

STUDY AS FORM-OF-LIFE:
MEDITATIONS ON SCHOOLING, ENJOYMENT, AND THE INOPERATIVE LIFE

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DEDICATION

For all the students

who have never received a satisfying answer

to the most important question:

Why do I have to do this?

And for my son, Theodore,

who will go off to school

and face this question soon enough.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore what potential that the concept of 'inoperativity' has in the philosophy and theory of education. I will discuss the method of critique used which aims to think through the problems in existing theory rather than discard good thinking when problems are found. The strengths and weaknesses of deschooling and democratic approaches will be at the center of this critique. As a response to the weaknesses of both, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, focusing on the way that interiority and enjoyment are essential concepts for the philosophy of education, as well as Giorgio Agamben, the philosopher of form-of-life, will be analyzed, demonstrating that we might find something vitally important in an inoperative understanding of concepts like study and school.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Seventeenth century wandering haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1998) opened his most famous travelog with the following lines:

The moon and sun are eternal travelers. Even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat, or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home. From the earliest times there have always been some who perished along the road. Still I have been drawn by wind blown clouds into dreams of a lifetime of wandering. (pg. 3)

These lines will serve as a poetic description that might make more clear the theoretical and conceptual terminology at the heart of this thesis. Basho, here, is invoking a not wholly uncommon belief that the journey is more important than the destination. In fact, he goes one step further, asserting that the journey and the destination have moved into a zone of indistinction: ‘the journey itself is home.’ ‘A lifetime of wandering’ then, to put it into a teleological framework, is precisely a life in which the means of living never culminate in an end, or, as Giorgio Agamben (2000) might state it, Basho’s form-of-life can only be formulated as pure means-without-end.

Origins

A troubling thought that serves as the impetus for this project is that although fostering ‘critical thinking’ appears to be a universal objective among educators, schools as a whole may be the greatest contributors to anti-intellectualism and uncritical thought in the world today. This is a broad claim that will require careful argument. And while

the purpose of this thesis is not to analyze ‘critical thinking,’ per-se, this work does seek to probe and rediscover what it means to educate and be educated, to understand why many like myself often feel totally unsatisfied with the the system of formal education as it is organized in the United States, which is only corroborated by the fact that a great number of young students report losing interest in school before leaving the elementary grades (Raab, 2017).

A fundamental component to any inquiry regarding education is school and it must be clear that school and education, though closely related, are not synonymous terms. Fundamentally, school purports to be a place, among others, where education takes place. It is from this perspective that the following inquiry will approach concerns in schooling and education in general.

My inquiry is grounded by the following concerns and objectives. First, I want to attempt to discover if it has been the case that, as scholars have attempted to re-theorize the grounds for schooling itself, they have missed key insights of certain thinkers due to the adoption of common philosophical *truths* about life that reach back to antiquity when proposing schooling reforms and revolutions. Second, I am interested in exploring the ways that two important critics of western metaphysics—Emmanuel Levinas and Giorgio Agamben—can help us approach key philosophical debates about schooling and the purpose of education in a way that breaks us free from ingrained modes of thinking and reveals an entirely new way of conceptualizing what education is for individuals and society.

The third objective is to demonstrate why I believe that we need teachers and schools that are highly resistant to the worst forces of, and changes in, state and federal

policy, whatever they be, rather focusing our energy on endless attacks of schooling that are unlikely to lead to a genuine movement toward deschooling.

Ultimately, it will be shown, both deschooling and education for democracy fail because they both maintain, in their own way, that the primary role of students is to serve a greater social function. As will be shown, this thinking cedes too much ground to forces which would make education an endeavor that always has determinative and operative ends rather than something that is inherently enjoyable for the human being in itself.

As a practicing educator in the K-12 system, it is nothing short of frustrating when I am put in a position where I need to tell a student that there should be no hurry when doing close reading, that reading a poem or a passage from an important text should be more like having a long, pleasant conversation with a friend than a race to the finish line, yet ultimately know that I am never able, as a teacher, to truly give them sufficient time to contemplate, wrestle with, and enjoy what they are reading.

Real Utopias

In the domain of alternative education, some have argued that we should pursue ‘real utopias’ (McGregor & Mills, 2011) when thinking about what schools could look like. While the idea of utopia is certainly problematic, real-utopias as a concept points to a hope in long lasting alternatives while remaining cognizant of actual, real-world potential and problems, leading to what I classify as utopian-realist in its critical approach. To bring the utopian-realist approach into the light, a metaphor supplied by the messianic philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1990) perfectly describes this vision. In a short piece, Benjamin describes the hasidic vision of a messianic world to come:

Everything there will be arranged just as it is with us. The room we have now will be just the same in the world to come; where our child lies sleeping, it will sleep in the world to come. The clothes we are wearing we shall also wear in the next world. Everything will be the same as here-only a little bit different (pg. 664).

Following Benjamin, the ideal pursued for schooling and education in this work is not a radical upheaval of every bit of the school system with the hope of eliminating all structures of power; instead, it is pursued with the conviction the future, though mostly the same, need only be ‘a little bit different.’

Critique and Critical Thinking

Before advancing to the central argument, it is worth considering how, according to existing scholarship, schools might make themselves into real utopias and interesting work has been done highlighting the value of critique as a practice. Critique, according to Olsen’s (2006) understanding of Kant and Foucault, is argued to be vital in the maturing process of individuals. Maturity, in this sense, does not require docility but instead is an “attitude toward ourselves and the present through a historical analysis of the limits, and the possibility of transgression, of going beyond” (pg. 246). The historical limits are precisely the structures of social discipline that define our possibilities. Maturity then recognizes the structural limit, but instead of being constrained by the limit, Foucault stresses that maturity requires transgression. The transgression in this case is specific; it comes from the will to go beyond. Transgression and deviance ought to be used synonymously so we might again see certain deviant or transgressive attitudes as an asset rather than a deficit. Though we might not expect students to reach full maturity in school, Foucault’s tool for moving toward this maturity, for thinking beyond present

possibilities, is *critique* (Olsen, 2006). Here it becomes possible to better distinguish between critical thinking and critique. Critical thinking connotes an analytical process of differentiation, categorization, and high level problem solving and can be trained to students methodically. Critique, on the other hand, refuses the position of docility expected through training rituals and discipline and “performs a function of challenging conventional authority” (Olsen, 2006, p. 257). The work of critique is to point out that conventional authority is a historical inheritance and is not necessarily the way things have to be (Foucault, 1977). In order to point out the historical basis for reality, that things do not have to be as they are, requires a type of thinking which a good education should prepare and expect students to do.

Schools that focus on engaging students in the practice of critique, then, would have to reformulate the way that students approach knowledge. Considering two types of knowledge discussed in Foucault’s writing, Mavelli (2014) demonstrates how schooling privileges types of knowledge that are instrumental rather than transformative. Instrumental knowledge, presuming that all knowledge must produce something, always operates within a framework of discipline, where the objective is “to increase the possible utility of individuals” (Foucault, 1977, p. 210). Transformative knowledge, on the other hand, requires “a progress of transfiguration of the self” (Mavelli, 2014, p. 861) rather than skill acquisition. In this model, if schools are to really make a difference for such students, they need to present students with a type of knowledge that makes possible the reconstruction of the self at a deeper level. Unfortunately, typical models reduce calls for justice and transformation to an “economic imperative” (Mavelli, 2014, pp. 863-4). Instead of insisting that students in schools learn practical skills, showing students in

what way education may be transformative, and providing them with the tools for meaningful critique, would be a significant opportunity for important change in formal education.

By removing the instrumental nature of schooling, schools might become a space for student transcendence and revelation “encompassed [by] an ethics of the care of the self” (Mavelli, 2014, p. 867). While this proposition asks for significant movement away from current practices and assumptions about the purpose of education, it does not require a seismic shift.

Instrumental or Inoperative

Critique, as discussed above, opposes critical thinking on the grounds of instrumental value. This distinction provides only a starting point for the analysis that is to come. Form-of-life, which is the central concept in the coming analysis, is certainly anti-instrumentalist, but can not be understood as transformative either in the sense described above, because transformation itself then becomes an end to be achieved. Form-of-life is living like a “wind blown cloud,” (Basho, 1998, pg. 3) where even the idea of being transformed is left behind. From this point of view, all activities are rendered inoperative—non-instrumental.

In pursuing this utopian-realist approach, a theory of education that centers the inoperative instead of the instrumental is *essential* for thinking through how a future might be mostly the same, but ‘a little different’ without ever being able to say what this future might look like and refusing to even define it as a goal in itself, because it can spontaneously arrive in any given moment as Levinas (1969) points out when he states against the traditional view of the end of the world that the escatological is simply found

in “being *beyond the totality*” (pg. 22), beyond the totalizing, historical reduction of beings to mere ends. This claim is founded on and will be supported throughout all chapters primarily using the philosophy of form-of-life developed by Giorgio Agamben (2000; 2013; 2017; 2019). The fourth chapter will be dedicated mostly to the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1969) in order to help clarify difficulties in understanding Agamben. The second and third chapters will develop critiques of the work of Ivan Illich (1970) and Amy Gutmann (1987) respectively. The fifth chapter will bring everything together and clarify the importance of Agamben when discussing education. A short conclusion will then follow, outlining larger implications of this study, and pointing toward potential for future study and research.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PROBLEM WITH SCHOOL

Preliminary Thoughts

Because school is a key social structure that nearly all individuals in developed nations experience and likely support, any meaningful critique of schooling runs the risk of being silenced. This is unfortunately what happened to Ivan Illich (Gabbard, 2020) who spent his life defending education and quality thinking against the values of consumerism, authoritarianism, and social reproduction which are so central to the school experience. A principle fueling this thesis is that the most important thinking in this world is always at risk of saying something that will be silenced. The following analysis risks offending predominant thinking about school. It also, as will become clear, runs the risk of offending the critics of school as well.

The central thesis of Illich's (1970) seminal work, *Deschooling Society*, is this: "All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society" (pg. 8). Though Illich is never perfectly clear in his definition of education, a succinct summary of his thought on the issue is provided by Gabbard (2020): "Education is conceptualized as an authentically human value that emerges from the authentically human need to learn." (pg. 38). While the principle goal of this chapter is to confront issues in the thinking of Ivan Illich, the reason that this is done is not to discredit him, but, hopefully instead, to move forward the dialogue that he opened when he published *Deschooling Society*. The reasons for moving this dialogue forward are twofold: first, because what he had to say in the early 70s is still relevant today and second, if educators continue to fail to take his

critique of school seriously, we stand little chance of creating opportunities for meaningful educational experiences. After all, though his name rarely appears on reference lists, the sort of thinking regarding the institutional abuses that schooling performs which he inaugurated fifty years ago persists among a subset of educational theorists today. Many theorists still remain concerned with themes that were of a concern of Illich. Many begin with a focus on schools as institutions designed to control, punish, and discipline young people (Chomsky, 2011; Gabbard, 2011; Giroux, 2011; Lack, 2011; Saltman, 2011; Scapp, 2011) while others share Illich's concern that schools serve to sort students and reproduce a stratified, unequal society (Alquist, 2011; Books, 2011; Brown, 2011; Giroux, 2020; Gorski, 2011; Jackson, 2011; Keown-Bomar & Pattee, 2011).

Ritual and the Institution of School

Illich is very intentional in separating school from education. As mentioned above, education is a human good related to exploration and the natural desire to learn new things. Further, the root of the word education is 'educere,' which means to "bring out" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), signaling the potential for something new to emerge through the process of education. According to Illich (1970), modern schools, on the other hand, are man made institutions that group individuals according to their age, assign teachers to these groups of pupils, and require full-time, compulsory attendance. Because schools serve an institutional function, their reason for existence is not necessarily education. Moreso, Illich lays out how education is actively stifled in schools. Ultimately, the reason for his concern about schools is precisely that "the school system today performs the threefold function common to powerful churches throughout history. It is simultaneously the repository of society's myth, the institutionalization of that

myth's contradictions, and the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality.” (pg. 37). Illich spends the entirety of Chapter 3, “Ritualization of Progress” critiquing the social myths that school reproduces. The contention of this paper is not that his critique is off base. The critique of the various myths that schools promote and support—The Myth of Institutionalized Values, The Myth of Measurement of Values, The Myth of Packaging of Values, and The Myth of Self Perpetuating Progress—is entirely justified. The big question driving this inquiry is, instead, does the conclusion that the only way forward is the elimination of schooling follow from the critique?

Taking the criticism that schooling is the institutional replacement of the Church, the exploration of this question will be supported primarily by the work done by Giorgio Agamben (2013) who, in *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, shows how the unique form-of-life developed by monastics, and exemplified by the Franciscans, was a life that was lived totally outside the institutionally structured values of the Church. What is essential to consider in the context of this study is that these monastics lived according to their Rule without ever needing or desiring to reject the Church itself. In this way, their approach seems definitively different from the deschooling approach and further exploration is required to determine what we can take from this. Illich (1970) claims that “neither ideological criticism nor social action can bring about a new society. Only disenchantment with and detachment from social ritual and reform of that ritual can bring about radical change” (pg. 38) but it is unclear whether he has considered all the variations of ‘reform’ that are possible to bring about a ‘radical change’ because he quickly states, after claiming that Universities traditionally were formed around

education and making a life of scholarship, but have since decayed as they adopted the Myths of Measurement of Values and Self Perpetuating Progress. Without much qualification, he states: “only a generation which grows up without obligatory schools will be able to recreate the university” (pg. 38). Why this is so for Illich is not entirely clear but it should be noted that this is the type of pessimistic view that cannot be easily argued against since it would require the elimination of institutions in order to verify its conclusion. Fortunately for this study, the history of the Franciscan movement can be of some help.

What is at stake here is the relationship between the legal institutional system of schooling and the possibility of education. Illich’s (1970) presumption is that the presence of the former cancels out the potential for the latter. Fortunately, Illich himself has already, through the analogy of school as the new Church, opened the door through which this critique will enter.

Francis and the early adherents of the movement that he founded existed in a space at odds with the Church but never sought to be separate from the authority from the Church. Agamben (2013) goes to great lengths to demonstrate this point. Central to understanding the relationship between Francis and the Church is the particular position taken up by priests which is totally different from the life lived by the Friars Minor, who also take up a different form than the monastics that preceded them. In order to understand the Franciscans we have to understand the history and role of liturgy in the church.

Originally developed in a monastic setting with the intention of directing the entire life of the monk to a specific form with the Rule that monks followed “assimilated

to the rules of an art rather than to a legal apparatus” (pg 32) creating a liturgy of life. Further, as Agamben notes, “the monastery is perhaps the first place in which life itself—and not only the ascetic techniques that form and regulate it—was presented as an art” (pg. 33). This liturgy as a form of life was later assimilated by the clergy and codified into the legal apparatus, which it initially had resisted. The emergence of liturgy in the sphere of law presented a major problem that Francis unwittingly appeared, for Agamben, to resolve. As he writes, in time “cenoby [monastic profession] appears as a field of forces run through by two opposing tendencies—at once to resolve life into a liturgy, and pulling in the other direction, to transform liturgy into life” (pg. 86). By this he is trying to demonstrate an unresolved paradox between the draw to a life that follows legalistically a liturgy set out for it and a liturgy that can not help but become life. With this paradox unresolved the monastic is assimilated into the legal order in much the same way that educators within schools, for Illich (1970), are assimilated into the power structure of the state and become modern clerics, themselves performing the liturgy of “open-ended consumption” (pg. 43) of knowledge. And because the investigation is not allowed to progress beyond this problem it is no wonder that the statement such: “school seems eminently suited to be the World Church of our decaying culture” (pg. 43) can only be read with pessimism.

Agamben (2013), though, sees in the early Franciscans a resolution to this problem that other monastic orders failed at. Teachers and educators, following the metaphor, though currently performing the clerical role in the new World Church (Illich, 1970), can take up a form-of-life that is removed from the legal apparatus. The solution, for the Franciscans, had nothing to do with the elimination of the clergy or the Church, or

even outright rebellion. Agamben (2013) notes that in Francis' own writing there was an absolute deference to priests and clergy, and this is key:

Francis defines priests as 'those who live according to the form of the holy Roman Church,' and it is clear that The Testament [a writing of Francis] distinguishes explicitly and firmly between the two forms of life. On the one hand Francis declares that the Lord has given him 'such faith' in the priests who live 'according to the form of the Roman Church' that even if they were to persecute him (it is significant that this possibility would be contemplated), he would fear, love, and honor them as his lords. On the other hand, he takes care to specify that 'after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel' (pg. 97).

This is exactly what is missing in Illich's (1970) critique of school. Illich, in comparing the institution of schooling to the Church, can only see the possibility of living according to the form of the institution, failing to recognize that although the institution has developed its own form, to live a life in the form of the wandering scholar (Illich, 1993) is still an option that has potential even without having to eliminate schools all together.

My own reading of Illich suggests that he is not far from this position, but that he, for whatever reason, could not bring himself all the way there. Critique of institutions is easy because it can go on forever and always reinforce itself. But he does, likely without realizing it, suggest something beyond the critique, something that can be done. He writes: "each of us is personally responsible for his or her own deschooling, and only we have the power to do it. No one can be excused if he fails to liberate himself from

schooling.” (pp. 47-8). If we take schooling to be a mindset, which these sentences clearly presume; deschooling here is presented as a type of deprogramming. It has less to do with the repurposing or destruction of buildings but of the elimination of a certain way of being that school expects—i.e. instrumentalized and operative being.

The Franciscans had the same problem. This movement was a dechurching movement, though, instead of deschooling. What is unique is that, as demonstrated by Francis’ approach to obedience to the authority of the priests, he “knows none of the ‘anticlericalism’ that is so characteristic of many spiritual movements that are contemporary with him. He can always give to the Church what is the Church’s without polemic, namely the administration of the *officium* that belongs to it” (Agamben, 2013, pg. 120) Note that although Agamben is referring here to 13th century anticlericalism, it should be clear that this is no different from the anticlerical gestures of Illich.

Why is Francis able to affirm subjection to the clergy and Church without issue? It is precisely because he recognizes “the radical heterogeneity of the two forms of life” (Agamben, 2013, pp. 120-1). Agamben calls this “radical extraneousness to law and liturgy” (pg. 121) distinguishing between life according to law and liturgy (clergy) and life according to the Gospel of Christ (Francis). In other words, “life according to the form of the holy Gospel is situated on a level that is so distinct from that of the life according to the form of the holy Roman Church that it can not enter into conflict with it” (pg. 122). This entirely distinct level is what Agamben refers to as form-of-life (hyphenated), which is distinct from any other generic form of life (unhyphenated). Chapter Five will more fully develop the concept of form-of-life and the necessity of its application to education, but for the sake of the conversation about Illich it is important to

point out that the complete radical move that Francis performs in no way demands a complete restructuring of existing legal and political institutions, namely schools and Universities. What is being proposed here is identical to Agamben's definition of the fundamental uniqueness of Franciscanism: that is, an "*attempt to realize a human life and practice absolutely outside the determinations of the law.*" (pg. 110) This life is form-of-life. Everything remains mostly the same, only a little different. But it is through that little difference that everything changes.

Potential and Act

In the second paragraph of chapter four of *Deschooling Society*, Illich (1970) lays out the criteria that he thinks are necessary when thinking toward social change that needs to occur. This section will focus on a close reading as an attempt to bring forward the philosophical assumptions contained in Illich's thinking and the way they inform the institutional analysis that he performs in the rest of the chapter. Paragraph 2 in its entirety reads:

I believe that a desirable future depends on our deliberately choosing a life of action over a life of consumption, on our engendering a life style which will enable us to be spontaneous, independent, yet related to each other, rather than maintaining a life style which only allows us to make and unmake, produce and consume—a style of life which is merely a way station on the road to depletion and pollution of the environment. The future depends more upon our choice of institutions which support a life of action than on our developing new ideologies and technologies. We need a set of criteria which will permit us to recognize those institutions which support personal growth rather than

addiction, as well as the will to invest our technological resources preferentially in such institutions of growth. (pp. 52-53)

This preference for a life of action, against consumption and the bare necessities of life, is not unique to Illich. Indeed, it traces back to ancient Greece in the political thought of Plato and Aristotle. Additionally, Hannah Arendt (1958), pulling directly from the ancients, resides among the twentieth century's great political philosophers. Her most significant study of politics is *The Human Condition*. Written clearly and with an unmistakable debt to Aristotelian political philosophy, this work will help to clarify exactly where Illich (and most moderns without realizing) stands. The next chapter will then begin the work of critiquing this position.

Without explicitly doing so, Illich (1970), by calling for a future in which individuals live lives of action, in which consumption is not front and center, is taking the position which holds the *good life* as life's highest ideal. This, according to Arendt (1958), is what "Aristotle called the life of the citizen [which is] not merely better, more carefree or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different quality. It was 'good' to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process." (pg. 37). To live a life of action, the good life, individuals must rise above the basic necessities of living and live, instead, for the public good.

Illich's (1970) praise for action and rejection of a lifestyle "which only allows us to make and unmake, produce and consume" (pp. 52-53) is an almost direct echo of Arendt's (1958) categorization of human life into three broad categories: labor, work, and

action. Labor, always necessary, is what humans do to sustain their own lives. Humans grow and prepare food; make and mend clothing; eat, brush teeth, etc. Work on the other hand, is not about sustaining life, but producing things that outlast individuals:

architecture, trade work, building, crafts, all of these are the product of work. Action, the highest of the human possibilities, is the activity of participating in and influencing the public sphere and, as noted above, requires the individual to transcend the other two.

The passage cited above clearly demonstrates that Illich (1970) feels that action is either not possible or rarely possible in the modern, industrial world. But why Illich holds this position is not entirely clear. Fortunately, Arendt's analysis addresses this problem directly. Arendt (1958) distinguishes between the public, private, and social. In ancient Greece, as one might expect, the public is the arena in which individuals acted. Labor and work were done in private. In order to enter the public space, one had to have the affairs of their private life in such a state that would afford them time to enter and participate in the public, hence the population of citizens, those who could participate publicly, was much smaller than the overall population. The social, on the other hand, is distinctly modern and arose as a result of the emergence of the private into the public; "society [the social] ... conquered the public realm" (pg. 41). As a result, "society...excludes the possibility of action.... Society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement." (pg. 40). Arendt's description of the interruption caused by society and Illich's institutional critique echo one another.

Illich (1970) considers schools to be among the types of institutions that he categorizes as manipulative institutions. Consider how closely his description of the function of schools is to Arendt's characterization of the social. He writes, "schools themselves pervert the natural inclination to grow and learn into the demand for instruction" (pg. 60). Demanding instruction instead of following inclination is precisely the exclusion of spontaneous action described by Arendt. He also laments that "by making men abdicate the responsibility for their own growth, school leads many to a kind of spiritual suicide" (pg. 60). And if all of this is a result of the collapse of the public and private into each other, the emergence of a new social, then of course the most appropriate intervention would be to call for action, the reemergence of a genuine public sphere. But this ideal is not without its critics.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEMOCRATIC APPROACH?

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was shown that Illich's (1970) call for the dismantling of schooling in *Deschooling Society* might not be the best way to approach problems in education and schooling. With that said, much of his best thinking on the matter has been left unmentioned. It is the intention of this chapter to bring what I see as Illich's strongest critique of school, that it is compulsory, into conversation with the democratic education theory put forward by Amy Gutmann. In this sense, the silenced voice of Illich will be able to speak with a leading voice in education scholarship. While the previous chapter suggested that a reform or revolution in education need not necessarily be rid of the institution of schools all together, nothing yet has been said regarding how this will look. Likewise, this chapter will continue the work of taking this critique another step further before, in later chapters, proposing a more comprehensive vision for education.

The previous chapter ended with a discussion linking parts of Illich's thinking with that of Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. As was discussed, the influence of Aristotle on Arendt is significant. And it is precisely at this juncture that we can in a certain way see Illich and Guttmann working in the same domain. If Illich's metaphysics and politics are implicitly Aristotelian, Gutmann (1987) is explicit in this connection, particularly in connection with the *Politics*. The obvious question that follows from this is how can this fundamental, but hidden, link between two diametrically opposed thinkers help to unravel the opposition and chart a new path forward?

The answer to this question will be something like this: though Illich is closer to the target, both thinkers misunderstand the consequences of compulsory schooling on political life. In order to make sense of this claim, it is first important to return to the work of Giorgio Agamben, this time in his first major work, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* where he identifies a key problem in western metaphysics that originates in Aristotle, the division between biological life and a qualified life.

Defining Life: *Zoē* and *Bios*

It should be remembered that key to Arendt's (1958) understanding of action is that it takes place in a separate, public sphere apart from the duties of labor, which are necessary for the preservation of life and a private affair. And while these duties are essential, attaining the ability to live a life of action is preferable. This division, as was noted, comes directly from Aristotle and is the distinction at which Agamben (2017) directs his critique in *Homo Sacer*. Agamben opens the book exploring the following: "the Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word 'life.' They used two terms that... are semantically and morphologically distinct" (pg. 5). The terms they used for life are *zoē* and *bios*. *Zoē* "expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings" while *bios* "indicated a form or way of living proper to an individual or group" (pg. 5). While Arendt (1958) is doing original thinking and not simply rehashing Aristotelian categories, it is clear enough that her thought can be mapped on to this classical division. After all, this simple fact of living, *zoē*, is clearly analogous to the category of labor, which always serves the continuance of life itself. At the other end of the spectrum is *bios*, the qualified life, the life defined by what it does, the life of action.

Paradoxically, the problem for Agamben (2017) is not simply that the separation of these two conceptions of life leads to the exclusion of bare life, *zoē*, from political life which prizes “a qualified life, a particular way of life” (pg. 5) over life-as-such. The real issue here is that this exclusion creates an inclusion of bare life in politics—by way of exclusion. In fact, the principal thesis put forward is that “Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life.”(pg. 9). And most importantly, this exclusion has a tremendous effect on political life in modernity.

According to my reading of Agamben’s complex work in *Homo Sacer*, modern democracy is altogether different from classical democracy. Much like Arendt (1958) who saw a blurring between private and public life resulting in a new *social* sphere, Agamben (2017) notes that “modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoē*, and that it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē*” (pg. 11). In other words, bare life in modernity has become the principal concern of politics rather than what is excluded. Drawing attention to the work of Foucault, Agamben points out that this is the origin of Biopower. But unlike Arendt, who would solve this problem with a return to the classical division of public and private life, *zoē* and *bios*, Agamben at one and the same time recognizes that there is no going back but, also, that this development reveals a truth at the foundation of all politics, namely the domination of sovereign, political power over bare life; though it has only now become apparent, it has always been the case. And because it has always been the case it is from this fundamental truth in western politics that any interventions must be proposed.

In Agamben's (2017) own words, "every attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city" (pg. 153). Agamben sees the emergence of camps (e.g. refugee camps) in the 20th century as the most clear example of the collapse of this classical distinction. Camps are a place where physical survival itself becomes for the individuals its own "particular way of life" (pg. 5). In the camp an individual's *bios*, their life's form, is bare life itself. The two become indistinguishable. And, unfortunately, "there is no return from the camps to classical politics. In the camps, city and house became indistinguishable, and the possibility of differentiating between our biological body and our political body... was taken from us forever" (pg. 153).

It should be clear that, while literal camps are the primary example, Agamben is also drawing an analogy between life in camps and life in the modern world. Life outside the camps now looks more and more like life in camps. And while there is true horror in this new reality, there is an angle that can provide a way forward politically without dreaming of a return to classical politics. This for Agamben is the inoperative; *bios* as bare existence is form-of-life. He writes in the final pages of *Homo Sacer*: "if we give the name form-of-life to this being that is only its own bare existence and to this life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it, we will witness the emergence of a field of research beyond the terrain defined by the intersection of politics and philosophy" (pg. 153). And in the field of education, recognizing that education is political, it is essential that inoperativity and form-of-life guide our analysis of existing approaches.

Deliberation, Democracy, and Compulsory Schooling

In certain ways, reading Amy Gutmann's (1987) *Democratic Education* is a breath of fresh air. At a foundational level, the division between deliberative and non-deliberative democracy (pp. xii-xiii) is of maximum importance because it shows how democracy is effective while recognizing that it can, when not deliberative, also "treat people as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled" (pg. xii). Though she does not outright say so, the sense is that we currently live in non-deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy requires full participation by each member of the society in conversations around issues. This requires that each person possess the skill-set to think about and discuss their point of view and listen to those of others before decisions are made. Unfortunately, a big question remains unaddressed regarding deliberation, though we can assume that the remainder of the book is Gutmann's attempt at a demonstration of why the answer might be in the affirmative: is a truly deliberative form of democracy even possible? And if so, is her approach to democracy and education sufficient to achieve a society of deliberative citizens?

Guttmann (1987) shows her commitment to classical politics that was critiqued above when she justifies the existence of schooling on Aristotle's belief that in order to rule individuals must first be ruled, recognizing that in a democracy each individual has a role as ruler and should be equipped for the job (pg.3). What Aristotle (2005) says in this section is that individuals "should know how to govern like a freeman, and how to obey like a freeman—these are the virtues of a citizen" (pg 62, 1277b). While it is not explicitly stated, this is the obvious defense of obligatory, compulsory schooling. Put in terms already deployed in this chapter, in order to have the *bios* of a citizen ruler, an individual

must first obey according to the form of this *bios*. Clearly, Gutmann, by structuring her argument according to classical concepts, has failed to address the more fundamental problem for politics, the *zoē-bios* split.

Because of this failure, a problematic contradiction begins to appear when studied closely. She brilliantly writes, “deliberative democracy underscores the importance of publicly supported education that develops the capacity to deliberate among all children as future free and equal citizens” (pg. xii) This is certainly true, but at this point, nothing can be said about the necessity of compulsory schooling to achieve this end. The problem here is the insistence on politicizing—giving a *bios* to—individuals through schooling. This *bios* is deliberation which makes deliberation operative and serves the purpose of social reproduction. And, the conclusion is, if students don’t reach the point of being good deliberators, they have not, by implication, achieved a good life. This is made evident in the way she defines education. Education, she writes, is “the conscious efforts of men and women to inform the intellect and to shape the character of less educated people” followed by the question “what kind of people should human education seek to create?” (pg. 19). This can not more clearly demonstrate the rehashing of the exclusion of “bare life” in exchange for “a qualified life”(Agamben, 2017, pg. 5).

The contradiction is that this insistence on creating a new, more capable individual than the one that enters school misunderstands deliberation. Deliberation in this sense becomes, exactly as Illich (1970) fears, a good to be consumed not a practice that is willingly engaged in for its own sake.

In order to be truly deliberative, the practice must exist in the realm of inoperativity. Deliberation itself is a kind of searching, recognizing that there is always

potential to not reach a conclusion. Inoperativity, form-of-life, in its very conception, cannot be compulsory. To compel can only be justified on operative grounds. So, making a fundamentally inoperative activity compulsory is to demand an end that can never be achieved. Yes, the state can and should sponsor robust public education, which both Illich (1970) and Gutmann (1987) agree with, but if it is truly to serve a deliberative politics it cannot be made mandatory. This is both a fundamental problem that supporters of democracy must contend with and the unfortunate set of circumstances that equitable, participatory politics must accept before any meaningful change in educational approach can occur.

Further, Gutmann (1987) criticizes functional theorists who “ invoke an intuitively implausible and empirically unverified form of determinism” (pg. 10) that allows for a critique of education and schooling without having to provide any meaningful results. The problem here is that by insisting that education’s primary function is to support deliberative democracy—the ability to accomplish such a task being questionable at best—then it allows democratic theorists to continue calling for more democracy and when it never arrives and bemoan the current undemocratic system even further. Ultimately, this type of treatment doesn’t pose a threat to the system as it is and can be openly praised without the possibility of ever having much of an effect.

This is why statements such as “we can appreciate the centrality of schooling to democratic education and still recognize that there is much more to democratic education than schooling” (Gutmann, 1987, pg. 16) are so frustrating. There is an insistence on defending compulsory education without ever giving its critique fair treatment yet, at the same time, pointing to the fact that education is so much more than school. She is

absolutely correct when she says that “the main problem with primary schooling today is not that it does not compensate for the failures of other social institutions...but that it does not prepare students for democratic citizenship” (Gutmann, 1987,pg 148) But that she never recognizes that it might be incapable of making that guarantee is a major weakness.

This does not mean that Illich’s (1970) concern with compulsory schooling hit the nail on the head either. He seems primarily concerned with two points. One that the legal obligation to go to school is a violation of rights and that schooling does not even do what it purports to do—create a more equitable society. He writes: “neither in North America nor in Latin America do the poor get equality from obligatory schools. But in both places the mere existence of school discourages and disables the poor from taking control of their own learning” (Illich, pg. 8). Though he does recognize that schools do not do what they purport to do, that is, form citizens for life in a democracy, he does not seem to understand why this is the case.

Deliberation and contemplation bring enjoyment. Deliberation and contemplation, which, as will be shown, are not only political but also ethical, are fundamental to the interior life. But they cannot be legalized or coerced. If there is to be a way forward for school and education as a whole, this is a central problem to be solved.

CHAPTER FOUR: ENJOYMENT AND THE FACE

School as an Instrument

In a brilliant dissertation titled *Why School?: A Systems Perspective on Creating Schooling for Flourishing Individuals and a Thriving Democratic Society*, Erin Raab (2017) categorizes the principal justifications for schooling, showing that scholars typically fall into a framework that distinguishes between Intrinsic and Instrumental justifications on one hand and Individual and Collective on the other. While she starts with the principle that “schooling is a teleological system – it has a purpose” (pg. 3), she spends much time arguing that focusing on the instrumental purposes of schooling (i.e. schools should exist for the benefit of economic, military, and other social factors) is problematic. This distinction is made because, according to her, “we must define the ‘problem of schooling’ correctly. Generating solutions to the wrong problem, or for a misunderstood purpose, may create ‘innovation,’ but it won’t necessarily create positive change” (pg. 7) and her goal is to see meaningful overhaul of the system of schooling itself.

While it is disappointing that she never takes up the debate around schooling and deschooling which one would expect from a work titled *Why School?*, she does appear to take the conversation about school into important territory. Ultimately, the project seems less about answering the question “Why School?” but more about the question “since we have school, what is the best way to do it?” On this point, there is a clear recognition that all societies have educated the members of the society for intrinsic personal and social

reasons, and that our society has chosen schooling as the method for doing this. In this sense, she takes a realist approach that is valuable to this study.

The previous sections have sought to problematize the conversation about schooling from both sides: pro schooling and anti schooling. Every teacher in K-12 schools has been asked “why do I have to do this?” by a student. At this point it should be more clear that making school obligatory is the cause of these ‘what-for?’ questions that students have always asked. The only justifiable answer to a question like this can be given in instrumental terms. But at its core, education and scholarship as it is being presented here is definitively non-instrumental, in the limited sense that instrumental and utilitarian judgements are one and the same.

While one could easily become hopeless if they accept the claim that compulsory schools are not capable of achieving their most noble ends, particularly, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, that of creating engaged, democratic citizens. What is most important in Raab’s work is that it accepts schooling as the educational reality that we live with, like it or not. It is from this recognition that the second chapter, which sought to show the way Francis and his followers were able to strike out in their own direction without ever having to bring down the Church because their form-of-life was could not be contained or limited by the legal structures created by the Church; they could go on living according to their form-of-life regardless of the institutional barriers before them. The same might be said, if not of students, of educators themselves.

While the next chapter will really flush out this idea, this chapter will explore to what extent the form-of-life *par excellence* ought to be determined by the exemplary ethical life and how the Other puts our possessions into question. The idea of separation

and the face of the other (Levinas, 1969), the great ethical call, are vital in forming a concrete theory connecting education in the twenty-first century to a distinct form-of-life.

Childhood to Adulthood

We cannot rid the world of historically totalizing forces, but schooling, like capital, is an invasion in the very private part of individual lives that is necessary for separation and the ethical relation—welcoming the Other.

We cannot command members of a society to live up to their responsibility to the face of the Other but ought we provide them with the necessary experiences that would encourage such responsibility? Levinas seeks to demonstrate how the process of separation is a necessary prerequisite for the ethical relation. If this is the case, it must be something at the forefront of any thinking about school and its aims. Not only this, but it also requires that we take a closer look at the process of separation and what it has to do with entering adulthood.

While a central concern of mine is to promote a theory of education that recognizes that education is endless, that it occurs throughout the life and that schooling, by signaling clear end points, distorts this reality, it would also be incorrect to neglect the role that primary schooling plays in the transition from childhood to adulthood. As Illich (1970), Gutmann (1987), and Raab (2017) all recognize, schooling is not the only way a society can choose to help its younger members make this transition, it is the way that ours does. Of key importance, then, is developing a clear understanding of this transitional phase and what it might entail.

Lloyd Demause (1982), in *Foundations of Psychohistory*, identifies the horrors of childrearing historically and proposes a psychohistorical approach to history which argues, “the central force for change in history is neither technology nor economics, but the ‘psychogenic’ changes in personality occurring be-cause[sic] of successive generations of parent-child interactions” (pg. 4). In other words, poor child rearing practices traumatize whole generations of adults, causing myriad social problems as a result. These adults then traumatize their children because they have unprocessed trauma of their own and the cycle continues. Demause (1982) identifies six historical modes of child rearing representing “a continuous sequence of closer approaches between parent and child as generation after generation of parents slowly overcame their anxieties and began to develop the capacity to identify and satisfy the needs of their children” (pg. 62). These six modes, proceeding from Antiquity to today are: Infanticidal Mode, Abandoning Mode, Ambivalent Mode, Intrusive Mode, Socializing Mode, & Helping Mode.

The value of thinking of history in terms of childrearing modes is that it helps us to more clearly understand what mode schools have worked within. Foucault’s (1977) work in *Discipline and Punish* clearly identifies early schooling with the Intrusive Mode. While some scholars (Chomsky, 2011; Gabbard, 2011; Illich, 1970; Saltman, 2011) argue that this remains true, we can also see an ideology of socialization not only at work in democratic education theorists like Gutmann (1987) and Raab (2017) but also to a certain extent in the realm of critical pedagogy with thinkers like Friere (2000) and Giroux (2020) who are critical of the disciplining Intrusive Mode and attempt to point the way

toward a mode of schooling that socializes adolescents on into adult society. All of this, though, says little of the Helping Mode identified by Demause (1982).

In a later book, *The Emotional Life of Nations*, Demause (2002) provides a framework to think about what he means by Helping Mode and this reveals how the framework might be used in consideration of ethical responsibility when it comes to compulsory schooling. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Demause focuses on the need for individuation. Historically (and currently) many people never really individuated from their parents and society because they were used as ‘poison containers’ for their own parent’s traumas and ‘desires’ for them and were never given the space for becoming individuals of their own. While the Socializing Mode hinders individuation, the primary objective of parents and other adults responsible for bringing children to adulthood is occupying a helping role in their process of individuation.

All of this would be meaningless if there were no discussion of the difference between a child and an adult. In a seminal article on this topic, Tamar Schapiro (1999) takes up the difficult task of considering what a child is and what our responsibility to children might be. Schapiro takes up the question using Kant’s conception of freedom of the will, ultimately addressing the question: at what point does a child, dependent on the adults around them, develop a free will of their own? Freedom, for Kant, requires that an individual take up as their own a set of maxims that guide their behavior (Kant, 2012). As naturally follows, an ethical person would take up a set of maxims that are ethically grounded. As such, although we can not make a person ethical, the first step to an ethical (or moral) life is to take up a set of maxims of one’s own. As Schapiro (1999) writes, “the problem is that man, now aware of his capacity for freedom, has to find a way of

governing himself *as* a free will” (pg. 723). The problem for adult society is not that “attempting to perfect others is paternalistic, but that it is, strictly speaking, impossible” (pg. 724) so the goal of education should not, can not, be to make perfect individuals/citizens. If anything, schooling in its best form can only serve to make children into adults. Defined by Schapiro (1999), an adult is a person “who is in a position to speak in her own voice, the voice of one who stands in a determinate, authoritative relation to the various motivation forces within her” while a child is one who “is not yet in a position to speak in her own voice because there is no voice which counts as hers” (pg. 729). Therefore the goal of childrearing should focus on giving children what is necessary to become free agents, to ‘speak with their own voices’ so to say; further, adults “should make it our end to do what is in our power as adults to help children work their way out of childhood” (pg. 735).

Daniel Weinstock (2016) wrote an important response and critique of Schapiro’s approach to the question of adult responsibility to the child, but on most points he is in agreement. His most salient points come toward the conclusion, particularly in their ability to add nuance to Schapiro who comes off as black and white when attempting to decipher when a person has selected maxims of their own and reached full adulthood. Weinstock argues that a person, in order to have reached adulthood, does not have to reach full and complete autonomy, writing “there is a point at which it makes sense to treat an agent as a morally responsible adult, not because her maxims have reached a final, unalterable state, but because they are stable enough” (pg. 57). Ultimately we should not have such a high bar that no one ever gets to be an adult. Rather, just the

opposite. When someone reaches the point where they have established some set of maxims, even if basic, they ought to be treated as adults.

Kohan (2011), though working outside a Kantian framework, developed a theory and method for teaching philosophy in schools that is supported by the work done by Demause (1982; 2002) and Schapiro (1999). Kohan (2011) conceptualizes philosophy as play and play as a form of ‘becoming child’. Ultimately, for the big picture, he proposes a pedagogy that focuses on engaging students in thinking critically without imposing preset ideas or curriculum, certainly reflecting a commitment to helping rather than socializing. The central question of this article is stated clearly when he asks “how might the purposes of practicing philosophy with children be affirmed other than as toward the social and political education of childhood?”(pg. 341) Kohan rejects the current trend of teaching philosophy in schools for political ends, i.e. to make good, democratic citizens. Kohan, as I see it, aligns with the Demausian injunction to help students individuate. In order to do this, adults (educators) have to let them freely explore ideas rather than impose a predetermined version of what is correct. As if responding to Kant (through Schapiro) and Demause, Kohan (2011) writes “the emancipatory teacher works upon the will of the student through liberating her intelligence to work by itself—which he can do only under the presupposition that all intelligences are equal” (pg. 351) and “we work to establish a context for thinking, and a pedagogical relationship in which the student realizes that the teacher does not want to transfer, bestow, or engineer the appearance of anything to or in the student, but is confident in the potential of her thinking, and in her capacity to share a thinking process with others” (pg. 352). This approach goes one step further than Raab (2017) who recognizes on one hand that “if we want to ensure the

ability of our society to adapt to changes in the environment, we need schools to be organized for intrinsic purposes and with aims of maximizing potential for anomalous thinking and new perspectives” (pg. 32) yet on the other seems to hang on to the notion, also found in Gutmann (1987) that schools “serve two broad functions: 1) to reproduce or replicate society, and 2) to renew society” (Raab, 2017, pg. 29).

Enjoyment

Emmanuel Levinas is distinctly not Kantian, though it is also hard for all philosophers that come after Kant to get out of his shadow. And though Levinas’ (1969) work in *Totality and Infinity* dispenses of Kant’s rationalist insistence on the taking up a set of maxims, through concepts like Interiority, separation, and Exteriority he sets out to rework concepts that are central to Kant, particularly freedom and responsibility. This section will maintain fidelity to Demause’s (1982) six modes of child rearing, not because his work is without critique, particularly its progressive view of history, but because it forces a closer look at what it might mean to help a child individuate. And while thinking about individuation in terms of Kantian maxims seems to have some value in thinking through what this helping hand might be, Levinas’ understanding of the development of subjectivity is vital to this discussion.

There is a constellation of concepts at work here that are all similar and work together. It should be clear as this discussion progresses that Demaus’ (1982; 2002) concept of individuation is similar to what Levinas (1969) means by Interiority and Separation. These concepts refer to the point in life where a person recognizes that, though they are inescapably situated within the world, they have an interior life that is uniquely separate from it as well; this is the point at which a sense of self begins to

develop. Prior to this, caught in what Levinas (1969) terms *the same*, the experience of life is that of being in a web of social relations in which there is no clear distinction between individuals. Because of this, a person is not truly able to recognize an ‘Other’ unless first going through separation and recognizing their own distinct interior life. Key here is that this interior life is where the experience of enjoyment lies.

In order to show how the interior life is a life of enjoyment Levinas (1969) distinguishes between nutritive needs and the act of “living-from.” It is common to say that one needs food because of biological needs, for the nutrition that it provides to our organism. Levinas challenges this reduction: “the consumption of foods” he writes, “is the food of life” (pg. 114). In other words, people do not eat food simply because it nourishes their biological being, but more importantly we live from the act of eating. We enjoy eating and, here is the key, “subjectivity originates in the independence and sovereignty of enjoyment” (pg. 114). It is from the enjoyment of living-from that we become independent subjects rather than anonymous members of *the same*.

Key here is that individuals do not simply enjoy and live-from food alone. Strikingly in alignment with Agamben (2017), who in *Homo Sacer* problematized the metaphysical distinction between bare life and the qualified life, Levinas (1969) writes “the bare fact of life is never bare” (pg. 112). Bare life is not simply sustenance. It is from this bare life that we actually live. We can start to see here how our *bios* become our *zoē*. This is precisely what is meant by enjoyment. Even more clearly stated, “life is *love of life*, a relation with contents that are not my being but more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun” (pg. 112). We live-from

and find enjoyment in the contents and activities of our interior, separated life. This is a process that must be undergone.

The more broad connection to the larger conversation about education can be deciphered in a key moment in *Totality and Infinity*: “food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation” (Levinas, 1969, pg. 134). By implement, Levinas is referring to making food a tool for basic sustenance of our bare life rather than something we live-from and enjoy. Cannot this exact thing be said if we replace food with education? Where individuals and knowledge itself are exploited for some social ‘good’, even if that good is deliberation or equity for all, we must conclude that education is being made operative as an implement for some greater end. As soon as we start thinking this way, we have missed the point. We *live-from* study, from education, from the leisure that is originally at the heart of the school day (we should acknowledge that *school* originates from Greek *scholē* and denotes leisure and discussion (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)).

The Face

Kant’s (2012) deontological ethics holds that certain acts are universally, categorically ethical or unethical and the role of the individual subject is to take up their own law or set of maxims that lead to ethical behavior. Levinas (1969), against Kant and through a more robust analysis of the emergence of the individual subject as discussed above, develops an ethics that is purely relational. For Levinas, prior to any metaphysical distinction are social relationships. In separation individuals begin to distinguish self, I, from the rest of the world. This is essential because without first separating and recognizing the self as totally different from the rest of the world, there can be no way to

recognize in the face of the Other someone who is infinitely different and unknowable. Ultimately, this is a bit of a reciprocal relationship since “the idea of infinity, revealed in the face, does not only *require* a separated being; the light of the face is necessary for separation” (pg. 151).

It is this experience of the infinitely unknowable Other that opens the possibility for discourse and calls the separate, egotistical I into question. Discourse that opens between the “I” and the Other is fundamental for understanding Levinasian ethics. “In discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the other, and this urgency of response—acuteness of the present—engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought to my final reality” (Levinas, 1969, pg 178). Again, although it puts the separate I who enjoys into question, makes the I responsible, that initial separation is essential for the existence of the ethical relation; there is no ethical relation between I and Other without first separating as an I. Distinct from Kant’s (2012) universal ethics, all ethics for Levinas start with a particular moment, and encounter between an I and an Other, what he calls the face-to-face.

While these ethical approaches are distinct they both are dependent on the moments where separation takes place. From this discussion, then, we can draw important conclusions regarding education: first, when considering the aspect of education that deals primarily with helping children enter adult society and developing practices that help students find enjoyment in separation is central; second, and most importantly, that separated individuals live-from and enjoy food, reading, and study not for some teleological ends but because it is fundamentally human to find pleasure in these

things. Finally, *if the ethical relation is primary, then all operative justifications for obligatory schooling begin to crumble.*

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY AND CONTEMPLATION

“A Little Different”

Returning to the critique of Aristotle’s division of *bios* and *zoē*, the relevance of Agamben’s development of *form-of-life*, *use*, and the *inoperative life* become essential concepts for developing an approach to education that both has the potential to be truly meaningful for all students and teachers and yet be resilient in the face of public policy that may not always be in the best interest of students and an educated society. In previous sections, Illich’s (1970) anti-institutional justification for the eradication of schooling in *Deschooling Society* and Gutmann’s (1987) belief that school should ultimately serve a deliberative democracy in *Democratic Education* have been problematized. Against Illich, it was proposed that there might be a way of thinking about education and schooling that does not require institutional overthrow. Yet, this was immediately followed by a critique of compulsory education, showing that Guttmann’s lofty ends of an educated, deliberative citizenry are not realistic.

Much of what has been said thus far has been in anticipation of a more fully developed discussion proposing that two interrelated concepts developed by Giorgio Agamben (2000; 2013, 2017, 2019), *form-of-life* and *inoperativity*, are concepts that need to be at the center of any discussion about education going forward. The previous chapter sought to lay a groundwork for better understanding these difficult concepts through a reading of Levinas’ (1969) philosophy of enjoyment in living-from rather than biological dependence.

As was proposed at the beginning, a central aim of this thesis is to consider how we might say something in response to Benjamin (1999) who's messianic Judaism led him to conclude that the future will be "mostly the same, only a little different" (pg. 664). What is at stake here is how we conceive of this little difference.

If a theory of form-of-life is that 'little difference' then it is essential to be as clear as possible what is meant by the term. While there is overlap with Camus' (1965) response to the absurdity of life in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, form-of-life is distinct from what is typically classified in existentialist thinking as projects. Project implies a point of culmination. A form-of-life, however, as made clear through the use and habits of the body, is lived and contemplated in each moment, in the form itself. There is no striving for, but only being (Agamben, 2017). To start, it is important to understand what Agamben (2013) means by highest poverty and how it relates to the inoperative.

The Highest Poverty and Use

In its most simple formulation, Agamben (2013) uses the term 'highest poverty' in reference to the Franciscan rejection of all rights to property and personal ownership. Highest poverty, being simply another way of describing form-of-life, is "not in any way reducible to a normative code" (pg. 98) because, as he demonstrates, the Franciscans, unlike the monastics that came before them, assert only "the right to have no rights" through the renunciation of all personal property (pg. 124). Through complex legal argumentation, Franciscan scholars hoped to demonstrate that even the habits they wore were not property, but simply items in their use. It is only through this concept of use, that it becomes entirely clear how the Franciscans, were not simply renunciants, but adhered in their lives to a form entirely separate from the institutional structured Church

that was so determinative of the lives of everyone in late medieval Europe (Agamben, 2013).

Use, as a concept, is further developed in the final book of the *Homo Sacer Omnibus* series titled *The Use of Bodies*. Agamben's (2017) most clear example of what he means by use comes in a paragraph about walking that needs to be quoted at length. He writes:

Just as, in the experience of making a visit expressed by the Hebrew verb, the subject constitutes himself as visiting and, in the experience of walking, the subject first of all walks himself, has an experience of himself as walking, in the same way every use is first of all use of self: to enter into a relation of use with something, I must be affected by it, constitute myself as one who makes use of it. Human being and world are, in use, in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; in the using of something, it is the very being of the one using that is first of all at stake (pg. 1054).

This reciprocal relationship between being affected by something and being in use of it is of critical importance. Use, which is form-of-life, undoes the relationship between means and ends where everything becomes a means unto itself, where "nothing is being produced or acted but rather something is being endured and supported" (Agamben, 2000, pg. 56). This, finally, is what is meant by inoperativity. To be clear, we should not mistake inoperativity as "indicating simple inactivity, as a form of passivity and utter absence of all labour" (Marmont & Primera, 2020, pg. 9) but instead recognize that that inoperative is not a prohibition on activity. Inoperativity denotes a type of activity that has no end in mind, is all means without end, where "the act of creation is a field of

forces stretched between potential and impotential” (Agamben, 2019, pg. 19) rather than toward finality.

Implications

What we live-from, to call back to Levinas (1969), can have no end. Human study, rest, play, enjoyment is at its core, fundamentally inoperative. The problem with compulsory schooling, as demonstrated earlier, should now be more clear. Compulsory schooling, as Raab (2017) so rightly points out, is a teleological system and, thus, must lead toward predetermined ends. Even when these ends have a noble ring to them like social (re)production and political deliberation, they are fundamentally at odds with the enjoyment humans draw from study, curiosity, and play that are means unto themselves.

Illich (1993), though critiqued in chapter two, was clearly in alignment with this view, especially in light of what might be his greatest piece of scholarship, *In the Vineyard of the Text*. In this study of the work of the late medieval pedagogue, Hugh of St. Victor, Illich repeatedly invokes wandering scholars, houses of reading, and scholars in exile. In an attempt to discern how education, scholarship, and reading were approached in the late medieval period compared to the present, Illich clearly sums up the difference suggesting that modern reading is for commuters and tourists rather than pedestrians and pilgrims (pg. 110). What jumps out in this comparison, is the relevance of Agamben in reading the opposition of commuter/tourists to pedestrian/pilgrims. Commuters and tourists connote people with ends and objectives whereas pedestrians and pilgrims are individuals who are in a position of use, and therefore get us closer to form-of-life.

This should not be surprising because a central metaphor of Illich's (1993) book is that reading, for Hugh, was not about reading cover-to-cover and feeling accomplished when completion has been reached, but is instead like a leisurely stroll through a vineyard, plucking grapes and savoring their various flavors. In this type of reading is enjoyment, pleasure, and a contemplative spirit that does not seek a final conclusion. This kind of reading is ruminatory. This approach is most apparent when Hugh (1991) writes "the start of learning, thus, lies in reading, but its consummation lies in meditation: which, if any man will learn to love it very intimately and will desire to be engaged very frequently upon it, renders his life pleasant indeed, and provides the greatest consolation to him in his trials" (pg. 93). This is undoubtedly the same conclusion that Levinas (1969) reaches about living-from. Learning starts by specifically developing a certain set of skills but ultimately this is not because it will necessarily achieve something, but because meditation and contemplation are enjoyable. This should provide more context justifying why Illich (1970) has such a problem with schooling which he reads as entirely antithetical to the vineyard approach to reading.

Not What, but How

How then can we justify maintaining the institution of school? It seems then that the reasons to be opposed to compulsory schooling are too numerous to ignore. To state it as clearly as possible, it is not the conclusion of this study that schooling is ultimately justifiable on the grounds presented up to this point. That said, it seems counterproductive to ignore the realist position which is that schooling exists and there is currently no indication that it will go anywhere in the near future. Further, because schooling is funded with tax dollars and argued over publicly, it should not be expected

that lawmakers will consider anything but an operative approach to public education. It should not be controversial to point out that for all the money being spent on education that lawmakers could never be satisfied with a proposal that simply wants to give students a space to become vineyard dwellers, lovers of leisure, *scholē*-ed instead of schooled. That said, lawmakers would be hard pressed to deny the intrinsic desire that humans have for study and leisure that have nothing to do with economic and social objectives. Finally, it would be a tragedy if people predisposed to be educators threw up their hands and gave up in futility because of the precariousness of the educator in this field of concerns governing their lives. So what can educators who suspect that there is something the matter with compulsory schooling do?

Before approaching this question, it needs to be stated that I have no intention of drawing up prescriptions for educators, precisely because, considering use and inoperativity are underutilized theoretical concepts in educational discourses, it would not only be severely premature at this stage of the conversation but also because inoperativity as a framework for thinking is itself not exactly open to a prescriptive approach.

That said, Agamben (2017) gestures toward an approach to answering this question most clearly when he clarifies that form-of-life has less to do with *what* I am, than *how* I am what I am (pg. 1237). Pointing to the Myth of Er section in Plato's *Republic* (2005) which describes Er going to the underworld and observing the process by which souls choose the life that they are going to take before being born on earth. Central for Agamben in reading this allegory is not that souls choose the form (*bios*) their life takes but that the form is only the 'what' their life is going to be, meaning that in any

given form an individual still can be good or evil. The way life is lived is not determined, only the form it takes. Form of life (*bios*) transforms into form-of-life only when the *how* is made explicit, because *how* one lives, *how* one uses one's being and existence is what is most vital.

Again, the goal here is not to prescribe specifically in what way the how question is to be answered by those who have chosen the form of educator. But it should not be controversial to agree with Illich (1993) that "the learned ought to be an example to the unlearned" (pp. 80-81). In this way, the emphasis is on *how* educators approach teaching, not on how students approach learning. And maybe we can let Hugh of St. Victor (1991) give us the word in response to this difficult question:

"If, however, you desire to be the learned teacher, hear what you shall do. The inexpensiveness of your dress and the simplicity expressed in your countenance, the innocence of your life and the holiness of your behavior ought to teach men. You teach better by fleeing the world than by following after" (pg. 131)

Teachers teach best who adopt the principles of use and the highest poverty, where there is no end in mind, but only the pure human enjoyment of living-from teaching, learning, and leisurely walking in the vineyard.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The trouble with Agamben as a thinker, to borrow from a common metaphor, is that he is operating as a blindfolded man trying to understand an elephant. Use, bare life, highest poverty, and inoperativity, among others, are all attempts at describing the elephant from different angles. The core concept, form-of-life, is the elephant. Toward the end of *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben (2017), pulls these concepts together in a way that clearly highlights the centrality of contemplation as a final key to understanding form-of-life.

The essential function that the tradition of Western philosophy has assigned to the contemplative life and to inoperativity: form-of-life, the properly human life is the one that, by rendering inoperative the specific works and functions of the living being, causes them to idle,... so to speak, and in this way opens them into possibility. Contemplation and inoperativity are in this sense the metaphysical operators of an anthropogenesis, which, in liberating living human beings from every biological and social destiny and every predetermined task, render them available for that peculiar absence of work that we are accustomed to calling ‘politics’ and ‘art.’ Politics and art are not tasks nor simply ‘works’: rather, they name the dimension in which works—linguistic and bodily, material and immaterial, biological and social—are deactivated and contemplated as such in order to liberate the inoperative that has remained imprisoned in them (pg. 1278)

While inoperativity and use are likely to be difficult concepts to translate into mainstream conversations in the education sphere, contemplation is at least a concept that

most individuals understand has something to do with reflection and the use of leisure time, even if that understanding is not fully aligned with all the resonances it has in Agamben's work.

A great starting point and next step for thinking through the distinction between operative and inoperative practices might be to analyze "The Tree of Contemplative Practices" (Figure 1) which has branches that we already associate with education and schooling in some respect or another—reading, music, arts, storytelling, listening, and dialogue.

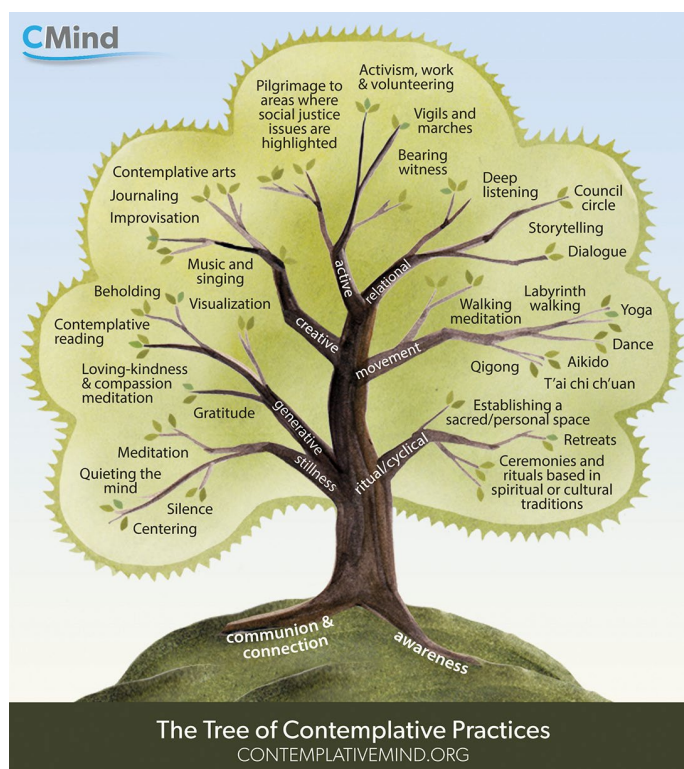


Figure 1 The tree of contemplative practices

When thinking practically, an obvious starting point in response to this work is to recognize that focus in schools might be thorough training of students on how to read closely, annotate a text, take notes, summarize passages, identify central ideas, write

good questions, and hold meaningful discussions. A well researched approach to doing this is given by Mary Keator (2018) in *Lectio Divina as Contemplative Pedagogy: Reappropriating Monastic Practices for the Humanities*. While Keator is not the only researcher taking seriously the need for a stronger focus on study through contemplation, her work is exemplary in putting forward a clear pedagogy and set of practices, at least within the humanities, that makes contemplation a meaningful experience in classrooms.

Additionally, Sean Steel (2015), leaning into the philosophers of antiquity in *The Pursuit of Wisdom in Education*, presents a strong case for educators to turn away from practices that focus on material gain and, instead, present the classroom as a space where wisdom might be more of a concern to the educational experience than knowledge acquisition. While wisdom is a sticky concept that can and should be analyzed and critiqued, the greater effort put forward by Steel suggests that there is a needed transformation toward contemplation and leisurely, exploratory reading rather than curricular coverage.

Again, it cannot be forgotten that inoperativity and form-of-life are new concepts within education scholarship and there should be pause before rushing into new pedagogical approaches. But what is promising when thinking about contemplative practices as foundational to the classroom is that they would not require teachers to outright transgress state mandates and common core standards.

More important at this point than thinking about new or alternative pedagogies is to begin thinking about what kind of changes might need to happen in teacher education programs, moving away from operative practices and toward the inoperative. If it is true that we live-from (Levinas, 1969) study, reading, creative endeavors as a way of living

that holds these activities as means unto themselves, then we should give prospective educators an education that aligns with this basic principle. We should want educators to spend more time not thinking about *what* an educator is, but *how* an educator becomes an educator. My objective is to develop a resilient theory of education and approach to schooling that might allow us to undo the harm that current operative practices inflict on students, and that work has to start with educators, not with students. When we put the above objectives in a form-of-life framework rather than a framework of competition and achievement, school and classroom practices will necessarily change. And though things will likely remain mostly the same, that little bit of difference, in its own way, is a difference with major implications.

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