Character, subjectivity, 'dasein': who or what are we? Ethics and the role of education after Heidegger. Some reflections.

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Abstract
Contemporary resurgences of discourses of character indicate that the character of character has changed. No longer attached to the mythical stable ego of solid identity, character becomes a function of specific modes of being-in-the-world, a problematic, 'spectral' category reflecting a new world (dis)order of liquid modernity.

At the same time, education in modernity has been characterized as, above all, a mass, social technology of the self, an extensive machinery of identity. In this exploration I would like to consider some contemporary ways of understanding the relations between subjectivity, ethics and education drawing on contemporary philosophies and the alternative ways of understanding they make possible.

In conclusion I will offer to table some scandalous reflections on the dissolution of classic understanding of the function of education in the name of a newly conceptualized ethics arising from the reconceptualization of character, subjectivity and 'dasein'.

Character of the institution (ontology)

One of the key insights offered in *Surveiller et Punir* (date) is the gradually dawning realization in the eighteenth century that a soldier can be *made* – and that the production of an army can be brought within the remit of a bureaucratically ordered training regime. In a powerful way, the dawning of this insight can be seen as providing the foundation for the establishment of mass education systems in modernity, those extensive apparatuses that arise across the 'west', that persist into the present and that have become the desideratum for all forms of nation-state across the world. What Foucault's modestly expressed insight demonstrates is the emergence of the social technology that will make the condition of the people (population) the intense focus of governmental concern.

This transition follows the change from sovereign power to the capillary form of 'bio'power. Government is no longer centralized in the hands of an oligarchy, but is dispersed through an apparatus that is ubiquitous and that claims its authority through the 'rationalization' of bureaucratic management. Significant power is not in the hands of individuals so much as systems, systems that obey generalized laws and that have a persistent life of their own.

That the school should carry the main burden of this enormous transformation should not surprise us. In the UK from 1870 the school becomes the very visible organ of government particularly prominent in the urban landscapes it dominates. Schooling is the process that seeks to transform 'dangerous multitudes' produced by the rapid urbanization of the industrial revolution into the 'ordered multiplicities' that became so evidently mobilizable by 1914. Masses of photographic evidence can be cited to testify to the extensive and often intensive work of this process. The raggedy working class pupils of the new school order are represented time and again in productive guises: boys sewing and knitting, girls doing outdoor drill, the wayward assemblies of poor, urban children being held together in ordered

ranks and rows for the class photograph. The labour of transformation that took place in the elementary schools produced modern, more or less self-managing populations transformed from the raw material of the new urban disorder of the early nineteenth century to the relative order of managed civic environments of the late nineteenth century.

The children of the new school system were often nourished by carefully calculated public feeding programmes. Their life-worlds were increasingly (albeit gradually) subject to practices and discourses of hygiene and health-care. The law (albeit gradually) intervened to prohibit them from work and to protect them from sexual and other kinds of physical abuse. They were trained in the necessities of living, learning basic literacy, basic numeracy, learning about the world and their nation's role in it. They were taught domestic skills, given object lessons, invited to consider themselves as adults in formation.

In this early form the essentials of the apparatuses of schooling were forged. The topography of the school environment provided clues to the quintessential processes of person-formation that the school enacted. New kinds of space, newly conceived and newly operated, provided the grounds for the school's work on the character of the population. The classroom in its modern form was a new invention. Its deployment as a tool for mass moral and practical self-management, as James Kay Shuttleworth, the pioneer bureaucrat of English education, might have expressed it, was and remains perhaps the key feature of this extensive governmental apparatus. The classroom enables the division of the school population into age-stratified, personally accessible, manageable units. The teacher, socially not too distinguished from her charges, operates within a

The classroom constitutes a technology of the self that is designed to produce the self-managing, self-regarding subject of modernity. In its ideal from the pupil – the subject of schooling, if you like – is not merely the passive recipient of another's wisdom but becomes the entity beloved of modern discourses of education, the self-motivated, self-directing, self-managing learner. This reflective being is crafted through the various exhortations and practices of the classroom.
This technology has a relatively deep provenance in western culture and in the schools of modernity. It is a 'technology of the self', to borrow Foucault's term, and has the ambiguity of all such technologies. It is an instrument for the production of a certain kind of agent and agency; but that agency at the same time is not necessarily dedicated to the dominant and explicit programme of the institution. In other words, if I am taught to be self-fashioning, it is not necessarily given in what shape or form I will fashion myself.

What I have referred to and described elsewhere as the essential socio-spatial topography of the school (Peim, 2001, 2012) includes two other elements laden with symbolic significance. Schools include spaces for collective gathering. Early elementary schools onward include this dimension in their architecture. This is the space generally given to the hortatory function of the institution and to its collective expression of values and collective identity (mitsein).

The playground was conceived by Kay Shuttleworth, following the example of Stow, as another essential feature of the school. In Kay Shuttleworth's conception the playground has an interesting and rather subtle role. It is essentially the more or less supervised space where the culture of the child (collective) meets the supervisory gaze of the institution. The mode of surveillance here is to be distant and light rather than visible and intrusive. Children at play, the theory goes, will express themselves in their own idioms of conduct. This conduct will be corrected from time to time and when necessary, but will be gently managed and redirected

under the informal ethic of the institution. The key to how this mechanism works lies in a relation between the informality of the dominant ethic, the relative levity of the intervention and the effect on the very character of the child under supervision. The aim is to gradually withdraw intervention as the playground and the children in it increasingly regulate themselves and their own conduct under the implicit surveillance of the values that have been subtly imparted by the work of delicate supervision.

In all these elements the school manifests itself as a socio-cultural machinery for character formation.

Ontological accounts – or arguments – about the constitution of the school remain rare in educational studies (rare in general too) as the apparatus of education could be a neutral medium for processes that could be conceived of and experienced as other than that apparatus. It is hard to explain this curious omission of thinking in educational discourses, except perhaps in not very flattering functional terms. It is more than possible that such historically informed ontological arguments (or positions or ways of seeing/knowing) drastically interrupt the dominant reformist modality of educational thinking. So much educational thought depends on a model of advocacy: an idea that – in the contemporary semantic order – impact is (and should be) the dominant value of research activity. That such 'impact' could remain ontologically unaware need not inhibit its rhetorical power and its persistence, in spite of all the historically continuous evidence to the contrary. So it is that education discourses still seek to retain a positivist alignment with what gets referred to as 'social justice' while the remorseless and remorselessly expanding machinery of education in modernity continues to enact its inbuilt function of scholastically based social stratification. That other things – positive and valuable – occur through and within education (a truth I for one would not want to contest although I would certainly want to qualify it) doesn't either justify or obviate the misplaced faith in education as the essential vehicle for social justice that it has become.

The character of character formation (subjectivity)
If Foucault's account of the character of biopower in modernity is concerned fundamentally with the formation of persons and the *productive* management of populations, this has far-reaching implications for the sources of modern forms of subjectivity and their accessibility to practices of modification. The upshot of Foucault's general position is, to cut a long story very short, that identity is both historically specific *and* plastic. That does not, of course, mean that there are not limits on the possibilities of identity. Such conditions of both constraint and possibility are carefully and exhaustively elaborated in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the twentieth century's manual for the grounds questions of identity can be addressed on.

Explicitly aligning Foucault's historical account of practices of person-formation via the apparatuses of modern with Heidegger's 'fundamental ontology' provides a powerful amalgam for making sense of the role of education in our time (or episteme). In fact, as Ian Hunter repeatedly demonstrates, the modern school – and the form of education that it continues to enact – is founded in an amalgam of the contingencies of nineteenth century bureaucratic pastoral discipline and the longer inheritance of Christian spiritual training. The latter, unmoored from any necessary attachment to any explicitly religiously informed context, becomes transposed as a training in the reflective agency of the subject – and the subject as essentially self-directing and self-managing. But this self-directing self is not operating in some space of open freedom. It is rather the product of the contingent, pastoral

domain of schooling. It is well known that early forms of schooling focused significantly on certain forms of bodily self-control and management as may be witnessed in countless images of drill or activities requiring disciplined dexterousness. Learning to take care of one's physical deportment might be seen in this context as a supplement to learning to take care opf one's spiritual comportment. A particular and implicit model of the good life – collective and individual – may be seen to be embedded in both the exhortations and the characteristic techniques that dominate scholastic life: it is within these that the pupil is invited to become a subject aware of themselves as a project for development, including possible moral development.

An array of scholastic practices including those relatively recent forms of self-production – self-reporting, record of achievement – form the outward manifestation/realization of the generalized practice that more or less constantly invites the subject of modern schooling to look at themselves and revise their impulses, conducts, attitudes. The very act of self-problematizing provides the grounds to build ethical character upon. Scholastic emphasis on achievement, on improvement are given the form of self-improvement and beyond to self-realization. The bureaucratic mechanisms of attainment, relatively recently refined in the National Curriculum for example, provide a template for a normative and explicitly elaborated version/vision of self-realization. Supplementing this is the constant discourse of self-management that accompanies the drive through the royal road of attainment. As Weber long ago indicated, the development of a work ethic, initially tied to a specifically Christian spiritual ethos was detachable as both a moral principle and a more generalized ethic for living – an orientation towards world and self that could subsist independently of its source in the religious ethic.

How much of contemporary life and world (contemporary life-world) is encompassed by the ethic of self-management and self-fashioning. Lifelong education now ensures that this ethic is strongly embedded from the cradle to the grave.

The organizing routines, 'drills', pedagogical practices (techniques of self-control required for timekeeping, following the timetable, abiding by the routines and requirements, writing and co) personal discipline and interpersonal relations of the modern school constitute the essential core of its 'mission' school – much more than the kind of skills or knowledge explicitly stated in curriculum specifications.

Curriculum details specify the grounds for enacting the social distinctions implicit in the ordering of identities that attainment targets promote. Standard attainment targets actually allow for a range of levels of achievement, so that scholastic value can ultimately discriminate between those who will be eligible for further academic training and those whose social destinies will be more 'vocational'.

Ian Hunter claims that 'at the centre of the modern school we find a 'psychagogy' or pedagogics of spiritual discipline'. Here Hunter is concerned to identify the features of what he refers to as 'a carefully crafted formative milieu that first appeared in the Christian schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. He defines one key feature, 'the classroom', as follows: '… a space of ethical formation in which the students are placed under the continuous ethical supervision and problematization of a teacher who embodies both moral authority and pastoral care'. This account is significantly different from the classic Marxist sociological analysis of Bowles and Gintis, say, who refer to the routines of schooling as corresponding with the routines of factory work. The object of pastoral pedagogy was not

placid docility and simple obedience, although these might be required on occasions. Ultimately, in its 'highest' realization, it was to 'form the capacities required for individuals to comport themselves as self-reflective and self-governing persons'. On this view the school provides a context organized for the mechanisms of pastoral discipline to operate on the entire population – constituting an extensive social technology of 'subjectification'. The reflective person of modernity emerges through the process whereby school populations have been collectively initiated into arts of self-regulation and self-concern.

Ethics and being after Heidegger

In *Being and Time* Heidegger extensively charts the conditions of existence for the being that is capable of taking on 'the question of questions', the question of being. For Heidegger, ultimately, the question is the piety of thought. Thought realizes its ethical instantiation when it remains open to the question. The project of *Being and Time* provides a background or context for understanding the conditions of ethical being and the kinds of constraints that impinge upon it. In this way Heidegger, rather like Spinoza, problematizes the idea of any ethics that does not arise from an approach to fundamental ontology and that is not open to the force of the question of questions. Ethical systems that follow and delineate codes of conduct are necessarily 'ontotheological'. They rely, in other words, on some resolution of the question of Being and are rooted in a 'theological' commitment.

In later work, Heidegger sought to characterize the dominant ethic of the modern era and coined the phrase 'technological enframing' to characterize the way of being that had come to dominate the world. Heidegger was concerned to define 'technology' as the process of 'bringing forth', essentially as a creative realization of a way of knowing and being in the world. The dominant characteristic of modern science-based technology, according to Heidegger, was its powerful tendency to see the elements it engaged with as resources to be maximized and worked upon to render useful. To cut an elaborate narrative short, it is possible to see contemporary education – with its emphases on performance, its ethic of performativity, its determinations of what constitutes useful and proper knowledge and its desire to maximize the utility value of its constituency – as a manifestation of technological enframing. The obsession with order, with age stratification, with norms of achievement, the drive to improvement and the domination of education by assessment and its massive (and growing) bureaucratic machinery can all be seen as symptoms of the 'technological enframing' role that education plays in our world in our times. This operates on a global scale now and also operates in relation to the relatively recent emergence of the idea of 'life-long' learning whereby learning (self-enhancement, self-improvement) is never to cease, but is also, in highly structured and specified form, to begin earlier and earlier, as may witness the now well-established nursery curriculum.

To think ethically is to return to and to remain open to 'the question': and the question of our time, I suggest, above all, concerns the ontotheological ambitions of education.

Lines of thinking

Fortunately, contemporary thought provides resources for rethinking the role of education in modernity. The idea that the destiny of the species now depends on education may be questioned from a number of perspectives that derive, at least partly, from Heideggerian perspectives on Being. I will identify the following lines of thought as possible for exploration of 'thinking otherwise' and of eschewing the ontotheological commitment of most contemporary discourse on the meaning and value of education in our world:

- 'Biopower' as a way of understanding the social technology of education without resorting to an ontotheological commitment to its mythical redemptive status;

- The opening of questions of identity formation and freedom in various forms of philosophy problematizes the cultural ambitions of education to provide a normative medium of existence (Butler, Malabou);

- Understandings of the global context of education, including the export and import of education practices, institutions, values and their politico-cultural effects (Lyotard);

- Perspectives on the relations between biopower, sovereign power and law (Agamben);

- The relations between conditions of existence ('dasein', 'mitsein') and horizons of understanding (Gadamer);

- Rethinking ethics in terms of openness to 'l'avenir' as opposed to a problematic faith in 'le futur' (Derrida, Badiou);

- Conditions of global, network culture and their implications for politics (Hardt and Negri, Castells).