

Not in front of the students

Jon Davies

'Because of the Welfare State', wrote one of our first year students, 'there has been a great increase in participation.' (She had been reading a textbook). I asked her: 'On what public issue or what public debate have you personally ever participated, even just by writing a letter to the editor?' Answer: never.

This is surely 'the student problem' - the depressing fact that so many of the top 4 per cent of the generation are political eunuchs, with no conception at all that public issues are *their* business; that they have a right so to define them; and that this right carries with it the concomitant obligation to ensure that, in the words of C. Wright Mills, they equip themselves with 'the disciplined and informed mind that cannot be overwhelmed.'¹

It is said that it is difficult to involve 'the poor' in public issues. It is even more difficult to involve the bulk of the student body (even by proxy in seminar arguments) and this is surely astonishing as they, a predominantly middle class group, are the major beneficiaries of the post-war era of free education, free orange juice, freedom to travel, freedom from poverty and insecurity and yet like 'the poor' they have a clear image of society as divided into 'Them' - the proper wielders of power and influence - and 'Us' - the passive well-fed semi-detached people, with no sense of history or conflict, operating mainly in the middle-range slots of the middle-range 'referee' bureaucracies of the Welfare State or private corporate structures and regarding politics and public issues as a spectator sport. *This*, not long-haired revolutionaries, or neurotic drop-outs and pregnant sophomores is what is terrifying about the end-product of our educational system: why do we get such large numbers of students who are, as David Willings says, 'conditioned to a lack of interest in what they are doing'?²

My answer is that this 'lack of interest' is precisely what the educational system, as at present organised, is both most likely to inculcate and that such an attitude is positively (if latently) functional both for that system and for the occupational system into which so many of our students go. I know that I can be accused of over-generalising from limited data - if twenty five years of British education can be called limited - but it seems clear to me, as student and lecturer, that there are elective affinities between certain facets of the education system and a range of rather pathetic attitudes which characterise too many of our students. Briefly, my argument is that *prolonged experience by pupils of the educational system results in a lowering of self-esteem and self-confidence and a consequent 'failure of nerve.'*³ This in turn leads to a refusal - or inability - to risk oneself in ventures into public argument and debate, to the internalisation of a sense of impotence and inadequacy and to the acceptance of the dichotomy of the world into 'the public sector', in which, both in the education system and later on at work, one accepts frustration and manipulation by others, and 'the private sector', the source of satisfaction and fulfilment to be sure, but a devalued fulfilment because it is a refuge from the endless humiliations in the public sector

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rather than a decent and autonomous pleasure in its own right.

For too many 'ordinary' students, therefore, the experience of education is an *introductory course to second-class citizenship*, the mass manufacture of other-directed people. The basic mechanism whereby students' self-confidence is undermined in the continuous demonstration to them of the fact of their own lack of power, lack of competence and lack of authority. Conversely, of course, the demonstration proclaims very clearly that the staff - as schools and universities - have a monopoly of power, competence and authority, and that this can - and sometimes is - used to deny the pupil or student access to the desired end ('A' levels, University entrance, degrees). *Educational institutions are perpetual proclamations of the dependency of the pupil or student on the staff.* The cumulative effect of such proclamation is the attrition of the pupil's self-esteem and self-confidence. This - as Morris Rosenberg has pointed out, results in an inability to operate effectively in the public sector. In the main, our schools and universities produce people who have neither the self confidence of intellectuals nor the weighty authority of the scholar. The destruction of the student is accomplished by the following mechanisms.

1. The principle of perpetual apprenticeship

'Social order', as H. Dalziel Duncan says, '... is a drama of social hierarchy in which we enact roles as superiors, inferiors and equals... Status is won by successful appeals to others who ... determine our success and failure.'⁵ All institutions structure the distribution of power and authority. Schools and Universities are almost totally autocratic, with Headmasters and Staff in complete control of the definition of the institution's goals ('Learning') and of the assessment of each individual's success in attaining those goals (Examinations, references). (See, for example, Anne Corbett, 'The School Bosses'⁶). The relationship is fundamentally non-reciprocal - the performance of staff in relation to goals is never effectively assessed by the student: *all he has is grumbles, an early version of the retreat to privacy*, an abandonment of the right to criticise. The student or pupil is permanently on his knees, placed there initially perhaps by parental pressure and self-induced anxiety, but certainly kept there by the clear revelation of the power of those in control, (see e.g. F. Musgrove⁷). Schools and universities are, to use Dahrendorf's phrase,⁸ characterised by 'dichotomous authority' as opposed to the 'continuous authority' demonstrated in the hierarchical arrangements of classical bureaucracies. Schools and universities are like industrial organisations - a line divides the aggregates of those who dominate and the aggregates of those in subjection. There is no natural mobility upwards. This makes 'participation' extremely difficult, (for this see the question of 'Pseudo Gemeinschaft' below). Here just note that, both as far as the goals of schools and universities are concerned, and as far as the power system in them is concerned, pupils or students have virtually no chance of upward mobility: they are perpetual apprentices. Graduation means leaving - still in a position of inferiority - the social system within which they interact with staff: B.A. means Goodbye.

2. The principle of inevitable incompetence

This attack on the self-confidence of the pupil and student is reinforced by another device which turns what could be a temporary and even necessary form of apprenticeship - a status which does, after all, carry a very proper sense of inferiority - into a permanent form of self-degradation. 'The authorities', having defined the goal of the institution then proceed to organise the system in such a way as to make it impossible for any pupil to attain

that goal. Ends and means are in fundamental dissociation (see R. K. Merton, 'Social Structure and Anomie'⁹). The devices employed are the timetable and the exams. Certainly at school, with the insistence on three or more 'A' levels, but also at many Universities, with an even wider range of subjects, the pupil-student is kept in a state of Inevitable Incompetence. Some time ago I carried out a survey into the working week of students who were doing five subjects in their first year. The total number of hours worked was, on average and including contact time with staff, 32.3. The average number of works worked per subject was as follows. Subject A, 10.1: Subject B, 5: Subject C, 4.3: Subject D, 8: and Subject E, 5.1. Even if these students worked an extra 20 hours a week (and for some reasons why they won't, see Cynicism The Highest Virtue, Enthusiasm The Greatest Vice, below), they would still be putting in only 10 hours per subject per week. An earlier survey, carried out at another university, showed that even if students did *nothing* other than eat, sleep and study for 7 days a week, they would still be able to put in no more than 4 hours' reading time per hour of contact time. Sunday, for example, would look like this: 8-9 a.m., getting up, washing, eating: 9-1 p.m., reading: 1-2 p.m., eating: 2-7 p.m., reading: 7-8.30 p.m., eating: 8.30-12 reading.

It must surely be clear that under-specialisation leads to Inevitable Incompetence. In the latter case, of course, with reading in fact coming out at 1.75 hours per hour of contact time, the lecturer or seminar becomes the major source of information. This further emphasises the authority of the lecturer and also inhibits acquaintanceship with alternative facts and interpretations. There are ways of 'dealing with' the timetable - e.g. skewing one's reading to establish a *de facto* specialisation, and, at the same time, increased and punished Incompetence in the neglected subjects. The point here though is that at no time is it possible for any pupil or student to know as much as - never mind more than - a member of staff, and this inevitably reinforces the super-subordinate role system, and further undermines the self-confidence of the pupil or student. (And don't say: 'Ah, but I went through this very necessary phase of being inferior, and then I did my M.A., then my Ph.D., and now I'm a lecturer' ... Remember! for the bulk of pupils and students, B.A. means Goodbye).

3. All things hypothetical and

4. Know-nothing morality

There is, pupils are told, a distinction between facts and values. Each discipline has a great body of facts, and essays or statements must be based on them. Very true - but see the Principle of Inevitable Incompetence, which, now allied with the idea of the existence of a 'body of facts', merely reinforces the position of the pupil as one of perpetual ignorance, and re-emphasises the authority of the staff, who are assumed to possess large sacks full of these important facts. (This is not always true: I remember stories - accurate ones - of a junior member of staff forced, at short notice to give a course about which he knew very little. He ensured that he stayed wise i.e. wiser than the students, which is what matters - by taking all the relevant books out of the library).

Deprived then, by under-specialisation and lack of time, of the opportunity of arguing from the facts, pupils may attempt to argue from moral or value premises: these efforts are usually introduced by 'but I think that ...' or 'when I was at ...' Sympathetic members of staff (though for more on such members, see 'Pseudo Gemeinschaft' below) may encourage these faltering efforts: but too often the staff member, tending to regard an incursion into moral arguments as a flirtation

with propaganda, has come to regard the distinction between facts and values as a reason for ignoring values altogether. Moral premises are only too easily described as 'opinions' - i.e. chatter 'unsupported by the facts', and as the pupil, according to the Principle of Inevitable Incompetence, has very few facts to present, that is the end of the argument. The pupil who over the years has come to have a grossly exaggerated respect for the facts, is left with the feeling - highly necessary in the occupational world - that his 'opinions' are irrelevant, suspect and even - horror of horrors! - subjective. How many schools, allegedly on grounds of style, put a veto on the use of the first person pronoun 'I think that'? Opinions introduced in this matter may elicit a relatively sympathetic response: 'Well, that is quite interesting, Mr Jones, but you're scarcely a representative sample are you, and you might perhaps care to think about it from this point of view or perhaps go and read Furstwanger's (900) page book, not to mention Katzipsky's article in *Zer Archive Der Sozienwisseschaft...*' The tentative comfort of a long-cherished opinion is demolished by the revelation of a bewildering relativity in values and the terrible paucity of one's own bibliography. From being wrongly sure, one becomes passively confused.

The ensuing refusal on the part of the pupil to identify himself with his essays and the statements they contain also reflects a very sensible awareness that, as a second best option, it is indeed advisable to keep himself private, for he is being asked to reveal himself in a situation in which he has no power to control what happens after the revelation. As Bernstein says, '(When) more of the pupil (is) made public ... more of the pupil is available for control. As a result the socialisation may be more intensive, more penetrating'.¹⁰

In addition to all this, even such facts as the pupil may have been able to scabble together are bound to be only a small part of what is - allegedly the great mountain of slowly accumulating data, and he has therefore to face the realisation that his views are always ... and inevitably contingent and questionable - the 'All Things Hypothetical' Principle. Indeed, it becomes reasonable to be diffident and to avoid making any decision or adopting any stand-point for only those who know all the facts (where are these creatures?) are entitled to have opinions. As C. Wright Mills says of our self-effacing students: 'They are acting as if they were disinterested judges, but they do not have the power of judges. Hence their reasonableness, tolerance and open-mindedness do not often count for much in the shaping of human affairs.'¹¹ The above four Principles of Education have an elective affinity with a fifth, that of

5. Cynicism the highest virtue, enthusiasm the greatest vice

'What was the point', said one of my (my?) students, 'of doing the geography of the Urals for my 'A' levels? - I wasn't interested in it and I still don't see the relevance'. 'That', I replied, 'is the whole point. You were not interested but you did it, and by so doing prove the efficacy of the institution which requires you merely to do what you're told, not to be interested in it. Indeed, the greater your distaste, the more successful your school can claim to be, as you reluctantly spent days of your life dutifully boring yourself. You were - and are - being trained in the occupational style to which you will become accustomed, - trained, that is, to separate your private interests from your public actions and to allow the latter to be controlled by other people - the mass manufacture of the other-directed personality. *Be cynical. Pretend*, by writing essays, sitting examinations and by taking us seriously, that our ways of doing things are what interest you. In

exchange, you will be allowed to have legitimate personal problems - as long as you ignore C. Wright Mills and refrain from turning them 'into social issues and rationally open problems.'¹² We realise that pupils do not easily accept perpetual humiliation, whether in schools or universities, and we realise you will have problems. But we insist, they will be private, *psychological* problems, to which you are entitled and for which we will provide help - University Health Centres now, mortgages when you go to work. *Just keep those problems private, that's all*.

(See, e.g. *Student Casualties*, by Anthony Ryle, The Penguin Press, 1969. Nine Chapter Headings are: How many fall ill? Who fails and why? Psychiatric Illness in Students. Psychotic Illness. Neuroses and Personality Differences. How does psychiatric disturbances interfere with Academic Work? Suicide and self-injury. Illegal drug use. Student sex and student pregnancy. A comment on Student protest and politics).¹⁸

Cynicism - defined as doing something (such as writing an essay) not because one is interested but because one has been told to be interested by someone in a position to penalise lack of interest - becomes the highest virtue, the necessary condition of survival. How else to describe the mentality of students who, finishing one essay turn hurriedly to the next - and have forgotten what's in the first one within five minutes of its completion? And what value can the student indeed place on such work, produced on demand, based on inadequate reading of the standard text, immune to personal experience, untutored in tone or purpose, an endless offering of junk? The only way out is to minimise the pain and humiliation by minimising the personal importance of these public performances; enthusiasm is bad for you. Small wonder that subjects 'learnt' for 'A' levels or essays are so readily forgotten the minute the degradation ceremony of public presentation has been undergone. There is a fast and sensible self-abstraction from 'the community of scholars', for this in itself has been transformed, from a group based (ideally) on a decently distributed and reciprocal flow of power, information and respect into a branch of the mass society, with a few talkers wearing the uniform of authority and using it to impress upon their many listeners that scholarship is not for them and that passivity in public matters is their proper role in life. A hundred other tricks proclaim authority. There is the business of *Gracious Dispensation* leading to *Compulsory Gratitude*. Staff devise, or at any rate operate within a system which humiliates and elicits dependence. Students who react by, for example, getting upset about exams are then reassured and given help - *personal* sympathy and support, gratefully received! Giving is controlling: and what a gift! First, I chop your leg off. You fall down. I 'help' you up. You're grateful. I win. Next please. In addition, in cases like this, there is the additional statement of the power of the staff to effect a little 'personalisation' of the rules: never mind, we'll see if we can get you a re-sit on grounds of illness... Dependency graciously offered and gratefully received. The 'help', of course, is not to change the system which made the student need help in the first place, but, by defining the problem as a personal and psychological one, to leave that system very much intact and to stress and perpetuate the pupils' need of staff help in order to deal with it. (It often amazes me how enthusiastic are the 'rescue teams' of our educational establishments. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to drop out as the first sign of dissidence rapidly mobilises a very efficient and well-intentioned group of rescuers - tutors, counsellors, psychiatrists - all of whom frenetically attempt to re-recruit the would-be farewell-sayer. Successful rescue attempts become part of the folk mythology of the school or university, trophies proudly displayed, the most difficult material graciously and grimly socialised.)

Then there is the business of *Pseudo Gemeinschaft* - the surface statement of common interests and mutual friendliness, the underlying statement that you'd better believe it. In face-to-face encounters in schools and universities, as in other places, interaction can only persist when well lubricated by the ordinary canons of courtesy and friendliness. Such expressions are doubly necessary - and doubly false - when the genuine bases of the interaction are in fact the almost total subordination and dependency of one of the partners, and when institutionally-induced anxiety is the dominant emotion in the minds of the subordinate partner. In such an atmosphere, relatively minor expressions of friendship - the occasional (and non-reciprocal) use of a Christian name - achieve the status of major proofs of decency and interest: crumbs become a feast, and gratitude - and the subservience it denotes - knows no bounds. Often the expressions of concern are tied to specific anxiety-provoking devices, such as exams: 'Look don't worry about exams, everyone passes and there's nothing in them that we haven't covered in class...' Once again, the revelation is of the manipulative power of the teacher or lecturer, the insubstantial nature of the worries and thoughts of the pupil, and hierarchy of 'the community'.

There we have it then: Perpetual Apprenticeship, Inevitable Incompetence, All things Hypothetical, Know Nothing Morality, Cynicism the Highest Virtue, Enthusiasm the Greatest Vice, Gracious Dispensation, Compulsory Gratitude and the Pseudo Gemeinschaft - all of them combining to produce students with minimal levels of self-esteem and self confidence but students with self-conceptions and values well suited to promote their careers in the middle-range slots of the public and private corporate bureaucracies in which most of them will find employment. They will accept frustration in their work and will find satisfaction not in their jobs or in the public sphere, but in the private and defensive sector: they will not question the ultimate goals or purpose of the system for which they work, but will let such matters be settled by 'Them', and will confine themselves to the unquestioning and efficient execution of their own specific task - and referee the system in its impact on recipients: 'Look Lady, I don't make the rules, I just administer them. Sorry.' (This stance, of course, equates reasonableness with conformity.) Politics will be experienced vicariously via television or - see, e.g. Jackson & Marsden's *Education and the Working Class*¹⁴, via the autobiographies and biographies of 'great men'. 'Extremism' (i.e. any form of argument) will be avoided and all views will be tentative.

There is no doubt that the English educational system is the most efficient in the world.

Notes

- 1 C. Wright Mills, 'Mass Society and Liberal Education', in *Power Politics and People*, O.U.P., 1963
- 2 David Willings, 'What Jobs are Worth', *New Society*, 18 March 1971
- 3 David Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered*, The Free Press, 1954
- 4 Morris Rosenberg, *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, Princeton University Press, 1965
- 5 H. Dalziel Duncan, *Communication and the Social Order*, New York Bedminster Press, 1962
- 6 Anne Corbett, 'The School Bosses', *New Society*, 15 April 1971
- 7 Frank Musgrove, *Patterns of Power and Authority in English Education*, Methuen and Co, 1971

- 8 Ralf Dahendorf, quoted in Musgrove, *op. cit.*
- 9 R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* The Free Press, 1968
- 10 Basil Bernstein, 'Sociological Aspects of Classifying and Framing Educational Knowledge', quoted in Musgrove, *op. cit.*
- 11 C. Wright Mills, *op. cit.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Anthony Ryle, *Student Casualties*, The Penguin Press, 1969.
- 14 Brian Jackson and Denis Marsden, *Education and The Working Class*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

Idealism and the matter at hand

George Berkeley and the Prevention
of Ruin in Great Britain

Anthony Tremblington-Sporus

From Ulster to Grenada, Britain and her colonies are plagued with unhappiness and strife. It is therefore all the more regrettable that few are alive today possessed of the charitable wisdom of George Berkeley, to whom Alexander Pope himself ascribed 'every virtue under heaven'. Nonetheless, although the good bishop is no longer able to address himself aloud to the times, his deathless (though in no way abstract) prescriptions are with us in written form, such that one would earnestly wish that every British subject, whether Englishman or Ulsterman or Bermudan, would purchase Volume IV of Mr Fraser's *Works of George Berkeley*.

Berkeley's non-medical remedies for our troubled times are as simple as they are today ignored. They are: Industry, Obedience, and Piety.

While philosophers today peddle the whiggish wares of a Locke or a Mill, it would be wise for them to peruse and promulgate the doctrine of *Passive Obedience* as enjoined by the young Berkeley in his 1712 Trinity College address. There Berkeley proves, to any who can follow a deductive procedure, the absolute and unconditional obligation of subjects to obey the supreme power of the land on pain of disobeying the Supreme Power of the universe itself. Patiently, Berkeley deals with any objection that might be brought to bear against his doctrine:

But (it will be urged), though it should be acknowledged that, in the main, submission and patience ought to be recommended, yet, men will be apt to demand whether extraordinary cases may not require extraordinary measures; and therefore, in case the oppression be insupportable and the prospect of deliverance sure, whether rebellion may not be allowed of? I answer, by no means.'
(etc)

Thus did one of the great architects of Tory Anglicanism respond to any who might harbour anarchistical doubts.

Corrupt

Sensible that Obedience without Industry does not suffice to render a nation prosperous, the good Berkeley enjoins both civil and religious authorities to so move (in their respective ways) their flocks to promote industry among them. Thus, in the *Essay Toward Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain* (1721) he urges on governments the work-house as an alternative to the wasteful and corrupting influence of poor-relief. Thus, in his *Exhortation to the Roman Catholic Clergy of Ireland* (as Anglican Bishop of Cloyne, in 1749), he vividly impresses on Catholic priests the need to convert their slothful parishioners to industry. To illustrate the Bishop's wisdom and concern is perhaps a better means of communicating it than to describe it.

Indolence in dirt is a terrible symptom which shows itself in our lower Irish more, perhaps, than in any people on this side of the Cape of Good Hope ... our poor Irish are wedded to dirt on principle.

Mark an Irishman at work in the field; of a coach or horseman go by, he is sure to suspend his labour and stand staring until they are out of sight. A neighbour of mine made it his remark in a journey from London to Bristol that all the labourers of whom he enquired the road constantly answered without looking up, or interrupting their work, except one who stood staring and leaning on his spade and him he found to be an Irishman.

Lusty

It is a shameful thing, and peculiar to this nation, to see lusty vagabonds strolling about the country, and begging without any pretence to beg ... A sore leg is an estate to such a fellow...

In England, when the labour of the field is over, it is usual for men to betake themselves to some other labour of a different kind ... instead of closing the day with a game of greasy cards or lying stretched before the fire...

It will be alleged in excuse of their idleness that the country people want encouragement to labour, as not having property in the lands. There is small encouragement, say you, for them to build or plant upon another's land wherein they have only a temporary interest. To which I answer that life itself is but temporary...

Raise your voices, Reverend Sirs, exert your influence, shew your authority over the multitude, by engaging them to the practice of honest industry ... inveigh against the crying sin of your country ... co-operating with the public spirit of the legislature and the men of power.

Erection

Can it be denied today that these diseases of irreligion, sloth and rebellion are choking the heart, not only of our Irish offspring but of our very mother England herself? Can it be denied today, even by those who mock the power of tar-water, that were George Berkeley's advice heeded our nation would not be in decay? Certainly our present Government has acted to limit the rewards of idleness; but can any claim that their actions have been sufficient? Certainly our present governments have made some use of the Roman Church's authority over its Irish