

IN DEFENCE OF LIBERAL THEORY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary radical literature on education, drawing on a variety of Marxist theories, holds the view that 'liberal theory of education' has been successfully discredited. This thesis challenges this view, arguing that it is based on a mistaken characterisation of the liberal position.

Having listed the objections, typical in the radical literature, against 'liberal theory of education', the discussion moves to a consideration of how the liberal point of view should be characterised. Taking John Locke and John Stuart Mill as examples from the liberal tradition, it is argued that what characterises the liberal point of view is that its central and most fundamental feature is the defence of the principle of individual freedom. This must be distinguished from particular expressions of the liberal point of view, which vary according to historical circumstances. It is a mistake to treat one of these particular expressions of liberalism, e.g. Mill's views on the franchise, as a timeless statement of the liberal position. Similarly, 'liberal theory of education' should not be identified with, for example, the capitalist assumption that schooling contributes to 'economic growth'.

An examination of radical attacks on two supposed areas of 'liberal theory of education' follows. Firstly, the ideas of P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters, whom the radical critics treat as 'liberal philosophers of education', are shown to be more appropriately described as conservative than liberal, in the fundamental respect of the notion of education which they hold. The alleged inadequacy of their mode of argument establishes neither the deficiency of 'analytic' philosophy nor the inadequacy of 'liberal philosophy of education'. It is demonstrated that P. S. Wilson and John White, in defending, in different ways, the central liberal principle of individual freedom, are better examples of liberal philosophers of education. Secondly, it is shown that, contrary to current radical opinion, the dominant tradition in studies of education in South Africa is not a liberal one. Most examples cited by the radicals from this alleged liberal tradition are more appropriately described as conservative, and at least one as reactionary. In the course of advancing this part of the argument mistaken assumptions and weaknesses of characterisation of 'liberalism' on the part of radical critics are exposed.

What characteristics would a liberal notion of education have, given that the liberal position in theory of education has been so mischaracterised? A formal account is given of a liberal notion of education as primarily concerned with the development of the autonomy of the individual. The kind of 'individualism'

suggested by this notion is explored, and a liberal notion of education is dissociated from the major strands in the history of individualist ideas, although they themselves tended to reflect liberal principles.

While radical attacks on 'liberal theory of education' prompt the assumption that liberalism and Marxism would offer very different notions of education, this is also mistaken. Analysis of the Marxist notion of polytechnic education shows similarities between most features of polytechnic education and the genuine liberal notion of education held by John White. Having dispelled the assumption that liberalism and Marxism are likely to generate very different notions of education, the discussion turns finally to advance the argument that because of a tension between the aims of democratic participation and revolutionary change, there are grounds for holding that Marxism cannot offer a coherent notion of education.

It is misguided to assume that liberal theory of education should be abandoned in favour of Marxist theory. The latter's perceptive analyses of schooling in capitalist society are not necessarily incompatible with a liberal notion of education. It is misguided to assume, and to offer to students of education, a straightforward choice between these two positions, especially given the flawed and often unrigorous characterisation of 'liberal theory of education' offered by those who posit such a choice.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organization or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

F.A. Tso

19th day of February, 1986

PREFACE

It is widely observed that schooling in South Africa is in a state of crisis. Many of the injustices of South African society coalesce around its schooling system; inferior schooling for blacks has been essential to the perpetuation of a social system in which most have been denied all but the most menial and low-paid work, with profound consequences in terms of their life chances. While white children have had greater access to schooling, the schooling they have received has tended more towards indoctrination than education.

In the face of these and other aspects of the crisis the dilemmas and responsibilities confronting those involved in teacher education and the study of education in South Africa are particularly awesome. One way of facing these problems has been the suggestion that in both the academic study of education and in teacher education what is required is a radical approach, inspired by a variety of Marxist positions, which would provide better conceptual tools for researchers and future teachers, as well as a praxis appropriate to changing South African society. Some who have taken this stance have advanced the associated argument that 'liberal theory of education' has failed and must be rejected in favour of a more progressive, radical theory of education. This thesis is a response to this view, with which I wish to take issue.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand for their helpful responses to earlier drafts of this thesis, as well as Dr John Watt of Murdoch University. Professor David Freer gave useful advice on the presentation of the thesis. I am especially indebted to my supervisor, Professor Wally Morrow, for his guidance and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Has liberal theory of education anything to contribute to the study of education in South Africa today? Or is it, as some argue, discredited and passé? In the face of the continuing crisis in education in South Africa one of the issues confronting those engaged in the study of education concerns the choice of appropriate directions for the enterprise of theory of education. Here three broad possibilities present themselves, each of which gives strong emphasis to the significance of education in this country. They could be described as the paradigms offered by liberal theory, Fundamental Pedagogics and radical theory of education. In debates about education at South African universities these are the three most obviously distinguishable, but not easily characterisable, possibilities.

Fundamental Pedagogics, which shares the anti-liberal position of the radical view, has been pursued in isolation from the other two paradigms within some of the Afrikaans-medium universities, at the University of South Africa and at the tribal universities. It has been subject to deserving criticism,⁽¹⁾ centrally on the grounds of its role, in spite of its claims to be a 'science', in defending the ideology of apartheid and the

unjust schooling system which is an integral part of the status quo. But Fundamental Pedagogics is not part of my subject of interest here. My concern, rather, is with some matters at issue between what I broadly describe as radical and liberal approaches to theory of education. More specifically, I am interested in a position advanced from a broad radical perspective against what is described as 'liberal theory of education'. This is the view that liberal theory of education has been discredited, and is of no relevance to the study of education, or at best is simply a well-meaning but fundamentally misguided enterprise. Hand in hand with this stance goes the claim that the methods and insights offered by a radical theory inspired by a range of Marxist inputs is better equipped and more successful than liberal theory, in the study of education no less than in a variety of other fields. This thesis will address itself to this rejection of liberal theory of education, which it will defend, given a certain account of the notion of liberal theory of education.

I will begin, in Chapter 2, by sketching the main arguments marshalled by the radical critics against what is called 'liberal theory of education'. In doing so I will indicate how and where, in subsequent chapters, I intend to deal with these arguments.

Chapter 3 takes up the problem of characterising the concept 'liberal', by examining some aspects of the liberal tradition. It shows how examination of the ideas of John Locke and John Stuart Mill reveals that liberal ideas are characterisable in

terms of the essential, central concern for individual freedom, while particular expressions of the liberal point of view vary, depending on the historical context in which they are developed. The argument questions the validity of identifying the liberal point of view with particular expressions of liberal ideas, like calls for equality of opportunity, or ideas which at times have been defended in association with liberalism, e.g. the defence of capitalism and certain brands of individualism.

The radical tendency to adopt simplistic characterisations of liberal ideas is exposed further in the two subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 is an examination of the radical argument that the work of P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters(2) as 'liberal philosophers of education' is fundamentally conservative, and that this conservatism is reflected in their methodology, their epistemology and their theory of schooling. It argues both that this radical argument is confused, in that there are significant differences between liberalism and conservatism, and that if one takes into account criticisms of Hirst and Peters from within analytic philosophy, their work should not be seen as representative and uncontroversial statements of 'liberal philosophy of education'. Chapter 5 challenges the radical view that the dominant tradition in studies of education in South Africa is a liberal one. It considers the arguments against, and implied criteria of, certain studies of education in South Africa alleged by the radicals to be 'liberal'. It shows that the criteria in question are inadequate and that, taking into account the examples cited by the radicals, it is simply wrong, with one

or two individual exceptions, to hold that the dominant tradition in question is a liberal one. This tradition, like the work of Hirst and Peters, is on the whole more aptly described as conservative.

If the argument is that the radicals are mistaken in the examples they offer of 'liberal theory of education' in the two cases discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, what counts as a correct example? Chapter 6 argues that while Hirst and Peters are more appropriately described as conservative, P. S. Wilson and John White are better examples of liberal philosophers of education. By contrast with Hirst and Peters, for whom education is seen as initiating pupils into worthwhile activities, identified in terms of public traditions and modes of understanding, Wilson's concern is that the individual should be enabled to discover her interests and to choose for herself to pursue activities appropriate to those interests. His emphasis on individual freedom in this sense is evidence of a classical liberal position. John White's defence of a compulsory curriculum, paradoxical as it may seem, is also a statement of a liberal position in that White sees this as being in the interests of increasing the freedom of the individual. It is further argued that Wilson's, and particularly White's ideas, have revolutionary rather than reformist implications.

While Chapter 3 establishes that the central characteristic of the liberal tradition has been its defence of the principle of freedom, and while the definitive presence of this principle in a

genuinely liberal notion of education is emphasised in discussing Wilson and White, the theme of emphasis on the individual will also emerge in Chapter 6. This raises explicitly the radical attack, pointed to in Chapter 2, on the alleged individualism assumed and defended in liberal theory of education. In taking up this issue in Chapter 7, I will show how most threads in the history of individualist ideas are incompatible with a genuinely liberal notion of education. But I will argue that a rationally justifiable notion of education is fundamentally concerned with the good of the individual, which consists primarily in helping her to exercise autonomy. In its concern for the development of the individual's potential such a liberal notion of education has much in common with a Marxist notion of education.

This issue of a Marxist notion of education is the central focus of Chapter 8. Here an examination of Marx's notion of polytechnic education and of Freire's theory of dialogical education shows that such notions have much in common with the genuinely liberal view of education found in the ideas of White, but a sharp contrast can be drawn between the former and the notion of education offered by Hirst and Peters. Further, it is argued in Chapter 9 that there is an incompatibility in the Marxist notion of education between the aim of revolution and the aim of developing each individual's capacity for autonomy. The ultimate agnosticism of the liberal view enables it to avoid such difficulties, and thus to develop a more coherent notion of education.

Setting the boundaries of this undertaking is of vital importance, given that debates and opinions on these two apparently competing models underlie much of what has taken place over a wide variety of disciplines over the last decade or so. As a broad spectrum of disciplines and issues is raised when liberal and Marxist paradigms come into conflict, it is vital to keep the limits of the exercise I have in mind both clear and modest. I do not propose to take on in any global sense the wide range of matters at issue between liberalism and Marxism. My central focus is a specific issue in theory of education, as outlined above.

One needs also to be cautious in using terms like 'liberal' and 'Marxist'. Such terms cannot be taken for granted. I do not use them as transparent labels for positions whose features are given or uncontroversial. Indeed one of the major thrusts of my argument is that there are no simple recipes or brief formulae which can successfully encompass the meaning of the term 'liberal', or the term 'Marxist'. The radical tendency is to be more sympathetic to the latter than to the former. Furthermore, it is obvious that within the range of views which could be described as 'liberal' on the one hand and 'Marxist' on the other there are debates about what these positions can and should involve. The identity, then, of both 'liberalism' and 'Marxism' is controversial. My main interest is in the identity of the liberal position, as it is an attack on this position which is the subject of this thesis. I am therefore going to pay more attention to the problems of characterising the liberal point of view.

My goal is not to settle once and for all the basic disagreements between liberal and Marxist ideas. It is, more modestly, to challenge the particular radical view of liberal theory of education which I have raised and the presuppositions on which this view rests. It calls for a serious re-examination of the relevance of liberal ideas to the study of education, and hence of what has become one of the dominant orthodoxies of the moment.

Notes

- (1) See: P. N. G. Beard and W. E. Morrow (eds.), Problems of Pedagogics (1981); Penny Enslin, 'The Role of Fundamental Pedagogics in the Formulation of Educational Policy in South Africa' (1984).
- (2) Criticisms of the work of Hirst and Peters are directed at: Paul H. Hirst, 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge' (1974); R. S. Peters, Ethics and Education (1966).

CHAPTER 2

THE ALLEGED POVERTY OF LIBERAL THEORY OF EDUCATION

1

In challenging the relevance of liberal theory of education to the study of education, radical critics(1) attribute to it certain mistaken assumptions and arguments, whose mistakenness is alleged to establish that liberal theory of education is passé, and that it has far less to offer than a radical theory. In setting about the task of defending liberal theory of education, I shall begin by making a reasonably comprehensive catalogue of the arguments and assumptions which radicals attribute to liberal theorists. The purpose of this catalogue is not to provide a programme for the remainder of the thesis. I shall not discuss all these items in the thesis. The purpose of the catalogue is simply to display the range of the radical critique. I will gather these arguments and assumptions under seven headings in section 2 below, sketching the grounds on which the critics object to them.

Before moving on to this catalogue of alleged features of liberal theory of education, two remarks are in order. Firstly, while I will indicate the central radical assumptions about both theory

of education and liberal theory of education, I do not want to suggest that I am handling here a unified radical view. The attacks on liberal theory of education have been gathered from various contemporary sources. Secondly, what I tackle here is not a 'review of the literature' but an attempt to pick out the major radical arguments in question and to sketch them from the inside. The aim is to set up the central issues at stake in the chapters which follow. In section 3 I will indicate where and how in those chapters I intend to respond to the radical view of liberal theory of education and its main assumptions and arguments. Some of the seven headings below will be treated in more detail than others in subsequent chapters, and I will indicate why.

2

(i) The economic growth argument

According to liberal theorists, their critics argue, schooling contributes to economic growth, to the benefit of all. It can be seen to do so in two ways. Firstly, efficient schooling contributes directly to the growth of technology by providing the necessary expertise and skills for its development and use. This in turn determines the level of economic and therefore social progress in a society. Secondly, the role of mass schooling in modern society is to help citizens to adjust to the industrial system by teaching them the necessary norms and by integrating

them into occupational roles appropriate to their abilities. In these ways schooling promotes economic progress and so raises the quality of life for all members of society.

But the reality behind this liberal rhetoric is that in capitalist liberal democracies(2) the main function of schooling is to provide not technical expertise, but particular types of people.(3) The social relations of production determine the nature of the technology to be employed. Besides which, the myth of economic progress for the benefit of all is but an element of liberal ideology, disguising the fact that technological and economic growth benefit not the masses, but the owners of the means of production. And teaching the masses the 'necessary norms' would be more accurately described as maintaining the existing social relations of production. The function of schooling is control, not economic and social progress.

(ii) The equality argument

The liberal view of education argues that some redress for life's unequal chances may be achieved through educational opportunities. By providing equality of opportunity, those with ability, assisted by objective selection procedures, have the chance to succeed, and each is allocated to her appropriate role in life. According to this meritocratic view, children with ability from poor backgrounds may enter the growing middle class. Thus the educational system provides for social mobility, dependent on individual talent and industry.

But, far from providing equal opportunity, education in capitalist liberal democracies ensures effective social control. Schooling slots children into the occupational hierarchy, which reflects the class structure. In the vast majority of cases, occupation is determined by class, prevailing notions of ability being mere reflections of dominant middle class values. Indeed it has been demonstrated(4) that ability is less relevant than class in determining a child's place in the occupational hierarchy. Furthermore the role of psychology and its various selection procedures, and of 'educational experts' in general, have now been shown to be far from neutral and objective.(5)

Liberal theory has failed to understand the nature and significance of cultural and class differences in attempting to account for the failure of working-class children compared with middle-class children.(6)

(iii) The liberal view of knowledge and education

The liberal view of knowledge, which according to some Marxist critics(7) has become dominant in universities and colleges of education, is exemplified in the work of the liberal philosophers, Hirst and Peters. The critics focus on Hirst's notion of forms of knowledge and Peters's view of education as initiation into worthwhile activities, and on the broader theoretical implications of these two focal points of liberal philosophy of education.

Hirst's forms of knowledge thesis is rejected. It is argued that Hirst underestimates the difficulties which arise from his attribution of independent criteria and distinctive procedures and tests of validity to the various forms. His position is seen as evidence of the belief that knowledge is objective, absolute and given, rather than socially and culturally situated. It also indicates a tendency to regard only propositional knowledge as knowledge, and to see the abstract and theoretical as superior to practical knowledge.(8)

These errors about the nature of knowledge are incorporated into the consequent view that education is initiation into public traditions and modes of understanding, which can be identified in terms of the forms of knowledge. Liberal education derives objectivity from knowledge associated with these public criteria and modes of understanding. The curriculum reflects this given objective structure of knowledge, and consists of disciplines into which the child is to be initiated.(9) By definition liberal education justifies itself - it has no extrinsic aim. This absolute view of knowledge and education assumes that the knowledge and theorising of the teacher is superior to that of the pupil.(10) In initiating the child into 'worthwhile activities' it imposes on her a particular construction of meaning to the exclusion of others.

The liberal philosophers' view of knowledge fails to take into account the factor of ideology. It ignores questions concerning the historically and socially determined production, reproduction

and legitimation of knowledge. In assuming that knowledge is absolute and autonomous the liberal philosophers fail to realise that knowledge reflects the interests of the dominant group in a society at a particular time. Hirst makes the mistake of taking the very question of the nature of knowledge as his starting point in trying to determine the nature of education.(11) A materialist analysis of knowledge, by contrast, enables the theorist to analyse the ways in which prevalent ideas of knowledge are determined by class interests. It provides the conceptual tools to enable one to demonstrate how the dominant ideology in a society distorts reality in the interests of the ruling class. These interests are further served by the division of knowledge reflected in the structure of academic practice,(12) which in turn fragments and dissipates the thrust of professional academic work,(13) and in the distinction between mental and manual labour. The liberal philosophers fail to see that knowledge and schooling are not neutral. Far from promoting knowledge, education serves prevailing ideologies, thus promoting ignorance.(14) By assuming that education is autonomous, neutral and apolitical the liberal philosophers support the existing power structure.

(iv) Analytic philosophy as a method

Not only do the liberal philosophers of education err in failing to take into account the relevance of ideology to a theory of knowledge. In addition their very activity as theorists requires analysis in terms of the production of ideology. But they do not

see their work as ideological,(15) as supporting the existing structures of power. Instead Hirst and Peters claim to use a method - analytic philosophy - which is detached and neutral.(16) From powerful positions as professors at respectable universities, and in the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, they set the parameters for a method which develops the supportive rhetoric which legitimates the status quo, and which has provided hardly any genuine insights into education.(17) By favouring analysis Hirst and Peters support a method which is now discredited.(18) Working within the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy, they ignore or dismiss the European phenomenological and Marxist traditions, each of which has offered considerable insights into education.(19) From the Marxist point of view liberal philosophy of education makes the basic mistake of focussing, as if they are free of context, on the inner processes of education,(20) taking ethics and epistemology as their starting point,(21) rather than the relations of production, which are primary.

(v) Liberal defence of the status quo

Education is a political act. Like the state, the law, the family and other institutions in capitalist liberal democracies, it serves the ruling elements in society. This it does by providing the skills appropriate to the prevailing mode of production, and by securing prevailing ideologies. Liberal theory of education makes a fundamental mistake in its perception of the relationship between education and politics, and thus

between education and social change. Failing to see that schooling in capitalist liberal democracies, far from being a neutral enterprise, independent of politics, is but a reflection of the political and economic conditions in a society, the liberal theorists mistakenly believe that education can bring about social change.

While liberal rhetoric refers to education as a tool for reform, the introduction of mass schooling, for example, has not in the vast majority of cases extended equal opportunities to working class children. Liberal reformism is a strategy for incorporation, where working class demands are acceded to in the modification of some unjust social conditions precisely in order to reduce demands for genuine change. Thus the prevailing power relations are strengthened.(22) The liberal rhetoric of gradual social change without conflict serves an essentially conservative and reactionary purpose, supporting the existing power structure.(23)

(vi) Education is for individual development

According to the liberal account, education promotes the personal growth and fulfilment of the individual. This aspect of the liberal philosophy receives particular emphasis in the work of John Dewey, for whom one of the functions of the school is the development of the moral, cognitive and aesthetic potential of the individual child.

But in spite of this emphasis, and because of the very nature of schooling in capitalist liberal democracies, education serves to alienate rather than develop the individual. Its function is to control her, and to prepare her for a place in the occupational hierarchy. What is more, this emphasis on the individual is symptomatic of further more deep-seated theoretical errors in the liberal view. It reinforces the notion of the individual as logically prior to society, assumed for example in IQ theories, which attribute properties like intelligence to individuals, in isolation from social structures.(24) And it emphasises a dangerous commitment to individualistic competitiveness, rather than social co-operation.(25)

(vii) Liberal theory of education in South Africa

Taking its inspiration from revisionist historiography, the radical assessment of the state of theory of education in South Africa is highly critical of what it regards as the 'dominant liberal education tradition'.(26) This liberal tradition is characterised by a neglect of black education, a tendency to be descriptive and to lack critique, and a failure to see education in the context of South African society as a whole.(27) It is also argued that liberals have been mistaken in attributing oppression in South Africa to racial prejudice on the part of Afrikaners, rather than to capitalist development. Similarly, radical theorists stress that it is the needs of capital, rather than mere racial oppression, which provides an explanation for the establishment of Bantu Education. The essential pattern in

black education in South Africa, before and after 1948, has been to school blacks for semi- and unskilled jobs (except where manpower needs dictate otherwise) and the relations of production appropriate to such a dispensation. Persistent liberal assumptions about the nature and function of education continue to lie behind the view that education and extended educational facilities can act as a neutral agent for change in South Africa. Such a view is theoretically incapable of providing tools for understanding schools as sites of struggle, particularly since 1976.

3

While my intention in the chapters which follow is to show that none of the features attributed to liberal theory of education in the arguments sketched above establishes the radical view that liberal theory of education is discredited, my position holds neither that radical theory of education has nothing to offer us, nor that none of the arguments above is correct, once detached from its mistaken association with liberalism. I must agree with the radicals that schooling cannot be seen as detached from political and economic features of a society, and that schooling on the whole fails to promote economic growth, equality or individual development. And theories of ideology, though not without their own problems, have contributed enormously to our understanding of schooling. The radicals also point to some significant problems in the work of Hirst and Peters.

But to concede these arguments to the radicals is not to accept that they discredit liberal theory of education, because underlying these arguments is a characterisation of liberal theory, of society in general and of liberal theory of education, which is itself mistaken. The radical arguments must stand or fall on their characterisation of 'liberal'. In showing that this characterisation is inadequate, Chapter 3 will argue that the liberal point of view is characterised by its central concern to defend the principle of individual freedom. This the radicals fail to acknowledge. While I will argue further that this defence of the principle of individual freedom takes different forms, depending on the particular context, and informed by various associated principles like that of equality, the argument about equality of opportunity attributed by the radicals to liberal theory of education is not necessary to a liberal view of education. Nor is a defence of capitalism.

Resting on my characterisation of the liberal point of view will be the argument in Chapter 3 that Hirst and Peters should not be seen as uncontroversially representative of liberal philosophy of education. This will raise severe doubts about whether the problems attributed by the radicals to Hirst and Peters's views are problems of liberal theory of education. I will argue that Hirst and Peters are in respect of their notion of education more appropriately described as conservative, and that P. S. Wilson and John White ought to have been included in radical discussions of liberal philosophy of education. And in the light of my characterisation of the liberal point of view I will show that

the central features of a liberal notion of education must be a concern to develop individual autonomy. I need hardly point out that the radical critics of liberal theory of education are sceptical towards the notion of autonomy. And although 'individualism' is a feature of liberal education as recounted by the radicals, I will show in Chapter 7 that the radical characterisation of this notion in education is also inadequate. Similarly, Chapter 5 will question the radical attack on liberal theory of education in South Africa largely on the grounds of its characterisation of 'liberal', although other problems will also be exposed in the local radical position. To complete the picture: Chapters 8 and 9 are not direct responses to the radical views which have been sketched in this chapter. By contrast with the depth and insights of the critique which radical theorists have developed of schooling in capitalist societies, they have paid little attention to the task of offering a positive account of the notion of education. Chapters 8 and 9 will compare liberal and radical notions of education. The similarities which will be revealed will draw further attention to the simplistic nature of the radical characterisation of liberal theory of education.

In its challenging of the radical characterisation of the liberal point of view it is clear that this thesis is fundamentally about the use of the word 'liberal'. It sets out to show that, in the arguments attributed to liberal theory of education by the radicals, this and other words are used carelessly, with a lack of sensitivity to their complexity. While radical theory offers

strengths of the kinds acknowledged above, it would do well to look to the strengths of liberal philosophy of education in particular in order to overcome some of its conceptual weaknesses.

Notes

- (1) Central texts representing this view are: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America (1976); Roger Dale, Geoff Esland and Madeleine MacDonald (eds.), Schooling and Capitalism: A Sociological Reader (1976); Kevin Harris, 'Philosophers of Education: Detached Spectators or Political Practitioners?' (1980); Kevin Harris, Education and Knowledge (1979); Michael R. Matthews, The Marxist Theory of Schooling (1980); Madan Sarup, Marxism and Education (1978); Rachel Sharp, Knowledge, Ideology and the Politics of Schooling (1980).
- (2) A term frequently used by Kevin Harris (1979).
- (3) Herbert Gintis, 'Towards a Political Economy of Education: A Radical Critique of Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society' (1976); Samuel Bowles, 'Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labour' (1976).
- (4) See Bowles and Gintis, op. cit.
- (5) I. Hextall and M. Sarup, 'School Knowledge, Evaluation and Alienation' (1977); Clarence J. Karier, 'Testing for Order and Control in the Corporate Liberal State' (1976).
- (6) Sarup, op. cit., pp. 132-133.
- (7) Sarup, op. cit., pp. 51-52; Harris, (1979) op. cit., pp. 79-80.
- (8) Sarup, op. cit., pp. 54, 60.
- (9) Ibid., p. 60.
- (10) Ibid., p. 53.
- (11) Harris, (1979) op. cit., p. 138.
- (12) Dale, op. cit., p. 5.
- (13) Sharp, op. cit., p. 5.
- (14) Harris, (1979) op. cit., p. 138.
- (15) Sarup, op. cit., p. 61.

- (16) Matthews, op. cit., p. 164; Harris, (1980) op. cit., p. 31.
- (17) Harris, (1979) op. cit., pp. 79-80.
- (18) Matthews, op. cit., pp. 161-162.
- (19) Sarup, op. cit., p. 59.
- (20) Sharp, op. cit., p. 9.
- (21) Harris, (1979) op. cit., p. 79.
- (22) Sharp, op. cit., pp. 108-109.
- (23) Sarup, op. cit., p. 66.
- (24) Matthews, op. cit., p. 153.
- (25) Sharp, op. cit., pp. 112-113.
- (26) Editorial Comment, Africa Perspective, No. 17, Spring 1980, p. 2.
- (27) See Peter Kallaway (ed.), Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans (1984), pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIBERAL POINT OF VIEW

1

Whether the radical critics are correct in holding that liberal theory of education is discredited depends crucially on the question of how the word 'liberal' is to be characterized. In this chapter I focus on the problem of characterizing the concept 'liberal' by examining some aspects of the liberal tradition. In doing so I set out to illustrate some of the difficulties involved in giving an account of what the liberal point of view is. The essential point I wish to make is that characterizing what makes a view 'liberal' is not a simple matter, for reasons I hope to make clear. My aim is to expose two mistakes, the first being that made in the radical arguments sketched in Chapter 2, which identify 'liberalism' with capitalism. The second is that made by those who identify 'liberalism' with specific examples of views expressed by spokesmen for the liberal point of view like John Locke or John Stuart Mill, whose liberalism I will discuss in sections 2 and 3 respectively. In what follows I do not set out to give a comprehensive account of the rich and variable liberal tradition. Nor is it my aim in this chapter to develop a defensible version of the liberal point of view.

2

In order to understand the nature of Locke's contribution to the liberal tradition we need to take note of the political and intellectual climate in late seventeenth century England. There were two dominant elements in this climate. First, the struggle for religious toleration and intellectual freedom in the wake of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, encouraged by the development of philosophy and science in the seventeenth century. And second, opposition to absolute monarchy, culminating in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Locke, who did not describe his ideas as liberal,(1) spoke for those opposed to the Stuarts' attempt to extend their authority by raising a tax on property without the consent of Parliament, in violation of the Common Law tradition. This defence of the right of the individual to his property is a crucial aspect of Locke's argument. Significantly, his notion of property includes the idea of the individual's right to the fruits of his own labour; 'every man has property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his'.(2)

For Locke, according to the Law of Nature, all men have a natural right to life, liberty and property. The Law of Nature consists of a self-evident set of rules, which are rationally justified, and which all social beings must accept. Locke argued that reason is 'the common rule and measure God hath given to

mankind'.(3) Presupposed by such rational justification is a minimum level of impartiality and respect for the rights of others, and for their property. This emphasis on rational justification, on the model of demonstrating mathematical axioms, stands in contrast to the appeal to supernatural authority or tradition.

According to Locke's version of social contract theory, society had been established by free and equal individuals in a state of nature who, because of the insecurity of the state of nature, freely agreed to leave it and enter into civil society in order to better serve their rights. The individual men who consent to enter society give up the freedom, equality and independence which they had in the state of nature in exchange for the greater security of civil society, the main purpose of which is the preservation of its members' property. In a society established in this way, the legislature is the supreme power. For although men agreed to form a society for mutual advantage, all states are potentially tyrannical. In this respect the main enemy is the executive, which must be kept subject to the law and held in check by the legislature. Locke thus anticipates Montesquieu's elaboration of the theory of the separation of powers.

Sovereign coercive powers must in civil society be constrained by law:

The end of law is, not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all the states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law there is no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint

and violence from others; which cannot be where there is no law: and is not, as we are told, a liberty for every man to do as he lists.(4)

Locke argued against Sir Robert Filmer's defence, in his Patriarcha, of absolute royal authority, which was made on the grounds of an analogy with patriarchalism. Filmer saw society as an extended family in which paternal authority is exercised in the hereditary right of kings to exercise the authority given to Adam over his children by God. In Filmer's opinion Adam's original authority as father of mankind is inherited by all kings, who are descendants of Adam, and who therefore carry the authority of nature and of God. Thus kings exercise authority by divine right and are responsible in doing so only to God. Locke's response is that while Adam had paternal authority over his children in their infancy, this ended once they reached adulthood.

As was the case with his opposition to royal absolutism and attempts to justify it, Locke's defence of religious toleration was a response to the circumstances of the time in which he wrote. At that time the churches, Lutheran, Calvinist, Catholic and the Church of England, as well as secular rulers saw it as their right and duty to force people to accept what the particular church or leader regarded as the true faith. In his 'Letter on Toleration' freedom of religious belief is argued to be one of the chief liberties whose preservation is the purpose of society and government. Locke argues that church and state are separate on the grounds that their functions are different.

And he argues for freedom for the individual in private spheres like religious belief:

... seeing one man does not violate the right of another, by his erroneous opinions, and undue manner of worship, nor is his perdition any prejudice to another man's affairs; therefore the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself ... Anyone may employ as many exhortations and arguments as he pleases, towards the promoting of another man's salvation. But all force and compulsion must be forborn. Nothing is to be done imperiously. Nobody is obliged in that manner to yield obedience unto the admonitions or injunctions of another, farther than he himself is persuaded. Every man, in that, has the supreme and absolute authority of judging for himself; and the reason is, because nobody else is concerned in it, nor can receive any prejudice from his conduct therein.(5)

Having sketched the essential features of Locke's arguments for liberty, I turn now to the question: what is it about Locke's ideas which leads us to describe them as an expression of the liberal point of view? And, if Locke's arguments are part of the liberal tradition, what makes them so when, as I shall show, liberals writing at later stages in history are not concerned about religious toleration or royal absolutism, but with other issues? This problem points us in the right direction for developing an understanding of what characterizes the liberal point of view. I suggest that we must differentiate between the central principle or essential characteristic which distinguishes Locke's ideas as liberal, and his particular expression or specific application of the liberal point of view.(6) The central and most fundamental characteristic of liberal ideas is that they defend the principle of individual liberty or freedom, which I am going to treat as synonymous.(7) But of course an argument for liberty or freedom is not necessarily a statement of

the liberal point of view. For example, one may call for freedom from exploitation or from colonial rule, without being a liberal. What distinguishes the liberal point of view is both that individual freedom is fundamental and the assumptions or associated principles which give meaning to this fundamental principle of individual liberty. Locke's argument in defence of the principle of liberty rests on the following assumptions or principles: that individuals are autonomous agents capable of conducting their affairs rationally, and that individual rights and tolerance are of central importance. These assumptions and the central characteristic must be distinguished from the particular expressions of the liberal point of view, for example Locke's defence of religious liberty, or of the right to property. My argument is that the particular expressions of the liberal point of view change according to historical circumstances, while the central characteristic remains constant as fundamental and definitive, although the assumptions and principles which give meaning to the principle of individual liberty are not entirely static and unshifting.

On the basis of this distinction between the central characterizing elements of a statement of the liberal point of view on the one hand and its particular expressions on the other, we can gain a proper perspective on C. B. Macpherson's controversial but notable analysis of Locke's ideas. Macpherson's Marxist interpretation is that the theoretical underpinning of Locke's work, and of subsequent liberal democratic theory, is possessive individualism. Locke's theory

of property 'provides a moral foundation for bourgeois appropriation ... the whole theory of property is a justification of the natural right not only to unequal property but to unlimited individual appropriation'.(8) Locke 'justifies, as natural, a class differential in rights and in rationality, and by doing so provides a positive moral basis for capitalist society'.(9)

While Macpherson may well be right in his criticism that Locke's social theory can be seen to underpin these social consequences,(10) we should not make the mistake of extending Macpherson's insights so as to see them as identifying the essential characteristics of the liberal point of view. Macpherson's work should be seen as concerned with critical evaluation of the content of Locke's particular expression of the liberal point of view. The relationship between particular instances of the liberal point of view and criteria for this point of view is aptly described by D. J. Manning:

What we can say is that Locke's political theory is one of the faces that liberalism can pull, and occasionally does. It is compatible with its bone structure. But it is not an appearance that liberalism has always presented or must again present to retain its identity. The identity of liberalism is to be found in the limits of its transfigurations, not in the persistence of a collection of individual expressions.(11)

My distinction between the central characteristic and the particular expressions of the liberal point of view can be developed further by closer examination of Manning's metaphor. The faces that 'liberalism' can pull are analogous to the varying

particular expressions of the liberal point of view. The bone structure is comparable with the more constant central characteristic and associated assumptions and principles of the liberal point of view. But we can also note that the bone structure of the face does not remain rigid. It too changes and grows.

In examining further examples from the liberal tradition we encounter other faces which it pulls. The discussion of these below will illustrate my argument that the tradition is characterized by its central characteristic, defence of individual freedom, and that it has no single spokesman.

3

The liberal point of view as expressed by John Stuart Mill is a reflection of the changed circumstances in England by the nineteenth century. Although, like Locke, Mill was concerned to defend intellectual liberty, the threat of religious persecution and absolute monarchy had by this time been checked. Mill addressed himself to new threats to liberty from, as he saw it, the potential tyranny of the majority posed by the development of popular government, and the growing powers of the bureaucracy.

In his essay On Liberty Mill states that his objective is to assert the principle

that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the

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In his essay On Liberty Mill states that his objective is to assert the principle

that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the

liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others... The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.(12)

Thus Mill makes a crucial distinction between an area of the individual's life which is essentially private and should be free of interference from others, and the public sphere, where the interests of others are involved and where coercion may be justified. In a free society three spheres of individual liberty will be respected. Freedom, argues Mill,

comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness, demanding liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling, absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological. The liberty of expressing and publishing opinions... Secondly, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits, of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age and not forced or deceived.(13)

These introductory considerations in On Liberty are followed by the development of two related themes. The first is a defence of freedom of thought and discussion, and the second an argument for the ideal of individuality. In arguing for freedom of thought and discussion, Mill passionately defends freedom of opinion:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.(14)

Mill defends not only the right of the individual to his own opinions, but also the view that to allow a diversity of opinions is to promote the search for truth.

The second major theme of On Liberty, the argument for the ideal of individuality, rests on Mill's admiration for the type of individual who is energetic, spontaneous and original, intent on developing his potential to the highest degree. Such a person could escape from the unthinking conformity of the masses and has the ability to exercise choice autonomously. Mill saw human nature 'not as a machine to be built after a model and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing'.(15) Modifying the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, he gave to the principle of utility a qualitative interpretation, arguing that certain kinds of pleasure, those based on 'the higher faculties of man', are more desirable than others.(16) The type of individual which Mill had in mind would freely exercise his higher faculties as parts of happiness, rather than merely as means to happiness. For Mill 'individuality is the same thing with development, and... it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings'.(17)

Such individuality is not only of worth to the individual. 'In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others.'(18) Mill posits the idea of an élite of individuals whose originality would enable them to discover new truths and to experiment, with the possibility of improving on accepted practices, to the benefit of all. Such individuals are described as 'the salt of the earth, without them human life would become a stagnant pool'.(19)

Although Mill shares with Locke the defence of intellectual freedom and individual autonomy, their reasons for defending these principles were not the same. While Locke's defence of liberty was based on his theory of Natural Law and of one's natural right to liberty, for Mill the individual's right to liberty was founded on the principle of utility, although he did not adhere consistently to utilitarianism. This is partly explained by the immediate background to Mill's presentation of his defence of liberty. While the intellectual climate at the time of Locke was one of scepticism, Mill's ideas were influenced, although he departed from them to a considerable degree, by the philosophical radicalism of Bentham and James Mill, who rejected both the natural law tradition and social contract theory. Instead, the dominant features of their writings were utilitarianism and the materialism of the pleasure principle.

Mill's position as a prominent member of the liberal tradition is

not only underpinned by different influences from other defendants of liberty. He also embraces issues which were not concerns of others like Locke. He was a champion of women's rights, arguing, controversially in the eyes of many later critics, that 'nothing more is needed for the complete removal of the evil [of the almost despotic power of husbands over wives] than that wives should have the same rights, and should receive the protection of the law in the same manner, as all other persons'.(20) He favoured the extension of the vote to women and the working classes. However, he expressed scepticism about the prospects for society of the growth of popular government, and so supported the extension of the suffrage with certain qualifications, for example that access to the franchise should be denied to those receiving parish relief, to bankrupts, to those who persistently fail to pay their taxes, and to the illiterate. As Locke had opposed absolute monarchy, Mill saw the claims to absolute sovereignty on behalf of the common man as an equally dangerous threat to individual liberty. He suggested that the effect of universal suffrage would be 'to make one narrow mean type of human nature universal and perpetual, and to crush every influence which tends to the further improvement of man's intellectual and moral nature'.(21) While he believed that most adult members of society should have the vote, he argued for provision to ensure that reason and education should have a stronger influence, by defending the idea that the more educated members of society should have more than one vote. Mill argued in favour of representative government, in the hands of the middle class, whom he regarded as the most energetic and able at

that time; the aristocracy he considered to have 'fallen off in energy and intellect and strength of will'.(22)

Mill's argument on representative government is clearly a controversial one. It has been criticised as a defence of middle class interests. This may well be an appropriate criticism, but its validity does not concern me here. The crucial significance of this feature of Mill's work is that it leads us back to my argument that the liberal point of view is to be characterised by its central principle as opposed to specific applications of that principle. Mill's writings, including his ideas on representative government, are, like Locke's, a defence of the principle of liberty of the individual. In defending this fundamental principle, which is the necessary feature of all expressions of the liberal point of view, Mill appeals to a set of principles and assumptions such as individuality and the privacy of the individual in matters which concern only himself, freedom of opinion, the rights of women and minorities, the role of law in establishing and protecting such rights, and belief in the role of education and reason in directing human affairs. However, Mill's views on representative government are an example of the varying expressions of which the liberal point of view is capable. They are not essential to all expressions of the liberal point of view; clearly the common liberal view on the franchise today is that it should be extended to all adult citizens, possibly with a few exceptions, but these are unlikely to resemble those suggested by Mill.

For these reasons I am not much impressed by the move made by critics of liberalism and liberal theory of education to tar the liberal point of view with the capitalist brush. One of the manifestations of this crude understanding of the liberal tradition is the attempt to dismiss Mill's ideas, and the liberal point of view in general, as centrally a defence of capitalism, through Mill's association with the classical economists of eighteenth and nineteenth century England. I will consider this issue briefly.

The doctrine of classical economics subscribed to by Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, the two Mills and others must be understood historically as a reaction against mercantilism. Mercantilist policy was aimed at fostering domestic trade and industry, directing private enterprise to the public advantage and securing a favourable balance of trade. In rejecting mercantilism, the classical economists argued that economic freedom would maximise wealth. The collective wealth would be increased by allowing each individual to pursue his own interests. Government cannot, and should not try to, produce economic growth by intervention. Competition, the division of labour and the accumulation of capital were regarded as essential to growth.

It is all too easy to lose perspective on this association between classical economics, the liberal point of view, and nineteenth century capitalism. The association may exist in a certain form in the case of Mill, but there are some

qualifications of which we ought to take note. First, Mill rejected Bentham's view that people are always motivated by self-interest.(23) A central assumption of the capitalist position is that if all individuals are left free to pursue their own interest, the result will be the benefit of all. Secondly, Mill was sympathetic towards certain brands of socialism.(24) Thirdly, he suggested a number of possible exceptions to the principle of laissez-faire, for example government action to provide better education for more people, and the protection of children from exploitation in the work place. He wrote in his Autobiography:

The social problem of the future we considered to be, how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action, with a common ownership in the raw materials of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour... [Employers and the labouring masses] must learn by practice to labour and combine for generous, or at all events for public and social purposes, and not, as hitherto, solely for narrowly interested ones.(25)

Mill's economic theory and his opinions in general should not be seen as essentially a defence of capitalism. While many people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have regarded themselves as liberal may have favoured capitalism, this does not establish that support for capitalism is an essential feature of the liberal point of view. The liberal point of view is only contingently, not logically connected with capitalism. What was essential to Mill's expression of the liberal point of view was fundamentally its defence of the principle of individual liberty, developed through the assumptions and principles listed above. Mill's more controversial ideas are evidence not that the liberal

point of view is 'wrong' but that it is capable of generating variable expressions. At this level of variable expression the liberal point of view is compatible with a variety of substantive policies particular to particular historical conditions, as I have shown in the cases of Locke and Mill. And as with Locke, to designate Mill as a spokesman for the liberal point of view whose content is viewed ahistorically as constant and unvarying is simplistic. Each expressed the liberal concerns of his age.

My observation on the contingent relationship between the liberal point of view and capitalism, or any other particular content, is borne out by a glance at the development of the liberal tradition after the period of 'classical' liberal ideas associated with Mill.(26) Liberal concerns subsequent to Mill become more and more centred on economic issues, and social problems generated by industrialization.

There can be observed in modern expressions of the liberal point of view a variety of strands of liberalism. F. A. Hayek, for example, defends the competitive economy and economic individualism against what he perceives as the threat posed to individual freedom by central planning and collectivism.(27) Milton Friedman argues that capitalism preserves freedom.(28)

Karl Popper defends the notion of the 'open society' against brands of 'utopianism' like Marxism.(29) L. T. Hobhouse, on the other hand, argues that the state must accept responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. Hobhouse observes a change in

direction in liberal thinking, arguing that

men of the keenest liberal sympathies have come not merely to accept but eagerly to advance the extension of public control in the industrial sphere, and of collective responsibility in the matter of the education and even the feeding of children, the housing of the industrial population, the care of the sick and aged, the provision of the means of regular employment.(30)

4

That the liberal point of view is capable of generating such variable substantive policies supports my argument that it is its central concern for the principle of individual freedom which distinguishes it from other points of view. While the content may vary, it is this central principle which gives unity to the liberal tradition. To fail to recognise this leads radical critics to make the mistake of identifying 'liberalism' with 'capitalism', or of treating the ideas of Locke or Mill as timeless statements of the liberal point of view, abstracted from the circumstances in which they were located. Such a lack of historical perspective is surprising, coming from those who claim to express the Marxist point of view.

This chapter can now be concluded by locating its main argument in my argument as a whole. Reflecting firstly on its significance for the issues set up in the previous chapter, I have suggested that the radical critics are wrong to assume a necessary association between liberalism and capitalism. I will show later that just as liberal social theory is contingently related to capitalism, capitalist assumptions are not an

indispensable feature of liberal theory of education. Indeed, they may well be a threat to it.

Secondly, looking ahead now to the chapters which follow, I am going to show, in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, that the radical attack on liberal philosophy of education and liberal studies of education in South Africa does not establish a case against liberal theory of education, centrally because the radical view of what is 'liberal' is mistaken, in ways which I will demonstrate. While Chapter 6 will show that F. S. Wilson and John White do reflect, in their notion of education, the central liberal concern with individual freedom, they are not considered in radical attacks on liberal philosophy of education. In Chapter 6 I will develop a formal account of what is implied by the concept of freedom in a liberal notion of education, while Chapter 7 will present a notion of liberal individualism which is different to the individualism attributed by radicals to 'liberal' theory of education.

In defending these arguments I will continue to contest the radical use of the word 'liberal'. In doing so it is necessary to distinguish three different senses in which the notion of 'liberalism' will be referred to from now on. Firstly, there is the mistaken radical reference to 'liberalism'. Secondly, the word 'liberal' can be used in the way defended in this chapter, in the context of referring to the broad liberal tradition, with its variety of expressions which share a common concern to defend individual freedom. There is also a third sense whose use will

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become more important as I proceed in Chapters 6 and 7 to defend a liberal notion of education. I will use this third sense of 'liberal' when arguing for a defensible liberal position. It is necessary to introduce this third sense in view of the diversity of expressions which there may be of the liberal perspective on a certain issue at a particular time. Because the meaning of liberalism is, beyond its central principle, dependent on historical circumstances, we cannot expect it to offer recipes for exactly what is an important issue and how to deal with it. It is, for example, possible for a liberal to disagree with Milton Friedman's defence of capitalism as the best means of defending individual freedom, on the grounds of an argument which we will encounter later, to the effect that Friedman is wrong in holding the view that capitalism can protect the freedom of all, rather than of the few.

Having distinguished between three senses in which the word 'liberal' will be used from now on, we turn from the task of characterising liberal social theory to the more specific context of theory of education, beginning with the radical arguments against Hirst and Peters as 'liberal' philosophers of education.

Notes

- (1) The term first came into use in the Spanish Cortes of 1820.
- (2) Second Treatise on Civil Government, (1683), section 27.
- (3) Ibid., section 11.
- (4) Ibid., section 57.
- (5) John W. Yolton (ed.), The Locke Reader (1977), p. 271.

- (6) Here I adopt a distinction similar to that of John Rawls in A Theory of Justice (1971), pp. 5-6, where he distinguishes between 'the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice', the latter comprising various interpretations to which the concept is liable.
- (7) This Isaiah Berlin does in 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1969), p. 121.
- (8) G. B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (1962), p. 220.
- (9) Ibid., p. 221.
- (10) It could be argued that Macpherson pays insufficient attention to Locke's inconsistency on the principle of the right to property. While Macpherson emphasises Locke's tendency in the later stages of the argument in the Second Treatise on Civil Government to emphasise the right to protection of property (e.g. in sections 94, 124, 136 and 139), the principle as discussed in Chapter V, 'Of Property', if carried through consistently, is radically in conflict with capitalist property arrangements. Locke writes in section 27: 'Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it ... and thereby makes it his property'.
- (11) Liberalism (1976), p. 12.
- (12) On Liberty (1859), pp. 72-73.
- (13) Ibid., p. 75.
- (14) Ibid., p. 79.
- (15) Ibid., p. 117.
- (16) It must be acknowledged that opinion is divided on interpreting Mill on this issue.
- (17) Mill, op. cit., p. 121.
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) Ibid., p. 122.
- (20) Ibid., p. 160.
- (21) Dissertations and Discussions (1859), Vol. I, pp. 379-380, quoted in E. K. Bramsted and K. J. Melhuish (eds.), Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce (1978), p. 43.
- (22) 'Spirit of the Age', in Gertrude Himmelfarb (ed.), Essays on Politics and Culture (1963), p. 43.

- (23) See R. J. Halliday, John Stuart Mill (1976), p. 82.
- (24) See Gernint L. Williams, John Stuart Mill on Politics and Society (1976), p. 48; Steven Lukes, Individualism (1973), p. 32.
- (25) Autobiography, quoted in Bramsted and Melhuish, op. cit., p. 255.
- (26) My discussion has focussed on the liberal tradition in England. The variability of the liberal point of view would be illustrated further by an examination of continental trends. Here, most notably, national-liberalism is a central theme in the nineteenth century, e.g. in Germany. The obvious point to make in the light of this is that nationalism is not, as a result, a criterion of the liberal point of view, although in instances like this the two are associated. National-liberalism is but one expression of the principle of liberty, in response to particular historical conditions.
- (27) F. A. Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (1944).
- (28) Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (1962).
- (29) F. R. Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies (1966).
- (30) L. T. Hobhouse, Liberalism (1911), p. 36.

CHAPTER 4

ARE P. H. HIRST AND R. S. PETERS LIBERAL PHILOSOPHERS OF
EDUCATION?

1

In Chapter 2 I indicated that part of the radical attack on 'liberal' theory of education is directed against the work of Hirst and Peters, who are criticized for their views of knowledge and education, and of the nature of theory of education. As the first of the two examples of radical arguments against 'liberal' theory of education which I propose to examine in detail, I will assess in this chapter the radical critique of the work of Hirst and Peters. The ideas I am going to examine are those expressed mainly by Michael Matthews, Kevin Harris, and also by Madan Sarup,(1) who share a rejection of the kind of philosophy of education exemplified in the work of Hirst and Peters, which all three associate with liberalism. Sarup describes Hirst and Peters as 'the liberal philosophers',(2) while Harris associates Hirst and Peters with liberal ideas by treating their work as 'liberal rhetoric' and Peters as an apologist for 'the liberal tradition'.(3) Matthews, who offers the most systematic critical treatment of Hirst and Peters, describes the analytic philosophy of education of which he regards Hirst and Peters as the chief

proponents, as 'the educational representative of a liberal-rationalist world view'.(4)

In examining the criticisms which are made of Hirst and Peters from a radical standpoint, I am centrally interested in the extent to which these criticisms succeed in establishing the alleged poverty of liberal ideas in philosophy of education, as part of a general attack on the place of liberal ideas in theory of education. I am going to argue that, far from establishing such a conclusion, the radical critics of Hirst and Peters make two fundamental errors. Firstly, they mistakenly take Hirst and Peters to be uncontroversially representative of analytic philosophy of education, which in turn is treated as unambiguously 'liberal'. And secondly, apparently assuming the meaning of 'liberal' to be either irrelevant or unproblematic, they treat the ideas of Hirst and Peters as representing an uncontroversially liberal position. Here I will show that in certain crucial respects it would be more appropriate to describe Hirst and Peters as conservative, which, ambiguously, the radical critics do at times. In discussing these issues it is not my intention to undertake either a defence of the ideas of Hirst and Peters, or a comprehensive critical treatment of their work and its significance. My concern is with the issue of whether a successful case has been made for the view that liberal ideas should be dismissed as discredited and of no further use in theory of education, with special reference to philosophy of education.

2

Radical criticisms of Hirst and Peters, as analytic philosophers of education, or 'APEs', as Matthews calls them, adopting Jim Walker's acronym, focus on three aspects of their work. In Matthews's treatment these are their philosophical method, their epistemology and their concept of schooling and education. Each of these aspects in turn contributes to the overall judgement that the work of Hirst and Peters is fundamentally a defence of the status quo. I will deal with the criticisms of each of these aspects in turn, and then proceed to a consideration of the rejection of their work as defending the status quo.

Concerning the issue of philosophical method, Matthews(5) is critical, firstly, of analytic philosophy of education's commitment to conceptual analysis as the correct method. He alleges that analysis as a method in philosophy has been discredited and that its tide has ebbed. The first reason for this, he suggests, is that the quality of the practitioners has deteriorated since Austin. The second is that, according to Matthews, Popper's view that science and philosophy should be concerned with searching for truth rather than for meanings, is gaining wider acceptance. While there is a legitimate place for analysing concepts within particular theories, analysis alone is rejected by Matthews.

One could quarrel here with Matthews's superficial and summary treatment of analytic philosophy,(6) but although I will indicate

the inadequacies in the radical characterization of linguistic philosophy offered by Matthews, this is not my primary interest. Generally, however, Matthews might have characterized what he calls 'analytical philosophy' more adequately if he had chosen to use the term 'linguistic philosophy', thus focussing on its concern with analysing the structures and properties of language as a way of coming to understand the world.(7) Nevertheless I will use with reservation (it is possible for a philosopher to use analytic methods without being part of the 'school' of linguistic philosophy) the term 'analytic philosophy' in my account and assessment of the radical criticisms in question. But my enterprise is concerned primarily with whether there is a case for defending the relevance of liberal ideas in philosophy of education. And the crucial point here is that Matthews's rejection of analysis as a philosophical method does nothing to establish a case against liberalism, for it is clear both that liberal ideas predate the emergence of analysis as a method, and that a commitment to analysis is not at the same time a commitment to liberal ideas. A similar observation can be made of Sarup's objection that, operating within the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy, the 'liberal philosophers' ignore the insights offered by the phenomenological and Marxian traditions. While analytic philosophy of education may have tended to be provincial in this respect, the point I wish to make in response to this observation is that this tendency is certainly not a necessary feature of a liberal position.

Matthews's second criticism of the method of analytic philosophy

of education is that the distinction between science and philosophy has been discredited. He refers as examples to Peters's distinction between scientific and philosophical questions, as involving different kinds of procedures, or as involving first-order and second-order activities respectively, and to what he describes as Hirst's endorsement of such separatism in describing science and philosophy as different forms of knowledge. For Matthews the distinction between concepts and the phenomena to which they are applied cannot be maintained. 'The raw materials of scientific production are already theorized materials, they are not real objects; when they are worked over into theoretical products they can be raw materials for another production process.' (8) Again, while there may be interesting issues which could be taken up here, (9) in the context of this discussion I will simply point out that Matthews has not demonstrated that the kinds of distinction in question are necessary features of a liberal position.

Matthews's third criticism of the method of analytic philosophy of education is one which he shares with Harris, both attacking the claim that analytic philosophy of education, by concerning itself with second-order questions, is ethically and politically neutral. Hirst and Peters are criticised for describing philosophy as concerned with second-order as against first-order questions, claiming to pursue the analysis of concepts and the grounds for and presuppositions of various forms of discourse as detached and neutral spectators, whose role is not to pronounce on issues of policy.

Pointing to the impossibility of such detachedness 'in both theory and practice', Matthews argues that the ideological content of ordinary language has clear implications for second-order analysis:

... if the first-order discourse embodies political choices, class interests and ethical prejudices, then the role of the philosopher as portrayed by Peters cements these. Far from being neutral, philosophy on the APE model is guaranteed to be political, at least to the extent that the first-order discourses are not value-free... Analysis takes language, everyday theory and common sense as given and fails to comprehend the ensemble as a product of certain practices which are historically contingent, and politically and economically ordered.(10)

Harris sees the detached analysis claimed for this second-order activity as 'a fiction'. He suggests that, contrary to the claims made on behalf of this second-order activity,

The end product, however, was to determine practical policy; the practical policy of leaving everything as it is. This was achieved negatively by not prescribing policy issues: and positively through the ideological justificatory-description of certain policy issues already in practice. Hirst and Peters, for instance, managed to "justify" in their collected works virtually every aspect of the social and educational status quo that might serve the interests of those wishing to preserve the status quo, and to present those justifications as rational, logical and disinterested. The end result was to serve and satisfy not only a large number of people at the decision-making level, but also to fulfil a necessary general ideological function of producing "interest-free" justifications for the continuance of social practices which actually serve particular political interests.(11)

There are here again issues which are not part of my undertaking.(12) Keeping this in mind I have two issues to raise. Firstly, although doubts about the second-order and neutral nature of Hirst and Peters's work are well-founded,(13)

this is neither a claim made universally by 'APEs' on behalf of their work, nor does it necessarily have anything to do with the alleged liberal nature of Hirst and Peters's analyses. Secondly, and more importantly, there is the question of the identification of the interests which Hirst and Peters, in spite of their claims to detachedness and neutrality, are alleged to express or serve. Both Harris(14) and Matthews(15) suggest, specifically of Peters, that here we have the ideas of the ruling class. Harris also, as quoted above, sees the work of Hirst and Peters as serving the status quo. Criticising, with justification, the use of the metaphor of the State as umpire by Peters and Stanley Benn, Matthews suggests that they 'provide a clear instance of just such supposedly neutral analysis disguising substantive judgements of a conservative kind'.(my emphasis)(16)

The problem which emerges here is the apparent identification of 'ruling class', 'status quo', and 'conservative', with the liberalism which the radical critics attribute to Hirst and Peters. This issue I will take up later. What I have pointed to so far, in considering the objections by the radical critics to the method of analytic philosophy of education, is that their criticisms do not establish a case against liberal philosophy of education.

Moving on to the issue of the epistemology of analytic philosophy of education, we note that Matthews declares that 'Paul Hirst's "Forms of Knowledge" thesis is the epistemology of APE'.(17) Radical critics reject the Forms of knowledge thesis and its

implications for education, curricula decisions and teacher-pupil relationships. The critics muster a number of arguments in their attack on Hirst's claim that there are seven forms of knowledge, distinguishable in terms of specific concepts, logical structure, distinctive truth tests, and distinctive methodologies for formulating truth claims. These arguments are familiar and I will not dwell on them at length.

Matthews suggests(18) that there is some equivocation and ambiguity in Hirst's formulation of the criteria for and the classes named as forms of knowledge, and also that Hirst uses the term 'forms of knowledge' in both a structural and a propositional sense.(19) Further, Hirst underestimates the difficulties which arise from his attempt to attribute distinctive concepts, logical structure, tests of truth and procedures to the seven forms of knowledge. Hirst's position is seen as evidence of a belief that knowledge is objective(20) and, for Sarup, absolute,(21) rather than socially and culturally situated. It also indicates a tendency to regard only propositional knowledge as knowledge,(22) and to see the abstract and theoretical as superior to practical knowledge.(23)

That most arguments of this kind have some cogency is widely accepted, although I question Sarup's claim, in summarising Michael Young's thesis in Knowledge and Control, that Hirst and Peters, by failing to acknowledge the socio-historical context in which knowledge is constructed, commit themselves to an 'absolute' conception of knowledge. As Matthews emphasizes,

Hirst himself has modified his own position since the early formulation of the thesis. But it is striking that criticisms of the forms of knowledge thesis are by no means the monopoly of radical critics. John Watt, identified as an 'APE' by Matthews, raises problems about the number of forms of knowledge proposed by Hirst and about the way in which the various forms are distinguished from one another.(24) Richard Pring, another 'APE' named by Matthews, makes more radical criticisms of the forms of knowledge thesis.(25) Pring objects to what he sees as Hirst's over-emphasis on the cognitive component of 'knowledge', which neglects practical knowledge and concentrates on propositional knowledge. He also objects to the reductionism involved in proposing seven fundamental forms of knowledge and suggests that Hirst's characterization of the forms is confused. Yet another 'APE', John White, argues(26) that there are difficulties of formulation, justification and completeness in the forms of knowledge thesis (although he acknowledges an indebtedness to it). While Matthews may be right in asserting that much of this criticism is 'intraparadigm discussion' or 'normal science', it does raise a question about the accuracy of his sweeping claim that the forms of knowledge thesis is the epistemology of analytic philosophy of education.

One does not, then, need a radical analysis to see the problems in the forms of knowledge thesis as an epistemological position. Nor, in the light of the criticism of the thesis from within analytic philosophy of education, ought we to view Hirst, or Peters, as representing, in any simple or straightforward way,

the work of other analytic philosophers of education. In any case, to revert to my main interest in this discussion, the crucial point is that Hirst's forms of knowledge thesis should not be identified as the epistemology of a liberal philosophy of education. It has not been demonstrated that the thesis is necessary to a liberal position in philosophy of education.

I shall now turn to the question of Hirst and Peters's concept of schooling and education. Hirst's forms of knowledge thesis is criticised by his radical opponents, both as an epistemology and for its role in his exegesis and defence of 'liberal education'. Attempting to develop a positive notion of liberal education, Hirst takes as his starting point the idea 'of an education based fairly and squarely on the nature of knowledge itself'.(27) This very starting point, together with the view which he implicitly shares with Peters that education is initiation into public traditions and modes of understanding, which can be identified in terms of the forms of knowledge, is rejected by the radical critics. Although Hirst does not use the word 'initiation' in his account of the forms of knowledge, Sarup is correct in attributing a notion of initiation to Hirst's view of education. Also rejected is Hirst's view that liberal education derives objectivity from the knowledge associated with these public modes of understanding.(28) By incorporating his mistaken epistemology into his notion of education, and by defending a curriculum based on these forms of knowledge, Hirst, according to the radicals, legitimates the assumption that the traditional middle class subjects of the grammar school represent 'knowledge'. By

favouring propositional, abstract and theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge,(29) Hirst's liberal education serves to perpetuate the distinction between mental and manual labour. His absolute view of knowledge and education presumes that the knowledge and theorising of the teacher is superior to that of the pupil.(30) In initiating her into the public traditions and modes of understanding it imposes on her a particular construction of meaning, to the exclusion of others. Let us examine Hirst's own explanation of his view of 'liberal education' in order to see whether these charges stick, and, to the extent that they might, what their significance is for the present discussion.

In developing his positive notion of 'liberal education' Hirst turns to the Greek notion of liberal education 'as a process concerned simply and directly with the pursuit of knowledge'.(31) Various doctrines about the mind, knowledge and the good life in ancient Greece give 'particular meaning and significance' to this general idea. In terms of these doctrines the distinguishing activity of the mind is to pursue knowledge, the achievement of which enables the mind to attain its appropriate end, the pursuit of knowledge being an element of the good life. Through reason, the mind comes to know ultimate reality. This knowledge develops into a structured scheme, which determines the structure and content of education, the justification of which is the development of the mind, not some use to which it may be put.

Although he refines somewhat the original Greek formulation, Hirst reasserts the Greek idea that 'A liberal education is, then, one that, determined in scope and content by knowledge itself, is thereby concerned with the development of mind'.(32) This idea of an education that aims 'at the cultivation and development of the mind in the full range of man's understanding' is preferred to one based on 'the predilections of pupils, the demands of society, or the whims of politicians'.(33)

While maintaining the general Greek formulation, Hirst argues that 'adequate definition and justification are not only not dependent on the classical doctrines, but can in fact be based directly on an explication of the concepts of "mind" and "knowledge" and by their relationships'.(34) But while Hirst claims to articulate a more contemporary version of the notion of liberal education, 'no longer supported by epistemological and metaphysical doctrines that result in a hierarchical organization of the various forms of knowledge', (35) he retains a feature of the Greek version which justifies one attack on his theory by the radicals. This attack highlights the problem of favouring propositional over practical knowledge, and so sanctioning the distinction between mental and manual labour. In discussing the planning and conduct of 'liberal education' Hirst remarks parenthetically, 'Certainly liberal education as is here being understood is only one part of the education a person ought to have, for it omits quite deliberately for instance a specialist education, physical education and character training'.(36)

What are the implications of this omission? Firstly, it seems that here we do have the suggestion that 'other' aspects of education, those supposedly not involved in the development of mind by means of initiation into the forms of knowledge, are not, centrally, 'education'. This supports the criticism that Hirst's 'liberal education', favouring propositional over practical knowledge, contributes to the perpetuation of the distinction between mental and manual labour. Secondly, Hirst's omission does provide us with evidence for saying that the traditional subjects or disciplines of middle class schooling are the model for Hirst's formulation of his notion of liberal education.(37) But thirdly, as for the allegation that Hirst's view assumes that 'the teacher's knowledge and theorising' is superior to that of the pupil, and imposes on her a particular construction of meaning, to the exclusion of others, the position is less clear. There is something odd about the idea of 'the teacher's knowledge', as if knowledge is a commodity which can be possessed by some individuals. There is the further problem that, as I will show in Chapter 9, the radicals do not succeed in their account of education, where they offer one, in avoiding the dangers of imposing a particular view on the learner.

But returning to the main issue in this discussion, what are the implications, for the viability or otherwise of a liberal notion of education, of Hirst's account of 'liberal education'? Firstly, to put Hirst in a fair perspective on the issues in question here, I suggest that the fundamental move which he makes, that is to argue that education is the development of mind

through the acquisition of knowledge, is correct (is it conceivable that education could not be concerned with such development?). The crucial problem is the kind of account which is given of knowledge so described. Once Hirst proceeds beyond this initial formulation his theory runs into trouble, as both radical critics and 'APEs' have argued.

Secondly, and more centrally, have the radical criticisms of Hirst's notion of liberal education demonstrated that the notion of liberal education has no place in an acceptable theory of education? It is striking that the radical critics see the use of the term 'liberal' in this context as unproblematic. The question which must be asked here is whether Hirst's is indeed a liberal view of education. An alternative way of casting the question is to ask whether this use of the term 'liberal education' exhausts the possible meanings which the expression could have.(38) I showed in Chapter 3 that the expression 'liberal' does not have a fixed and given meaning. Similarly there is no simple answer to the question of what a liberal education is, or what a genuinely liberal view of education would be. A case will be made in Chapter 6 for the argument that, in their emphasis on individual freedom, which is central to liberalism, P. S. Wilson and John White,(39) who can also be described as 'analytic' philosophers of education, offer a more clearly liberal starting point for an alternative notion of 'liberal education'. Had the radicals taken the work of Wilson and White into account, they might have taken into consideration two liberal views of education which, albeit in different ways,

emphasize the centrality of individual freedom of choice. Wilson is concerned with the definitive importance in education of the individual being allowed to discover what interests her and to choose to pursue activities which enable her to develop those interests. White, on the other hand, is concerned with ensuring that the individual pursues those activities which will increase her freedom to choose activities which she finds to be intrinsically valuable. I shall take up this argument in more detail in Chapter 6, having made the point here that radical objections to Hirst's notion of 'liberal education' should not be taken as the last word on the nature and desirability of liberal education, which raises further doubts about whether Hirst, or Peters for that matter, can be taken as straightforwardly representative of analytic philosophers of education. My point here will be strengthened by the argument below that Hirst's notion of education, like that of Peters, is more appropriately described as conservative than liberal.

Similarly, we need to ask whether Peters's notion of 'liberal education', which he sees as almost indistinguishable from the notion of education which he develops in Ethics and Education(40) is indeed a liberal one. In raising this question I note, firstly, that Peters cites three features as traditionally lying behind the demand for 'liberal education'. These are that education should not be confined to serving extrinsic ends, that it should not be too specialized, and that it should not constrain beliefs in a doctrinaire way. Secondly, and problematically, Peters develops a notion of education as

initiation into traditional modes of understanding which, I am going to argue in the following section, reflects a conservative rather than a liberal outlook. While Peters appears to see his account of the three features of 'liberal education' as compatible with his notion of education as initiation, I maintain, on the grounds that his notion of education as initiation is a conservative one, that there is an incompatibility here. While the three features which Peters attributes to the notion of 'liberal education' may well be compatible with and even necessary to a liberal view of education, this does not entitle one to conclude that Peters is here providing us with the definitive account of liberal education or a liberal view of education.

Matthews raises two major objections against Peters's concept of schooling, which we should note here. His first objection is that Peters has a conception of schooling which is idealist and mistaken. Peters, observes Matthews, sees schools as concerned with initiation into a worthwhile form of life. 'The schools share with churches and other institutions the "function of preserving and transmitting the ultimate values of society". Their *raison d'être* is to "transmit what a community values".' (41) In addition to this primary function of schools, Peters acknowledges that society must produce goods and reproduce labour power. For Matthews, Peters is radically mistaken in referring to the training and selection function of schools as an instrumental function which is subsidiary to the primary function as he identifies it. According to Matthews, the primary and

subsidiary functions as identified by Peters are the reverse of what is really the case; 'The selection and training of labour power is the main concern of a school system: education fits in where it can'.(42)

Matthews's second objection is that not only is Peters's view of schooling idealist and mistaken but that it is also, in spite of Peters's methodological claims, evaluative and prescriptive of a liberal view of schooling and of society.

Now regardless of the merits or otherwise of Matthews's two objections here, and bearing in mind that I have raised and will pursue later the problem of Peters's supposed commitment to a liberal view, I will again suggest that here we have criticisms of Peters's ideas which do not necessarily apply to liberal ideas in philosophy of education. It has, in other words, not been demonstrated that it is necessary to a liberal view that it should make the two errors pointed to here by Matthews.

In sketching the central radical objections to the ideas of Peters and Hirst, as 'representatives' of analytic philosophy of education, it has not been part of my task to undertake any detailed assessment of the work of Hirst and Peters or to deal comprehensively with the criticisms made of it by the radicals. Instead, I have suggested that the radical attack on the method, the epistemology and the views of schooling and education attributed to Hirst and Peters does not establish a case against liberal ideas in philosophy of education. My argument has

pivoted on two considerations. The first has been to raise doubts about whether Hirst and Peters are either uncontroversially liberal or representative of analytic philosophy of education. The second has been to point to the ambiguous description by the radicals of Hirst and Peters's work as both liberal and conservative. This second consideration I will take up in the next section. But before this, a brief remark about 'ideology'.

Each of the three aspects of 'APE' criticised by the radicals is seen, crucially, to be open to analysis in terms of a theory of ideology. For Harris, the kind of work produced by Hirst and Peters fails to perceive that education, far from promoting knowledge, serves prevailing ideologies, thus promoting ignorance.(43) From a radical standpoint, for example, Hirst's view of knowledge ignores questions concerning the historically and socially determined production, reproduction and legitimation of knowledge, and fails to realize that knowledge reflects the interests of the dominant group in a society at a particular time. While claiming to use a detached and neutral method, and working from powerful positions as professors at respected universities, Hirst and Peters set the parameters for a method which developed a supportive rhetoric which legitimates the status quo.(44) But Hirst and Peters do not see their work as ideological,(45) and that their very activity as theorists requires analysis of the production of ideology.

I do not propose to be drawn into discussion of these issues, or

to question the considerable relevance of theories of ideology to an understanding of the function performed by schooling. Instead I will suggest that, while these criticisms of Hirst and Peters may be correct, it has not been demonstrated that it is a necessary feature of a liberal view of education or of philosophy of education that theories of ideology could not be taken into consideration, rather than ignored.

3

It is time to take up the question of whether Hirst and Peters can indeed be described as 'liberal', and I am going to question whether they should be. In doing so I shall show how the radical critics tend to contradict themselves by attributing both a liberal and a conservative position to Hirst and Peters.

We have noted how, while their radical critics associate the ideas of Hirst and Peters with liberalism, they also describe them as expressing ruling class interests, and those of the status quo, as well as alleging that they are conservative. But there is a contradiction in this set of labels, for while one may associate a ruling class view and defence of the status quo with conservatism (and this too can be seen to be problematic), this is not a feature of liberalism. Liberalism and conservatism can be seen as basically incompatible points of view. This is certainly so for Roger Scruton, for whom 'the philosophy of liberalism' is 'the principal enemy of conservatism'.(46) I will return to a possible objection to this position later.

Matthews appears not to consider the possibility of such a clear-cut distinction between liberalism and conservatism as relevant to his considerations on Hirst and Peters. He points to the admiration of Hirst and Peters for the ideas of Michael Oakeshott, of all people, as evidence that they hold a liberal world view. Yet a reading of Oakeshott's essays,(47) particularly and obviously 'On Being a Conservative', does not bear out the assumption that his is a liberal world view. For Oakeshott the general characteristics of the conservative disposition 'centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be'.(48) For Oakeshott, conservatism

is a disposition appropriate to a man who is acutely aware of having something to lose which he has learned to care for; a man in some degree rich in opportunities for enjoyment, but not so rich that he can afford to be indifferent to loss ...

To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss.(49)

Distinguishing between change, to which, he argues, the conservative disposition is averse, and innovation, which may offer improvement and is more cautious and piecemeal, Oakeshott maintains that 'The man of conservative temperament believes that a known good is not lightly to be surrendered for an unknown better'.(50) Writing on political education he accepts the maxim, which I take to be central to the conservative position,

'The world is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil'.(51) Emphasizing continuity, Scruton shares this outlook, writing that 'conservatism arises directly from the sense that one belongs to some continuing, and pre-existing social order, and that this fact is all-important in determining what to do'.(52) Scruton stresses that an existing social organism is presupposed in conservatism, whose politics is concerned with sustaining it.

I argued in Chapter 3 that the liberal position is to be understood as deriving its meaning from its central concern with the principle of individual freedom. At this point in the discussion we have two possible central characteristics of conservatism, concerning its attitude to the status quo, and to change. In the light of my characterization of the liberal position we can note that to emphasize, firstly, the virtues of what we have at present, which I am going to take as comprising what the radicals call the status quo, contrasted secondly with the uncertainties and risks of change, are not definitive features of liberalism, as they appear to be of conservatism. It is not a necessary feature of liberalism to endorse the present, which I am going to take as comprising what the radicals call the 'status quo'. A glance at examples from the liberal tradition illustrates this.

What was distinctive of Locke's liberalism was, firstly, his defence of religious toleration, and secondly his defence of the individual's right to his property in the face of the Stuarts'

attempts to raise taxes on it without the consent of parliament. Locke rejected arguments which tried to justify the Stuarts' actions by appealing to the traditional notion of the divine right of kings. Mill's liberalism expressed itself in reaction chiefly to what he perceived as the tyranny of the majority and threats to freedom of speech and opinion. There is in these examples no simple relationship between the ideas in question and the status quo. Locke's liberalism is expressed in opposition to two elements of the status quo of his time: religious intolerance and the tradition of the divine right of kings. In Mill's case the position is not as straightforward, as the major source of his concern to defend freedom of speech and opinion was the issue of the extension of the franchise, and he saw universal suffrage as a threat to individual liberty. But, although Mill was sceptical about such change, endorsement of the status quo is not central to the liberal ideas which he expressed. Of course it could be argued that both Locke and Mill were defending ruling class interests, but my response to this would be that it is not a necessary feature of the liberal point of view that it should be either an expression or a defence of ruling class interests. This can be seen in the examples of liberal feminism and the African National Congress in South Africa before it entered its radical phase in the early 1960s.

The notions of defending the status quo and of opposition to change, which are the main focus of interest here, do not offer cut and dried formulae for distinguishing between conservatism and liberalism. There were, as we have noted, features of the

status quo which Mill would have preferred to retain. Nor is defence of the status quo unproblematically characteristic of conservatism. For some conservatives - Thatcher and Reagan spring to mind - there may well be features of the status quo which require quite radical action for change. Although, as Oakeshott argues, we can attribute to the conservative position a preference for innovation rather than change, we have to take this as a common but not necessary feature of the conservative position. And we cannot draw a clear contrast on the criteria of either defence of the status quo or opposition to change, between liberalism and conservatism, for it is not the desire for change per se which is distinctive of the liberal position (or absent from the conservative). The liberal may regard retention of certain aspects of the status quo as vital.

We need to look rather at the issue of what concerns are fundamental to conservatism and liberalism in order to grasp the contrast between the two positions. I have already made it clear that for the liberal it is the defence of individual freedom which is central and definitive of her position. To this I should now add the observation that defence of this principle will in general be more fundamental to the liberal position than defence of any other. I have argued that there are various associated principles in terms of which the liberal will interpret the central, and I now add fundamental, one of defence of individual freedom. The possibility of one of the former overriding the latter will be discussed in Chapter 7, but will not undermine my argument here. What is fundamental, by

contrast, to the conservative position is a feature emphasised by both Oakeshott and Scruton, namely the value attached by conservatives to the present, not simply as the status quo, but as embodying a continuing social order comprising institutions and conditions with a continuity with the past. It is worth noting that to value these institutions and traditions is not the same as endorsing all aspects of the status quo, for example the conservative position thus described is not necessarily committed to the current distribution of wealth in a society.

In the light of these considerations it is simply confused to suggest that Peters is both a liberal and a conservative. But perhaps the most serious mistake which the radicals make here is to use labels like 'liberal' and 'conservative' too simplistically. A virtue of conceptual analysis is, at least, that it encourages us to be sensitive to such distinctions. I am not going to make the same mistake by suggesting that Peters is a conservative. But I would agree with the observation that in certain respects Peters is conservative in outlook. Matthews is correct in describing as 'typically conservative'(53) the concluding statement of Ethics and Education, 'The most worthwhile features of political life are immanent in the institutions which we in fact have'.(54) Peters shares Oakeshott's appreciation of the tried and familiar as part of an existing social order. This emphasis on the value of the present institutions in society is the presupposition underlying Peters's notion of education as initiation, to which we now turn, via a look at Matthews's treatment of Hirst as also both 'liberal' and 'conservative'.

Just as Peters's admiration for Oakeshott must sooner establish conservative rather than liberal leanings, so too with Hirst. Matthews describes Oakeshott's 'liberal' world view as having led Oakeshott to title the essay, from which Hirst chooses an extract to conclude 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge', 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind'. Matthews points in particular to Hirst's quoting Oakeshott's opinion that 'Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognise the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance'.(55) Again, I would suggest that Matthews is on shaky ground in taking evidence of an admiration for a conservative thinker as evidence that Hirst adopts a liberal view. But further, Matthews points to an issue here which brings us to the core of Hirst and Peters's notion of education, and of their conservatism in this respect.

In the passage quoted by Hirst, to which Matthews refers, Oakeshott advances a notion of 'education as initiation into a civilization'. 'It is', he writes, 'the ability to participate in this conversation ... which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian'.(56) There is much in common here with, and an inspiration not only for Peters's notion of education as initiation into worthwhile activities, understood in terms of traditional modes of understanding. This notion of education as 'initiation into a civilization' can also be seen as an inspiration for the notion implicit in Hirst's idea of education as initiation into the

traditional 'ways in which human knowledge has come to have shape', (57) which Hirst articulates in his forms of knowledge thesis. Matthews is correct in describing such a view of education, which both Hirst and Peters share with Ozkeshott, as 'conservative', emphasizing as it does the value of current institutions and traditions, and of continuity. Matthews draws this emphasis out when he refers to

Peters' image of teachers as taking the role of the priests who used to introduce successive generations of individuals into the "various aspects of a culture within which the individual has eventually to determine where he stands". Far from viewing this as a threat to the status quo, Peters indeed overtly supports it. He sees our "current political and cultural institutions as embodying the very values of civilization which teachers should be striving to uphold and create". (58)

This conservative feature of Peters and Hirst's work is crucial to the position which I wish to defend in this discussion, that their work, and the criticisms of it by the radical critics in question, cannot be taken as demonstrating the failure of liberal ideas in philosophy of education. A notion of education as initiation is not, however, peculiar to a conservative view of education. I will show in Chapter 9 how, in spite of their attack on the view of education held by Hirst and Peters, the radicals themselves adopt a view of education which involves initiation, albeit into 'worthwhile activities' of a different kind. I must emphasise that as with the notions of defence of the status quo and resistance to change, that of initiation is not the central and definitive characteristic. What is distinctive of a conservative notion of education is the idea of initiation into traditions of understanding, reflecting the

conservative preoccupation with the value of traditions as reflecting continuity with the past.

I must now return to a possible objection, raised but not discussed above. This objection questions my argument that liberalism and conservatism are basically incompatible points of view, and it could be advanced by arguing that examples could be cited of views or opinions on particular issues which are not clearly identifiable as either liberal or conservative. For example, it could be possible to defend certain kinds of freedom, say freedom of opinion and expression, with some restrictions on libel or obscenity, on both liberal and conservative grounds. So, it might be argued, it is misleading to suggest that liberalism and conservatism are clearly distinguishable positions.

In response to this move, I would agree that examples can be found, like this one, where both a liberal and a conservative could advance a similar opinion. But such examples could not carry the weight of an objection to the argument that liberalism and conservatism are distinguishable and ultimately incompatible positions. My reason for arguing this is that at the core of liberalism and conservatism are, as I have suggested, very different ideas of what is fundamental. It is the ideas which are fundamental which characterise these positions. But nonetheless these positions can produce particular opinions or views of quite similar content, e.g. on freedom of opinion and expression. But while it is possible to hold fairly similar opinions on such issues, the reasons for holding such opinions,

as either a liberal or a conservative, are different. I have already suggested that the central and characterizing feature of the liberal point of view is a fundamental concern for the principle of individual freedom, while for the conservative it is the value attached to present institutions, of being part of a social organism with a continuity with the past. Beyond these two central and definitive features, each position may comprise a constellation of further particular ideas, which are related differently to other principles. Thus while the principle of freedom is central to and definitive of liberalism, where it is a good in itself, it occupies a different kind of place in conservatism. For Scruton the concept of freedom 'cannot occupy a central place in conservative thinking' but is 'comprehensible as a social goal only when subordinate to something else, to an organization or arrangement which defines the original aim'.(59) The freedom that Englishmen enjoy 'is a specific personal freedom, the result of a long process of social evolution, the bequest of institutions without whose protection it could not endure. Freedom in this sense ... is not the precondition but the consequence of an accepted social arrangement'.(60) Thus, while Peters pays some attention to the notion of freedom, devoting a chapter to it in Ethics and Education, this does not establish that his is a liberal view of education. His notion of education, like Hirst's, is more appropriately described as conservative.

But another way that the objection to the distinction between liberalism and conservatism might run could be to argue that in

their effects the two positions are not different from one another, that there is a phoney dispute between them. From a certain radical point of view the criterion according to which positions are to be distinguished and judged is whether they do or do not bring about revolutionary change, in other words whether they are or are not part of a revolutionary praxis. But the problem for those involved in any theoretical consideration of these matters is that to be involved in serious consideration of the issues in question must surely be to commit oneself to taking seriously conceptual distinctions like that between liberalism and conservatism. Besides, it is doubtful whether the effects of liberalism and conservatism are the same. To hold that they are would be to pretend that there was little difference between, say, the roles of the middle class and the old aristocracy in the Industrial Revolution. To hold that the effects of liberalism and conservatism are the same is illegitimately to run together two political stances which represent two poles of continuing political struggles. While within a radical approach to political theory political practice is a central preoccupation, this certainly should not be taken to mean that political theory can be collapsed into political practice. This way of objecting to the distinction between liberalism and conservatism is not worth further consideration.

I have challenged in this chapter the popular radical stance which holds that liberal ideas in philosophy of education have been effectively discredited. This radical position rests on the assumption that the work of Hirst and Peters exemplifies and

represents 'liberal' analytic philosophy of education. My challenge to this assumption has been to argue, firstly, that Hirst and Peters are more accurately described as, in certain fundamental respects, conservative in outlook. Secondly, I have questioned whether Hirst and Peters are, as is assumed by their radical critics, representatives of analytic philosophy of education. Examination of the work of Wilson and White in Chapter 6 will show them to be much better examples of liberal philosophers of education, because they are each fundamentally, unlike Hirst and Peters, concerned with defending the central liberal principle of individual freedom. Before taking up that argument, I will deal in the next chapter with the radical argument that the dominant tradition in studies of education in South Africa is a liberal one.

Notes

- (1) Op. cit.
- (2) Sarup, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
- (3) Harris, (1979) op. cit., pp. 112-113.
- (4) Matthews, op. cit., p. 156.
- (5) Ibid., pp. 161-162.
- (6) For example, it could be pointed out that analytic philosophy's concern with language, far from being mere quarrelling about words and questions of terminology, is a matter of seeing language as our access to the world. Austin made this clear by arguing that ordinary language is not the last word, 'only it is the first word'. Quoted in S. Cavell, 'Austin at Criticism' (1968), p. 87.
- (7) See R. F. Dearden's use of the term 'linguistic philosophy' in 'Philosophy of Education, 1952-82' (1982), pp. 60-61.
- (8) Matthews, op. cit., p. 163.

- (9) For example, while one must agree with Matthews that attempts to make rigid distinctions between what goes on in science and what goes on in philosophy should be resisted as indicative of failure to understand what goes on in both, his suggestion that we cannot maintain a distinction between concepts and the phenomena to which they are applied is absurd; if we cannot make this distinction then how is theory possible?
- (10) Matthews, op. cit., p. 164.
- (11) Harris, (1980) op. cit., p. 31.
- (12) Matthews, in arguing that analysis 'takes language, everyday theory and common sense as given', indulges in a simplistic description of analytic philosophy, which certainly does not take ordinary language as given. For Wittgenstein ordinary language is not sacrosanct. On the contrary, one of Wittgenstein's concerns was with what he expressed as the bewitchment of our intelligence by language. But this bewitchment does not tempt Wittgenstein to abandon ordinary language. Instead his argument is that ordinary language is the necessary starting point for any investigation, as it provides the only conditions for intelligibility that we have. Matthews wants to suggest that we should rather pay attention to the ways in which ordinary language is constituted by ideology. I see no reason why theories of ideology need to be seen as incompatible with Wittgenstein's ideas, for is ideology not describable as bewitchment of our intelligence? In any case, we cannot dispense with ordinary language if we are to engage with problems of ideology at all.
- (13) In The Logic of Education (1970) there are numerous instances where Hirst and Peters make first-order statements, e.g. on the authority of academics on pp. 117 and 119.
- (14) Harris, (1979) op. cit., p. 80.
- (15) Matthews, op. cit., p. 164.
- (16) Ibid.
- (17) Ibid., p. 167.
- (18) Ibid., p. 168.
- (19) Ibid.
- (20) Ibid., p. 173.
- (21) Sarup, op. cit., p. 14.
- (22) Matthews, op. cit., p. 168.
- (23) Sarup, op. cit., p. 153.

- (24) 'Forms of Knowledge and Norms of Rationality' (1974).
- (25) Knowledge and Schooling (1976), pp. 38-42.
- (26) J. P. White, Towards a Compulsory Curriculum (1973), Chapter 6.
- (27) Hirst, (1974) op. cit., p. 30.
- (28) Sarup, op. cit., p. 53.
- (29) Matthews, op. cit., p. 168; Sarup, op. cit., pp. 54, 60, 141.
- (30) Sarup, op. cit., pp. 14, 53, 55.
- (31) Hirst, op. cit., p. 31.
- (32) Ibid., p. 41.
- (33) Ibid., p. 32.
- (34) Ibid., p. 33.
- (35) Ibid., p. 41.
- (36) Ibid., p. 51.
- (37) See R. Edgley, 'Education, Work and Politics' (1980).
- (38) A recent re-examination of the notion of 'liberal education' is offered by Charles Bailey in Beyond the Present and the Particular: A Theory of Liberal Education (1984). Bailey describes as 'liberal education' that which liberates the individual from 'the present and the particular'. Although he finds that Hirst's characterization of 'liberal education' comes closer than others to offering a satisfactory account, Bailey is critical of some features of Hirst's notion of 'liberal education', chiefly its enumeration of the forms of knowledge as distinct in terms of categorial concepts and tests of truth.
- (39) P. S. Wilson, Interest and Discipline in Education (1971); White, op. cit.
- (40) Peters, op. cit., pp. 43-45.
- (41) Matthews, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
- (42) Ibid.
- (43) Harris, (1979) op. cit., p. 96.
- (44) Ibid., pp. 79-80.

- (45) Sarup, op. cit., p. 61.
- (46) The Meaning of Conservatism (1980), p. 16.
- (47) Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays (1962).
- (48) Ibid., 'On Being a Conservative', p. 168.
- (49) Ibid., p. 169.
- (50) Ibid., p. 173.
- (51) Ibid., 'Political Education', p. 133.
- (52) Scruton, op. cit., p. 21.
- (53) Matthews, op. cit., p. 160, fn. 10.
- (54) Peters, op. cit., p. 319.
- (55) Oakeshott, op. cit., 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind', p. 199.
- (56) Ibid.
- (57) Hirst, op. cit., p. 40.
- (58) Matthews, op. cit., p. 160.
- (59) Scruton, op. cit., p. 19.
- (60) Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

IS THE DOMINANT TRADITION IN STUDIES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA
A LIBERAL ONE?

1

My task in Chapter 4 was to show that the radical critics are wrong to take Hirst and Peters as representatives of liberal philosophy of education. Hirst and Peters, I argued, are in respect of the notion of education they hold more appropriately described as conservative. Turning to radical criticisms of 'liberal' studies of education in South Africa, I will now discuss my second major example of an area of theory of education where the radicals mistakenly describe the views in question as 'liberal' rather than 'conservative'.

The growth of a radical literature on education in South Africa is an exciting and welcome development. South African work within this paradigm is in an embryonic state by comparison with the more extensive radical literature elsewhere, in Australia for example.(1) Peter Kallaway's collection, Apartheid and Education(2) is therefore a significant and overdue addition to published work on education in this country.

A clear tendency in the growing radical literature on South African education is its rejection of 'the whole "liberal" education tradition that is dominant in South African society at large'.(3) It is argued that 'the study of education in this country has to date been dominated by the liberal convention, and has in consequence taken place within the context of a set of unquestioned ideological presuppositions'.(4) I am going to take it that those who adopt the radical stance, in holding the view that the 'dominant tradition' in studies of education in South Africa is a 'liberal' one, maintain that most of the influential texts on education in South Africa have been written from a 'liberal' stance. In response to this position I intend to argue that the radical critics are mistaken in suggesting that the dominant tradition in studies of education in South Africa is a liberal one. In doing so I shall show that there is some confusion in radical circles about the use of the term 'liberal' and that the criteria of the liberal tradition implied in the radical criticisms of it are inadequate.

In examining the radical arguments against the 'dominant liberal tradition' I am going to take the arguments in question as suggesting three criteria of 'liberal' studies. Although the radicals are mistaken in thinking that these criteria can be used to characterise a liberal position, I shall for the sake of the argument adopt these criteria in investigating the arguments which reflect them. I shall also suggest, in section 2, that two additional more central criteria need to be considered and, in section 3, that the examples of writers cited by the radicals

generally fail to satisfy these additional criteria. Section 4 will illustrate further the lack of rigour in the radical attack on 'liberal' studies of education in South Africa by focussing on the alleged overemphasis by the 'liberals' on the significance for black education of the coming to power of the National Party in 1948. As with my treatment of the radical arguments against Hirst and Peters, I set out to show in the present chapter that the radicals have not established that liberal theory of education has been discredited.

2

Let us establish first the arguments against 'liberal' studies of education in South Africa asserted by the radicals and the criteria of 'liberal' implicit in these arguments. Commenting on the standard texts on the history of South African education, Kallaway notes

a picture of neglect and indifference regarding black education. E G Pells allocated the subject some 22 out of 152 pages (or 15 per cent of his text), Ruperti about 12 per cent and J C Coetzee 20 per cent. Behr represents some improvement with over 50 per cent of his book being devoted to black education (20 per cent to African education), and Brian Rose's collection of essays moves conclusively towards a more balanced presentation with more than 75 per cent of his section on South Africa being concerned with black education.(5)

Kallaway comments further that published work in this field

has been almost exclusively descriptive and empiricist in conception. Liberal writers on the history of education in South Africa have tended to take education policy statements and statements of intent by politicians and

officials at face value. For example, the citing of the notorious statements by Dr H F Verwoerd on the nature of Bantu Education have never been matched by detailed research into the nature of the schooling system to ascertain whether these policy statements really did reflect the practice in the schools during the 1950s.(6)

Commenting similarly,(7) Mary Crewe writes that studies in this tradition are

works which are predominantly descriptive, catalogues of disparities in education and information collecting rather than critical. Where they are analytical the analysis remains on an introverted level and doesn't yield proposals for alternatives. Further they are almost all oriented towards White education, emphasising the split between English and Afrikaans and referring to the other education systems in passing. Virtually no works exist which view the education systems in an interrelated way as part of South African society as an integrated whole.(8)

Crewe identifies as works within the paradigm in question

E G Malherbe, Education in South Africa, E G Pells, Three Hundred Years of Education in South Africa, and more recently the works of a small group of writers such as A Behr and R MacMillan, B Rose, D A Duminy, R Tunmer, and ... works from outside education faculties produced by Sprocas and the SAIRR.(9)

A problem in setting out to evaluate the validity of the criticisms in question is that the critics of the dominant 'liberal paradigm' are clearly not unanimous in citing the works which they regard as part of this paradigm. It is worth noting, however, that Colin Collins(10) also cites Pells as such an example, while Pam Christie and Colin Collins(11) also refer to Brian Rose and Raymond Tunmer, and to Muriel Horrell who worked under the auspices of the SAIRR. But bearing in mind these problems of identifying examples, we can discern so far three common accusations against the dominant 'liberal' tradition of studying education: first, that the emphasis has been on white

education, while black education has been neglected; second, that such studies have been largely descriptive and lacking in analysis and critique; third, that their superficiality in analysis has resulted in a failure to see education as interrelated with other features of South African society.(12) There is a further criticism of 'liberal' studies of education which is of a different order, which I shall take up in section 4 below. In the absence of further specific attempts to identify the features of the 'liberal tradition' in question we shall have to take these three criticisms as implicitly reflecting also the alleged characteristics or criteria of the 'liberal' tradition.

This is the 'liberal' tradition as characterised from within the paradigm of radical historiography. A more complete account of the liberal tradition must include reference to the ideas or principles in terms of which the liberal tradition, in its broadest sense, not merely in South Africa, has expressed itself. Centrally, liberal ideas have in common the defence of the principle of individual freedom. As I have shown in Chapter 3, this has taken different forms at different times, e.g. the defence of freedom of ideas or expression, or of certain rights, a call for tolerance, or an emphasis on the principle of equality, depending on the historical context in which they are expressed.

In the South African context liberal ideas have a complex history, reflecting a peculiar character of their own. I am now going to give a brief indication of the character of liberal

ideas in this context but must emphasise that my intentions are modest, in that I do not propose to give the subject detailed treatment. Considering the record of liberalism in the decades following the National Party's election victory in 1948 (the period in which the 'liberal' studies in question were written), we find the peculiar character of South African liberalism reflected in the policies and actions of the United Party. The UP was cast, in the years following 1948, as the 'liberal' opposition to the National Party government. Janet Robertson points out that 'The United Party stood for the preservation of principles and methods historically associated with the Western liberal tradition - minimum government interference with the rights of the individual, the rule of law, the inviolability of the constitution, and the independence of the judiciary'.(13)

But while these principles for which the United Party stood can be seen to place it within the liberal tradition as I have characterised it, it is necessary at this point to invoke the third of the three senses in which, as I suggested at the close of Chapter 3, the word 'liberal' can be used. It will be recalled that I suggested there that we need to distinguish between 'liberal' in the mistaken sense in which the radicals use it, and liberal in the sense of the liberal tradition, characterized by its central concern to defend individual freedom, with variations in its expression depending on the context. While it is the use of 'liberal' in the second sense which I have been mainly concerned to defend, I pointed also to a third sense, in which, accepting the broad characterization of

the liberal tradition which I have defended, and from within a liberal framework, one considers what a defensible version of liberalism could be. The best example of this kind of deliberation in my argument will be the discussion of Milton Friedman's liberalism in Chapter 7. It is in this third sense that we can appraise the peculiar expressions of the liberal point of view in both the United Party and the Liberal Party in South Africa. For while the United Party paid lip-service to the principles of the Western liberal tradition, its 'liberalism' was corrupted by its wish to maintain white political control, and it was opposed to the extension of full equality to blacks in an integrated society. While it defended the existing privileges of the coloureds, it did not press for integration, or an extension of their rights. Its 'liberalism' was thus highly ambiguous and largely a function of its opposition to the Government's methods of maintaining white supremacy. Robertson observes that

the ways by which the government proposed to enforce apartheid aroused non-Nationalist fears for the freedoms of whites in South Africa. And consequently the defence of liberal methods seemed as important to non-Nationalists as the pursuit of liberal aims. Thus, in the lengthy debates on apartheid legislation in the first term of Nationalist rule, non-Nationalists were encouraged to see the United Party, in contrast with the Nationalists, as the defenders of liberty.(14)

Even the Liberal Party, although the general principles for which it stood were clearly liberal ones, e.g. human dignity, human rights and democratic participation, did not embrace universal adult suffrage until 1960. It adopted the principle of a qualified franchise at its first National Conference in 1953,(15) thus calling into question its commitment to the principle of

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