




Rethinking education: Bildung, civil society and the search for solidarity

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the paper is on the relation between education and solidarity and the possible futures that this might entail. A concern over solidarity has been a constant in different forms over the history of western education systems - these forms have encompassed a focus on socialisation and cultural reproduction, a desire to alleviate moral decay, through to a more recent sense that education should do more to tackle social division, the rise of demagoguery and post-truth agendas. A long and steady relationship has been established between solidarity and education, but it has suffered in the glare of other, possibly more pressing, imperatives such as concerns over social justice.

This paper offers a 'rethinking' of the solidaristic nature of education and in particular the extent to which educational institutions can provide suitable grounds for 'learning solidarity'. To expand on this topic, I draw on a number of intellectual resources, including the work of Hegel (bildung, socialised conceptions of freedom), and the 20th century debate between Richard Rorty and Nancy Fraser over the possibilities of creating and maintaining solidarity in an increasingly fragmented world. I suggest that a rethinking of educational aims along solidaristic grounds requires greater emphasis on both schools and civil society as sites of learning solidarity and a revitalised bildung. I conclude that any such project should also take into account the possible dangers of this approach, including an over-reliance on 'statism' as well as contributing further to processes of educationalization.

KEYWORDS

Schools; education; solidarity; Rorty; Hegel; Bildung

Introduction

Schools are often pitched as tools of social justice from all sides of the political and social spectrum— governments as well as international organisations have been all too eager in the 21st century to position formal schooling in particular as a miracle cure for societal problems, such as low social mobility, poverty, various inequalities as well as physical and mental health issues. This opportunistic but also very visible rebranding of education constitutes a new politics of educational

governance, one that offers a ‘quick fix for the ills of a post-welfare state’ (Murphy, 2022, p. 4). While this rebranding is morally dubious at best it represents part of a more general conflation of educational and justice aims, an equation encouraged by those on the left as much as on the right.

The discourse over education and justice is instructive as regards what it omits—this equation is presented as natural and unarguable, as if ‘justice’ operated as the only important element of a democratic society. But even a cursory awareness of educational issues indicates that justice is forced, at an institutional and pedagogical level, to share moral ground with concerns over liberty, or freedom. This is evident in, for example, fractious debates over public vs private schooling, the ongoing educational movement centred on free, charter and academy schools across the globe, as well as the tension stoked over the capacity of educational institutions to cater for religious and sexual freedom. Recent controversies over the inclusion of gender-neutral toilets in schools, alongside the backlash against ‘woke’ teaching in US schools, suggest that struggles over social justice do not monopolise the moral ground of education.

This tension between freedom and justice in education reflects a much broader political context, one in which solidarity gets played down as a moral imperative. There is a power imbalance among the three—liberty (freedom) and equality (justice) tend to get top billing in social theory (Murphy, 2021). This may be because the two have, as Bouchard and Charbonneau (2014) put it, ‘universal appeal’ (p. 532). Together they provide a heady mixture of ‘individual freedom to lead one’s life as one pleases, within a society where all have equal opportunity’ (p. 532). More recently in the 21st century, issues of equality have held much of the attention. Matters of justice have overshadowed issues of individual and social freedom that concerned so much of social theory in the 20th century. This leaves fraternity, or solidarity, as the erstwhile poor cousin.

The relative lack of attention paid to solidarity may be due to the glare of the spotlight on liberty and justice, as concerns over the binds that tie people together retreat into the background. Just as likely a cause is its historical Cinderella status, as solidarity ‘came a poor third’ (Johnston, 1991, p. 491) to liberty and equality in the original democratic agenda. Fraternity as an ideal was of less interest to the philosophers of the Enlightenment who preceded the French Revolution, whose concerns revolved more about the ‘rights of man’ and who was entitled to those rights. Questions of solidarity sat awkwardly alongside debates over what were considered natural rights, and as a result tended to be less amenable to forms of legal and statutory regulation.

One aspect that has been lost over the decades has been the view that solidarity was as central to democratic life as justice and also freedom. Prominent proponents of democracy in the early 20th century viewed solidarity as an indispensable element, one that needed to sit alongside justice and freedom ‘if we wished to understand how a democratic society can exist and thrive’ (Frega, 2019, p. 674). The polarisation of freedom versus justice later in the 20th century (and arguably still today) did not help matters, with solidarity taking a back seat in the tensions between capitalism and communism.

Setting aside this historical backdrop, solidarity is undoubtedly a central concern in democratic societies and it is wise to ‘bring human solidarity back’ into the equation (Sachs, 2012). One way to support such a shift is by connecting solidarity to the institutional world of education. Education institutions such as schools, colleges and universities provide significant foundations for sociality—even in privatised versions, they offer spaces for community building, social interaction, interpersonal engagement, dialogue and communication. These institutions sit alongside those of the family, church and the workplace as social spaces that fulfil solidaristic functions of society. A concerted effort to think of education in solidaristic terms is long overdue, and in some ways lags behind other people-centred fields such as health, which have witnessed a growing interest in issues of solidarity (Illingworth & Parmet, 2012; Ter Meulen, 2016).

Solidarity and public policy more broadly are no strangers, as a solidaristic value system has enabled the development of welfare systems across the world. Fields such as health and social care in particular rely heavily on solidaristic concepts of care and reciprocity in advancing welfare statism

in countries such as Sweden and France. Although questions of both justice and freedom have held sway in debates over these fields, more recently there has been a resurgent interest in the importance of solidarity (Ter Meulen, 2016).

This reimagining of public policy from the viewpoint of solidarity is well overdue, and is a welcome rejoinder to overly individualist accounts of policy outcomes as well as the dominance of rights and redistributive-based approaches to social justice. As Ter Meulen (2016) rightly points out, the importance of solidarity ‘lies particularly in its emphasis on relational aspects and the role of recognition in care practices’ (p. 517). Education as a core component of public policy is well placed to provide a system of mutual recognition that helps binds people together. This is a big ask of course and requires a level of thoughtful engagement to flesh out the core issues involved in making stronger connections between education and solidarity. The discussion below serves as a contribution to this engagement, focusing first of all on debates over ‘learning solidarity’.

Learning solidarity: Philosophical debates

A pedagogical approach to the question of solidarity is evident in philosophical debates on the topic, which have often been entangled with debates over personal freedom and social justice. Richard Rorty’s text *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) is a striking example of this, one that seeks to steer clear from reconciliation between the demands of freedom and solidarity while also pointedly avoiding any input from educational institutions. Rorty (1989) sees solidarity as a work in progress, or what he terms a ‘goal to be achieved’,

not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize people different from ourselves. (p. xvi)

There is a pedagogical element to Rorty’s conception of learned sensitivity, as if we can learn out way out of division and fragmentation and into more solidaristic frames of community. Eschewing more formal approaches to learning, Rorty’s curriculum comes in the shape of personal activities such as novels, documentaries, even comic books. Fiction, for Rorty (1989), has a moral force that ‘gives us the details about what sorts of cruelty we ourselves are capable of, and thereby lets us re-describe ourselves’ (p. xvi). Alongside the power of novels, he also credits popular culture such as movies and TV as the ‘principal vehicles of moral change and progress’ (p. xvi).

Rorty accepts that human solidarity is tribal, that sentiments such as ‘people like us’ and ‘our sort of people’ are part of the fabric of life. He does not dispute this and argues that people necessarily look for forms of similarity and dissimilarity among themselves. This is his starting point alongside a belief that people ‘have a moral obligation to feel a sense of solidarity with all other human beings’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 190). On this basis, his approach to solidarity is one which sees people extending their sense of ‘we’ to people whom ‘we have previously thought of as ‘they’.

Solidarity for Rorty (1989) is the

ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of ‘us’. (p. 192)

Self-doubt also carries a pedagogical component that can be collectively shared over time, self-doubt which has ‘gradually, over the last few centuries, been inculcated into inhabitants of the democratic states’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 198). This doubt is a form of critical reflexivity on one’s stock of empathy towards others, which can lead to further doubts about the capacity of modern care structures to deal with the ‘pain and humiliation’ of others, while also opening up opportunities to consider the alternatives.

Rorty's approach to solidarity on the surface is commendable, and one that mirrors everyday reality for people who often inhabit different 'tribes' and different sets of solidarities. Forms of 'us and them' solidarities are evident in friendship groups, associations and networks that tend to align along class, nation, political or religious lines, while tight bonds are also formed around specific interests such as sport, art, music and current affairs. These bonds of affiliation are to some extent cemented and strengthened by the difference between 'us' and 'them', the difference an essential part of the solidarity in the first place.

Rorty's pedagogy of solidarity belies his wider view of the world which includes a deep suspicion of a personhood potentially usurped by adherence to a wider community. There is danger in forms of learnt solidarity that come with compulsion and should not impinge on any hard-won personal autonomy. But his view also incorporates a rather passive view of progress and of change, whether personal or social. His view of solidarity lacks a strong social component and there is something of a disconnect to other forms of everyday practice, including political practice, practices of inequality and power, and practices of social movements. A glaring omission is a theory of change and social conflict, the kind of which could do with the input from a civil society in which struggles over solidarity have been endlessly played out. This was effectively Nancy Fraser's (1989) critique of Rorty: for her, Rorty puts forth a theory of the social which is passive and highly individualised, lacking the politics of struggles over cultural meaning, identity and position. Self-doubt as a vehicle for social learning, change and justice is insufficient and lacks empirical support when faced with the power of social movements to transform how we see others. She argues there is a need to consider the 'agents of historical change to be social movements rather than extraordinary individuals' (Fraser, 1989, p. 107).

How to put the social in solidarity, then, becomes a pedagogical question that demands further intellectual tools that those provided by Rorty. This question has a set of interconnected components: the framing of 'community' and how this relates to solidaristic sense of selfhood; the input of formal educational institutions; and the role of civil society and social movements in building a more inclusive worldview. To address some of these elements, I turn to the work of Hegel, whose ideas on solidarity provide a strong contrast to those of Rorty and to some extent fuelled Rorty's postmodern ironic take on contingent solidaristic selfhood.

What is freedom without solidarity: Some reflections on Hegel's ethical life

Rorty's distinctly postmodern take on solidarity seeks to avoid any grand narratives for enlightenment aims, especially those that, in his eyes, conflate demands over individual freedom with solidarity. For Rorty, any solidaristic movement that seeks to impinge on personal autonomy are doomed to failure. These different imperatives should instead be viewed as equally valid 'yet forever incommensurable' (Rorty, 1989, p. xv). In and of itself, this intellectual position places Rorty at a considerable distance from the ideas famously developed by Hegel about democracy and justice across his philosophical works. Rorty's ideas are in direct contrast to Hegel's position that community membership *precedes* individual autonomy: it acts as the necessary pre-requisite as well as, ideally, the guarantor of personal freedom. For Hegel, the conditions that undergird communicative forms of language, 'the conditions that the private ironist must recognize if she is to be what she takes herself to be' (Hogan, 2017, p. 363), always come before individual capacities for selfhood and personal freedom.

The development of a solidaristic ethical life for Hegel is dependent on community forms of association which also presupposes the need for personal autonomy—the 'demand for community [is] at the very origin of my striving to be an individual' (Hasan, 2015, p. 503). More broadly, Hegel offers an antidote to philosophers, including Rorty, who exhibit a 'persistent rationalist tendency to collapse identities back onto interests and their maximisation' (Epstein, 2018, p. 808). Identities are

constructed intersubjectively and human relations provide the bedrock for personal interests, decisions and choices.

Hegel was careful to situate concerns over freedom and justice in and against questions of solidarity, viewing all three tenets of the enlightenment as interconnected. Importantly for Hegel, membership of a community is necessary for individual freedom to flourish. The state provided the highest form of this community while also demanding a commitment to ethical life, or *sittlichkeit*. As Miettinen (2020) puts it, Hegel introduced the concept of *sittlichkeit* to ‘refer to and define the historically developed social and political environment in which the moral and intellectual development of an individual takes place’ (p. 361). Ethical life is ‘the concept of freedom that has acquired a real existence in the world and in the consciousness of its members’ (Hegel, 1991, p. 88).

Hegel’s theory of freedom was therefore an intersubjective one, as well as a contextualised conception, and far removed from what he considered the common-sense understanding of freedom as ‘being able to do as one wants’ (Hegel, 1991, p. 15). ‘Being able to do as one wants’ in the context of freedom, occupies the role of destroyer of ethical life, and as such social constraints on this form of negative freedom are necessary.¹ Hegel (2013) described freedom as ‘being at home with oneself in another’ (p. 240). Freedom as ‘being at home with oneself in another’ summarises his response to the problem of freedom classically formulated by Rousseau: namely, how is it that a person can be autonomous or self-determining despite their inevitable dependence on others? (Baynes, 2002, p. 1). Hegel refers to this conception of freedom as ‘absolute freedom’—in contrast to relative, partial or dependent forms—or ‘concrete freedom’—in contrast to the abstract or formal freedom primarily associated with Kant. Freedom is embedded in intersubjective relations which, for Hegel, are themselves ‘grounded in a fundamental dependence of the self upon the other’ (Epstein, 2018, p. 808). Any capacity for individual freedom and autonomy ‘is unintelligible except as the reflection of and dependence on, certain prior social relations’ (Pippin, 2014, p. 3).

Bildung as a source of solidaristic selfhood

Hegel’s emphasis on intersubjective forms of solidarity needs to be placed in historical context, a time in which debates over freedom and how to achieve it/protect it tended to dominate moral discourse. This is in stark contrast to modern attitudes to morality in which freedom often has to share considerable space with concerns over justice, a situation possibly more to Hegel’s liking.² A solidaristic conception of ethical life drives Hegel’s understanding of the social world, including that of education, or *bildung* as Hegel referred to it. This association should also be historically situated in a German context which saw remarkable shifts in the meaning of *bildung* during Hegel’s lifetime. And the shift was stark. In the mid-18th century *bildung* was conceptualised via a concern with the social elements of learning and was initially a response to rapidly altered relations between individuals and society ‘in the face of conflicting socio-cultural developments and social alienation experiences’ (Bauer, 2003, p. 211). This more critical take on *bildung*, however, had begun to cede into the background as a more instrumental and apolitical version took hold in the German education sphere.

Hegel’s broader socio-philosophical approach to the Enlightenment is heavily imprinted on this conception of *bildung*, the latter making little sense without an understanding of the former. Education and specifically *bildung* is a recurring theme in Hegel’s work and is arguably central to his overall philosophy (Dum & Guay, 2017, p. 299). While often translated as cultural formation, *bildung* has a number of components specific to Hegel’s thought. It is the main mechanism via which *geist*³ or spirit is collectively achieved (Dum & Guay, 2017, p. 299)—*bildung* acts as a bridge between self-development and a shared collective cultural understanding. Another element is the importance of experience to self-development, that through experiential learning, individuals can overcome their limitations and develop into rational beings with agency to determine their own place in the social order. This aspect has two additional elements—freedom and ethical life—that speak to Hegel’s

political understanding of *bildung* and the role of education in helping individuals 'be at home with oneself in another':

Education [Bildung], in its absolute determination, is therefore liberation and work toward a higher liberation; it is the absolute transition to the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life. (Hegel, 1970)⁴

This is arguably the most significant element of Hegel's conception of *bildung*, that educational processes constitute a core component in the development of ethical life, and hence civil society. The development of ethical life presupposes an intersubjective worldview while also relying heavily on educational processes. As Honneth (2010) puts it in his reading of Hegel's theory, intersubjective practices are 'able to initiate processes of education that produce, for their part, the practical habits that constitute the foundation of ethical life' (p. 55).

Hegel sees education as both the cause and solution to the core problem facing society: a one-sided view of freedom and one divorced from an adequate connection to others. People in Hegel's view had learnt how to live with a distorted view of freedom and thus required an 'emancipation from a failed process of education' (Honneth, 2010, p. 46), a failed process with its roots in familial associations and early cultural learning. This form of education and learning represses intersubjectivity, and therefore any effective form of solidaristic education for Hegel should therefore serve the capacity to overturn this wrong-footed view of the world. As a result education becomes a tool in Hegel's philosophy of freedom and of justice, and of his desire to free us 'from one picture and suggest another way of looking at the issue' (Pippin, 2006, p. 129). An effective education 'irons out particularity', education offering a route for subjective will to attain 'objectivity even within itself' (Hegel, as cited in Honneth, 2010, p. 74). Education is key then to the formation of an ethical life that would allow freedom and justice to flourish in a historical context which could all too easily undermine such ethical lives.

It should not be overlooked that Hegel's work was developed in a world of rapid industrial development, untrammelled market capitalism and growing divides between the social classes. Liberation from a world which encroached on the capacity to perform reciprocal recognition was a learnt capacity and was vital if one was to belong to an ethical life. Ethical life, after all, was for Hegel a 'staggered arrangement of different forms of recognition' (Honneth, 2010, p. 51). But it is also the case that education is dependent on the existence of intersubjective recognition to be successful.

From this description of Hegel, we can establish some defining parameters of what a revitalised *bildung* can be: an approach that is situated in forms of intersubjective recognition, which by itself establishes routes to solidaristic learning; and a form of critical pedagogy that enables thoughtful deliberations over personal freedom and social justice. Importantly, *bildung* can act as a form of cultural formation, without defining what that culture is or could become. Likewise, it can represent elements of a foundation for an ethical life without establishing the content of that ethical life.

The importance of institutions to solidarity: From schools to civil society

Solidarity is a fragile ideal and practice at the best of times and inevitably needs help outside of the basic structures of human interaction and reciprocity. Solidarity, especially when it comes to flourishing welfare states, 'requires that there should be common institutions' to bolster such an ideal (Gearey, 2012, p. 73). Hegel appreciated this sentiment and the importance of institutions such as the family and corporations was high on his agenda as conduits of learnt solidarity. Hegel also emphasised the importance of schooling and educational institutions as sources of *bildung*, including in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and elsewhere (Hegel, 1807/1977). As a number of authors have pointed out (Kivelä, 2018; Sørensen, 2015; Stojanov, 2018), Hegel had a keen interest in educational institutions and their function within nation states that were experiencing political turmoil. His assessment of institutionalized education 'reflected public schooling and its legitimacy

in the context of the rapid transformation of European feudal societies toward modern society' (Kivelä, 2018, p. 72).⁵

Hegel's conception of social order as expressed in *Philosophy of Right* was geared towards determining 'what social spheres a society must comprise or make available in order to give all its members a chance to release their self-determination' (Honneth, 2010, p. 18). But more importantly his philosophy is also geared towards justifying 'those social conditions under which each subject is able to perceive the liberty of the other as the prerequisite of his own self-realisation' (Honneth, 2010, p. 18). For Hegel, institutions such as the school, family, the state as well as the system of corporations (businesses) provide access to the formation of ethical life (Miettinen, 2020).

While institutions are a vital element of solidarity building, they should not be viewed as static elements of the construction of solidarity. Institutions such as schools and universities are subject to change and transformation like any other—much of this change can be generated by policy and markets, but as per Fraser's argument, it is also emanates from civil society; it is easy to forget that schooling is itself a product of social movements determined to create avenues for democratisation, self-improvement and social mobility (Carr & Hartnett, 1996; Choudry & Vally, 2019; Dobbs, 1919). This is important as civil society mediates between the state and market, provides a sense of social order and coherence, while also recognising the 'legal moral and economic autonomy of its component parts' (Seligman, 1993, p. 155).⁶

An important element of this mediation is an institution housed within the space of civil society, namely the public sphere (Campello, 2020), a space of debate and dissent over educational matters that contributes to the development of *sittlichkeit* or what Campello (2020) calls a 'sittlich identity' (p. 814). The sharing of a common public sphere allows one to 'recognize others with whom I don't share any previously established fixed identity' and to 'cultivate the sentiments of empathy or solidarity' (p. 814). Campello makes this claim in the context of emotions and their contribution to solidarity while also recognising the importance of social movements in the public sphere. This is a topic that demands further reflection, but so too does the notion of a shared public sphere and what this means for *bildung* and learnt solidarity.

That said, bringing civil society and the public sphere into the equation can also help create the conditions for what Frega calls more 'robust forms of solidarity' (Frega, 2019, p. 487). These forms require more active engagement in solidaristic pursuits, a 'commitment to a shared form of life to which we all contribute' (Frega, 2019, p. 487). This active element can be overlooked in the concept of *bildung* as learnt solidarity; Without it, however, it is difficult to envisage how the link between freedom and solidarity can be maintained, as individual freedom effectively demands 'active popular involvement in the exercise of public power if the principle of self-determination were to have real purchase' (Nah, 2021, p. 291).

Hegel was all too aware of the balance needed between the demands of the family, on the one hand, and of civil society on the other. He saw schools as effectively a mediator between them: 'The school stands between the family and the real world... It is the middle-sphere which leads the human being from the family circle over into the world' (Hegel, 1970, as cited in Wood, 1998, p. 312). But this was very much a case of schooling being a means to an end, that end being the ethical life of civil society. Hegel did not consider the ways in which civil society could impinge on the ethical life of schools—the traffic always appeared one way. Given the increased role and visibility of the public sphere and social movements in educational debates in the 21st century (Babu, 2020), it may be timely to reconsider how these forces are shaping the capacity for learnt solidarity and ethical life in our schooling systems.

Conclusion

The question of solidarity is a pressing one, especially in a political and economic climate where welfare statism – the de facto political apparatus of solidarity, at least in European states – struggles

against the tide of neoliberalism and its ideological distaste of solidaristic and collective forms of political association (Wilde, 2007, p. 172). The same can also be said of the promise inherent in *bildung*, which in the 21st century 'is again in the process of turning into an individual asset' (Bauer, 2003, p. 222). Learning solidarity through an institutionalised and reconstituted form of *bildung* is for this educator a proposal that cannot be easily dismissed.

It cannot be easily dismissed, given that the lack of solidarity evident in so many aspects of life is, at the very least not helped by an ill-equipped institutional life or a retreat to the bonds of family and state. The deterioration of social institutions, places where people can interact with one another, for example as evident in the decline of youth and community centres (Robinson & Sheldon, 2019), is, while not necessarily the cause of division, certainly a contributing factor to fragmented bonds, growing mistrust and suspicion. Rethinking the aims of education along solidaristic grounds can at the very least offer an alternative discourse to dominant narratives of identity and identity politics, ones that seek to create further division and discord between 'us' and those 'not like us'.

There is nevertheless a caveat to state-sponsored solidaristic understandings as states themselves have often been the cause of so much division and disharmony. This was a danger all too apparent to Hegel himself, but as Hegel was at pains to point out, an even bigger danger was 'the state failing to distinguish itself as a state and becoming confused with civil society' (McGowan, 2019, p. 204). Solidarity cannot be forced or imposed via legal fiat—unlike justice, it does 'not have to be justified on legal terms' (Campello, 2020, p. 814). What solidarity does need in order to flourish is a community of practice within which unrelated people can share and through which they can generate a 'sittlich identity'. Whatever the merits of other public spheres or institutions to engender 'dialectical identification', schools and colleges provide ready-made sources of recognition and solidarity that literally establish grounds for collective learning opportunities, or as Hegel would have it, grounds to unlearn the 'bad' habits of solidarity.

There are a number of other caveats to this argument. First of all, care needs to be taken to not present solidarity as a zero-sum game. As with Ter Meulen (2016) in the context of health, educational justice should not be jettisoned 'in favour of solidarity' as it does 'not offer an alternative to distribute justice' (p. 528). But it does offer something quite different to either justice or freedom as underpinning principles, an approach to social life and socialisation which is not oriented exclusively to questions of rights and needs but instead views such questions through the prism of human relations and human connectedness.

There is of course a real danger in the pursuit of solidaristic recognition and reciprocity that such a pursuit only adds further to the wave of educationalisation that has seen educational spaces as the cure-all for so many societal ills (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2010). To be fair, this danger is real. Yet, education is evidently a contested space and why should justice or neoliberal selfhood monopolise the debate? There is also the case to be made that solidaristic approaches to education at least allow for deliberation to broker between freedom and justice.

Engaging with the concept of learning solidarity raises questions about the social purpose of schooling, and in particular the long-standing debate over socialisation as an educational imperative (Lawy, 2014). On the surface, parallels can be drawn with this established strand of thinking, although the learning of solidarity does not need to be overly burdened by processes of social preparation, reproduction and enculturation that so often accompany discourses of educational socialisation. The possibilities for solidaristic learning become more feasible when such burdens are reduced, providing a more supportive pedagogical environment in which young people can engage in critical dialogue with each other and enable more solidaristic understandings of the world.

That said, calls for greater solidarity should come with a warning, especially those that position it as a route to justice. The argument presented here should be taken in the spirit of Hegel, a philosopher 'who had no illusion about saving the world' (McGowan, 2019, p. 220). Not even *bildung*

can achieve this impossible task, either in Hegel's time or in the context of a deeply divided and fragmented contemporary existence. But just as with Hegel, what can be achieved collectively is a deep doubt over personal superiority and traditional sources of power, and an acceptance of the 'insubstantiality of whatever authority we worship' (McGowan, 2019, p. 220).

Notes

1. Hegel provides an example of his conception of freedom when discussing the issue of freedom of trade and commerce and the dangers associated with leaving such fields to their own devices:

but the more blindly it immerses itself in its selfish ends, the more it requires such regulation [state regulation] to bring it back to the universal, and to moderate and shorten the duration of those dangerous convulsions to which its collisions give rise, and which should return to equilibrium [ausgleichen sollen] by a process of unconscious necessity (Hegel, 1870/1991, as cited in James, 2012, p. 56).
2. This relation between the two was also a theme in the early Frankfurt school, for example with Max Horkheimer who argued that 'the concept of justice can just as little be separated from the concept of freedom as it can from the concept of equality' (Horkheimer, as cited in Ibsen, 2023, p. 63).
3. One of Hegel's most influential ideas is that of *Geist*, a German word that is normally translated as 'spirit' or 'mind' in English versions. Broadly speaking, Hegel uses the term to refer to the collective consciousness of society, as opposed to individual private forms of awareness. This dimension has similarities to Emile Durkheim's later notion of collective consciousness and is not dissimilar to the more modern conception of culture.
4. Liberation for Hegel has a double meaning, referring 'both to a negative state of release from two extremely one-sided perspectives that limit freedom (and the relief agents feel when this has occurred) and to the positive process in which agents turn to and adopt a life of real freedom (ethical life)' (Honneth, 2010, p. 43)
5. There is a wider debate concerning Hegel, *bildung* and education that continues to this day but which cannot be done justice in this short paper. As well as the references cited in the paper, other valuable sources on these debates can be found in Lumsden (2021), Miyamoto (2021) and Siljander et al. (2012).
6. This to be fair is a Hegelian conception of civil society, which has been subsequently altered and transformed in the work of Marx, Gramsci and others (see Murphy, 2001 for further details). In the educational realm, however, this mediating function has been maintained and even strengthened (see for example, Ravitch & Viteritti, 2001), alongside a sense that public schooling systems sit within what can be defined as the state administrative apparatus. While there may be numerous points of intersection between them, schools and civil society also occupy distinct spheres of activity.

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