

Teachers: Grist for the Laurentian millstones

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ABSTRACT

Teachers (and not just elementary ones) are in a vile and false position: they (and their pupils) are caught and ground between the millstones of idealism and materialism: and school is the place (although not the only place) where these millstones meet. What is sadly lacking, however, is a significantly rigorous analysis of the causes and nature of the resultant floury mess. The time has surely come for philosophers to get into this act; and this paper is a tentative beginning in that area.

Introduction

In 1918, at the invitation of the editor of *The Times*, an elementary schoolteacher turned novelist, one D. H. Lawrence, wrote Part 1 of "Education of the People", where it was declared within the first four introductory pages that "The elementary school-teacher is in a vile and false position ... caught between the upper and nether millstones of idealism and materialism"; and that the elementary school was the place where idealism and materialism met, "like millstones", and where "teachers and scholars are ground between the two".

The manuscript was rejected and lay unpublished till 1936. It was not until 1973 that it was transferred into the literature on 'Education',¹ and since then it has been systematically ignored.² Thus has a rare piece of educational wisdom lain virtually unnoticed for over six decades; for Lawrence, as it turns out, got it pretty well right. Teachers (and not just elementary ones) are in a vile and false position: they (and their pupils) are caught and ground between the millstones of idealism and materialism: and school is the place (although not the only place) where these millstones meet. What is sadly lacking, however, is a significantly rigorous analysis of the causes and nature of the resultant floury mess.

That is where philosophers of education might have come in, even though sifting through blood and bones ground into flour is not an appealing task. But it is hardly likely that squeamishness alone has kept philosophers away; and it's not, of course, that philosophers of education have lacked interest in teachers or teaching (as witnessed by that terrible decade of sustained analysis of the concept of 'teaching' and the proliferation of prescriptions based on this analysis - a decade of labour that is yet to be fully lived down). The case is rather that philosophers have tended to leave concerns with the role, function, and location of teachers to the sociologists; and leave them apparently little perturbed that sociologists of most persuasions tended to get it wrong in various ways.

The time has surely come for philosophers to get into this act; and this paper is a tentative beginning in that area. What follows, however, is hardly the missing "significantly rigorous analysis":

it is more of an elementary description and exploration of the location of teachers taking the “Laurentian millstones” as its jumping-off point, presented in the convictions that its subject matter is grist for the philosopher’s mill and that its methodology is representative of philosophical grinding (even though its substance and method have been significantly absent, and even summarily dismissed, from what has tended to pass for philosophy of education in recent, darker days), and in hope that it might in some ways be instrumental in the eventual production of the sort of analysis required.

The Millstone of Idealism: Dominant Idealist Educational Theory (DIET)

Teachers are constantly subjected to, and guide their actions by, educational theory. They consume large doses of it in their training period, they espouse it as practitioners, they confront it in guides to their work (such as curricula preambles) and in the advice and policy statements of their mentors, and they are accountable to it in their practice. But not just any old educational theory, of course. The vast bulk, if not the whole of the educational theory which teachers learn, espouse, are confronted with, and which they attempt to implement in schooling practice, is idealist educational theory - the dominant educational theory of the present historical conjuncture.

Now educational theory doesn’t have to be idealist, nor does idealist educational theory have to be dominant. What we shall examine in this section is why idealist educational theory is at present dominant (and dominant to the extent that the species is commonly represented, and mistaken, for the genus); what it is about this educational theory that characterises it as ‘idealist’; and why it is a millstone for teachers.

To begin to understand why idealist educational theory is presently dominant in its field we can do well to recall one of Marx’s best known statements:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.³

That statement should bring no cause for alarm, for, in words made popular recently,⁴ “one need not be a Marxist” to accept it; and it would surely be only extreme divine interventionists or those whose faith in Karma is unshakeable, rather than the general body of liberal theorists, who might feel compelled to dissociate themselves at this point. And it is a statement which makes rather interesting re-reading if we substitute “educational theory” for “history”, this being a substitution which involves no violation since educational theory is but part of the overall history we make, and make under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. Or, in other words, the educational theory produced in any historical conjuncture is itself a historical product.

But this, however, is only part of the story. For further explanation of why a particular species becomes dominant, and also commonly mistaken for the genus, we can turn once more to Marx (this time in collaboration with Engels), where we read that:

... each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim ... to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.⁵

Here, regrettably, we are likely to run into more resistance than before. There are those who will not subscribe to class-conflict theory or to the “ruling class-ruling ideas” thesis, and there are those in this era of liberalism who would balk at the thought that any ideas could possibly be represented as “the only rational, universally valid ones”. Now while I am sure that Marx and Engels’ thesis can be fully defended, such a defence (although useful) can hardly be given here, since the purpose of this paper is to focus not on ideas or theory in general but specifically on educational theory. Nevertheless, I take it that much of the point of theoretic production is to make particular viewpoints

prevail, if not as “the only rational universally valid ones”, then, at the very least, as the dominant and most widely respected and respectable ones - i.e., to have them legitimated - and I also take it that legitimation and dominance of particular theories or “bodies of ideas” at any particular time are not necessarily a function of the truth, validity, or even the relative merit of those particular theories. Very often, if not always, what counts as much, if not more, is the site of the production of the theory (and even the status of the producer within that site). There have been times and places wherein what the church said went, regardless of scientific or other theories and evidence (witness the Barberini-Galileo conflict, and remember that even today among the faithful the Pope’s theoretic products are infallible); where the Academy verdict counted as legitimate even if it was wrong, (vide Pasteur) p where legitimate knowledge lies with the witch-doctor; where the letter of the Bible ruled (pity Clarence Darrow and his team of expert witnesses, Tennessee 1923); where folk lore and tradition count far more than book-learning; where book-learning counts far more than folk lore and tradition; where university-accredited professional expertise is venerated; and so on. Always there is theory, theory, and more theory; but only some becomes legitimate, and less becomes dominant.⁶

And so it is, of course, with educational theory. In any historical conjuncture there is plenty of it about, but only some of it will count as legitimate, and only part of that will become dominant. And today especially, when virtually everyone over the age of five is at school or has been to school, and where education is a popular media topic and schooling a matter of overt political controversy - educational theory is not far to seek. One can get it from kids, pick it up in the pub, generate it over morning tea, get doses from the popular press, and among other places pick it up from professional experts. Now all of this might be politely listened to; but it is the theory generated by the professional experts which is presently stamped as legitimate. And these professional experts today reside not in the cloisters of the church nor in the houses of astrology but rather within Educational faculties in universities and advanced colleges, which in turn have become the site for the production of legitimated educational theory.⁷

This, incidentally, is a relatively new phenomenon with a history which goes back barely a century. The middle of the nineteenth century was particularly devoid of Chairs and Faculties of Education, and teacher educating institutions, and the production of legitimate educational theory was then entrusted to men of letters⁸ (e.g., Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Spencer), dons in schools of classics and/or philosophy (e.g., Sidgwick, Laurie), and the occasional political reformist (e.g., Kay-Shuttleworth) or practising innovator within an elitist and selective system of schooling (e.g., Thomas Arnold, Farrar, Newman).

The concentration of recognised “expert” educational theorists in universities and advanced colleges was partly brought about by, but more importantly coincided with, the training of teachers in such institutions, and only in such institutions, as the notion of universal compulsory schooling gained prominence and finally became a political reality. Once upon a time the roads to a teaching career were many and diverse, but by the beginning of this century (and with the implementation of universal compulsory schooling) they were reduced to one - the one which passed through the education faculties here in question. Thus, for near on a century now, all teachers and intending teachers have met as legitimate educational theory that which has poured from the mouths and pens of professional. academic “experts” in ‘Education’: and legitimate educational theory has become manifest as that highly selected body of theory, given and transmitted from the past, which a particular group of highly selective people has considered worthy of preserving and passing on. In fact, what we have before us, or behind us, is a period of a mere five generations which, despite the occasional schism, rift or conflict, has been largely characterised by continuity, and clearly lacking in revolutionary change. In Kuhnian terminology it has been a period of “normal ‘Education’”, with the original paradigm still prevailing. And this in turn is a paradigm of liberal idealism, firmly rooted in Plato.⁹

The roots in Plato are manifestly obvious in the works of those who held the first chairs and lectureships when the monopoly on legitimate educational theory shifted to universities and advanced colleges. The highly influential S.S. Laurie even went as far as to say “with confidence” of Nettleship’s celebrated lectures on *The Republic* that:

... if a clever young graduate who has been teaching for a year or two without thinking much about the great question of education, will shut himself up for a week with Nettleship’s essay he will come out into his school afterwards ... convicted, converted, regenerate, sanctified. A new sun will be shining by day, and a new moon by night. As a teacher, he will live henceforth in the atmosphere breathed by the minor gods.¹⁰

But just as Erasmus had to reconcile Platonism with Christianity, so the Victorian Platonist dons had their particular reconciliation to do too. Plato’s social and educational theory was unashamedly elitist. But more recently found, given and transmitted from the past were theories (rooted in changing material practices) of equality, egalitarianism, liberalism, and the “Romantic” belief in the worth of every individual person, which those such as Voltaire, the French Revolutionaries, Rousseau, von Humbolt and Mill had given expression to. Alongside this, industrial capitalism had brought about the great migration to the industrial and commercial cities, as well as the need, of which more will be said later, to school everybody. Thus the major problem confronting educational theory, as practised by its first academic professionals, was that of reconciling Platonic idealist elitism with liberal egalitarianism; and the legitimate educational theory which has since emerged as dominant is that which has continued to address itself to this task. A proper account of why this has been the case would have to delve deeply into socio-historical issues and their relationship with theoretic practice in general and educational theory in particular, and this regrettably, is beyond the scope of this paper.¹¹ It must suffice, for our present purposes, merely to recognise that it is this dominant idealist educational theory, this DIET, (itself but a small part of the many diverse views variously held, a small portion in comparison to the total of recorded but forgotten voices, and unrecorded voices) which teachers have been confronted with since the dawn of formal teacher training, and with which they are still confronted today; and confronted with usually as if there were no other theory about, or at least no other “legitimate” rational and valid body of theory to be seriously concerned with.

Teachers (or any students of ‘Education’), it should also be recognised, are not only served up their DIET to digest and assimilate. They are also served up a particular history of educational ideas or theory which assists in making the DIET more palatable through actually representing it directly, and indirectly-through-omission, as the only rational and universally valid (or at least worthwhile) one around. This particular ‘history’ warrants a quick examination.

Whereas educational theory has always abounded, recorded histories of educational thought are a relatively new phenomenon. While there was little formal study of ‘Education’ they lacked a readership. When formal studies were instituted in academic establishments - coinciding with the training of teachers in these establishments - they rather suddenly began to appear and proliferate, almost always written by the professional purveyors or apologists of DIET; and not surprisingly, like Pete Seeger’s “Little Boxes”, they all turned out the same. A mandatory beginning with the Greeks, then a journey down the increasingly-trodden path through the variants of idealism charting the “significant” movements in the ongoing attempted reconciliation between the basal elitist conceptions and contemporary egalitarian concerns, picking up and assimilating such key concepts as ‘equality’, ‘autonomy’, ‘individual development’, ‘enlightened citizenship’ and ‘democracy’ along the way.

A selective exercise indeed: and one often duly, if not properly acknowledged. Take, for instance, Curtis and Boulwood:

In this volume we have presented the creative ideas, which from the earliest times [they start with, and justify starting with, Plato; yet one suspect there might have been even earlier times and earlier creative ideas] to the present day, have shaped men’s conceptions of the aims and meaning

of the educational process ... All our thinkers developed ideas which were related to transitory conditions alone but, on the other hand, all formulated certain ideas which appear to us as timeless and universal.¹²

The very "Preface" is idealist, focusing on timeless, universal ideas, and indicating that ideas shape history and are developed in great thinkers' minds; and presumptuously so in claiming to have selected the "creative ideas" rather than some of "the creative ideas ..."; whereby his story is reduced to "X thought A and later Y developed that into Theory A", which people believed till Z said B". Following such a "Preface" the content gives little cause for surprise, even when Mannheim is totally dismissed¹³ for not being a Christian holding timeless and universal values - Nunn, whose extreme version of individualism is characterised as both Christian and eternal, is brought forward as the acceptable alternative - and where, in the face of all possible contenders to represent the voices of university teacher-training departments in the present century, three knights of the realm are chosen to carry the full burden.¹⁴ Could anyone not be excused, after coming away from Curtis and Boulton - or John Adams, R.R. Rusk, A. E. Meyer, R.F. Butts, A.V. Judges, W. Boyd, J. W. Adamson, Elisabeth Lawrence, and their like, and they are all alike - for thinking that educational theory is the detached product of particular fine minds, or that the cast of millions populating E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* really had nothing to do with making the history of educational thought? Could anyone not be excused coming away from the whole corpus of published educational theory up to 1973, for not meeting the Laurentian quotation from which this paper springs, given that it was continually met by disfavour among those very editors who were otherwise engaged publishing the works of Sir John Adams, Sir Percy Nunn, and Sir Fred Clarke, which Curtis and Boulton (and others) are sufficiently enamoured with to place among "the creative ideas, which ... have shaped men's conceptions of the aims and meaning of the educational process"? And could any student seriously doubt, given constraints of time and the vast similarity among virtually all books of this type (where does the assiduous student go for a counter-opinion?) that what is laid out are the really important educational ideas - the genus "educational theory" - or be blamed for absorbing and adopting both the context and the content? In this way DIET literally became, and becomes, the staple diet (and as we shall see, the theoretic burden) of teachers first studying, and then espousing, or at the least trying to apply educational theory.

We turn now to our considerations of what it is about DIET that characterises it as 'idealist'; and why, while on the surface it appears to be appealing, seductive, easily digestible and at times succulent, it is actually a millstone (or a theoretic burden) for teachers. These issues might best be considered together, and outlined in point form.

Basically, dominant educational theory is idealist in that it denies, ignores, misconceptualises, and renders unproblematic certain important factors about the real world of daily experience and practice. More specifically:

(a) it assumes, either explicitly or implicitly, an atomistic stance to social relations, adopting a theoretic context which regards teachers as free, autonomous, individual agents and describing teacher practice within the terms of such a context. An emphasis falls on what the (independent, autonomous) individual teacher can or might do for individual pupils, and then through dubious extrapolation closely resembling the committing of a category error on the gains and transformations which are hoped for from the accumulative effect of large numbers of (independent, autonomous) individual teachers interacting with larger numbers of less independent and less autonomous but similarly individual pupils. It thus appeals to the aspirations and capabilities of teachers as individuals, and teachers are, of course, individuals in one sense (a sting in the tail is that it also attributes blame for failure to teachers as individuals), but fails to account adequately if at all, for the non-atomised social constraints which stand between the teacher-as-individual (and the pupil-as-individual) and the fulfilment of the prescribed ideals.

(b) it conflates schooling with 'education'. That is, a public concrete institution is confused and conflated with an abstracted ideal in much the same way, as Illich has noted,¹⁵ that hospitals and

'health' and the police force and 'law and order' have similarly become conflated. Now this is not to deny that schooling has something to do with 'education', but the nexus is a tenuous one and anything but the essentialist association which Peters (in direct line from Matthew Arnold) so commonly proclaims.¹⁶ Schooling, as we shall see, has much more to do with things other than 'education'; and the nexus which DIET has consistently woven between the two thus falsely represents schooling to its agents (the teachers), its charges (the pupils), and to its providers and beneficiaries. Theory which declares that the main business of schooling is 'education', or simply blurs the distinction between the two, presents teachers with fine ideals, noble hopes, admirable aspirations, and large-scale failure when it comes to the realisation of these things in practice (which does not mean that no teacher ever assists in the 'education' of some pupils). The nexus, in fact, mystifies the function of schooling within social relations, and in so doing creates tension and pressure on teachers.

(c) it concentrates quite centrally on notions such as 'democracy', 'equality', and 'personal autonomy', suggesting also that it is the case - which it most certainly isn't - that the social formations in, to and for which the theory is meant to apply are democratic and egalitarian (or at least are moving strongly in those directions), and that they are seriously desirous of promoting the type of personal autonomy spoken of among all. Now teachers might believe in promoting democracy, equality, and personal autonomy, and strive as hard as they can towards these ends; but if in reality they are working within social relations which are quite undemocratic, based firmly on inequality, and threatened by too much personal autonomy, then clearly these teachers most continually encounter restraints between what they are striving for and what they are able to achieve, or experience conflict between the theory which guides their practice and the actual outcomes of their practice - and conflict which, in the long run, is not adequately accounted for by the theory itself.

(d) it exhorts moral and intellectual prescriptions which, although possibly applicable to the best of all possible worlds, tend to emerge as somewhat empty rhetoric in the present historical conjuncture. It would be very nice if teachers helped all pupils "achieve the highest degree of individual development of which they are capable",¹⁷ led pupils as deep as philosophy and as high as art,¹⁸ or, to be a little less grandiose-sounding, developed the spirit of fraternity among all, encouraged co-operation, and promoted equality and justice. Concerns and ideals such as these, flowing freely from DIET, are a common basis of general teacher-endeavour which is surely directed towards "stemming the common tide in a wealthy and industrial community and saving the future from being vulgarised even if it cannot save the present".¹⁹ They are, however, very difficult concerns and ideals to fulfil in non-co-operative, unfraternal, unequal, unjust, wealthy and industrial communities which, as we shall see, cannot afford (both literally and figuratively) to stem the common tide.

(e) it accounts for failure to achieve its own ends, predictably, in idealist terms most commonly falling back on human nature (people are naturally lazy: greedy, evil etc.), and/or a naive a-historical account of "the way things are" and how they got to be that way which distorts and misrepresents causal relations, takes existing conditions as "given" rather than brought about, and most importantly fails to recognise that "existing conditions" are actively maintained, reproduced and recreated in the present. In this way actual existing dynamic problems are confused with causal factors, and can thus be identified, and dismissed as causes which have brought about the problems that we're now stuck with. An interesting example of such argumentation, combined with a retreat to human nature, is provided by R. S. Peters:

In all social movements, whether they be religious, political or cultural [does this include, and if not can we add 'educational?'], there is always the problem of the majority who do not care ... The explanation of this familiar phenomenon, as well as the inefficacy of advocacy [and education or schooling?], is not far to seek. The majority of men are geared to consumption and see the value of anything in terms of immediate pleasures or as related instrumentally to the satisfaction of their wants as consumers.²⁰

And thus we have all the consolation necessary for teachers seriously endeavouring to put DIET into practice but somehow just not getting the results. Echoing F. Scott Fitzgerald's chorus - "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"²¹ - they can live henceforth in the atmosphere breathed by the minor gods, but only as it settles over a haven of misrepresentation.

Not everyone however will settle for such an explanation. What then of teachers who find their DIET palatable, but also totally incapable of sustaining them in the harsh, polluted, but very real classroom climate - not quite the atmosphere breathed by the minor gods - in which they live and work? Some stick to their DIET and waste away, thinking that they themselves are sickly; while others turn to baser yet more sustaining fare, abandoning hopes of tingeing activities with visions of greatness and settling instead for a modicum of quietness and order as they assume a lesser role of disciplinarian and child-minder. Teachers such as these, as well as those who retreat into idealist apologies (and this may not represent all teachers) have been ground down by the very theory which was meant to guide and sustain them.

(f) finally, although not exhaustively, it either denies or is largely oblivious to the matter of production relations and the effect of production relations on all aspects of material practice; including, of course, schooling. But we have arrived now at the second of the millstones, and thus a separate and more detailed discussion becomes necessary.

The Millstone of Materialism: Reproduction of Bearers of Labour Power (RBLP)

We noted in the previous section that one of the legacies or effects of DIET is that the assumed connection between schooling and 'education' is almost universally taken for granted. The connection between schooling and RBLP, however, is far less familiar and far less recognised.

The reason for this is not hard to find. 'RBLP' is a Marxist rather than a DIET concept, and is thus absent from the corpus of dominant educational theory. This is not to say, of course, that DIET is totally oblivious to the general implications entailed in the notion of 'RBLP'; and it speaks of much the same sort of thing when it refers to 'socialisation' - much the same sort of thing, but not exactly the same, and the differences are crucial.

Both Marxists and DIETists are well aware that the continuance and reproduction of any form of society requires, at the very least, the inculcation of new generations into the values, habits, language, norms, mores, beliefs, traditions, practices etc. that characterise and make up existing social relations. DIET, however, tends to speak as if this were the first and foremost requirement, whereas Marxism attributes primacy to the production of material life itself;²² and thus by focusing on modes of production and on relations to the dominant mode of production in any particular social formation, is able to concretise the vague and embracing notion of 'socialisation' by relating the issues of values, habits, etc. directly with production relations as these themselves are determined by, and characterise modes of production. Within such a context 'RBLP' emerges not as an abstracted ideal but rather as a concrete reality - namely the production of people both capable of and willing to enter into the existing forms and relations of production. Put another way, it is the production of people who have both the skills and the attitudes necessary to preserve the dominant mode of production, and it would, of course, differ markedly in practice depending on which mode of production was dominant as well as on the stage of historical development of the particular mode of production in question. Thus, in contrast to DIET conceptions of the 'educated person', there can be no formal or ideal timeless universal 'bearer of labour power'.

RBLP, then, is a historically-specific task; and the role that schooling (or anything) plays in the task is also historically specific. Examination of the role of contemporary schooling in RBLP thus requires consideration of contemporary production relations (in this case corporate capitalism), an understanding of the process of reproduction itself, and some consideration of the history of schooling under the present dominant mode of production. We shall now consider these issues in the reverse order of this listing.

Historically, the capitalist mode of production (CMP) has brought about increased collectivisation and socialisation of the work process; and one result of this has been the attendant increased expulsion of the family unit from the production process. The family unit, as a possessor and transmitter of specialised skills across generations, once adequately reproduced specific labour power; but with the development of the CMP it became increasingly less adequate to the overall task of reproduction of labour power in general for capital-in-general. And paralleling the expulsion of the family unit from commodity production there occurred a de-legitimation of its informal educational processes. Thus, by the early nineteenth century a three-fold need had arisen:

(a) to provide an arena for passing on the more general skills and knowledge required by the newly-collectivised workers: skills and knowledge the family alone could no longer provide.

(b) to rationalise the reproduction of labour power in general, i.e. to inculcate in future workers particular attitudes, values etc. not necessarily specific to particular jobs but rather conducive to accepting and promoting certain social and production relations.

(c) to provide an institutionalised transition from family relations to (collective) work relations.

It is no accident that the emergence of “free”, compulsory, universal elementary schooling (and later secondary schooling) paralleled this development. Elitist schooling, the norm for preceding millennia, was no longer on its own adequate to changed socio-historical conditions; and schooling as we now know it developed not as a response to socially-caring educational theorists (i.e. not as material manifestation shaped by the leading “creative ideas” of the day - rather it was those who blended the older elitist idealism with the new material conditions whose ideas were legitimated), and not (in the form in which it came) to appease working-class demands, but rather to meet a set of contingencies within the historical development of capitalism: and it stands now much as it stood in the beginning - as the intermediary institution between the family and the labour market; as the key institution in the process of RBLP, operated by the state (as the representative of capital-in-general) for the reproduction of labour power in general for capital in general. The purpose and point of compulsory universal schooling was in fact, not at all ambiguous: beneath the moral, religious, and liberal idealist overtones - those overtones which DIET has heard and recorded - sounded the clear and dominant chord that schooling was to be the new institution charged with RBLP for capital. And as it was instituted so it has become and remained.

We now turn to the process of reproduction, which, in a paper of this size, can hardly be discussed in a detailed and comprehensive way. We shall confine ourselves therefore, to considering the ideological function of the state, and the place of schooling in the performance of that function (along with certain interconnected political functions).

Put broadly and bluntly, the ideological function of ‘the state is that of establishing hegemony; which, in a liberal capitalist state, means ensuring that the relation between capital and labour remains unthreatened by obtaining voluntary submission on the part of labour to the forms and processes of capitalist production; or, more loosely, by having labour accept the theoretical and practical representations of capital²³ as being in the interests of all and as the “only rational, universally valid” representation around.

Such acceptance, however, does not come innately to the biological individual; but neither is it the case that human beings live their lives strictly at the level of biological individuals. The reproduction of any existing social relations is basically dependent on constituting biological individuals into ideological subjects through their experience in a complex yet coherent network of objective ideological processes; and the end result of living in, participating in, and passing through the objective social process is that people, who are essentially biological individuals, become constituted as ideological subjects bearing specific ideological representations of social reality and a relatively coherent set of norms, beliefs and attitudes relating to the dominant social relations. Human agency is thus the practice of constituted ideological subjects rather than the conditioned responses of prisoners of human nature.

There are a large number of these objective ideological processes, both of a formal and an informal kind, in any advanced (i.e. complex) set of social relations; and schooling is but one of these - arguably the most important and pervasive of them all. Less arguable, however, is that schools do have the primary ideological function of constituting biological individuals into individual ideological subjects-who will 'freely' enter the labour market as willing bearers of labour power, whether they are headed for the factory floor, the directors' seats, or somewhere in between.

What it is that schools actually do in the process of RBLP has, in recent years, been documented rather fully in the Marxist challenge to DIET, and thus only a schematic summary is necessary here. Basically:

(a) schooling is highly instrumental in providing certain skills and knowledge required in common by most, if not all, future workers (e.g., literacy, numeracy); as well as in providing more esoteric skills and knowledge for a small proportion of pupils headed for the "higher" regions of the job market.

(b) schooling transmits to all future workers in a contested way (and thus with varying degrees of success, and with less success now than a generation ago) the behaviours, attitudes, norms and values required by the existing relations of production of people occupying the different positions within those relations; and it produces, again with varying degrees of success, people who are bearers of particular norms, values, habits etc. which are essential for the reproduction of social relations. As a case in point consider John as revealed in a short interview with Paul Willis:

John: ... I'm on twelve pounds a week. In a day I could bring a thousand pounds in for 'em. I mean, everything you're doing is money.

PW: What do you make of that?

John: I think every place, the management are better off everywhere you'll find the same.

PW: Yet you still say things, by and large, are fair.

John: It's fair on the whole, but I mean obviously there is points where it ain't fair, like management, but I think it's everybody's fault, everybody's too greedy...²⁴

John has a number of skills which enable him to perform certain labour, and a set of beliefs (the system is fair, abuses are universal and can be attributed to human nature) by means of which he can rationalise what he partly recognises as his own economic exploitation,²⁵ and thus accept and acquiesce in particular production relations. Schooling would have had something to do with so constituting him.

(c) In and along with its ideological function schooling is highly instrumental in the licencing and certification process, and through certification serves the political function of RBLP by:

- i) reproducing class membership across generations
- ii) attesting to formed values and attitudes as well as gained skills and knowledge
- iii) glossing the overall streaming process with a veneer of "fairness" such that it appears as if everyone comes out in his or her rightful place
- iv) lowering the cost to capital of RBLP by delivering up to the labour market pre-sorted material, and by saving employers from having to engage in value formation and training in basic skills.

Interestingly, it is this very last point - the least touched on by those who do approach schooling in terms of RBLP - which is actually of most significance in understanding the role of schooling, and the place of teachers, in corporate capitalist social formations: most significant in that it places schooling where it should be placed (yet is rarely placed) - within an economic context. And having introduced this economic context we have thus reached a good place to consider contemporary production relations as they relate directly to the role of schooling. Let us come at this issue by first traversing the context of DIET.

DIET is presently committed to the hard core principles that all should be 'educated', and that the central function of schooling is to get on with this 'educating'. DIET does not, of course, see contemporary schooling as being exclusively concerned with 'educating', nor does it seriously expect all children to emerge from the schooling experience as nicely or equally 'educated' people. Constraints on schooling itself are commonly recognised, such as the need to engage in functions which were once the province of other social and familial services but these tend to be reduced to the "nuisance level" and are not seen as altering "the fact that education is the main business of the school".²⁶ Similarly, constraints on individual pupils are also commonly recognised; such as different social backgrounds (which it is hoped that schooling may yet overcome, even though the evidence shows that schooling systematically reinforces rather than ameliorates the social inequalities which children bear); and different capabilities among children which, so the story goes, makes it pretty hard to really, 'educate' those kids who are dumb, slow dull, lazy or just plain stupid. DIET tends to deal with this problem by means of gestures (often quite vague ones) towards things like developing the full capabilities of each child (regardless of how meagre they might be), and by variously asserting either that the fault lies with the child and not the ideal (cf. Hutchins), or that 'education' really isn't an all-or-nothing affair but rather a matter of "how far individuals can progress along the same avenues of exploration".²⁷

Let all of that be as it may. The point is that what DIET quite dramatically fails to recognise is the economic impossibility of 'educating' everybody under corporate capitalism, and the related economic absurdity (and impossibility) of having 'education' as "the main business of the school". Now this has little to do with how much money the treasury has in an absolute sense, or how much "we" are willing to lay out on schooling. Rather it is tied up with the relation between productive and unproductive labour within capitalist social relations, and how unproductive labour is paid for.

Productive labour under capitalism²⁸ is labour which is exchanged with capital to produce surplus value, and is thus the very source of capital accumulation - which is the one thing above all necessary to keep capitalism going. Within capitalist relations of production, and only within capitalist relations of production, labour power is a commodity, sold in the market place, and sold at a "value" less than its actual worth to the purchaser or capitalist. Productive labourers, therefore, sell their labour power for the best deal they can get, while capitalists buy this labour power always at a monetary cost lower than its actual value to them and are thus able to extract and generate surplus value and profit. The case with unproductive labourers is similar except that they are expropriated of surplus labour rather than surplus value, and are categorised as being economically oppressed rather than economically exploited. Bearers of labour power under capitalism, therefore, must be willing to acquiesce in an unfair and unjust system, and 'freely' participate in their own economic (and political) exploitation and/or oppression. Now there are fairly obvious, as well as far more speculative, reasons as to why people would acquiesce and participate in such a way but one thing can be said with a high degree of certainty, and especially as it applies to the more proletarianised level of unproductive labourers (the testimony of John - above - bears fine witness to this) - namely that the willingness and acquiescence required can be produced through maintaining ignorance or producing distortions of the status quo, stifling critical consciousness, and thwarting the development of the full autonomous person. Put another way, it is advantageous to capital that productive labourers especially are not model end products of the application of DIET; and, as I have suggested more fully elsewhere,²⁹ capitalist social relations, which can be maintained only by the increased proletarianisation and increased exploitation of productive labourers, would be massively threatened by any future generation universally 'educated' according to DIET criteria. Thus, at one level, the economic absurdity and impossibility of really putting DIET into practice and 'educating' everybody in its terms. But there is, however, a far more concrete level on which the same point can be made.

Productive labour, as we have seen, is labour exchanged with capital to produce surplus value; and it is on this process (or more precisely, the continued accumulation of surplus value) that capitalism fundamentally depends. Unproductive labour, however, is labour exchanged with

revenue; and revenue itself is part of the surplus value produced by productive labourers along with part of the surplus labour produced by unproductive labourers, most commonly (but not totally) manifested in taxes.

Two key points must now be recognised. First; virtually the entire expenditure on schooling comes from taxes, that is, from the surplus value generated by productive labour and from the exchange against revenue from unproductive labour. Thus schooling itself is actually a drain on surplus value and represents a threat and impediment to capital accumulation. Second; as capitalism has developed historically from its entrepreneurist phase to its present corporate phase the proportion of unproductive labourers in the workforce has risen dramatically to a present day level of 40-50%; and if present production relations were maintained this proportion would continue to grow. What this simply means is that about half of the population now passing through universal compulsory schooling is headed for unproductive labour, and in the future will not generate surplus value directly for the capitalists.³⁰ Or, put more starkly, since the beginnings of universal compulsory schooling an ever-growing proportion of schooling expenditure has been consumed unproductively by capital, to the extent that, just on this count, contemporary schooling has become quite a serious drain on surplus value for capitalism. Clearly, then, schooling is now a drain at two levels - and it is central to capital accumulation that this be offset or plugged up at some point.

The most obvious way out of this "problem" is simply to modify universal compulsory schooling either by offering it to less people (i.e. making it non-universal) and/or offering less of it to most, if not all people (i.e. modifying the conditions of compulsion). Capital, however, cannot do this in the present historical conjuncture, because it too is caught between the Laurentian millstones. It is, at present, firmly stuck with its ideological commitment to universal compulsory schooling (being, in this sense, victim of the DIET it has propagated and endorsed³¹ - in beautiful dialectic fashion sowing seeds of its own demise); and it also has a very strong political and opposing economic need not just to maintain but possibly to further extend universal compulsory schooling.³² This leaves one other possibility; that of turning whatever aspects of schooling expenditure it can towards counteracting the drain on surplus value.

Once again, however, the most obvious and simplest solution in this regard turns out to be less simple and effective than it might be. That solution is, of course, to direct expenditure towards enhancing the basic training of future productive labourers such that they require less training elsewhere, and such that their increased future productivity offsets both the increased cost of their reproduction (schooling is getting dearer to provide) and the drain in surplus value, so as to actually bring about an overall increase in surplus value. That would work nicely if a large majority of school pupils were headed for productive labour, which was the case when universal compulsory schooling was first introduced, but as we have seen, this is no longer so. The major problem for capital is to reduce the drain brought about through the production of future unproductive labourers, and here two solutions present themselves: either modify schooling itself to produce less unproductive labourers and/or modify production relations in order to redirect present unproductive labour back into the realm of productive labour. And what is happening at the moment and must continue to happen if capital accumulation is to continue, is an interactive application of all three solutions: capitalism has to offset its growing expenditure (via schooling) on both productive and unproductive labour by getting more back from its expenditure on productive labour as well as by making present unproductive labour more productive in the future. The effects of this move are already evident in the schools and in the rhetoric of their apologists. Discipline; i.e. more effective value and attitude formation and behaviour control, is now a major issue (DIETists turn back once again to Socrates' complaint that today's children are not behaving like the ladies and gentlemen of the past): concentration has fallen on the basic skills, i.e. those skills required by all future workers (DIETists retreat again into the perennial myth of declining standards): and the emphasis on job-orientation; i.e. ensuring that pupils leave schools with marketable skills, grows daily supported by the absurdity proclaimed by some that herein lies the solution to unemployment. Schools are being

asked and forced to “cut out the frills”, and to make pupils employable,³³ funding has been massively redirected away from the public sector and within the public sector away from liberal arts programmes towards vocational and technical programmes; and while DIET still reigns supreme in academia and still infiltrates policy statements in a rationalised form, material (economic) practice - now more at odds with DIET than it has ever been³⁴ - determines (as it always has) the ongoing practice of schooling. The millstones are grinding.

This is, of course, nothing new. Material practice and DIET have been at odds ever since the introduction of universal compulsory schooling, and what has changed historically have been the terms of the playing out and the rationalising of the conflict, not the conflict itself. What is required at this point, to tie up the overall argument of this paper and show the precise nature of the millstone effect, is just a little further consideration of schooling once again in terms of productive and unproductive labour.

If we relate productive and unproductive labour to years and type of schooling it holds generally that productive labourers are the first to drop out (in Plato's schema their 'equivalent'³⁵ were the first culled out), most commonly at or very near the point where legal compulsion ceases; and they are also those who swim in lower streams and/or do the more vocationally oriented courses in schools. Unproductive labourers generally, although again not universally, do more schooling in higher streams (attending beyond the point of legal compulsion) and need higher certificates in order to get their particular jobs (for instance, a base-grade public servant needs an HSC, and must also pass an entrance exam, in order to be allowed to staple forms together). Now the type and content of schooling encountered by future unproductive labourers does not at least in the later years not begin to approach something like that which DIET proclaims, just as it is the case that DIET has always been in harmony with the particular production as in the past, of a small highly-schooled social elite. Thus it could appear, on the surface, with more and more staying on longer at school, and with increasing numbers apparently heading for unproductive labour, that DIET and schooling practice are becoming more and more compatible. However it is the reverse of this common illusion - an illusion which has reinforced the credibility of DIET, made it more palatable and more easily digestible for some, and which has helped to keep it dominant - which is actually the case. There is a general point to be considered here, as well as a historically-specific one.

The general point is one of basic economics and has been touched on before; namely that globally production of unproductive labourers must at least be counterbalanced by the production, at minimal cost, of productive labourers equipped for increased productivity. The brutal fact to emerge from this is that whatever success teachers have in turning children into unproductive labourers, or actually putting the principles of DIET into practice, must be at least balanced by the production of more, and more economically exploitable, workers. The production of unproductive labourers ultimately impels the production of exploitable workers;³⁶ just as the digestion of DIET for some pupils necessarily denies it to others. Children elevated or directed by teachers into unproductive levels, or 'educated' according to DIET criteria (and they are not necessarily the brightest, most able or best suited children) are so elevated, directed, or 'educated' at the expense of others who must, at the basic bedrock level of economics, be kept down and see the ideals of DIET evaporate before them.

The historically-specific point is concerned with changing production relations. At the time of the beginnings of universal compulsory schooling only a small proportion of unproductive labourers was required, and teachers were seen, and saw themselves, as “doing their job” if they fulfilled the ideals of DIET for an elite while offering literacy, numeracy and sound moral values to the rest: 'education' for all was easily rationalised as a hope for the future, to be gradually brought about. Changing production relations, allied with economic expansion, however, soon put an end to that. “Opportunity” became a key word; Keynes forecast affluence for all; the ranks of the unproductive labourer swelled; people stayed on at school longer to better themselves; 'education' was proclaimed as a principal means of social advancement; and certainly more of this 'education'

was offered to more and more people. Hopes ran very high indeed and DIET flourished. But an end came to economic expansion too, and the capitalist world moved into its present contractive phase; one better suited by the production of less unproductive labourers, along with channelling more of the work of those still remaining into the productive sector. The present situation, then is that while schools and teachers (with many of these teachers still inspired by the theory and practice of 'headier' days) will continue to assist in the reproduction of unproductive labourers, the number and proportion of these labourers are highly likely to decrease, and their required skill-level in general will certainly decrease (and be de-valued as labour power).³⁷ The situation, expressed in DIET terms, is that teachers will be required to 'educate' less people less well; and this stands in marked contrast to those past hopes of DIET which were concerned with 'educating' more people more fully. This is why DIET is now more at odds with material practice than it has ever been - the hiatus is beginning to widen again, and this time, unlike past experiences, it appears to be unbridgeable by rationalisations internal to DIET.

Thus the millstone effect. On the one hand DIET informing practice and pointing it in certain directions. On the other hand material reality and RBLP, steering practice in the opposite direction by impelling the production of more, and more exploitable and proletarianised labourers, while simultaneously encouraging a reduction in the numbers, and in the level of skills and knowledge, of those whom DIETists might be happier to regard as 'educated'.

Conclusion

Teachers work simultaneously within two contexts: the context of corporate capitalism which is geared towards increasing proletarianisation; and the context of DIET which is geared towards quantitatively and qualitatively increasing 'education', variously but always similarly defined in terms antithetical to proletarianisation. And clearly the attempt to implement the principles of DIET, and to apply them equally and fairly among all, within production relations directed toward ever-increasing proletarianisation, is to be ground between millstones.

The situation is a tragic one; and the personal history and experience of a great many teachers (and former teachers) bears clear witness to this. It is not, however, hopeless. There are ways out - but there are also illusory and/or negative ways out.

Possible the most illusory, and eventually the most dangerous "way out" for teachers is to ignore the structural constraints limiting (rather than determining or over-determining) what they are able to do, and instead to completely individualise their situation and apply themselves more fully to, and concentrate only on their lessons, their pupils, and their achievements. This may relieve some personal dissonance, especially for teachers blessed with higher classes in 'better' schools: but teachers will do no better (globally) if they just work harder, prepare more conscientiously, or attend the latest in-service courses; just as children will fare no better (globally) if they study harder, pay more attention in class, or (as has recently been suggested - seriously) apply themselves consistently to homework.³⁸ The actions of individuals as individuals might bring about a resorting among individuals - the elevation of A at the expense of B - but they are not well suited to changing basic social relations whereby both A and B could benefit. And the negative way out - that of abandoning much of the substance and many of the moral principles of DIET and becoming instead a time-serving child-minder (which could relieve dissonance for teachers, with lower classes in "not-so-good" schools) - is no better. DIET, as a theoretic context for understanding, explaining, and guiding practice in the real world is deficient, confusing, mystificatory, and at times even pernicious - specifically, the classroom climate in which teachers live is not the atmosphere breathed by the minor gods - but much of its substance, recontextualised, is none of those things. Teachers should not, for instance, give up the endeavour to develop the full capabilities of each child: rather they should cling tenaciously to such hopes, but also situate them within a theoretical and practical context whereby they can actually be realised. This leads us to our positive conclusion, which is not

one of rushing out and attempting to smash the capitalist state overnight, but rather one of active resituation on the part of teachers as a first step in the process of both counteracting the grind, and moving out of the path of the millstones themselves.

Active resituation requires, first and foremost, re-theorisation stemming from the material reality of the grinding process described in this paper, re-theorisation which can account for the grinding process, which can make good the deficiencies of DIET, which coheres with material circumstances, and which can guide teacher-practice within the real circumstances in which they work. It would need to be theory which rejects idealism and which goes far beyond individualism; and which at the very least considers teachers globally as a sub-class within existing production relations actively and structurally involved in the process of RBLP.³⁹ As Sharp and Green have noted, concerning the contemporary situation:

Unless or until educators [read 'teachers'] are able to comprehend their own structural location and develop theories of the limits of feasible political action to transform that location p they will continue to be unwilling victims of a structure that undermines the moral concerns they profess and which ... informs their own perspective on their activity.⁴⁰

Given that teachers are, as this paper has strongly suggested, victims whose concerns are undermined D and whose perceptions of their work are misinformed; and more generally, a sub-class in need of developing a more appropriate theoretic context for the purpose of comprehending and transforming their structural location; then surely philosophy of education can and should help them with this task.⁴¹

Notes

1. In this paper 'Education' refers to the academic study, subject or discipline; 'education' to the concept suggested by idealist educational theory; and education, ungraced by capitals or quotes, to the common everyday language usage.
2. The complete essay, containing twelve parts or chapters, was first published in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. E. D. McDonald, (1936), London: Heinemann, a book itself which was not reprinted until 1961. The transference to 'Education' came in *Lawrence on Education*, eds. J. & R. Williams, (1973), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. I have been able to locate only two citations to the essay in the entire literature on 'Education'.
3. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in R.C. Tucker (ed.), (1972) *The Marx Engels Reader*, N. Y.: W. W. Norton, p. 437.
4. See the debate in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* Vol. 10, No. 1; Vol. 11, No. 2; Vol. 13, No. 1. See also I. Snook, (1982) "'Ideology' in Educational Theory", *Access*, 1, 1, p.16.
5. "The German Ideology", in R. C. Tucker, op. cit., p .138.
6. According to Marxism, in a capitalist society theoretic representations are produced within the context of objective structures of capitalist social formations, and dominant theoretic representations are the products of the dominant class - i.e., the representations of capital. Later discussion will presume this context.
7. A thorough discussion would have to indicate the relationship of this development to the service of ruling interests within the overall historical development of the capitalist mode of production.
8. Quite literally entrusted to man.
9. I do not take the "progressive education" movement of the first half of this century as indicative of revolutionary change. It was always opposed by liberal idealism (e.g., Adler, Hutchings), viewed with suspicion from within the "establishment", and commonly, and quite definitely in 1957, denounced as a failure. Dewey, of course, was very influential in the U.S.A.; but elsewhere, although recognised, he has been mainly on the outside trying to get in.
10. S. S. Laurie (1902), *The Training of Teachers*, Cambridge: C.U.P., p.69.

11. For an excellent example of the type of analysis required see J. C. Walker, "The Evolution of the APE", unpublished paper read to the NSW Branch of PESA, April 1979.
12. S. J. Curtis and M. E. A. Boulwood (1966), *A Short History of Educational Ideas*, London: University Tutorial Press, p.vii. This very popular book continues to go through newer and newer editions, and more and more printings.
13. *Ibid.*, p.531.
14. *Ibid.*, p.523.
15. I. Illich (1973) *Deschooling Society*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.9.
16. R.S. Peters (1970) *Ethics and Education*, London: Allen and Unwin p.74, p.167, and elsewhere. Arnold, a century earlier, wrote a great deal on schooling specifically, but always referred to it as education.
17. T.P. Nunn (1945) *Education; its Data and First Principles* (3rd edn.), London: Edward Arnold, p.12.
18. As suggested by A. N. Whitehead (1929) *The Aims of Education*, N.Y.: Williams and Norgate, p.1.
19. M. Arnold (1963) *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge: C.U.P., p.52.
20. R.S. Peters, *op. cit.* p.145 (my emphasis).
21. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1974) *The Great Gatsby*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.188.
22. See particularly "The German Ideology - Part one", in R. C. Tucker *op. cit.*
23. See Note 6.
24. P. Willis (1978) *Learning to Labour*, Farnborough: Saxon House, p.165.
25. Technically, being expropriated of surplus value. See below, p. 22.
26. R.S. Peters, *op. cit.*, p.272, my emphasis.
27. *ibid.* p p.178. As far as 'vague gestures' are concerned, Peters suggests one page earlier that for some children we can be well satisfied if we develop "the enjoyment of personal relationships and conversation, physical prowess p dexterity, taste in clothes and in the arrangement and decoration of rooms, and the cultivation of a variety of skills which are necessary for turning a house into a place where people can live with some kind of grace and dignity." Not much better, this, than E. B. Castle's (1961) solution: to "enrich the young worker's dream life ... so that while he is turning his screws and she is filling her cigarette packets, day dreams arise from a healthier subconscious"; a solution which is admitted to be "thoroughly Greek" (*Ancient Education and Today*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books II p. 200). One might suspect Peters of accidentally talking about training servants rather than 'educating' autonomous individuals and he seems quite oblivious of the fact that the qualities he advocates are hardly likely, on their own, to generate the wherewithal necessary to rent or buy a house along with things to arrange gracefully in it.
28. Whether labour is productive or not is specific to particular modes of production. See K. Harris, (1982) *Teachers and Classes*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.56.
29. See (1977) "Peters on Schooling", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 2 Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 42-3; (1979) *Education and Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 153-4; *Teachers and Classes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-24, 79-98, 111-124.
30. To be more accurate, about half of those who will get jobs are headed for unproductive labour if present production relations are maintained.
31. See Note 6, DIET has become dominant because it has, through its proponents, represented the interests of capital.
32. The opposing economic need arises from escalating unemployment, itself a drain on surplus value, which would most likely increase if the school-leaving age was lowered.
33. DIET's at present trading on an ambiguity here. Schooling might assist in making pupils better and more suitable potential employees but this does not mean making them more likely to get jobs.
34. See below, pp. 28-9

35. Plato was not describing a capitalist system. See Note 28.
36. The full economic argument is not possible here, but it must be stressed that past (and possibly future) moves by capital to swell the ranks of state unproductive labour are necessarily temporary and stop-gap measures.
37. A large proportion of unproductive labourers are employed by the state, and large numbers will continue to be so employed. However we have already seen cuts in this area, as well as de-skilling and de-valuation of labour power (consider the base-grade clerk; above, p.26). Note also that teachers themselves belong to this group. None of this is to suggest, of course, that the production of highly skilled labourers will cease: the actual situation is that they will become more highly skilled, but that we shall need less of them.
38. This assertion was dubiously extrapolated by Professor Drinkwater of U.N.S.W. from research recently done in six schools; and received wide press coverage. See, for instance, the Sydney Morning Herald of 23 October 1981.
39. This holds for any class society, not just a capitalist one. In any class society state teachers and state-licensed teachers will be agents of the ruling class. This points us to another millstone effect; teachers working to overthrow existing production relations must work in and through those very production relations, and thus even radical teachers are potential grist, albeit for another mill.
40. R. Sharp and A. Green (1975) *Education and Social Control*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.227.
41. *Teachers and Classes*, op. cit., which attempts to describe, understand and explain the role, function and effect of teachers in terms of a subclass within the class structure and relations of production of corporate capitalism, is a step towards that end. Many of the points in this paper are argued more fully there; and many of the throw-away lines above: e.g., "schooling systematically reinforces rather than ameliorate the social inequalities which children bear", are supported by largescale evidence in the Select Bibliography (pp. 162-7). Like the book, this paper too is written in non-sexist language: hopefully one day that much at least will be taken for granted in works in philosophy of education.