labour, compulsory free secular education, equality for women and the nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Some members of the SDF, according to Stuart Macintyre, could hold an extremely 'mechanical version of the materialist conception of history' in which the whole of human life 'was controlled by economic forces independent of human volition' (Macintyre, 1980: 17). Education, politics and consciousness were mere epiphenomena of the techniques and relations of production. The students could correspondingly be rigid in their economic doctrines (ibid). That rigidity was sometimes played out in the tutorial classes, as illustrated below.

Tawney himself thought the tutorial class 'movement' and the WEA a successful 'experiment in democratic education'. According to Tawney, it was founded on three core principles. First, the opposition to revolutionary violence: 'one may not do evil that good should come', in Cobbett's dictum of a century before. Second, no institution, however perfect in conception, could be made to work effectively by individuals whose morality was inadequate. Third, where a sound morality was lacking, this could be forged in a community of scholars seeking truth and the common good (Dennis and Halsey, 1988). There was an Aristotelian ideal at work here, as well as Oxford idealism (Goldman, 1995), notions of the fully developed person living in communities, building and sustaining virtue in relationship – communities cultivating not self- but other-regardness, directing themselves to higher aims than the purely egotistic or narcissistic (Dennis and Halsey, 1988). The idealists at Oxford who influenced Tawney were opposed to individualism, utilitarianism and social atomism and drew on German philosophers, especially Kant and Hegel, and the notion that individuals are best understood and realize their potential in the collective. Men and women were part of webs of social and political as well as economic relationships from which they could not be divorced for analytic or practical purposes. They were linked together by values, institutions and diverse patterns of association rather than simply economics.

But such ways of thinking became unfashionable after the Second World War. Tawney himself had doubts about the tutorial classes, not least the intellectual and emotional effort required from the worker students. Tawney was also far from a naïve idealist and there were ‘limits to his moralising’, as Lawrence Goldman notes (Goldman, 1995: 160). He was aware that the same spirit of non-conformity that drove some of the worker students could also narrow viewpoints and bring the tendency to over-proselytize, making it difficult to dialogue and be respectful to different perspectives. For some on the left, the critique of the tutorial classes was part of a broader disdain for a paternalistic welfare state and the deference towards universities and high culture. In contrast to the overtly Marxist National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), it was alleged that educators like Tawney and the tutorial class movement were intent on marginalising other forms of working class knowledge especially Marxism (Macintyre, 1980: 89-90).

In one influential historical interpretation, the tutorial classes, and the WEA as a whole, ‘was welcomed by the establishment as a bulwark against revolutionism, a moderating influence and a form of social control...’ (Fieldhouse, 1995: 123). One difficulty with this perspective is that the autodidactic proletarian Marxist was neither representative of the working class or even of autodidacts of the time. The Marxist autodidacts tended to be more predominant in specific areas of the country such as parts of South Wales and the West of Scotland (Macintyre, 1980). Furthermore, there is simply no evidence from Stoke or many other places that the tutorial classes encouraged political quiescence in Marxist students. In fact, Rose (2010) questions whether quiescence applies even among Fieldhouse’s own sample of seventy-one students. Lawrence Goldman (1995: 185) questions the assumption of what might have happened without the alleged constraining embrace of universities like Oxford. ‘There is little evidence that Marxist politics or Marxist adult education were in general attractive to the working class’; and where they were, as at Longton, students themselves came to dislike a focus only on Marx to the exclusion of everything else. We could see this as profoundly education rather than the cultivation of quiescence.

Neutering Marxism was never quite my view, but I embraced a paternalistic critique, accusing key figures like Tawney and the students of a simplistic faith in the social democratic project and university education. My own research mainly drew on archival material including student memoirs and other life writing as well as Tawney’s own observations. It acknowledged, begrudgingly, some of his achievements and those of tutorial class students, but parts of the text, especially the conclusion, were dismissive of what was achieved and its relevance to renewing workers’ education in the 1970s. This despite the evidence of the extent to which the tutorial class students built a wider workers’ education across the mining communities of Stoke and North Staffordshire (West, 1972). But I was young, ambitious and easily seduced by academic fashion. I was also envious of critical Marxists who were better able to play grand theoretical games and who dismissed purely descriptive studies or idealism, and the role of character in human betterment. Revisiting these issues, I note that Edward Thompson himself observed how there has always been a strain of structuralist, over determinist Marxism that neglected human agency in struggles for a better world, and where class was an abstract thing rather than a living relationship between actual people (Thompson, 1978)

### **Space for dialogue and recognition**

Furthermore, in a new and closer reading, grounded in what students themselves thought of their experience, the classes frequently created space to question and challenge dogmatism and other forms of bigotry as well as to encourage self-experiment. They provided forms of self-other recognition among tutors and students alike. In one telling account, Nancy Dobrin,



born in 1914, wrote that the study of literature had revolutionary consequences for her. She grew up in a home where learning was not valued, where there was either 'a row or an order'. She read little but later joined a WEA class and read avidly, although she admitted that she went to the class partly in search of a man. Nancy became a writer herself. She described working for a German Jew during the Second World War, wondering what on earth he was doing there and why couldn't people like him go home. Later, in another class, she met her future husband, a German Jewish refugee who described himself as a Christian Communist. She talked of these changes by reference to her encounters with characters in literature – in the writing of Lawrence, Tolstoy and James Joyce as well as in her relationships with students and tutors. She came to question, profoundly, her own bigotry as well as her place in the world. These experiences, in turn, shaped her relationships with her children and family, and impelled her to question aspects of their schooling. Agency can take many forms: in the everyday, in families as well as on a wider democratic stage (Dobrin, 1980).

In certain respects, Nancy's story resembles those of later generations of adult students, such as Brenda, in my own research among non-traditional adult students at university in the 1990s (West, 1996). Brenda found recognition for self with particular tutors and students as well as in literature. She was terrified of being found wanting, of being exposed in her ignorance and emotional vulnerability, but eventually negotiated a way through such anxiety in the company of important others. For Brenda, the others included fictional characters, such as an abused but resilient woman in a novel by Maupassant. The character, so to speak, became part of Brenda's internal world through processes of what psychoanalytic object relations theory labels projective identification. Aspects of self are projected into a fictional (or actual other) and their resilience and capacity to keep on keeping on can be introjected (or reinternalized), in a changing experience of self. The basis of our mental operations in such terms is deeply relational. Psychological dynamics and meaning making are created in exchanges between subjects and diverse objects, between what lies inside and what is external. Psyche is considered, metaphorically, as analogous to theatre, in which casts of characters change, in potentially transformative ways.

We are able, through such research and writing, to build more nuanced understanding of the importance of dialogue, of recognition, and of subjectification processes, which embrace the interplay of inner and outer worlds. Nancy and Brenda projected and then introjected transformed aspects of self and experience, that enabled them, in turn, to better recognise others and engage with otherness. They learned, like countless adult students, more of a democratic sensibility, or cosmopolitan 'subjectification', in the tutorial classes and later, which they describe in their own words (West, 1996; Dobrin, 1980; Rose, 2010: 274–5; Bainbridge & West, 2012). The reality of such 'object relations' in adult education cannot be proved in any absolute sense: but their utility in illuminating change processes is grounded in the application of clinical ideas to changing experiences of self in adult education. I return to these issues below.

### **Dogmatism and its roots**

Dogmatism and even fundamentalism of a Marxist or religious kind existed in the classes. It is interesting that the worker students admired tutors like Tawney who remained steadfast as well as respectful even when harangued by a fundamentalist student. We can think of fundamentalism, like its variant Islamism, as ordinary – when we feel out of our depth we may grab at things that seem to offer narrative certainty, an answer to everything. Leftist fundamentalists, sometimes from the Social Democratic Federation and later the Communist Party, though not exclusively so, would quote from texts like *Das Capital* with religious fervour. The other students noted how Tawney remained steadfast in the face of provocation.

One recalled a particular Marxist – the SDF could dominate the first tutorial classes – challenging point after point and referring to classic Marxist texts. Tawney took it in his stride but insisted that there were other points of view. The student accused the tutor of hopping around like a bird, from twig to twig, and a sense of bad temper pervaded the room. However, Tawney insisted that everyone, including his challenger, take tea together afterwards and tell stories, read poetry and sing songs. A shared humanity and a spirit of fraternity were restored (Rose, 2010: 266). This particular class stayed together despite the local secretary of the SDF demanding that his members leave for fear of contamination (Goldman, 2013). We might conceive of Tawney as a good parental figure in keeping the class together and in recognising the worth, however difficult, of everyone involved; I-thou, rather than I-it dynamics.

It should also be mentioned that Tawney's contribution to theorizing the role and practice of inclusive university education is being re-evaluated by a number of authors (Holford, 2015; Goldman, 2013). Tawney stressed the moral and spiritual in human betterment, which could be embodied in the tutorial classes in ways inspiring fellowship and service. The tutorial classes sought to make university education available to everyone in their own localities: very different to today's meritocratic assumptions about higher education for individual social mobility. Tawney was committed to a liberal and humane view of education for everyone so that they could acquire civic qualities of reciprocity, mutual recognition as well as intellectual confidence. Moreover, Holford (2015) suggests Tawney offers a localist critique of the current emphasis on developing global skills and mobility. Communities should not be privileged or discounted because of their wealth or poverty and universities can be active agents in communities using, for instance, adult education. Tawney also represents a more constructivist view of knowledge: the classes were classes, not lectures, and ideas were explored and developed in discussion. The processes of education were democratised – students engaged in research and discovery through using original source material, like historical documents, rather than simply relying on secondary texts. The fundamental aim of the tutorial classes was to make university education available to all people in their localities, in pedagogically democratic and dialogical ways.

### **Williams and a long revolution**

Williams was of the same broad tradition as Tawney, although of a later generation and with a somewhat different political and pedagogic outlook. Both understood that the WEA's historic mission was far from over by the 1950s. If 'exceptional minds' from diverse backgrounds now went to university more easily, wrote Williams in a letter to WEA tutors, the remaining question was what about everyone else? Were they simply to be treated as rejects, suitable only for narrow vocational training? The WEA stood for something that even educational reformers tend to forget, obsessed as they might be with schooling: 'It stands for an educated democracy, not for a newly mobile and more varied élite', wrote Williams in 1961 (cited in Goldman, 1995: 252). Like Tawney, Williams was critical of people who presumed to deliver all the answers to ordinary people via ideological texts, to shape their minds and actions, without really requiring active and critical engagement. Such 'teaching' was the antithesis of a democratic education, as both Tawney and Williams understood it: it was demeaning, infantilizing and anti-educational to proffer conclusions – people needed to reach them on their own, in fellowship, over time.

Raymond Williams continues to inspire adult educators in Stoke like Derek Tatton, schooled in workers' education (West, 2016a) and deeply involved in the Philosophy in Pubs (PiPs) movement. Williams himself, like Derek, was a product of university adult education, as well as of a working class background. He knew how difficult it could be to straddle different

worlds, and how disconnected universities easily became from the communities that gave them birth. In one of Williams novels – *Border Country* – published in 1988, partly autobiographical, he wrote of the difficult journey to and from the border Welsh town of his birth and a university like Cambridge; not least when his father was seriously ill and Williams longed to talk to him and connect emotionally. He describes the difficulty of moving beyond cliché and awkwardness as his father lay dying. Difficulties impregnated with the imprints of class, habitus and the problems of intimacy between men. In a sense, much of William's own struggle was to build connections between his background and destination, between forms of intellectually challenging university education grounded in the material, spiritual but also emotional struggles of ordinary people.

In his writing on 'culture as ordinary' (Williams, 1989), Williams observed how the advertising men and women held the same essential, dehumanising view of the masses as the authoritarian left. Expensively educated people were 'now in the service of the most brazen money-grabbing exploitation of the inexperience of ordinary people' (Williams, 1989: 6). 'The old cheapjack is still there in the market...he thinks of his victims as a slow ignorant crowd. The new cheapjack is in offices with contemporary décor, using scraps of linguistics, psychology, and sociology to influence what he thinks of as the mass mind (Williams, 1989: 7). But his scorn was not confined to the marketing men and women. He wrote about getting angry with those of his friends who talked about ignorant masses...'one kind of Communist has always talked like this, and has got his answer...at Budapest' (in the 1956 Hungarian uprising). The Marxist interpretation of culture is not acceptable while it insists that people should think in prescribed ways, he insisted. 'It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings (within cultures) can in any way be prescribed: they are made by living people, made and remade, in ways that we cannot know in advance'. The Marxist interpretation of culture, he argued, could never be accepted as long as it retained a directive element. This is the insistence that if you desire socialism, you must learn to write, think, learn in certain prescribed ways (Williams, 1989: 8). Thus Williams' idea of learning democracy is one of process too, an attempt to build a culture of shared meanings, open to the influence of all, in relationship. This message may be highly pertinent in our present crisis of multiculturalism and growing disrespect towards the other.

Williams did criticise Tawney for making too much of the cult of impartiality, in his refusal to take a stand, any stand (even against the zealot), other than seeking to offer a different point of view. But both shared a pedagogy of faith in ordinary people, and in the importance of open enquiry, of cultivating curiosity, and of challenging received wisdom, whatever its source. And of the necessity of creating space in which all partialities of opinion were brought in and interrogated in fraternal ways (Goldman, 1995). This was in fact the central conviction of William's 'the long revolution', the title of one of his most important books: learning democracy took time, was never complete, and always difficult. Later, Williams was to talk of the long counter-revolution, in the rise of a rampant individualism and seductive consumerism, alongside growing inequality and poverty.

Derek Tatton, an autodidact to the core, was an active participant in WEA classes, and later became a student at the Colleg Harlech, a workers' institution, and then Cambridge University. He talks fondly of the fraternity of the classes and of the encouragement given to him by a particular tutor with a passionate commitment to literature, cultural studies and nuclear disarmament, in the manner of Raymond Williams (West, 2016a). In his own writing (Tatton, undated; & 2011), Derek has been preoccupied with how we can revitalise the 'very concept of human reason and value'. Tatton writes of the pessimism generated by conflicts in

Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Gaza and Palestine, and the widening gap between rich and poor, as well as a deep ecological crisis of sustainability. To which we could add the emergence of fundamentalisms, and fascistic violence in Paris, Nice, Rouen, Pakistan, Madrid, Germany, Italy, Nigeria and other parts of Africa; and in small pockets in Stoke and other post-industrial cities. Derek quotes Chomsky (Chomsky, 2012) to observe how the optimism of the 1950s and 60s was displaced by pessimism about the prospects of human betterment. The 1970s evoked growing feelings of hopelessness and despair among progressive forces. Chomsky thought the reversal of centuries' long move towards industrialisation was of importance, with the economic shift from productive enterprise to financial manipulation. Williams himself in his book *Towards 2000*, published in the 1980s, was troubled by an emerging self-consciousness among elites – political, cultural, military, and in the media – who constantly calculate their relative advantage over others in a war of appearances and display. This is Williams' Plan X: we could call it neo-liberal narcissism and the marginalisation of the collective good.

Both Tatton and Williams note how pessimism and cynicism towards representative democracy went hand in hand with these tendencies. Decreasing numbers of people exercise their right to vote and Tatton quotes Williams, from *The Long Revolution*: 'A tightly organised party system and parliament seems to have converted the national franchise into the election of a court. As individuals we cast one vote at intervals of several years on a range of policies and particular decisions towards which it is virtually impossible to have one single attitude. ...from this ...a court of ministers emerges...and then it is very difficult for any of us to feel even the smallest direct share in the government of our affairs'. Tatton also mentions Williams's concern over militaristic metaphors and the fetish of violent 'solutions' among some on the left. When power is monopolised by unresponsive elites, divisions can constantly open up among those who seek to oppose them: some may find violence attractive. Williams is quoted, in the introduction to a new edition of *The Long Revolution*, published in 2011, as saying that he was deeply uneasy with a language of short or violent responses to injustice. Metaphors of assaulting citadels, he observed, are the wrong kind of metaphor. Any struggle needed to be slow, democratic, non-violent and fundamentally educational. 'Active reception', Williams suggested, was a living response that real communication elicited, in adult education as in life, which depended on creating 'a community of experience, of human and intellectual equality'. Adult education was 'a crucial experience', a central way of getting in touch with ourselves and others in new ways (McIlroy, 1993: 6). In short, in learning democracy and building I-thou experience.

Interestingly, as organised working class traditions waned, he saw potential in new forms of communication technologies, and their capacity not only for political activity but also for experimenting and experiencing forms of democratic self-government. The long revolution might partly be digital: in the interplay of diverse communities, local and global; and in a determination to occupy or reclaim parks, halls, schools, universities, churches, synagogues and mosques for building horizontal forms of dialogue, learning and decision making. The importance of such experiments partly lies in recognising, in new ways, the potentially humanising, democratising and psychosocial processes at their heart.

### **Fragments, and a theory of recognition**

We could start, to paraphrase C. Wright Mills (2000), with a new kind of interdisciplinary imagination. Sociology has often neglected the psychological or inner world and human agency while psychology, in its desire to emulate the natural sciences, (a process which

characterizes psychoanalysis too), often neglects the social and cultural in framing its objects of interest. The focus of psychologists can get very narrow in the analysis of brain neurons and synapses. But, as Marianne Horsdal (2012) observes, new forms of neuropsychological thinking resist any sharp distinction between physical and mental dimensions or the social and internal world. Experiences of interpersonal interactions, of love or becoming more agentic in relationship, may be central to the development of brain and mind.

A concept of recognition helps us to think about the intimate, social, psychological, physical and even neurological levels of being human, and of the importance of adult education. New resources of hope can be created in intimate, group and wider social space, including educational. The concept better enables us to understand how social solidarities and democratic health were once created and might be again, in civil society, on which the health and stability of representative democracy depends.

I have chronicled how processes of recognition were generated in the tutorial class experiment. They were a consequence of good enough, challenging relationships. But a theory of recognition must also encompass appreciation of our human vulnerability and the common need for love, affirmation, respect and esteem. Axel Honneth refers to Freud's profound anthropological insight that human beings, relative to other mammals, separate early from the mother and rely absolutely on others for survival and well-being (Honneth, 2009). Dependency, alongside anxiety, is hardwired into us in what the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein called memory in feeling: our effort to transcend the anxiety associated with separation processes, from the known and familiar, or from an old but redundant idea, requires loving and challenging relationships. These primitive dimensions of recognition play out in later life, in a struggle to make a point in a tutorial class or engage in community action because we feel exposed, vulnerable and in danger. Nancy, like Brenda, felt terrified in her early encounters in classes. We are born into vulnerability and dependence, and into a struggle for self-recognition.

The struggle encompasses wider social dynamics too (Honneth, 2007; 2009). Historically, I suggest, adult education afforded forms of recognition for ordinary people, as people felt themselves to be accepted and listened to, treated as equals with a right to be heard and fully participate. This is a right to be respected and listened to as mature and capable people with stories to tell and ideas to offer. It is a profoundly emotional, largely unconscious as well as a cognitive process. Crucially, as people felt themselves better recognized, they became more able to recognise and care for others. Recognition, in short, is more easily given when we ourselves feel recognized. Self-respect, in Honneth's terms, is a consequence of experiencing a shared dignity of persons who are morally responsible agents, capable of participating in public deliberation and action rather than having a good opinion of ourselves. The wider experience of being honoured for one's contributions to a community or society fosters what Honneth calls self-esteem and the capacity to recognise diverse others, as 'thous' not 'its'. Autodidacts like Derek, and Nora in the tutorial classes, illuminate these processes rather well. They include recognition in the symbolic order, in an idea or literary character. Classed or gendered aspects of lives become clearer, and new theoretical and literary friends are made and join the inner conversation.

## **Conclusion**

The question of how to build stronger I-thou dynamics in public and private space is central to my research and writing (West, 2016a & b). We find examples, in a place like Stoke, today, in the continuing presence of the WEA, however fragile its funding base. It exists in WEA health groups in which white working class women and those from Muslim communities

learn together. It is there in their struggles to resist austerity and the closure of swimming baths, using digital technologies. It is alive in the Philosophy in Pubs movement, PiPs, in which Derek is involved, where ordinary people meet, in fraternal ways, in pubs and clubs to make sense of the contemporary world. Resources of hope exist too in the inspirational Lidice shall live campaign in Stoke, as connections are made between now and the heroic role of the Stoke miners in opposing fascism during the 2nd World War. How they helped rebuild the mining town of Lidice, in the Czech Republic, after that terrible War. Survivors of Nazi atrocities visited Stoke in 2012, and local histories were revitalised as children in old, run down mining communities learned about and became proud of what their grandparents and great grandparents achieved. This is living history, inspiring families to learn together, and used to explore the theme of peace between different peoples and in struggles against racism. The Lidice shall live campaign was led, in 1942, by a local family doctor called Barnett Stross. He was in fact my mother's GP. His family fled pogroms in Poland and his name, and caring role, are used in schools today to consider attitudes towards the other. Stross later became MP for Stoke Central and a Minister of Health in the 1945 Labour Government. The personal is deeply political, and there can be many ways of working across difference and of cultivating democratic sensibilities.

Of course there are many and varied ways too of thinking about how to revitalise popular education, and maybe to 'feminise' education and politics. It may seem strange, even irritating to some, that I have chosen two long dead, white European males to help in the task. I am aware too that both Tawney and Williams might have been uncomfortable with overly psychologising experience. Yet Williams struggled with aspects of his emotional life, most of all in his relationship to his father, and there might be room for auto/biographical dialogue between us, because I have struggled too (West, 2016a). Tawney might have appreciated the emotional aspects of recognition, by reference to his Christianity and the divine in everyone. He had seen the worst as well as the best of people on the Somme, as a young Sergeant, and understood the terrible things that humans could do to one another but also the capacity for good even in extremis (Dennis and Halsey, 1988). He had also experienced how people find it difficult to live in uncertainty, and of how we can grab at ideas in rigid ways, as a form of defence. He in fact, embodied, in many ways, the capacity for negative capability, as the poet Keats framed it: of being able to live in uncertainty and remain open to diverse ideas and experience even when under attack. Whatever their response to the paper, their work merits rescuing from overly rigid forms of interpretation.

Peter Jarvis would certainly agree on the importance of the quality of our relationships in learning to be a democratic citizen. A quality encompassing our relationship to knowledge, to processes of knowing as well as our engagement with otherness. And perhaps with the awareness at the heart of this paper of the limitation of what we can ever know; and the potential dogmatism lurking in every one of us. Maybe Peter would like the importance I attach to the psychosocial concept of recognition, encompassing processes at an emotional, imaginative as well as symbolic level. At least, we could enthusiastically talk about this together, as part of an I-thou relationship.

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