WAS THE PIGGy WHO WENT TO MARKET SATISFIED?
Educational Aims in a Consumer Society Adrift

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The allusion in the title of this paper borrows connotations from both a children's nursery rhyme and the teasing question that occasionally appears in first-year philosophy papers - "Is it better to be a pig satisfied or Socrates dissatisfied?" The question is important to those whose professional concern is education. For education purports to satisfy needs: the needs of the individual, and the needs of society. But is education necessary to the achievement of satisfaction? And is satisfaction a state of mind, a state of excitement, or perhaps a state of digestive repleteness? What needs is education meant to satisfy?

Back in the 1970s, Richard Peters was claiming that in recent usage, the term "education" had come to connote something beyond mere vocational training or cultural conditioning. It is now associated, he said, with developing the capacity for critical rationality, giving students the power to evaluate their socialisation and exercise greater autonomy in deciding how to live and what values to embrace. Education is therefore concerned with a state of mind.

Initially, Peters supposed himself to have derived his conclusions from pristine conceptual analysis, successfully avoiding programmatic definition while at the same time constructing a normative goal for education. But subsequent criticism, to which philosophers from Down Under made no small contribution, obliged him to admit – albeit in an article carefully tucked away in a non-British journal – that he was just as indebted as the next person to presuppositional values.

Interestingly, the authors of a recent psychology textbook went so far beyond their paradigm as to say that: "Having a phobia about spiders is learned behaviour, but it does not count as education. Nor does acquiring greater skill in breaking into cars as a result of learning from peers in prison." That is, they were acknowledging that the aims of education are not exhausted by either Behaviourist or Technicist objectives; there is more to being human than can be accounted for by the reflex arc.

Meanwhile, there has been a rising concern in the general community about the need for explicit values education in the public schools. It would be nice to think that systematic logical analyses by our guild had been responsible for this change in the ideological climate, but it owes more to the effects of increasing civic turbulence and value pluralisation. If we are to be of any use in the world, values education must be high on our agenda. It is a debate in which conceptual and ethical confusion are rife.

In addition, values discourse is all the more necessary at a time when an industrial paradigm is setting the agenda, deriving its raison d'être from the demands of the national economy. It is imperative that we revisit the question of what part personal satisfaction should play in education.

Satisfaction or Ruination?

"Satisfaction" is a term derived from Latin roots which imply "making enough" of

something. Satisfaction is a sense of pleasure derived from reaching a goal through our own or someone else's effort. It can be attained by a variety of routes, such as solving a teasing problem in mathematics, watching a compatriot win a race, receiving repayment of a debt, or temporarily reaching a point of satiation in the consumption of pig-swill.

This range of examples suggests that satisfaction is a very subjective notion, all the more so in a postmodern climate which insists that the construction of reality is particular to each individual. Indeed, one person's satisfaction may well be another's ruination. The classic case is "substance abuse" (or use, as your lordships please).

Another difficulty is that satisfaction can apparently be manufactured. Patrick Goldring implied as much in the 1960s, when he analysed the lifestyle of residents in the multi-storey apartment blocks that were then being favoured by town planners. In his book *The Broilerhouse Society,* Goldring first described the treatment of battery hens, well-fed but confined in cages with their wings clipped and environmental stimuli minimised. He then compared that with the housing of residents in units painted in subdued colours, with low wattage lighting, and television soapies running continuously. Occupants were encouraged to order consumables and other goods by phone and these would then be delivered to the door by conveniently randy couriers. There was effectively no reason for the occupants to go outdoors.

Well might we recoil from such an alien vision. Except that we ourselves may be more confined than we realise by the gilded cage of consumerism. And in the construction of this cage, television plays a major role. TV producers, driven by their sponsors' need to make a profit, offer us multiple diversions and dissipations designed to bring on a satisfying adrenalin rush without actual risk or physical effort. In between the excerpts customarily described as programs, artful ads appeal to primal urges in order to beguile us into consuming more. And with the advent of so-called "reality TV", what we are being induced to consume is virtual pig-swill.

So why not? If such things give satisfaction – which after all is only a feeling state – who would be such a spoil-sport as to suggest that "there are better things to do"; that life wasn't meant to be sleazy? Educators bleat that the life worth living beckons us to higher levels of satisfaction – but who said they were higher?

Dissatisfaction through resistance

A part answer is that if it can be shown that many people are being deliberately degraded and exploited to satisfy someone else's desires, then we educators should do what we can to awaken in them dissatisfaction with this state of affairs. That is, we should – in the interim at least – be educating for resistance. This is, of course, a moral purpose, apparently exempt from the relativism generally attributed to moral values. Is this, then, the answer?

A recent catch-cry of this kind has been "Critical Pedagogy", recruiting an old Marxist slogan for a postmodern project. To quote Henry Giroux, Critical pedagogy calls into question forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives . . . This [he says] is a pedagogy which links schooling to the imperatives of democracy.

All this is reminiscent of the problem encountered by classical Marxists in America in the 1960s. In the pre-war decades, they had been urging the exploited classes to resist oppression and throw off their chains. After the war, however, they were faced with a situation in which a buoyant economy was leading to a general increase in material goods. Many people, though still powerless and not-so-subtly exploited, were satisfied with their situation because they had been given access to creature comforts that Richard III would have given his kingdom for.

Marxists in that era were aghast at the capitulation of the masses to such blandishments. Like several others, Herbert Marcuse sought to buttress the classical theory by enlisting the notion of "false consciousness", which he regarded as a subtle form of exploitation master-minded by the ruling classes of his day, analogous to the way the overlords of ancient Rome sought to divert the masses with bread and circuses. But can one really apply the notion of "oppression" to pigs enjoying their swill?

In the same era, Paulo Freire was also confronting "false consciousness" in the poorer classes, though he had less difficulty identifying instances of real oppression. He was working by choice with peasants who were much more obviously exploited, in both material and cultural respects. He sought to raise their level of consciousness, so that they would realise how they were being manipulated, and assert their rights as human beings to experience greater satisfaction in life. At the same time, he saw that satisfaction would require not only improvement in their material condition, but enhancement of their sense of self worth and spiritual purpose. In Freire, the grand narratives of Christianity and Marxism were fused, providing a strong motivation to uplift his fellow human beings.

But in today's postmodern climate, such a motivation struggles to find purchase. Certainly, many people still feel that if commercial barons are in fact deliberately exploiting the masses, using tawdry pellets of titillation to condition their hip-pocket nerve, something ought to be done about it. But have we the right to sit in judgment? The favourite villain in this scenario, of course, continues to be the persuasive power of television. But some recent research is suggesting that the latest youth cohort – which Leonard Sweet has labelled the "Netgen" – is developing a resistance to being manipulated by "the box." No doubt we would like to be able to attribute this to the effect of schools offering critical media studies, and these may deserve some of the credit, but Douglas Rushkoff puts more weight on the invention of the "remote control."

Rushkoff's theory is supported by research showing that when the "screenagers" of the Netgen surf the channels, mostly during the ads, they are able to grasp several story lines at

once, whereas their elders tend to become bewildered and lose track. More importantly, as they switch from one imagined world to the next – in the ads as well as the programs – they become aware of the fictional character of these worlds and the artifice that has been used in creating them. This means that at a deeper level, they are learning to cope with multiple realities. To that extent, today's screenagers are also developing some resistance to seduction through advertising – but only some.

In any case, is resistance enough? It is not self-justifying, any more than Peters' championship of rational autonomy was. The appeal of pig-swill still haunts us. Screenagers, while realising what is being done to them, may well be going along with it for want of something better to value. Analysts note that while the post-boomer generations are developing a protective armour of ironic detachment, they also lack better alternatives to the fantasies on offer.

Officially, those who advocate developing in students a capacity for critical resistance are trying to do justice to the diversity of human groupings and the rights of oppressed minorities. They seek to free those who have been fettered by a hegemonic mind-set and the political exploitation that goes with it. Like Freire, they want students to develop the ability to perceive more clearly what is in their own best interest and the will to claim it. The role of emancipatory educators is to be midwives in this process. Shades of Socrates!
But can we safely leave it to them to know what is in "their own best interest" without the help of more experienced elders? Midwifery usually involves more interventionism than that. But if we do so guide them, won't we inevitably be promoting another hegemonic value framework? Moreover, if the values we want to promote diverge significantly from the cultural conditioning which originally shaped their identity, might the result not be dissatisfaction: not just dissatisfaction with the conditions that oppressed them, but dissatisfaction even with the positive and self-affirming aspects of their initial acculturation. Might this not leave them adrift and vulnerable to other forms of exploitation? Is there some special virtue in being dissatisfied? It's a question we will return to later.

For the moment, let us admit that resistance educators, outside of the academies, are not flavour of the month. Another paradigm has education in its grip.

Satisfaction through consumption
We are to understand that the piggy who went to market was on the right track. That is where human satisfaction is to be found. The children's jingle is conveying the right message to my grandchildren.

It is hard to fathom why the economic rationalist paradigm has achieved such a stranglehold even in education, where it manifestly subordinates the rights of the learner to the priorities of economic growth, and treats human beings merely as producers and consumers – in effect, producers of pork and consumers of swill. It is as if the value neutralism affected by the Philosophical Rationalists in the 1970s has been displaced by the confident materialism of the Economic Rationalists, peddling a reductionist interpretation of wants grounded in the experience of consuming.

Whereas one might have hoped that people committed to promoting higher satisfactions would re-occupy the high moral ground, their visions have been discounted by a postmodern reluctance to use words like "higher" or "more worthy" in regard to values. Perhaps, too, multicultural diversity has caused many people to doubt that sufficient agreement would be

achievable on judgments of this kind. Meanwhile, bread and circuses are back in vogue, and the overlords this time are the barons of commerce. They are not too worried about the quality of satisfaction experienced by the consumer, so long as turnover is sufficient to increase their profit. For both the barons and the peasants, quantity of consumption is the measure of satisfaction.

So effectively have industrialists pressed this view on politicians that dissent, particularly when coming from professional educators, is brushed off as being merely an attempt on our part to preserve our own level of satisfaction. Our concern, they allege, is because we have a vested interest in the consumption of education.

The industrial paradigm has an even more disturbing effect on our view of education. It encourages the application of production-line metaphors to the process of learning. The input is teaching; the outputs are knowledge and skills. The favoured rhetoric is "Outcomes-based Curriculum." This is not the place to tease out the pros and cons of this way of conceptualising the task of curriculum development, except to point to one possible effect of production-line thinking, currently taken to an absurd limit in the TAFE sector.

There, each unit is spelled out in terms of a finite set of specific "competencies." Lecturers are not to move outside that frame. Such atomisation of learning purports to be more practical than older practice, but it ignores the holistic nature of understanding and competence, as demonstrated years ago by such people as Polanyi and Glaser. A TAFE lecturer in one of my classes reported to me the reaction of a mature-age re-trainee in one of her classes, when confronted with the list of competencies prescribed for the subject she was teaching. The student said with a sniff, "A pile of crumbs doesn't make a loaf of bread." Mind you, a pile of crumbs, suitably libated, is good enough for swine.

Ethics in Hiatus

Meanwhile, many people, young and old, are becoming increasingly discontented with the bread that does not satisfy. Where shall they turn? To the field of ethics? After all, here is where we learn to employ "value rationality" – a term that's been coined to represent Aristotle's *phronesis,* which the Greek sage contrasted with epistemic rationality and technical rationality. If the average citizen is confined in the gilded cage of consumerism, as I suggested earlier, Max Weber nearly a century ago considered that intellectuals were caught in the "iron cage" of instrumental rationality. With unusual foresight, he warned that our civilisation would not see the importance of value rationality "until the last ton of fossilized fuel [had been] burnt."

But has not ethics been employing this discourse? Unfortunately, for most of the twentieth century, ethics was in hiatus. The grand schemas in normative ethics were toppling long before postmodernism set in, apparently routed by scientific positivism, which appeared to necessitate the emotivist view that value language merely expresses and arouses emotion. Meanwhile, existentialism in the Sartrean mode was elevating individual personal authenticity over general principle, and the social sciences were enthusiastically endorsing cultural relativism. So one way or another, ethics was transmuted into empirics.

The rescue package which sought to reinstate moral discourse was prescriptivism, which applied Wittgenstein's notion of language games to Kant, resulting in the so-called "transcendental argument." This involved deducing moral principles from the necessary conditions for moral reasoning. In this spirit, Richard Peters and John Wilson made impressive attempts to justify a number of ethical principles germane to education. Ultimately, however, since this form of argument relied on conceptual analysis as such which, by Peters' own admission, "leaves things as they are", the project was vulnerable to the charge of committing the naturalistic fallacy.

Relativism seemed to have won, but efforts continued to anchor morality – and more broadly, value theory as such – in given features of human society. This has also turned ethical debate towards social ethics rather than personal ethics. John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* was a trail-blazer in this quest, though seen by some to be too dependent on the economic myths which thrive in Main Street, U.S.A., as evidenced by a display hall in Disneyland which celebrates the four freedoms – and the fifth: free enterprise.

Subsequent attempts to put teeth in normative ethics have included the communitarianism of Alasdair Macintyre, which has helped to steer discussion towards issues of equity and social justice in the pluralist democratic state. There has also been a move away from attempting to identify over-arching principles towards the discussion of actual social and political problems, not least of all global concerns about the modification of human genes and the viability of our natural habitat. Here again, though, the divergence of viewpoints on issues such as these could be seen as further proof that relativism is absolutely unavoidable!

Now the point of foisting upon you this absurdly simplistic summary of a century of debate is to underline the lack of consensus within the academic discipline of ethics. And that is just the Western tradition, excluding even any mention of the input of religious ethical systems to that tradition. The gain, if there has been any, has not been in finding answers but in developing more precise tools of values discourse, enabling us to better identify appropriate questions and relevant reasons. I excluded mention of relevant inputs from religious and other world-views to show that even within the sub-set of those who insist on the autonomy

of ethics there is little convergence. But if it is admitted that the normative force of moral values is dependent on more global frameworks of meaning, both genetically and logically, the possibilities of rational consensus seem to recede to vanishing point.

Interestingly, the postmodern critique enables us to account for this, in terms of how conceptual frameworks are constructed. No framework is without presuppositional starting points generated by the unique previous experiences of the particular individual. Attempts to provide ultimate justifications always depend on people's initial bets as to the nature of reality: call them leaps of faith, albeit – one hopes – leaps of reasonable faith. If a person becomes convinced that someone else's framework is superior to their own, this usually occurs as a result, not of one or two knock-down arguments, but through a growing conviction over time which eventually triggers a paradigm shift in their own approach to believing and valuing.

Philosophers should have great respect for anyone who has come to a settled habit of mind through honest and strenuous reflection, regardless of whether or not they concur with the conclusions reached. Unfortunately, it is more often ego than logic which leads to the feuds for which our guild is famous.

Negotiating to Our Satisfaction

The shift of emphasis towards what some are calling "applied ethics" suggests a way forward. Back in the 1950s, Jacques Maritain, when he was a delegate to the United Nations, drew a useful distinction between justifications at an ultimate level, which tend to integrate an individual's life-view, and those at a practical level, relating to what is required to enable people to work together in a democratic milieu. This suggests that negotiation between members of a pluralistic society might yield a level of agreement on values sufficient to greatly enhance community life and education.

Opposed to this view are some postmodern critics who insist that we are bound to encounter incommensurable values as between the value frameworks constructed by individuals and sub-groups. For this reason, some advocates of critical pedagogy will go no further than alerting students to their rights as self-determining choosers. But it cannot be claimed that this objection is one of logical entailment; it is an empirical hypothesis, yet to be tested on a wide front.

In the meantime, other philosophers have placed their bets in the opposite direction, hypothesising that if they sponsor negotiations in a rational spirit between people of good will, they just might get somewhere. Interestingly, Peter Singer, who has long relished the mantle of the iconoclast, was nevertheless moved to say, after editing a substantial and eclectic reader in ethics in 1993.

What is recognised as a virtue in one society or religious tradition is very likely to be recognized as a virtue in the others; certainly, the set of virtues praised in one major tradition never make up a substantial part of the set of vices of another major tradition.

Such sentiments lend weight to the efforts of those philosophers who are seeking to develop democratic principles alternative to collectivism and individualism. In addition to Giroux's more recent forays into normative democratic theory, I am thinking in particular of Kenneth Strike's "particularistic communitarianism" and the notion of "associative democracy" developed by the political philosopher Paul Hirst.

A second reason for "giving it a go" is that education itself is a values project and needs a robust mandate. Such a mandate requires both a defence of human rights, to which those who advocate education for resistance are committed, and beyond this a commitment to shared goals and visions of the life worth living. We may not know whether this working hypothesis will produce the results we hope for, but we have to try. As Bill Clinton said at the Camp David talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders some time ago, there's no guarantee of success, but not to try is to guarantee failure. In such an enterprise, the input of the discipline of ethics – understood as including general value theory as such – is crucial, though not so much to decree what the common good shall be, as to facilitate the exercise of value rationality in particular contexts: to be, in effect, a midwife to negotiations in good faith between the stakeholders.

In recent years, I have found myself involved in a number of projects of this kind. The most encouraging one – from my point of view – occurred here in Western Australia. Funded by an NPDP grant, a consortium in the non-state sector led by Dr Tom Wallace began by reviewing the status of values education in the 1993 National Curriculum. There was so little evidence of the employment of value rationality in the "assessment profiles" of that curriculum that the consortium moved on to explore the possibility of developing its own value base and deriving values outcome statements from it.

Using an approximation of the Delphi Technique, we developed a so-called Agreed Minimum Values Framework, from which workshops with teachers in many schools derived a rich resource of "values outcome statements." The State Education Department, which had initially been reluctant to collaborate on the grounds that it dare not be seen to be espousing partisan values, later welcomed the use of some of its schools for the trialling, and embarked on a values review of its own outcome statements.

Space does not permit me to describe in detail how the various stages of the original project were conducted, or at what points philosophical analysis was invoked, but it is relevant to the present argument to refer to two elements that were designed to reduce the possibility of hegemonic dominance. One was a ground-rule intended to minimise the possibility of being stalled by conflict over a particular value. It ran as follows:

The purpose of the exercise [is] not to develop a totalistic account to which all participants would be expected to conform, but a minimalist set of agreements on which to base common action in the wider educational arena.

That is, negotiations were to focus on agreements and avoid bogging down in particular disagreements. Where specific beliefs and values had failed to secure general agreement, they were put on hold for further attention at a later stage. Though held over in this sense, they still, in principle, qualified for a place as content in that part of the curriculum devoted to developing an appreciation of the various belief systems influential in the wider community.

The second element called for a combination of pluralistic content and the development of skills of value analysis. Together, these arguably constitute the best hedge against indoctrination. Consistent with them, the fourth ground rule we formulated required that the resulting values charter itself be available for critical analysis, and kept under continuous review by all stakeholders, including the students. This, of course, was not only warranted on ethical grounds, but constituted good pedagogical advice.

Further down the track, a Cross-sectoral Curriculum Council set up by the then Minister for Education developed a state-wide curriculum framework in which a prominent element was a values charter. In this charter, something approaching 80% of the entries were indebted to the earlier Agreed Framework, a fact duly acknowledged in the government document.

The dialogue goes on, as it must. As I said in an article detailing the philosophy and strategy of the original project.

It is possible to say that this is an experiment that has not failed, though it could yet do so. Nevertheless, there have been several encouragements which have strengthened our confidence in its viability. And it has the virtue of being grounded in the belief that human beings are agents capable of rationality and regard for others. These, in short, are beliefs worth betting on.

Is Dissatisfaction a Need?

Values! Values! What has all this to do with satisfaction: satisfying the needs of the human organism? And, to return to a question earlier put on hold: Is it possible that sometimes dissatisfaction is better than satisfaction? After all, did I not endorse the idea that there might be a place for awakening dissatisfaction with one's present situation? And was I not also rather disparaging of pig swill, hinting that the educator might deem it appropriate to discourage interest in some kinds of satisfaction?

Value judgments are inherent in both strategies. Can we justify them? Part of the difficulty is that a discourse focusing on satisfying needs is something of a fraud. Needs-talk is a smoke-screen, making it appear that we can avoid partisan values by simply identifying the developmental needs of the human organism. But the direction of "human development" apart from the inbuilt mechanisms of maturation, always involves choices on the part of the growing individual and its carers. We choose which needs and values to satisfy, and when.

The big question is unavoidable: what do we value in human beings? Normative philosophy has reached no agreement; scientists either disqualify themselves by dogmatically reductionist answers, or admit that their epistemic rationality does not directly address the question. It is left to great religious and ideological traditions to promote answers for ordinary people to live by. But they are at each other's throats too, though paradoxically they exhibit convergence on a number of moral and practical precepts. This suggests two ways to go: ways which complement each other. One is to endorse the critical study of the great value traditions. The other is to encourage negotiation between the stakeholders in society, and those for the school in particular, to achieve a viable level of value-agreement. And those were the strategies I was commending earlier.

It is likely that one outcome of such a move would be a hierarching of values, identifying the satisfactions most commonly believed to be most worth seeking. The corollary is that some areas of rightful dissatisfaction would also be identified. I have suggested what some of these might be in my more sardonic asides. But as I conclude, let me address them more directly.

First, it is generally agreed that Socrates' glory was precisely his dissatisfaction: he asked questions where others accepted. Philosophy was born out of dissatisfaction with our ignorance and self-deception. Let us value this dissatisfaction in our schooling and privilege the development of all the rationalities.

Second, social reformers from the biblical Amos to Africa's Mandela have been dissatisfied with the status quo, so long as it continued to exploit some in order that others might maximise their satisfaction. Let us endorse this indignation in our teaching, eschewing the spurious value-neutrality which allegedly leaves things as they are. Marx famously said: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently; the point is, to *change* it". But the appropriate weapon for philosophers in the role of change-makers is not the polemic backed by violence espoused by Marx, but a passionate rationality on behalf of human welfare and planetary stewardship.

Third, Socrates and Jesus both affirmed that social morality is a hollow shell if there is not at its core a conviction of cosmic meaning and purpose, coupled with a respect for self and others. These together generate a stronger preference for higher satisfactions than would the mere indulgence of our biological and territorial instincts. So let us include in our school charters and curriculum, along with the defence of personal rights, promotion of agreed higher values, being sure to privilege persuasion over coercion, and negotiation rather than indoctrination.

Conclusion
So then, is it better to be a pig satisfied or Socrates dissatisfied?
My hope is to have motivated you to work harder at persuading teachers and students not to allow themselves to be satisfied with pig-swill, or wish it on others.