

The History of Inquiry and Social Reproduction: Educating for Critical Thought

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Inquiry proceeds by posing questions: by interrogating subject matters or reality itself so as to lay underlying connections or structures bare. Such question-posing becomes *critical* when it not only reveals the shape or nature of what is, but also reveals what is problematic with what is, what calls for reconstruction of position or fact to achieve some more adequate understanding or action. We can see this pattern of questioning and disclosing, criticizing and reconstructing at work in one form or another in any developmental process mediated by thought, in any project to overcome past limits by some higher understanding or practice. The history of humanity's learning, we might say, is a history of variations on this theme.

The fundamental block to this whole process, however, is that some very central questions are extremely dangerous to ask. For example, it has traditionally been dangerous to question the belief, in any of its various forms, that one's state or laws are an expression of God's will.¹ The question relates to assumptions which established ruling powers would rather leave unasked. As such, it invites attack upon its poser as a disturber of social peace who ought to be silenced for imperilling social order, if not for treason. Other kinds of questions, in contrast, are accompanied by no such danger. At their "purest," they offend no one and no interest. Compare the inquiries "What are Newton's laws?" and "What is the plot structure of *Twelfth Night*?" to "What are central arguments against the capitalist system?"

So strong is the resistance to deep questioning of established social relations that it is difficult to think of any settled form of societal life that is rationally challenged in the history of learning prior to 1750. Socrates, for example, despite his reputation as an inveterate interrogator of conventional opinion, never went so far as to query seriously his society's belief in enslaving other people to do its work, nor did he ever think to question the system of aggressive war and imperialism upon which this enslavement was based. Like his fellow citizens, he benefitted from such arrangements, and however they might cry out for the philosophical daemon he held so dear, he left them unexamined. His questions stopped short precisely where one might have hoped for his gadfly bite—where repression of the light of intellect was at its worst.²

The lasting significance of Socrates was that he raised questions about the nature of social relations at all. The Pre-Socratics had prudently relaxed in speculations about natural phenomena,³ and it was an accepted view even among the reputedly wise that social custom and role constituted fate, or *Moirai*. Indeed, transgressing one's assigned lot in the social order was conceived as the root of all tragedy: an ancient outlook that continued through Shakespearean times and re-

mains today in condemnations of “defying authority.” Socrates distinguished himself in this framework by being sceptical enough of Athenian social givens as to be executed for his impiety and subversion (though he accepted without question the laws by which he was condemned).⁴

Socrates was executed because his interrogation of established values was considered too radical *as such*. The great generality of the charges against him—“corrupting the minds of the young and believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the state”—indicate that Socrates was thought to be undermining the very structure of social life his fellow citizens identified with. Had he stuck to inquiries of natural science, like the Pre-Socratics who had safely preceded him, or had he questioned within the framework of deference to power, like the Sophist teachers who co-existed with and followed him, he would doubtless have been left to philosophize on, to “mind his own business” as his triers put the option to him. But Socrates, though never venturing so far as to debate the value of the laws or the state, had had his “divine command” to inquire into the rationality of conventional belief. His indifference and even disdain for the price of offending the socially accepted in this quest was considered too subversive of established authority and order to tolerate.⁵ In consequence, as in all classical tragedy, where the social order is *Fate* and non-compliance bears in its wake the sentence of death, Socrates was condemned to the hemlock. In fact if not in intention, he might be called the first martyr of social questioning.⁶

After Socrates, as if in tribute by his student Plato, such questioning is made respectable by *The Republic*, but more in name than in influence. It is the purely ontological and mainly epistemological arguments within *The Republic's* sociopolitical framework that are taken seriously by Plato's successors. The really interesting social questions that it raises seem essentially ignored until they become conventionally acceptable to debate (e.g., its arguments on the equality of women). Or they are kept at arm's length indefinitely, as with the position that disinterested government requires communist governors. (Consider how many Plato scholars or teachers have defended that position on the rule of reason.)

In the Eastern philosophical tradition, there is still less explicit critical reflection on the social given than in ancient Athens, and the same persistent structures of caste, genocidal conquest, sexism, blind obedience to superiors, paternal absolutism, mutilative punishment, material inequality, and so on continue more or less unquestioned as *a priori's* of normal thought. Their cognates persist to the present day. What remains of social thought, other than justifications of the social given as part of the moral order of the universe, is hidden in code: concealed behind the protective face of paradox, symbol, and cipher. Lao Tzu's brilliant dismantling of Confucian orthodoxies, warlordism, and human chauvinism in the *Tao-te Ching* and Krishna's dialogical surpassment of the values of competition and caste maintenance in the *Bhagavad-Gita* are classics of such critical pedagogy.⁷

Despite these covert victories of critical inquiry, however, open questioning of the forms of social life within which one lives is still regarded as a kind of blasphemy in that these forms, however cruel or destructive, are understood as the sanctified expression of the Absolute. For example, the Carvaka, an ancient materialist, anti-caste philosophy in India, was hunted to virtual extinction, and its proponents burned alive.⁸ Any philosophical work in China which did not feature the Five Relations of social subordination as its cornerstone—whether by implicit challenge

(as with Mo Tzu's "universal love without distinctions") or by omission (as with Buddhism)—was inexorably condemned as a threat to society itself. Even the Taoism of Lao Tzu, inscrutable to conventional intelligence, was soon emptied of its anti-Confucian and antinomian content by the transcendentalism of Chuang Tzu and, eventually, by its assimilation into Neo-Confucianism, where the doctrines of filial piety and the Five Relations that Lao had scorned were re-established more strongly than ever on his metaphysical basis of universal harmony.

We may conclude, in short, that human societies have been traditionally characterized by a *taboo against questioning their established structures of social rule: a deep prejudice against which critical intelligence is posed as the bearer of humanity's education in the largest sense.*

Despite its persecution, however, rational reflection on given forms of social life always persists in *some* mode as an irrepressible moment in mankind's progress toward ever more inclusive understanding. Socrates is successfully repressed in his aged body, but he springs up more lastingly than ever before in the dialogues of his student Plato, and is soon succeeded by the more robust anti-conventionalism of Diogenes the Cynic, "Socrates run mad."⁹ The Carvaka, Mohism, and Lao's mockery of external regulation are discredited in their respective societies, but they survive in the long run through the tests of millenia, opening the span of human self-consciousness ever wider, if only by a tortuously delayed historical route.

A not dissimilar pattern occurs in Judaeo-Christian thought. The more socially critical Prophets of Israel are deprived of their security and threatened from above for their fiery criticism of the wealthy and powerful who "tread upon the faces of the poor."¹⁰ Nonetheless, their words outlast by epochs the works of the social orders they condemn. Their culminating figure, Jesus, a carpenter leader of the variously dispossessed, is crucified for his institutional criticisms, whose radical break with every vested interest of the day lead to his execution as a political criminal.¹¹ But however mystified and distorted his criticisms have subsequently been, they still stir to like sacrifice critics of oppressive social orders across the globe.¹²

In short, we see a kind of dialectic at work here, between, on the one hand, the tribalism of established social habit and the vested interests it protects and, on the other hand, the reflective space of critical intelligence that questions the ensconced patterns of the conventional way. Human learning in the species sense develops in proportion to the extent that this critical intelligence is able to flourish.

The Dark Ages is the one post-classical period in which this dialectic seems to cease. Given social relations are kept out of discussion altogether, as an unspoken taboo of the medieval tribe, or they are accorded mere apologetic defence and justification. Not once in a millenium of philosophy does rational challenge of a significant form of established social life occur: not of slavery nor serf bondage, not of inherited command nor king's absolutism, not of capital punishment nor burning of perceived heretics, not of trial by battle nor rule by military lords, not of economic inequality nor living off the work of others, not of sexist relations nor childbeating; not, in short, of any social form that might seem worthy of critical reflection.

With the conquest of the controls of thought by religious institutions in return for their theological support of the established ruling classes, the prevailing social order becomes apotheosized as the Will of God, with any criticism of it therefore a

heresy punishable by the knout or the fire. Society's worshipping of itself as totem, a transcultural tendency as ancient as human groups, is here given totalitarian because monotheistic form. There is only one God, an all-powerful God, whose prescriptions endow all established relations of the social order with the authority of the Absolute. Therefore, to criticize or to challenge any constituent of it by the conceit of reason is to criticize or to challenge the command of God Himself. As the latter is heresy, and all learning is done under the tutelage of the Church, independent thinking is thereby ruled out by the very structure of the situation in which learning occurs. Accordingly, one can search the inquiries of this era's preserved thinkers, from Augustine and Aquinas to Scotus and Ockham, and fail to discover a page of criticism of feudal bondage, absolute paternalism, divine right, slavery, or any other major institution of social oppression of the day.¹³ Much like the religious dogmatism we see today so aggressively re-asserting control over the schools, the idea of criticizing obedience to established orders of command is an enormity too great to be countenanced as anything but the work of the devil.

Thus a great split-off occurs in the philosophy of Europe that the post-Socratic ancients had at their best overcome. Critical examination of the structures of social reproduction, which Socrates and Plato and even Aristotle developed at least to some extent, is now ruled out from the curriculum of acceptable thought. Education is incarcerated within the role of a kind of ceremonial routine operating entirely within the received framework of an exhaustively prescribed social given. Indoctrination triumphs in the guise of teaching, a catechistic format of schooling from which the educational system has yet fully to recover.

We do not have space to follow this struggle of human intelligence against the closures of ruling interest through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the 19th century to today. However, it is worth noting that wherever critical thinking about the order within which a society is reproduced occurs after this feudal captivity, and is not merely avoided by systems of abstraction continuing to eschew the discipline of this-worldly facts, it almost always remains apologetic for the established relations of social authority and power. John Locke may atypically write a treatise on government that is used by revolutionary movements elsewhere, but his work fails to see the light of day until the removal of the regime he criticizes and the clear ensconcement of the private property holders for whom he has ever since stood as the prime philosophical defender. Hobbes may write social and political philosophy based on a metaphysic which is also social and political philosophy in an unconscious form, but one can look in vain for a single line of it that does not remain within obedient deference to the sovereign powers of his place and time. Scholarly inquiry that finds the reflective space to debate the forms of social life within which it arises, and to entertain their more rational alternatives, remains as scarce as Diogenes' honest man.

In general, what occurs even after the Renaissance is that critical thought about social relations is blandly ignored, or becomes subservient to the social order as a system-justifying metaphysic. Leibniz, Spinoza, Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel, for example, more or less entirely presuppose the social regime of their day and its constituent forms as in some way the expression of a divine Mind, which they see as their rational duty only to accept or to justify. They confine their attention to "pure," that is, asocial philosophy—being as such, the conditions of knowing as such, and so on—or they rationalize the social given as the manifes-

tation of some kind of perfect Reason.¹⁴ Nothing like the rigorously critical inquiry they bring to the premises of common sense is ever brought to bear on their treatment of the givens of social power.

Even Hume, perhaps the West's greatest subverter of conventionally accepted positions since Socrates, refrains from his sceptical posture altogether when it comes to reasoning about principles of social governance. Here he rides on received opinions with an absolutist's faith in repression of their contrary, calling for the crushing of even religious dissent as a robberous crime:

Fanatics may suppose that dominion is founded on grace and that saints alone inherit the earth; but the civil magistrate very justly puts these sublime theorists on the same footing with common robbers. (Hume, 1957, p. 24)

It is made explicit in what follows that what strikes "horror" in Hume and, he says, in "mankind" is the suggestion of certain 17th-century English non-conformists that there be "an equal distribution of property." It is because, Hume says, such equality would "destroy all subordination" and "weaken extremely the authority of the magistracy" that its very proposal is "pernicious" and deserving of the "severest punishment." He does not offer arguments for the status quo that he prefers.

There is no point listing the question-begging dogmas of Hume's position here, as they are all too evident. But what does deserve emphasis is the unphilosophical attitude of even this philosopher's philosopher when it comes to asking questions about forms of social life and rule. He is riveted to their acceptance as fixedly as any tribesman to his totem. When the English-speaking world's very paragon of understatement and sceptical acuity reels into intolerant rhetoric and unreason, he reveals by his example the vice-hold of the social given on thought and consciousness.

Rousseau is perhaps the first major modern thinker to criticize the structure of established rule, and he does so with respect to its most primary forms: exclusionary property and corruption by wealth, blind acceptance of coercive law, and reproduction of these patterns in the upbringing of the young. That he quarrelled violently with Hume is hardly a surprise, and perhaps more due to Rousseau's philosophical scruples than philosophers have hitherto allowed. Compare Rousseau's trenchant position in *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality* on privatized property and the civil order with that of Hume's:

The first man, who after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how many misfortunes and horrors would that man have saved the human species, who pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditches should have cried to his fellows: Beware of listening to this imposter: you are lost, if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody. (2nd part, 1st paragraph)

After Rousseau, philosophy and learning are never again the same. They have begun to re-awaken to the social problematic and the underlying structures, principles, and values which it is their vocation to disclose and to develop. The revolutionary ideas Rousseau advances of freedom by self-given law, participant democracy, reduction of material inequality, non-authoritarian education, and social sovereignty of the "common interest" are philosophical advances of the first

order—explanatory and evaluative principles by which human forms of social life are better understood, criticized, and superseded. Not only do these ideas set the stage for the later moral and epistemological theories of Kant and Dewey and for radical political thought ever after, but they also establish a core of critical standpoints that provides the foundations of modern thought. Rousseau's work begins the release of human learning from its long incarceration within the tribal status quo.

Needless to say, Rousseau paid dearly for his philosophical courage. He was afflicted with financial worries, church and state persecution, notoriety, and ill-health. Critical thinking about forms of social life is still a dangerous subject, but less so after Rousseau because of his refusal to exchange compliant thought for personal privilege and position. Yet we must not overlook the social structural impediments to critical inquiry by which even a Rousseau is cognitively blocked. He drops his anti-property line soon after his *Origin of Inequality*, refuses after he is persecuted by the Parliament and the Archbishop of Paris for *Emile* to talk about an educational system for the Polish Constitution he is commissioned to pen, and by the time of the *Social Contract* endorses as just such forms as the exclusion of women from public life, special honors and privileges for rank, state censorship, and the execution of anyone who no longer believes in "the dogmas of civil religion."¹⁵

What breaks open the reflective space for critical analysis of the powers-that-be once and for all is the unprecedentedly penetrating work of the philosophical radical, Karl Marx. Though refused a post within the university, expelled from Belgium, calumniated by the popular press, and tried (unsuccessfully) for treasonous conspiracy, he manages to survive to give to philosophy's long acquiescence with the social status quo an historical *coup de grace* from which it never fully recovers. Going far beyond Socrates or Rousseau, he exposes to systematic criticism the material power structure of all hitherto existing civil society: the ruling class system wherein, he argues, a self-serving minority owns most of the society's means of producing the necessities of life, and to which, therefore, the majority is constrained to subordinate its life interests. No thinker in history before this had dared to go so far. Ever since, Marx's work has been a critical reference point on the cognitive landscape: a landmark beyond the established fences of thought beckoning to interrogation of social forms as the next major step in humanity's development toward moral self-consciousness and cognitive maturity.

Players of a game do not see or criticize the game's structure as long as they are playing *inside* it. They are determined by the requirements of their positions in the game not to question its nature, as a price of holding and advancing their own places in it. But, as Kohlberg has recognized for the individual, higher-level moral understanding only develops when merely conventional and self-serving norms are taken as an object of scrutiny and subjected to standards of independent criticism and universalizable value. The same holds for social orders. Marx was the first to point out the essential ruling-interest block to this educational process on the historical plane.

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* might be understood as civil liberty's complement to the thought of Marx. It too is a move toward releasing the educated imagination from its imprisonment by the tribal status quo: arguing step by step for the almost unheard-of right to think and speak in divergence from customary belief to any

extent whatever so long as it does not interfere with the rights and liberties of other individuals. Herein lay a pushing back of the margins of acceptable discourse whose opening up of the discursive space for social self-criticism was of momentous importance. But, interestingly, it is on behalf of the very privileged classes attacked by Marx that Mill's arguments were consistently, if often unconsciously, made (i.e., in defence of British imperialism, racism, unequal voting, and disregard for the lot of other races and classes).¹⁶

This is not to say that Marx's philosophy was not also undergirded by the uncritical presumptions and biases of the same social order within which he was educated. On the contrary, however vast his contribution to their critical examination, his work remains within the grips of established forms of social life in ways that civilized thought a century since has not yet clearly exposed nor surpassed: for example, his absolute anthropocentrism, his blindness to the surplus disenfranchisements of the young, his Euro-supremacism, and his unhesitating endorsement of ever more social centralization and machine technology.

What distinguishes Marx and Mill as well as Rousseau from the preceding mainstream of thought is their critical readiness to debate and to evaluate social structures and patterns, even if they still continue to take many of them for granted. Whatever their shortcomings, they lead a revolution in human thinking toward realizing the project of human self-knowledge, and the truly educated person.

By the 20th century, civilization's learning agenda *seems* to have achieved academic age and release from the political repression to which it had so long and transculturally been subject.

The Great Culture Lag in the Schools

What holds back social self-understanding despite its persistent rise is what always holds it back: the law-like tendency of social systems to select against the reproduction of those views which expose and criticize their ruling forms. One is likely to be judged a "subversive" or "troublemaker," an "unfit teacher" or "defiant student," if one does so. In societies we call "dictatorial" or "totalitarian," one can be killed or imprisoned for such inquiry; and in our own schools, failed or fired, called on the carpet, cautioned, discriminated against, harassed or marginalized, even if the mode of questioning is conducted with the utmost logical and empirical rigor. The rational attitude that has slowly developed over 2,500 years of human thought has not yet been permitted in the "Free World's" public education system. Where the 20th century has thrown up philosophers of schooling who are regime-critical in varying degrees—John Dewey, A. S. Neill, Bertrand Russell, Paulo Freire, for example—this critical content of their theories is usually altogether expunged before any of it has reached the classroom. It is in this rigid conformity to the social given that the anti-educative function of the schools is hidden.

One can systematically confirm the dominance of this function of the schools by asking oneself a general question. Is there any subject in the school's curriculum that anywhere requires of its students that they consider *any* critical question about any established form, principle, or value of the social order within which they live?

Is the ownership of most of society's means of production by a small minority

of the population, for example, ever posited as an issue worth discussing in any educational ministry's curriculum guidelines? Are the interest-arousing figures or methods which are relevant here ever raised in any mathematics, economics or history text? Is class analysis, one of the more important modern principles of understanding in such traditional subject disciplines as history, geography, economics, literature, law, sociology, and theatre arts, ever required learning on any level of any of these various courses? Or, on the contrary, is inquiry into such matters implicitly ruled out by likely censure of any teacher who might independently pursue such a line of thought? Can, for example, social arrangements characterized by any system of ownership *other* than capitalist be described as "free" or "democratic" in the classroom? Is the very possibility of an alternative economic order ruled out as "undemocratic (e.g., as a "command system") by the very prescribed meaning of terms of our school system's prescribed tests?

More broadly, is the possibility of any alternative social form—of family, of workplace management, or of government—treated as other than impossible or inherently wrong within the discourse permitted by the schools' current curricula and authority structures? Where is description of the way we require our young to live, and to reproduce, ever more than indoctrination? Where is established authority of *any* sort questioned by normal inquiry in our schools? Where is critical judgment of even religious prejudice or fascist position allowed, if it is advanced by empowered citizens or groups? With forms of social life that involve surrounding vested interests of possession or rule, in short, questions are not allowed to arise.

As a further thought experiment to test the extent of the schools' repression of critical inquiry and reflection, consider the following presupposed forms of life (and the openness of any to question) in our public education system: the adult's right to prescribe and the young person's obligation to obey; the sanctity of the nuclear family or of the possessory form of marriage; the inviolable moral authority of all local and national law; the unlimited right to and desirability of money accumulation and profit; the divine inspiration of Judaeo-Christian dogmas; the legitimacy of caging people for non-violent offences; the duty of serving one's country by homicidal obedience to national military command; the ultimate good will of our nation's senior allies or our historical forebearers in international wars and affairs; the non-democratic control of the workplace or the products it produces; the benefit to corporate leaderships of unregulated pollution, unemployment, and poverty; the moral superiority of one side alone in all East-West relations and conflicts; the established structure of power in the school and the classroom itself. These and other eminently questionable patterns of our social reproduction are standardly presupposed, or imposed, as a framework of order *within* which our young learn and do, and our teachers teach.

The issue here is certainly not one of safeguarding academic standards. A teacher could be deeply informed in any of these directions of thought and would be no more entitled to engage students with them than if she or he knew nothing. In the schools, there is no right to or duty of academic freedom of teachers or students; and no right of appeal to the authority of evidence and argument to determine what may or may not be taught and learned. The matter is decided by authorities external to the subject discipline itself, and they normally caution against or rule out whatever might be perceived as a challenge to prevailing opinion and power. On the other hand, when teachers take it upon themselves to denounce anything that *does*

challenge prevailing social opinion or power, “communism,” for example, their “freedom to speak” is apt to be unrestricted though their evidence and arguments be without shred of scholarly merit. Clearly, the pattern of prohibition and allowance here has nothing to do with upholding academic standards, but rather the opposite: sacrificing academic standards to serve prevailing opinion and power.

Where such suspension of scholarly standards on issues of the very deepest importance to human understanding and development is practised by the schools as a matter of established routine, then we cannot in truth call this system “educational.” It is not only a question of failure to incorporate the critical achievements of the past into the teachings of the present, or learning how to think as a social membership beyond received dogmas and prejudices. It is a question of doing the very opposite of what education by its nature entails.

As we know, education is a concept whose root sense derives from the Latin “educare” (not, as is often misleadingly supposed, “educere”), which means “to cause to grow.” Stated as a formula, *x is educational if and only if x enables a more inclusive range of thought, experience, or action.* It follows, then, that a school curriculum, hidden or overt, which prevents the broadening of these very scopes of possibility by ruling out consideration of their most basic parameters of determination is not educational but anti-educational to the extent that it so prohibits.

There are two standard ways in which educators come to accept this self-contradictory repression of inquiry. The first is to avoid the problem and the contradiction. This is the way of the institutional role-filler whose presence is so familiar to us in the schooling system today. The second way is to recognize the censorship but to actively justify it as “guidance” or “respect for our traditions” or some such euphemism for thought-control. The latter is the explicitly self-contradictory position. It overtly asserts that *x* equals *not-x*. Both ways are incoherent with the nature of education, but one is implicitly absurd, while the other is explicitly absurd.

The practice of ruling out inquiry into the social forms within which we live and reproduce is not only contra-educative in principle (it prohibits the more inclusive ranges of understanding, in particular critical understanding, that it is the aim of education to develop), it is also, to compound the irony, in opposition to the very traditional values it purports to serve. If, as Matthew Arnold has most succinctly expressed the traditionalists’ case, cultural transmission of “the best that has been thought and said” is the primary purpose of our educational system, what more demanding or more far-reaching tradition could be preserved and extended than that of reflecting upon the forms of life we individually and together bear in the world? The traditionalist who opposes such rational reflection upon the most fundamental patterns of human life’s determination thereby seeks to expunge the core of the very civilized tradition he or she claims to value.

If the schools are to live up to the contemporary as well as the traditional values of inquiry and understanding they have the responsibility to cultivate, they are obliged to enable reasoned debate without barriers of tribal prejudice and taboo. They subvert these values by precluding, or not requiring, this authority of inquiry’s method.

“Educating for democracy,” teaching “independent thinking,” “developing critical and creative minds,” “adapting to change,” “scientific understanding,” “development of moral responsibility”—these are all central concepts of the school

system's lexicon of stated aims. The school system cannot without absurdity both continue to declare these aims as elements of its essential vocation, and institutionally prevent their fulfilment at the same time. Perhaps it is this ongoing duplicity of announced purposes and actual practices which lies at the heart of the demoralized scholarship that is so widespread in the school system. Research and inquiry in such circumstances becomes a fake, a going through the motions of the official line without the challenge of actual thought.¹⁷

Over 20 centuries of experience have shown us that without the protections of academic freedom at the site of inquiry, thought stagnates within imposed forms of the social status quo and learning degenerates into propaganda and rote. We have followed the course of humanity's mental captivity in the past and the long, painful history of reflective liberation that it is our central intellectual tradition and accomplishment to have won. But such freedom for inquiry as has been achieved has not yet been allowed to take root in the schools, at least not where humanity's self-made forms of life are concerned.¹⁸ It is time they were allowed academic respectability—especially in a period where social reproduction through their learning structures requires some such development of critical rationality if the species and the world are to survive. For it is clear that the many deep problems we now face—nuclear and military war, resource exhaustion and pollution, third world famine and impoverishment, work alienation and exploitation, the growing gap between rich and poor, racial, class, and age discriminations, and the programming of our minds by forces external to our control—are generated by the very underlying structures of social life and power which the schools have largely ruled out of debate.

No doubt the school system, like civilization itself, requires the philosophical tradition of value overview and criticism to enable its development into intellectual maturity. But more broadly than a philosophy or values education curriculum, the schools require a scope for critical inquiry within their already established fields of study and endeavor. If they were to be accorded similar general rights and responsibilities of academic freedom as are now unquestioned at the university level of our publicly funded educational process—namely, the right to reasoned inquiry free of external interference on any other account¹⁹—they could better become the centres of interested learning and debate they are educationally intended to be. We know well that other major institutions of idea dissemination are governed by other priorities and imperatives than education—the mass media by the profitable sale of entertainment, the political process by the garnering of empowering bases for rule, and so on. We know too that public education free of such distorting determinations is ever more essential to our intelligent survival and development as individuals and communities. What we have not effectively recognized is that this educational requirement cannot be fulfilled as long as our educational system itself abdicates its responsibilities of inquiry under the pressure of these same special interests and prejudices.

The schools are, moreover, spiritually and pedagogically sapped by their failure of academic standards. Consider the deepest malaise of "schooling" as such—the pervasive boredom and apathy of the students and the cognitive closure and inertia of teachers. What is it here that deadens the soul of curiosity, and what is it that opens the way of its awakening? Is it not the release of inquiry from the staleness of conventional line? Is it not the freedom to discover the unspoken, to break the

passive sleep of routine acceptance into active thought and research?

Yet here we are with a world and future that need such rethinking, teachers formally educated to the subject matters that enable it, and younger generations whose very make-up demands such a challenge for their self-limitation and creation, and still the very forms in accordance with which we live are ruled out of authorized discussion. The torpor that results is palpable in the halls. While we lament the lack of values education, of academic standards, of learning discipline, of dedication to education in the schools, the very method of inquiry that is essential to the life of these values is sacrificed in submission to external politics and conventional beliefs. Our civilization's core tradition of critical free speech and thought is not yet linked to its public education base. Fear of controversy and guarantee of a captive audience leave the school system in a kind of medieval prison of hierarchical command and dogma where living inquiry and debate have not yet been given the space they require to breathe.

In dealing with the political resistance from ensconced powers and prejudices which open investigation in the schools has in the past provoked, we need to be clear, as we have not yet been, as to what education is and what it is not. It is not propaganda on behalf of the social status quo, however reassuring to conditioned assumptions such a function may be. It is not public opinion nor interest group mollification any more than nuclear physics or language studies are. It is not acquiescent to prescribed doctrine, but in Western thought above all, questions received prejudices and seeks reasoned understanding of forms of life. Its final authority lies not in political pressure groups, principals, or even ministers of education, but in the subject matters and methods of inquiry themselves. The education system, in short, is governed by its own disciplines of research and expression, not by special interests and demands, or it is not education. The history of human thought that has prevailed against external orders of rule, and transformed them, is what an educational tradition consistently bears, disseminates, and develops—not current established powers and prejudices outside it that seek to impose themselves everywhere. The school system needs nothing so much as coherence of its rule with the vocation of rational inquiry it has inherited.

Notes

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1. Standardly, the state and its laws are *presupposed* as in accordance with divine prescription, and no question as to their relationship even arises. This is as true of the impersonal Mandate of Heaven to which the secular rulers of the Chinese have traditionally laid claim as it is of the unchallengeable Divine Right of Kings promulgated in pre-1800 Europe. We may be inclined to think that such a presupposed connection has largely disappeared with the modern Western separation of church and state, but almost no Western state has, in separating itself from the church, allowed itself to be dissociated thereby from ordainment by God. To rationally question this connection as a teacher of school or as a writer in a student newspaper remains standardly prohibited in North American schools (see note 17), while current mass-media religion pressure groups seek to impose it further as a more primary prescription of the daily curriculum.

2. It is extraordinary the length to which Socrates goes to avoid criticizing the system of military aggression, conquest, and slavery upon which his society is based, even when

these forms of life clearly violate his concern to restrain the appetites and to nurture the rational element inherent even in slave-boys (*Meno*, 82–86a). A passage where this contradiction between allegiance to reason and subservience to the status quo (a contradiction which may provide the clue to Socrates' celebrated irony) emerges clearly is in *The Republic* (II 372a–II 374e). Here Socrates, in a few lines, allows his pupil Glaucon to take the ideal republic from modesty to luxury and swollen armies of labor, to robbery of neighboring states and war ("no form of work whose efficiency is so important"), with no argument against any step of the way. By the end of the section, training for war has become Socrates' focal concern, and the breeding and education of a military class of guardians remains his preoccupation throughout the six subsequent chapters.

3. We do not, of course, mean to impute to the Pre-Socratic cosmogonists and cosmologists a conscious intention to avoid trouble by avoiding more controversial issues of social and political rule. The Pre-Socratics' historical situation was one in which the constancy of ancient custom, conjoined with the forces of habit and established power, may well have been sufficient to rule out critical social thought as even a conceived possibility. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that unconceived implies inconceivable, and that the Pre-Socratics were cognitively incapable of questioning their social regimen. Even children are acute enough to question the forms of social life by which they are governed, until their guardians and teachers put a stop to their queries. (Our educational process may in this way form the underlying structure of the generally successful suppression of critical social thought through history.)

4. Socrates has nothing critical to say about the state or the laws during or after his trial, according to the reports of both the *Apology* and the *Crito*. Indeed, he argues that the state and the laws are the source of life, his master, his sacred commander, his teacher, and his father and mother (50a–52b).

5. Socrates was not only legendarily provocative in his style (for which the young used to follow him about to watch the fun), but he was also allied with the Thirty Tyrants who were overthrown as Athen's rulers about four years before his trial.

6. Michel Foucault's words are of interest here: "The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language; relations of power, not relations of meaning" (quoted in Gordon, 1981). Foucault may construct a false disjunction here—if we conceive language and meaning to *include* war and power as basic elements—but his disjunction highlights what educators like to ignore: the structures of social power and struggle within which human inquiry takes place.

7. Here are some of Lao Tzu's more regime-critical remarks in the *Tao-te-Ching* (Chan, 1972, pp. 155–166):

The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world,
The poorer the people will be (57)

The courts are exceedingly splendid
While the fields are exceedingly weedy;
Elegant clothes are worn,
Sharp weapons are carried,
Foods and drinks are enjoyed beyond limit,
and wealth and treasures are accumulated in excess.
This is robbery and extravagance.
This is indeed not Tao, (53)

For a victory, let us observe the occasion with funeral ceremonies (31)

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is never so direct as this in its social criticism, but its implicit rejection of caste-ultimates and its explicit rejection of self-seeking behavior ("To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruit") might be illuminatingly compared to the contrary acceptance by today's schools of class divisions and the equation of virtue to competitive self-advancement.

8. Unlike modern philosophical materialists, the Carvaka's rejection of the soul as anything more than the body distinguished by the attribute of intelligence carried with it radical social implications which its adherents explicitly embraced: namely, repudiation of the merit-justified caste system, of the priesthood, and of taboos against enjoyment in general. See, for example, Radhakrishnan & Moore (1971, pp. 227–236).

9. We take this opportunity to emphasize the historical mutation of such concepts as cynic and anarchist—standing for philosophical positions which criticize and reject social convention and the state respectively—into accepted terms of abuse. The debasement of these concepts into labels of stigma indicates the extent to which criticism of the social status quo is customarily discredited.

10. These famous words are Isaiah's (3:15), but his concern for the poor's oppression by the rich runs throughout the prophets: for example, Jeremiah (5:27–29), Ezekiel (16:50), Amos (2:7; 8:4–8), Habakkuk (2:5–9), and Malachi (3:5). One might go so far as to say that class analysis originates with the Old Testament prophets, though their repudiation of the wealthy's exploitation of the needy is seldom noted by those who call for the teaching of traditional religious values in the schools. Indeed, in the recent Krever Commission Inquiry in Ontario, it was observed that in Canada the mere citation of Isaiah by J. S. Woodsworth in the 1930s was enough to incur his prosecution for sedition (Dowson, 1980, p. 51).

11. The execution of Jesus as a political criminal is, again, a fact that those who talk of "Christian values education" are inclined to overlook. Better for social rule that he is conceived as a religious apostate from colonized Jewry than a rebel against the Empire and Roman Law. As the biblical scholar Oscar Cullman (1965, pp. 43ff) has pointed out, if Jesus' crime had been religious and against Jewish law he would have been stoned for blasphemy, not crucified with his crime posted on the cross as required by Roman law.

12. In the last five years, in Central and South America especially, but also in South Africa, historically established Christian churches have become unprecedentedly involved with people's movements against repressive governments and exploitative structures of corporate power: just as, simultaneously, mass-media religious movements have increasingly defended these very business and government powers. An extraordinary example of this identification of historical Christianity with the struggle of people to expose and to remove the power structures oppressing them is the former Primate of El Salvador, Archbishop Romero, who made the following published comment after the killing of one of his priests by El Salvador security forces:

When a dictatorship seriously violates human rights and attacks the common good of the nation, when it becomes unbearable and closes all channels of dialogue, of understanding, of rationality, when this happens, the Church speaks of the legitimate right of insurrectional violence. (Cited by Riding, 1981, p. 28.)

Archbishop Romero was murdered with evident security-force collaboration not long after this statement, on March 24, 1980.

13. In ironic reversal of the Founder's commitment, perhaps in unspoken fear of his cross, this more or less total compliance of Christian thinkers with the social given begins as early as Paul, who is quite clear about the duty of unqualified subjection to all relations of established social power whatever: "Let every man be subject to the powers that be" (Romans 13:1); "The State is there to serve God for your benefit" (Romans 13:4); "Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord. . . . Slaves, be obedient to the men who are called your masters" (Ephesians 5:23; 6:5); and "For the sake of the Lord, accept the authority of every social institution" (I Peter 2:13).

Within such a sanctified framework of unquestioning obedience to the established order, it is not surprising that Church education systems, from which our present school systems derive, were so uncritically silent about social structure.

Even so far as the schoolmen and teachers of the Church went, which was never so far as to critically investigate God's appointed social forms, they were not immune from censure. Aquinas was imprisoned by his own family for two years for joining the more

socially conscious Dominican Order in its early years, Scotus was banished from France for refusing to take the side of King Philip the Fair in a dispute over Church taxation, and Ockham was excommunicated by the Pope over his scholarly support of the legitimacy of apostolic poverty.

14. As has often been argued, Hegel's dialectical method may be an inherently critical one. The spirit of negation is its very meaning, however Hegel may have conceived the Prussian State as the Absolute's historical culmination. What is of particular interest here is that even though Hegel's dialectic contradicts in principle the absolutization of the social-institutional present, he is unable to refrain from so absolutizing the institutional edifice within which he lives, even though he must contravene his own method to do so. Hegel helps to reveal by his self-contradiction just how confined by the social given human inquiry has traditionally been.

15. See *The Social Contract and Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Crocker, 1971, pp. 39, 135, 145–46, 236). For Rousseau's position that woman's submission to man is a law of nature, see his discussion throughout Book V of *Emile*, especially "The Education of Women and Training for Womanhood" (1) and (2).

16. Mill supports unequal voting and imperialism in his *Representative Government* where he argues for a plurality of votes for the managerial and professional classes (chapter VIII) and where he defends British colonialism as a matter of "free states" governing "dependencies" (chapter XVIII). He supports racism by his stated belief that there are "backward states" of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its "non-age" (Robson, 1965, Volume XVIII, p. 224). And he shows himself insensitive to the lot of the oppressed—namely, slaves and serfs—in his claim that "in ancient society [and] in the middle ages . . . the individual was a power in himself" (p. 268). I am indebted to Marvin Glass for the latter two points and citations.

17. Consider, for example, this explicit prescription of the Ontario Ministry of Education for all teachers in its elementary and secondary schools: "to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for . . . loyalty . . . frugality, purity, temperance and all the other virtues" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1985, section 235[c]). As in other jurisdictions, this Act also stipulates that educational authorities external to the schools (here the Minister and Boards of Education) "prescribe areas of study" and "select and approve for use in schools, textbooks, library books, reference books and other learning materials" (section 8[f]). As an Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (1975) booklet on *Values Education* recognizes, "Schools indeed have always had a values curriculum, but one which in a large measure [is also] hidden from view and therefore excluded from critical analysis and evaluation."

18. The universities themselves have only won the institutional recognition of their members' right to freedom of inquiry in this century, and then with notable exceptions across the world. The development of academic freedom through political, business, and administrative attempts to prescribe "acceptance of existing political and economic institutions," "the British connection," the abstention from "politics," silence on Canada's European military involvements, and "loyalty" to academic administrators is recounted through several central cases between 1930 and 1960 in a special report in the *CAUT Bulletin* (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 1975 & 1983). It is interesting to note how similar are the past justifications of repressing academic freedom in the publicly financed university educational system to still-persisting justifications for perpetuating such repression in the pre-university educational systems.

19. Academic freedom is characterized in this way by the Canadian Association of University Teachers' (1986) "Model Clause" on the subject, which bears the stamp of historical antecedents in the U.S. and elsewhere. "The common good of society depends on the search for knowledge and its free exposition. . . . The parties agree that they will not infringe or abridge the academic freedom of any member of the academic community. Academic members of the community are entitled, regardless of prescribed doctrine, to

freedom in carrying out research and publishing the results thereof, freedom of teaching and of discussion, freedom to criticize the university and the faculty association, and freedom from institutional censorship. . . . Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base research and teaching on an honest search for knowledge” (p. 4).

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