

# **The entrepreneurial self and informal education**

## **On government intervention and the discourse of experts**

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### **1. Child-rearing: The traditional and the progressive picture and the change of society**

There was a time when education and schooling were not readily seen as “essentially contested concepts”, when, following Kant, education was understood as the “means” to become human – and that is to say, rational. This was itself a reaction to an earlier period, characterized by the inculcation of values, the uncritical learning of facts or bodies of information, and where discipline was understood as obedience to authority. With the Enlightenment, rationality becomes the proper end of what a human being is. This is not to say that this results in a means-end reasoning: in becoming free from one’s inclinations and passions, one realizes one’s true nature – that is one puts oneself under the guidance of reason. Thus, Liberal Education, along these lines, is concerned with the initiation of the learner into forms of thought and understanding that are part of the cultural heritage. In their strongest formulation these norms were thought to be stable and valid, moreover, for all cultures. In the German tradition, where, at least initially, this academic endeavour flourished particularly, the concept of education also encompasses child-rearing as well as more formal schooling.

To begin with the traditional picture, such (18th or 19th century) writers as Kant and Herbart, see the educational relationship between the adult and the child undergoing education to be one whose primary aim is the adulthood of the child. The influence adults exert on children will bring them to the point where they can take up for themselves what is called a dignified life-project. Adults, supposedly being a representation, though certainly not the ultimate embodiment, of what is objectively good, are in a position to educate, since they themselves have already achieved adulthood. Responsibility for realising one’s life-project is dictated by reason. Adulthood shows itself by being in command of oneself, able to bind oneself to a law of one’s choosing, to maintain steady relationships both morally and practically and not being reliant upon the judgements of others; to put this more positively, having personal access to objective standards of value and being able to place oneself under a higher moral authority. This will show itself in the adult’s taking part in societal life in a constructive manner. The child on the other hand is helpless in a moral sense. She does not know what is good and therefore cannot yet take responsibility for her own actions. She cries out for guidance and only if such guidance is offered, if adults (first the parents, and subsequently the teachers) make the necessary decisions in relation to the child, will she be able to reach adulthood. Central to this traditional concept of education is this intention on the part of the educator and it is this which makes an activity educational. What the educator undertakes can only be justified as education in so far as it aims and contributes to adulthood, and to the autonomy of the young person. The educator is, thus, responsible by proxy and the relationship she has with the child is based on trust. This is no simplistic reasoning of a manipulative kind. The adult decides on behalf of the not yet rational child and in her best interests. By confronting the child with rationality in this way the adult seeks to awaken the child’s potentialities to become a rational human being. Such was the manner in which relations between adults and children were paradigmatically conceived in the German Enlightenment tradition from the eighteenth century until the time of the Second World War (Langeveld, 1946). The view necessarily implies a transmission model of education. The child may be conceived of as a passive recipient of rationality and culture or as recalcitrant material to be moulded or inscribed. Alternatively, she must, like the barbarian outside the citadel (Hirst and

Peters, 1970), be lured in and skilfully initiated into the stock of worthwhile knowledge, sentiment, and inherently valuable activities and practices of civilised life.

For Rousseau by contrast, and the many child-centred educators that followed him, the adult world, far from representing reason, is essentially corrupt and given over to the superficialities of worldly vanity. On this view, the child, as a product of nature, is essentially good and will learn all she needs to know from experience. Though the adult world is represented by the educator, her role is depicted essentially as that of nurturing or, as expressed in the horticultural metaphor, of protecting the burgeoning plant from harm or noxious influences and permitting the development of that adult perfection supposed to be already precontained in the child, as the seed precontains the ideal pattern of the fully grown plant. It was against the overall understanding of “becoming human” that child-centred theory was directed. For its protagonists child-rearing could not properly be characterized by activities pursued by adults in order to bring children to adulthood. From this position the educator (the parent or the teacher) is, first of all, the adviser to the child, and the facilitator of what she really wants. It is the child, it is argued, who is from the very beginning responsible for the learning process. It is hardly the case that this either was or is seen as unproblematic. More rigorous and relatively more recent philosophers of Education (Peters, 1969; Dearden, 1972) have applauded the ethical concern of child-centred educators to respect the vulnerability and individuality of the child but have questioned their non-interventionist claims, pointing out that reference to natural growth and the supposed needs and interests of the child embody a number of covert value judgements. Particularly of note, in view of later developments, is the recognition by these writers of the significance of the child’s present and future ethical interests and the psychological distinctiveness of her motivational pattern and view of the world. These writers maintain that, far from being generated spontaneously in the child’s contact with the physical world, much of what the future adult has to learn is of a conceptual nature and therefore social, not to say traditional, in origin.

Certain later conceptions of the relationship between the child and the adult world may be seen as taking the concept of child-centred education to its logical conclusion - or *reductio ad absurdum*. For writers such as Neill (1962), Holt (1969), Duane (1971) and others, the relationship between children and the adult world of teachers and parents is an essentially romantic one of persecuted innocence in which sensitive and intelligent children are constantly thwarted by the obtuseness and neuroses of punitive adults. Taking this one step further the so-called “deschoolers” (Illich, 1971; Reimer, 1971; Goodman, 1971) take an even more naive view of children and their capabilities. Compulsory education is standardly referred to as “incarceration” and young people are supposed capable of both identifying their own educational needs and organising their own programmes to meet them. In the case of the deschoolers, however, the “oppressor” is taken to be not flawed or bloody-minded individual teachers or parents but a hypocritical “society” or exploitive capitalist system and its needs for a docile and socially differentiated workforce. In this context too the general criticism whether it is possible for an individual to discover exclusively within herself what she really wants was raised, and moreover, it was argued that it is not clear how parents could possibly avoid initiating their children into the values that they live by.

Beyond this “internal debate”, the change in the content of education (i.e. child-rearing and schooling) is now furthermore due to a radical pluralism that has swept the world. This is in itself part of a wider crisis of rationality. The question whether reason, and reason alone, can decide what should be done, and if, moreover, rational thinking is even possible at all, are at the heart of this matter. And there is of course Nietzsche’s anti-metaphysical legacy which generated many questions concerning the self and its presupposed autonomy and will. Changing concepts of childhood and the debates to which they give rise necessarily reflect social changes which provide the context for the various philosophical reflections referred to in this paper. Such changes entail new ways of conceptualising education and child-rearing which in turn take account of the changing experience of human life. Under these circumstances it may be asked whether children continue to have the same significance for their parents as they once did, and moreover, how the situation in which

parents presently find themselves vis-à-vis their offspring can now be captured. For instance, most societies are nowadays characterised by ethical and religious pluralism, leading to the suggestion that parents are no longer morally justified in initiating their children into a particular way of life. This may be illustrated by the different positions taken in the debate concerning religious education at school (see for instance, Carr, 1995, 1996; Mackenzie 1998). Thus it is also argued that educators in general can only indicate possible positions on these matters.

Besides the more general transformation of society, a further change of note is the fact that it is nowadays more difficult than it once was for parents to live up to their children's expectations and to what is demanded of them as family members and members of the society. Few people any longer work at home and the time spent away from the home necessarily limits that which is left for their children. The same can be said of participation in community life or the time available for the pursuit of joint amusements, hobbies or pastimes in a family context. Family members are encouraged to behave more as individuals and families themselves tend to be seen, rather, as institutions providing opportunities for their various members. And those families which are unable to do so are regarded as deficient. That this perceived deficiency is in part a reflection of the subculture to which they belong only adds to the insecurity parents feel concerning the upbringing of their children. Partly in consequence of this and in line with general tendencies towards greater child-centeredness, parents may leave many choices and decisions to their children, finding it easier not to become involved themselves. There is also an increasing tension between what children directly desire and think to be important and what can be afforded by the family as a whole, to say nothing of the parents' own priorities and preferences as reflected in the time parents want to invest in family life and that which children wish to give to it. Equally, children can no longer expect their parents to be on hand whenever they think they need or want them. Furthermore, society's demand for caring on the one hand conflicts with its insistence on the child's being treated as an individual.

There may be differences in value between individual parents and between values held within the family and those held in society at large. Furthermore, due to the process of individualisation currently taking place in society, the overall control of parents over their children is continuously slackened and yet they are expected to ensure that the latter become "good citizens". Such conflicts, may generate a partial retreat or even a total withdrawal from responsibility on the part of parents, possibly leading to an attitude of "It's your life. Do as you wish". When others insist on putting values explicitly on the school curriculum, thus urging schools to take on some of the functions of "the home", parents may feel paralysed and no longer able to decide. "Experts" may be consulted and even courses in parenting established. Their apparent lack of expertise may leave some parents feeling disempowered yet the expertise that is sought may not bring the desired results. At issue is whether the current problems of family life are to be conceived of as resulting from parental lack of expertise or as the predictable result of living together in a changing society in which the role of parents is being transformed.

Interest in issues of child labour and child abuse not to mention incest have put the way families operate in a different perspective. The context of trust in which the proclaimed common goal was "happiness and fulfilment for all family members", has come under attack and has put the language of children's rights on the social and political agenda. And the desire of children and young people to live more independently of others and pursue the kind of life they want to pursue has been encouraged by changes of an economic kind. The more children are financially independent of their parents, the less they are obliged to accept their ways and values. Children are not, of course, financially independent even in Western countries. The majority do not have an income sufficient to allow them to support themselves, and it is questionable whether they would be able to manage such an income if they did. However, pocket money which children may (within limits) spend as they choose, is nowadays more or less established as an institution and many young people are able to earn money from part time jobs in a way that was once less easy. More importantly, society now provides them with a number of facilities and opportunities which used to be at the discretion of their

parents. The overall social climate has changed so that parents find themselves under pressure to provide the means for their children to behave in a more independent way. As is well known, many children may possess their own rooms, radio and TV sets, record players, computers, individual bank or savings accounts, mobile phones and so on. To lead one's life independently as early as possible has almost become an educational aim and as such is consistent with the prevailing societal climate. Even if these privileges are limited to middle class children, the background assumptions are there as an ideal or norm for all children in the Western world.

A number of rather different issues in relation to children are raised by changing attitudes to divorce and the stability of marriage and the supposed effects of such changes upon the development and upbringing of children. The moral and developmental consequences supposedly threatening the children of divorced or unmarried parents are less frequently predicted for those of war widows or those whose fathers or mothers are obliged to be away from home as part of a mobile or flexible labour force. And many tremble for the fate of children brought up by lesbian couples or homosexual men. However, to suppose that healthy child development requires the presence of role models of both sexes implies that traditional gender roles, the relationship between them and the traditional relationship between children and parents of each gender will remain appropriate to the future, or indeed to the present. It suggests that family relationships as we currently conceive them are a necessary and permanent feature of a flourishing childhood rather than a historical phenomenon reflecting a particular division of labour in an age when physical robustness or protective aggression were required of men, and women might be more or less permanently incapacitated by serial child-bearing. In such times the bond between child and blood-father may have served as the justification for the accumulation of property and status ("for the sake of the children") and the means of its transmission. The child, especially the male child, was the vehicle of the family fortune "cascading down the generations". In an age of individual educational and social mobility such a conception has become increasingly irrelevant if not socially dysfunctional.

The declining authority of custom, tradition and religion has had a number of other significant effects upon the way we view children and the relationship in which they stand to parents and the adult world in general. In particular such developments have led many to regard rights rather than some settled conception of the good as the primary guiding concept in a liberal society. The question "What should be done?" or "How should children be taught to live?" has been replaced by "Whose interests are to be considered?" and ultimately "Who is entitled to decide?" The period immediately following the university disturbances of 1968 was marked by a surge of interest in the rights of children. Initially this interest was expressed in terms of the supposed civil and political rights of children: rights to freedom of speech and association, rights to publish comment and opinion, rights of freedom in matters of personal appearance and access to knowledge, the right to make a democratic input into the management of their schools, to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs on the same basis as adults, and to engage in responsible sexual activity (Wringe, 1981). It is perhaps heartening that the results of some of these agitations have to some extent been taken on board by the adult world, even though they are now rarely expressed in terms of rights. Lists of "school rules" for instance, now characteristically draw attention to the importance of mutual respect for each others' work and aspirations not only between pupil and pupil but also, reciprocally, between pupils and teachers. The habit of "consulting" pupils on various matters is nowadays an established part of the image of good practice in the field of pupil management.

We may, perhaps, be somewhat dismissive of the more strident claims to the rights of freedom and political participation voiced by or on behalf of children in the 1970s, given that a certain measure of rationality would seem the logical prerequisite of their exercise. This hesitation, however, implies a possible entitlement on the part of children to receive the kind of upbringing and education that will not compromise their right to an "open future" in favour of the local or parental religion or value system (Feinberg, 1980; O'Neill and Ruddick, 1979). On the contrary, it may seem to suggest a view of education and upbringing

that positively reinforces the development of that autonomy and enables children to eventually choose their own conception of the worthwhile life. Children's rights of protection from interference and harm (passive rights of freedom) have also provided the framework for much writing about the damage done to children through cruelty, exploitation or abuse, sexual or otherwise (McGillivray, 1992; Kent, 1992). With regard to rights of this kind, at least, the objection that children have no rights because they are less than rational or because they have done nothing to earn any rights, cannot be made. It is sometimes suggested (e.g., Kleinig, 1978) that talk of rights in the context of children's upbringing and particularly in the context of family life where love, affection and freely given mutual respect should reign, is inappropriate. No doubt this is true. If children constantly strutted around demanding their rights whenever parents displeased them, and parents were inclined to reply in kind, life would be intolerable for all concerned. It is, however, equally true that situations in which adults (colleagues, friends, neighbours) make frequent reference to their rights in their dealings with each other are also disagreeable. It is the mark of courteous and civilized relations that rights are not continuously referred to but are understood and respected all the same. The notion that we may simply flout the important rights of those who are supposed to be united with us by bonds of dependence and affection would be monstrous.

Rights in relation to education may be claimed not only on behalf of children but also for parents. Claims to rights on behalf of parents have been of two kinds: claims of parents against the wider community, usually represented by the state, and claims against children themselves, that is, the claims of parents to limit children's freedom, require certain behaviours of them and bring them up in certain ways of the parents' choosing. Given the close historical links in many countries between education and religion, liberal democracies traditionally respect the right of parents to choose their children's schools though some (France, USA) insist that state provided education should be secular. The notion of children as choosers or potential choosers subject only to the provisional authority of parents and other adults in a pluralist world of uncertain and changing values, places emphasis on significant differences between the concepts of socialisation - induction into the beliefs, values and practices of existing society - and education which involves the development of both critical insights and qualities of self-assurance and self-confidence essential to the development of personal autonomy.

However, we must exercise some caution in discussing this education and child-rearing in terms of rights, a tendency which has been vehemently criticised by Mary Midgley (1991), among others. No conceptual scheme, Midgley claims, ought to have automatic priority in discussion moral issues, but there is a special objection to talk of rights which is the most competitive and litigious of moral concepts. Like the legal model it dictates a zero-sum solution where there are winners and losers but no room for the careful reflection so necessary when we are confronted with moral dilemmas. She refers to the reason why parents are taken to be normally the least bad available persons to rear their children, not in terms of a belief in a particular right, but according to the widespread experience that other people are, almost always, much less willing even to try to do the job properly than parents. She also draws attention to the fact that the experience of pregnancy and childbirth normally produces a deep emotional bonding with the coming child and that culture usually does not oppose this bonding but backs it by social approval. She points to the fact that this deep emotional investment makes separation so painful and is therefore willing to speak of innate emotional tendencies. All of this, however, does not confer on parents any unconditional "right to rear". There is a nexus of sometimes conflicting claims that has to be considered and which casts serious doubts upon a legalistic view of the aims of life, that is, where rights are explicitly placed at the centre of morality and where all other human values are ignored. It may be helpful therefore to describe child-rearing instead in terms of a "practice", a concept that is often used when talking about social behaviour and which has a long tradition in social sciences.

## 2. Education as an initiation into practices?

To think of education as an initiation into practices has indeed been part of many “traditional” views of education. As argued above, in the Enlightenment tradition, for instance, the learner is initiated into forms of thought and understanding that are part of a critical cultural heritage. These forms are public but beyond a child’s understanding; therefore, she must be gradually and skillfully initiated into the knowledge, sentiments, and valued activities and practices of civilized life. But this formulation has been long under pressure for its so-called conservative tendency because of the broadly unquestioning stance it encourages toward the particular content into which the learner or novice is initiated. Through such processes society reproduces itself, but the unexamined assumptions behind practices may reinforce existing disparities, such as the unequal distribution of wealth and power. Though such a modernist conception of education may also seek to promote practices that cultivate the critical potential of youth, and their capacity to question traditional practices or explore new ones, even here initiation is regarded as too much of a stabilizing factor for the predominant ways of living together. As argued above, the contrast to this initiation view of education is generally based upon one or another form of Romanticism. Yet here as well the concept of “practice” remains in the background. For epistemological, though no less for ethical reasons, it seems that we cannot do without it.

The concept of “practice” has been discussed by a number of philosophers, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, who could broadly be called “communitarian”, but even for a philosopher who was more concerned with questions of language and knowledge, i.e. Ludwig Wittgenstein, it is at the heart of this position. Wittgenstein’s later work revolved around the idea that human life begins in doing, not in thinking. He provided a view of human life that takes seriously the idea that humans are cultural beings. Language is, on this way of looking at the matter, embedded in a constantly expanding and shifting set of cultural practices, or as he called it, a “form of life”. That “practice has to speak for itself” (OC, # 139), points for him not only to the ways in which the unity of our concepts is formed; it also comprises the skills involved in *handling* the conceptualized phenomena, our pre-reflective *familiarity* with them, expressed in the sureness in our behaviour toward them, and the *judgmental power* exercised in applying or withholding a given concept on a particular occasion. These factors are all relevant to the establishment of knowledge, but they cannot themselves be fully and straightforwardly articulated by verbal means. In returning to the ordinary, Wittgenstein stresses the essential groundlessness of the social contexts in which assessments can be made and standards evoked.

For him *training* plays a crucial role in education, but this is in an important sense different from *conditioning* in that the association is structured by a practice that is, according to Wittgenstein, rule-governed (or normative): not the mere reinforced association of word and object, or behaviour, but an association that is effective in enabling novices to realize their more basic desires by shaping their behaviour to conform to — or, perhaps better, mimic — the activities licensed by the practice or custom. Training is successful if it results in the initiated learner eventually becoming a skilled and autonomous practitioner, and subsequently performing within, and thus adding to, the practice — perhaps even contributing to a further change in it. Notice that on this account there is no necessary incompatibility between initiation into an existing practice and transforming that practice in some way; indeed, the first is a condition for the second. A necessary support both logically and physically for the novice’s actions is the structuring provided by a community or practice. It is logically necessary because it provides a system of background beliefs, actions, and competencies; this complex pattern is necessary for the token utterance or action to have significance. It is physically necessary because the very possibility of any learning at all is the presence of exemplars and models – *even if* the outcome of the process is to question or modify them. Thus training provides the ground for the development of the cognitive competencies constitutive of mastery of language, for Wittgenstein, or for the mastery of any genuinely normative practice with a complex “form of life”.

It should be noted here that not only do we take over certain ways of judging the world, as we experience it, from earlier generations, but that, in this context, judging is also a way of acting. The child's coming to act according to these beliefs cannot be learned simply by rote (Cf. OC, # 144). This is why the practical aspect of rule-following cannot be taught on the basis of rules alone; it has to be picked up by examples and by training. As Wittgenstein said, we look at a model or template and learn "to go on" in a similar way. But, as we have stressed, this is not to say that practices are forever fixed: they are always open to new developments. There are many ways to follow a rule on Wittgenstein's view, including, he says, "making up the rule as we go along". That these standards are embedded within socially constituted bedrock practices is the only view of norms that ends neither in mystery-mongering nor in a regress. According to Wittgenstein, these practices are not deliberately chosen conventions but are constituted by the harmonious "blind" agreement in words and activities of a group of people over a period of time, which stands in the background. It is "blind" only in the sense that it does not itself result from the self-conscious or explicit application of rules (Cf. PI, I, # 219). Hence, he said, to the extent that we are following a rule we are doing so "unquestioningly," but this does not mean that the act of following a rule brooks no originality or spontaneity. Judgment always plays a role, even where there are limits on judgment. On Wittgenstein's account, people are neither unconscious automata "blindly obeying" rules, nor utterly free agents; the indispensability of an unquestioned background links the process of learning to the content of what is learned. In this process, regularities that create a space for going on in the same way are both reinforced *and* opened to potential question as they are acted out in actions and reactions shaped by our initial training.

Because humans are cultural beings whose use of concepts presupposes a pre-reflective familiarity, a context of cultural practices is necessary even to communicate and interact with each other — one cannot *not* be initiated into such practices, for this would imply the lack of any human relationship at all. Yet such essential practices are learned foremost by doing rather than by teaching. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that these grounding meanings must always come down, at some point, to a recognition that people just *do* accept this or that, just *do* agree about what actions count or do not count as following a certain procedure; they may not even be able to articulate how and why this is so. Here the limits of critical reflection are set by the fact that a good deal of practical know-how is *tacit*, learned not through explicit representation and explanation, but through unspoken processes of observation and emulation (Cf. Warnick, 2005).

Now, while the normative element is, according to Wittgenstein, not to be radically separated from the "meaning" dimension, it is not clear beyond this minimal characterization which kind of practices one *should* be initiated into. To put this differently, there is no straightforward answer about which practices matter most for the stability and character of a form of life — significantly, these practices may not be the ones that are *thought to be* the most important within that form of life. Therefore, further differentiations are clearly needed about the *kinds* of practice that can be found in contemporary society. But before going into that, the focus will be on two positions where the link between practices and an ethical or educational stance is explicitly made.

Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian approach stresses that practices depend upon rules and internal standards of excellence that are demonstrated to us by masters who are their most competent and authoritative practitioners. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre defines a "practice" as

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175)

For MacIntyre this concept of a practice and how it is taught is central to understanding a society; but, as he conceives “teaching” as a set of skills and habits, it follows that for him teaching cannot itself be a “practice,” even though it is put to the service of a variety of “practices” (MacIntyre and Dunne, in Dunne & Hogan, 2003, p. 5). MacIntyre’s position, Richard Smith has argued (Smith in Dunne & Hogan, 2003, pp. 314 ff.), ignores the distinction between self-contained practices and purposive practices. The former are those such as chess or football, and games in general, where the essential point of the activity lies within itself; there is no external end at which, by their nature, they aim. The latter are those that, while conforming to MacIntyre’s definition, nevertheless have some end beyond themselves. MacIntyre tends to write, so Smith claims, as if practices in general were self-contained rather than purposive. But without the element of purposiveness, it is difficult to see what prevents a practice from falling into self-indulgence and self-absorption, from turning into an endlessly sophisticated tea ritual. For Smith, teaching is a purposive practice in this sense. As will be argued further, a similar conclusion can be drawn for child-rearing.

For Charles Taylor, social theory rarely consists simply of making some ongoing practice explicit. The stronger motive is the sense that our implicit understanding of a practice is in some crucial way inadequate or even wrong. Theories can extend, or challenge, or even criticize our constitutive understandings. Theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on, to show us the real, hitherto unidentified course of events. Of practices he says,

[those] which make up a society require certain self-descriptions on the part of the participants. These self-descriptions can be called constitutive. And the understanding formulated in these can be called pre-theoretical, not in the sense that it is necessarily uninfluenced by theory, but in that it does not rely on theory. There may be no systematic formulation of the norms, and the conception of man and society which underlies them. The understanding is implicit in our ability to apply the appropriate descriptions to particular situations and actions. (Taylor, 1985, vol. 2, p. 93)

Thus, for Taylor, a social theory is validated not by seeing how well it describes the practices as a range of independent entities, but rather by judging how practices fare when informed by the theory. The kind of practice he envisages is much broader than MacIntyre’s, which depends on the normative standard of “achieving excellence,” and so his account includes all sorts of activities as genuine practices. The self-descriptions that he considers constitutive presuppose that the human beings understand themselves against a background of what he calls “strong evaluations”. On this view, the desirable is not only defined by what one desires (plus a calculation of consequences) but by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base (Cf. Taylor, 1985, vol. 1, p. 23). Here one finds a minimal idea of a practice employed by Taylor’s position, along with what would characterize practice if one fully takes into account his general stance concerning values and how they characterize human life. In the minimal sense, a practice does not include the criteria that would help us determine the activities that are worth being initiated into. Yet if there are no distinctions of worth and no strong evaluations whatsoever, there could ultimately be no practices in Taylor’s sense.

As argued, the “conservative” view of education as initiation into practices seems to overemphasize the reproductive functions of teaching and learning. But this is true only at first glance. Particular practices may be thought to be worthwhile now because they were worthwhile for earlier generations, but for different reasons. To elaborate, if the preservation is based solely on the value that was attached to them in the past, without question, this represents a straightforward conservatism and, when defended in these terms, tends to shield from criticism not only the practices themselves, but also the groups, cultures, and power relations they privilege. Some practices, however, have “conserving” functions in the sense that they make other things possible. Reading and writing are examples, as are a number of things within the context of child-rearing. While subject to question and change (text-messaging, for example), it is their very continuity and

stability that make other valuable and necessary practices possible. An interesting example of how “conservatism” does not necessarily conflict with transformation and change can be seen in the impact that new technologies are having on daily practices such as communicating, shopping, playing, or working. For many people letters have been replaced by e-mails or cell phone messages. Traditional educational practices of teaching and scholarship have changed profoundly now that reference materials and primary data are no longer exclusively paper-based but digitally stored. Though there are many things that might be deplored in this sketch of changing models of educational provisions, the question is whether such an approach to education can still be seen along the lines of a “practice”. For all that has changed, there seems to remain a core of these activities and relations that is still easily recognizable as a teaching/learning endeavor: specific practices, such as lectures, class discussions, Socratic questioning, tests, grades, and so on, still serve broadly familiar purposes. It may be that over time even these practices will be fundamentally transformed, or even disappear. But the central point is to illustrate that it is the very continuity and stability of practices that makes transformation possible; they are related, not opposed concepts. *Because* educational institutions are dedicated to teaching, engaging, and motivating learners, they are forced to react to changes in how, when, and where people learn. *Because* some aspects of the teacher-learner relation remain important, and familiar, to participants, it is possible to put certain aspects of that relation under scrutiny, to challenge them, and then to change them. *Because* a set of implicit norms and values are shared within educational encounters, participants feel secure enough to embark on the risky journey of sailing uncharted seas together.

Surely, there are parts of what constitutes formal education (schooling) that can still be seen as an initiation into practices, and the same is true for the professions, as in being trained to perform a particular job. But things look different if one tries to encompass a broader sense of education that includes child-rearing, friendship, and that large range of informal interactions and contexts in which we also teach and learn. It can legitimately be asked, for example, what it is exactly children grow into. They hang around, learn to dress appropriately for the parties they go to, try vehemently to look cool, but does this constitute anything more than merely doing something for everyone’s approval? These actions do not seem to be “practices” in the robust sense. There is a casual appearance to these choices that is itself part of the “style” or persona being sought. But, in fact, all these choices are often quite earnest and intentional. This points to the question, what is “stable” here, in a cultural context that seems to privilege the personal, the spontaneous, the freely chosen? Practices can be chosen — that they are available entirely at one’s discretion seems to contradict the very idea of a practice as traditionally conceived: to be engaged in a practice, to do it the “right way,” seems to require that certain things are beyond individual choice. Even in these situations the concept of a “practice” seems to remain crucial. As was noted, even activities of choice, transformation, and critique of the conservatism of certain practices — and certainly the viability of any alternative set of practices — would still be *practices*, practices that would require some stability and perpetuation over time, and hence practices that would require the initiation of new participants into them. Thus the question to be answered is whether there is a way of thinking about practices, and our ways of *learning* and *coming to enact them*, which is liberating, and not merely (in the pejorative sense) “conserving” or reproductive.

One may distinguish activities, games, practices and rituals. There are “family resemblances,” to use a Wittgensteinian term, between these. Indeed, there are cases in which it is not completely clear to which category a particular kind of human doing belongs (as there are possibly more intermediate cases one could distinguish). But they are all one or other kind of “practice”. A different way to think about “practice” might consist in emphasizing (1) how they are learned — for instance through imitation, initiation, instruction and so forth; and (2) how they are enacted. In both cases one’s *relation* to the practices in which one is engaged becomes crucial — that is, how one is brought into it, and how one contributes to it. The practice, viewed in relation to human actors, cannot simply be seen in intrinsic terms. This model examines the interrelation between the nature of the activity and how people think about and act within the practice. For example, practices may be learned, or enacted, in an unreflective, ritualistic way; they may be performed as a strategy

of conforming; they may be occupied or enacted ironically; they may be learned, or enacted, as a way of transforming them, or as a way of portraying them as objects of reflection and questioning; or they may be learned, or enacted, as part of a process of perfecting them, excelling at them. To be sure, the particular type of practice has features that tend to promote one or another way of learning or enacting them. There is a *relation* here, but it is a reciprocal one. There are practices that are in essence conservative (as folklore activities), and others that are directed at change (as the conventions of debate over the introduction a new law); there are more rigid (the performance of a classic piece of medieval music) and more flexible practices (the work of an artist like Andy Warhol); some practices are more critical, while others do not tolerate any kind of questioning. There is a normative core to practices, but in a sense different from MacIntyre's, because interpretation and adaptation is always a potential within them.

There is usually a right and a wrong way of enacting practices. For instance, in order to look "cool" one must dress in a particular way and have one's hair done according to one or another fashion. But this can be a very subtle exercise. *Too much* effort might negate it; a practice that might be "cool" when one person does it may not be seen as such when another does. The right kind of touch is needed. The expectations of others are crucial. Part of learning a practice involves *practicing*. But here too the matter is complex. While sometimes it is clear what belongs to a practice, in other cases it is not. For instance in learning to play the piano one may have to practice certain boring and repetitive drills that are in no way "musical," but that are essential to learning how to produce musical sounds. Practicing needs to be handled carefully, as too much of these technical exercises might endanger seriously one's enjoyment of the practice and even kill off one's motivation for playing. In other cases it is not clear where the boundaries lie. For instance, is sharpening knives part of the practice of being a cook? Is baking part of it? In many cooking schools, novices do nothing but chop vegetables at the prep table. Does this teach them to be chefs? Analyzing the specifically different ways of learning and enacting such practices (or practicing) can help us to answer such questions, because these may vary from person to person and context to context. Such variations can be said to *change* the practices (into mere rituals, for example); but it is equally true that changes to the nature of a practice invite or encourage or discourage different ways of learning or enacting it. Both directions of influence are important.

Leaving simple activities and rituals for a moment aside, and focusing on practices, the comparison with learning to play a game may be instructive. Many things youngsters get involved with are not practices in any of the senses previously described. Of course, there are different games. There is "playing house", a game often played by very young children where fantasy and creativity are at the heart and rule following is in some sense minimal, versus organized professional sports, where the opposite tends to be the case. Though some kinds of games are first played just for the enjoyment, without the need to be excellent, this concern may come to the fore at some point (one may think of the Olympics as an example, which also brings in wider issues such as how practices become commercialized and institutionalized spectacles). The game may change from informal and not particularly goal-driven to something beyond itself. What changes is the relation to the activity, something that does not lie simply within the practice itself but in the aesthetic and moral components that go with it. With such changes, practicing, and all that goes with that, may tend to become more rigorous and teleological.

Another dimension of the relation that a practice encourages or discourages through different ways of learning or enacting it, is how it is intertwined with our *self* and sense of *identity*, on the one hand, and our *relations* and ways of *interacting* with other people, on the other hand. Here the way we identify with particular practices, and to what extent, is at stake. Some practices thrive on the possibility of multiple or alternative identities; others exemplify and enforce a more static identity. In both cases our relations to others and to ourselves will be changed. Practices transform the self, but at the same time there may be subversions of a practice that give opportunities to the self. This account is intended to balance against an excessive boundlessness and an inherent conservatism. Sometimes the way the practice is enacted encourages a

particular “interpretation”; sometimes it helps to distance oneself from it. As practices have the potential to deepen one’s engagement with them, they clearly have educational relevance and potential. As modes of engagement it becomes clear how central they are for education. What for one person is a practice may for someone else be merely a ritual. At heart is the issue how practices are reproduced and sustained over a period of time.

If this line of argument has any credibility at all, it resonates with the category of the *narrative* which Taylor, MacIntyre and many others refer to. If we want to engage people with some narratives that we consider more important than others (say, moral or aesthetic ones), a possible foothold could be found in the informal practices children find themselves in. Indeed, the whole area of informal education may become more important in this regard, and the activities of schooling much less so. There are questions to be dealt with here concerning how narrativization shapes one’s *relation to the practice*. This would shed light on how some of the predominant narratives today (performativity, individualism, estrangement from tradition, and the like) are threatening the rich and robust significance of certain practices. Narrativization also involves how a practice becomes aestheticized, how it is given moral weight, how it comes to be seen as having a history behind it, how it becomes an object of excellence/perfectibility.

Finally, there are those narratives which can give rise to a more critical/reflective relation to a practice (which we want to call “education *about* a practice” and not just “education *into* a practice”), and how these can revitalize practices and promote a more liberating relation to them. The processes of narrativization create the possibility of framing practices in relatively static or dynamic terms; they can influence who gets to adjudicate or interpret the rules (implicit or explicit) of a practices — and who gets to propose new rules or norms. Most important of all, these processes of narrativization play a crucial role in how one views the practice itself: whether, on the one hand, they are viewed as historical, cultural constructs and conventions (that have a trajectory, that have changed, and that will change), or whether, on the other hand, they are seen as necessary, natural, inevitable — and hence as unquestionable. Practices have reasons behind them, even, if these are not always made explicit, for they could not have the stability and permanence they do without them — but these are reasons that also can be reexamined and questioned.

Before dealing with the question whether child-rearing can still be seen as a “practice” in the amended version that was argued for, it may be interesting to have a closer look at some examples of initiatives that are taken in this area and more generally at the kind of educational research that is supposed to warrant particular interventions.

### **3. State-intervention and the discourse of experts and educational researchers**

If the characterizations offered in section one concerning society in general and the way parents find themselves in it can be endorsed some further issues press themselves forward. There is not only in education and child-rearing as in other spheres of human interaction a general tendency for more laws and codes of conduct (in Belgium for instance as a result of among other things the Dutroux case), in other words a climate to settle disagreements in a court of law, there is at the same time a tendency to call upon experts for all kind of matters of teaching and child-rearing. The performativity that swept the world in many contexts, that invaded public services, for instance hospitals and post offices, and that continued its destructive consequences within the walls of the school, is now spreading its deplorable effects into the area of child-rearing. It is nourished by the illusion that all problems can be solved or their negative effects at least lessened and that there are experts who know how to do that. Further ammunition is found in the idle rhetoric of much empirical educational research that is embraced by the experts and that is supposed to give a foundation for their interventions. Thus performativity rules on the level of the practitioner (the output characteristics on various scales of behaviour of the children), on the level of the experts (the effectiveness of their interventions concerning the behaviour of the practitioners), and even on the level of educational

research (with its shibboleths of “generalizability” and “ranking and impact factors”). Notwithstanding the criticism from academics in the educational community, many governments have adopted in matters of schooling the language of output and school effectiveness. Something similar is now bound to happen (and is already to some extent happening) in the sphere of child-rearing. Talk of parenting skills and moreover parenting courses ordered by a court of law make abundantly clear the general trust many seem to have to be able to control the challenging area of child-rearing and to do away with all or at least most of the risks this human endeavour confronts one with.

I will briefly sketch two examples that exemplify the problems I have in mind. 1). A recent study (see *Public Health*) by Sturm (Rand Corp.) analyzed U.S. government data of people who reported their own weights and heights. Participants were categorized as severely or morbidly obese if they had a body mass index of 40 or higher. About 3 % of people, or 6,8 million adults of the U.S.A. are in this category (up 24 % compared to 2000) – and this is probably even an underestimation, as people usually underreport their weight (Sturm suggests that 5 % is probably more correct). George Blackburn (Harvard Medical School) commenting on this, calls it a catastrophe, as the disability, the discrimination and the health care costs for this population are enormous. I would like to combine this observation with the following debate that recently took place in the U.K. In February 2007 Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt (U.K.) has expressed concern about the case of Connor McCreddie (an eight-year-old boy who weights 89 kg). His mother, Nicola McKeown, has been called to a child protection conference with the local authority. Connor, from Wallsend, North Tyneside, has lost some weight, but still prefers processed food to fruit and vegetables. Family support may be offered, but the last resort would be for North Tyneside officials to place Connor into care. Mrs Hewitt backed the involvement of local services. She said: “As I understand it social services and children’s services are rightly very, very concerned about this boy, and are trying to make sure that they give him and his family every possible support in dealing with what is quite clearly a growing threat to this child’s health and happiness”. Mrs McKeown denied she is neglecting her son, and said he would be “skinny” if she had been. She said she had seen doctors, but no-one had actually stepped in to offer her help. She said that taking Connor into care would be “disastrous”. Dr Colin Waine, chairman of the National Obesity Forum, said that removing a child from their family could be justified (and refers to the great risk of diabetes and coronary illness and to the fact that his life expectancy is severely prejudiced).

2). In an interview with the BBC (31 August 2006) Tony Blair spoke about his plans to tackle social exclusion. After having indicated the policies such as the “Children’s Tax Credit” and the “New Deal” and “Sure Start” and the investment in local communities that according to the Prime Minister, have helped hundreds of thousands, millions of people, he continues: “ ... but you have always got to be looking at the next stage, and the next stage I think is to recognise that some families, maybe they have got drug and alcohol abuse problems, maybe it is a teenage mum who is not in a stable relationship, those families we tend to identify too late and intervene too late when the problem has already grown to an extent and then of course we spend tens of thousands of pounds, sometimes actually hundreds of thousands of pounds trying to deal with it”. When the interviewer refers to the fact that a lot of the evidence suggests that you need to be getting in there while the child is still in nappies, Blair replies: “Or pre-birth, even. You see I think if you look at this realistically and I think in some ways society has been a bit reluctant to face up to these questions fully for very obvious reasons, but let me try, and choose my words carefully, I mean in my view if you have a teenage mum who is not in a stable relationship then you have got a pretty good chance, it doesn’t follow absolutely - of course I’m not saying that, but there is a pretty good chance that that child will grow up in a difficult set of circumstances and then it maybe only at the age of 7 or 8 that the behavioural problems are so severe that something happens. Now perhaps we should be intervening far earlier making it clear that in those circumstances from a very early age there is going to be support but also some sense of discipline and framework put in place in order to make sure that that child gets a better start in life because I think if you talk, as I do, to teachers sometimes they will tell you, and I know it sounds almost crazy to say this, but at

age 3, 4, 5 they are already noticing the symptoms of a child that when they are 14 or 15 is out on the street causing mayhem”. And he continues: “Now for those that simply refuse to have any help we already have through the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation parenting orders, individual support orders and so on. So you have a range of sanctions there if you have to use ...” To the question whether he would lower the bar, as it were, for the point at which Social Services can go in and look at the welfare of the child, and perhaps removing that child from that situation, he answers: “Well I think that is one of the things you have got to look ... there is now a very clear body of evidence that you can predict reasonably accurately although nothing is 100%, but reasonably accurately - the kids and the families that are going to be difficult for the future”. To the suggestion that if one is not going to accept support, the child may be taken away, he answers: “Well you have got to look after the interests of the child. These are families, for example supposing you have got a family in which one parent or maybe two are heavy drug abusers of hard drugs. Do you just let the kid be brought up in that family with no help and no support, no intervention with the parents to say that your lifestyle is going to be a problem. Maybe the particular person as a result of the habit that they have got they are either into crime or prostitution. The child is being brought up in those circumstances. Now I don't think it is Big Brother to say look this is a situation in which this child is being put at risk in being brought up in a household where these problems exist and no-one is going in there to offer help and support and an intervention to say look you have got a problem here and you have got to take responsibility in dealing with this problem and if you are not prepared to take responsibility then we have got to try and make sure that the interests of the child are protected”.

Thus far two examples. Should these initiatives by the authorities be welcomed for the effects that can be anticipated? Or are the grounds on which these interventions are to be justified fatally flawed with presuppositions that many are not likely to accept or endorse? Incidentally, there are similar developments in Belgium and The Netherlands (see for instance the screening procedures by Kind en Gezin, Vlaanderen, concerning child-abuse and the Government Programme of the newly formed coalition in The Netherlands, Balkenende IV, section “Jeugd en Gezin” N° 8). On the one hand it is clear that a government should be worried about the physical and mental health of its population, but phrasing this bluntly and more or less exclusively in terms of costs is perhaps a bridge too far. And going the way of screening procedures to justify a “pre-emptive strike” is a route never mind the dismissal of the rhetoric of Big Brother one surely does not want to take. So what is worrying me in these examples is that a logic is presented where the avoidance of undesirable outcomes, that is even if these could be prevented, is used to justify whatever interference in people's lives. Moreover, as the conclusion that is supposedly to follow draws on the subject's approval that it is after all “in her best interest”. The rhetoric about “lifelong learning” and about “quality” too proceeds along these lines.

That a particular model of educational research is supposed to make all of this credible, i.e. an empiricist quasi-causal model of explaining human behaviour, goes without saying. But one seems to forget that an explanation is in this case not an argument (a logical structure with premises and conclusions governed by some rule of acceptance), but rather *a presentation of the conditions relevant to the occurrence of the event, and a statement of the degree of probability of the event given these conditions*. Moreover, in educational contexts it is not so much factors or elements that have to be studied as such, but the complex relationships between them, the problem is thus not only that it is impossible to foresee which new elements have to be taken into account. This does not mean that one should rule out causes or observed regularities when explaining human action - incidentally they too presuppose a meaningful context. But to give a causal explanation of human behaviour refers only to the fact that it is described in certain terms, in the same sense as an explanation that provides reasons presupposes a background of shared understanding. Some human actions may, therefore, be characterized in terms of causes and effects, but it may also be possible to give descriptions in terms of regularities (how antecedent variables go together with subsequent conditions) or to refer to reasons. One should indeed not forget that in causal or quasi-causal studies the relations are determined in terms of factors

(independent and dependent) that can be measured and manipulated in their constituent parts. What does not fit into this “experimental pattern” is simply left out. What is ignored here is that the different elements in their interaction with each other, create something new (which is not just the result of an addition or subtraction of variables seen as factors). Characteristic of an “interpretative model” on the other hand is that the meaning of its elements can only be determined by taken the whole picture into account and vice versa, that the meaning of the entity is not just the result of the summation of its constituent parts. Some activities may almost exclusively be understood by using one type of explanation, while in other cases several will be possible. Therefore, the questions of whether something is really explained or of whether what one argues for deals with “what is real” need not drive us back to a correspondence theory of truth, with reliance on sense data as its keystone. Instead, as Peter Winch rightly argues, it is always about “what is real for us”.

If the limitations of the causal or quasi-causal model are taken seriously, educational research can and should necessarily be characterized in terms of a pluralism of method and content (and not be exclusively of an empiricist quasi-causal or more general of an empirical nature). Much will depend on the problem that is studied but also on the kind of theoretical interest that one is pursuing. It is clear that there is a proper place for concerns of an ethical or religious nature, just as there can be an appropriate interest in more instrumental kinds of reasoning. Educational research should take into account (particular) societal developments, as various modes of life are involved (the religious, the educational, the social, etc.) and various principles (for example, rights and freedoms). The issue that is at stake has to be dealt with from a variety of theoretical stances. Furthermore—this is surely not an exhaustive list—whether or not the proposed measures work is another matter. It is evident that if an educational researcher studies an issue in the context of policy research, she will have to take particular empirical outcomes into consideration. The problem is that this is often the exclusive interest. Social research does not seem to give us fixed and universal knowledge of the social world as such, it rather contributes to the task of improving upon our practical knowledge of ongoing social life. This presupposes dialogue between all those involved. And when we realise that there are many and often highly contested versions of participants’ self-interpretations, we will also see that though such interpretations are the only plausible starting point, more is needed for good dialogical and social scientific practice. In the end, the explanation that is offered will have to be subjected to the community of researchers and scholars but also to practitioners—to be judged on the basis of whether it makes sense to say what is argued for, given “what is real for them”. And, evidently, it is at least in principle always possible to offer another explanation, referring to reasons, causes or regularities and applying theoretical insights (of differing qualities) from philosophy, history, aesthetics, etc. Structures of meaning have to be discovered in particular cases—something that is generally accepted within social science. Particular cases need to be understood in terms of their contexts. But this is no less true for the natural sciences, which require that all the relevant and possibly intervening factors will be taken into account. As it is always possible, in the case of social sciences, that practitioners will appreciate a particular situation differently, it is similarly possible in the context of natural sciences that new elements, which one was previously not aware of, or new mechanisms will present themselves. Furthermore, a parallel can be drawn between the creativity of the practitioner who “applies” insights and the demand for the scholar to raise creative questions and to offer inventive answers. It is, therefore, possible not only to give a place to what is newly discovered but also to reflect on new developments in what Wittgenstein calls our “form of life”. An example of this to focus on may be the recent demand for performativity, which so strongly characterises present-day society. This calls to mind that it is a particular task of philosophical reflection to remind us of the “bedrock” that underlies what we do, even though this may not be something of which we are fully aware in our conscious dealings.

It would be good to realize the limitations of empirical educational research in the area of child-rearing, being it quantitative or qualitative. There are issues which should be addressed from a broader theoretical interest which demands various “methods”. Here philosophy of education may contribute in at least three ways. First, philosophical analysis should concern itself with problems rooted in the use of language in

educational discourse. Though his task is not anymore that of a conceptual underlabourer, analytic techniques remain useful. Furthermore, philosophy of education should address the assumptions and values embedded in other disciplinary approaches in the study of education, whether these are explicitly promoted or tacitly assumed in policy and practice. Evidently, the debate between philosophy and other disciplines needs now to be an engagement on equal terms. Finally, it should engage in explorations of what education might be or might become. It can revisit but also problematize its canonical questions about such matters as the aims of education, the nature of knowledge and the point of particular curriculum subjects, about human nature and human practices. Reiterating a point I made earlier, such a stance can make it clear that there is something deeply worrying when attention is almost exclusively directed in educational research to means; where ends cannot be discussed anymore because of their to be avoided value-ladenness; where education and child-rearing have become a technology as well on the level of the practitioners as on that of the government. Parental skills may be helpful as far as they go. An almost exclusive attention to children's behaviour together with the advice of so-called experts who preach the effective means for certain ends, push many of the real important things concerning education to the background. We should therefore part company from the entrepreneurial manipulative educator to open up a sphere of responsiveness for the child. For these reasons we should revisit the concept of practice of child-rearing.

#### **4. Child-rearing still a practice nowadays? A tentative interpretation**

There is no point in romanticising education as it was in the good old days nor in trying to restore the past. Though the feeling of belonging to a family or to a community was probably much stronger in the past than it is now, there were also other sides to this life such as the fact that members were often prevented from exploring a wider range of possibilities in life (see Macmillan, 1994). Nor does one have to go back to medieval times to be appalled by the exploitative relationships that have often existed between adults and children. What may be witnessed in the contemporary Western world concerning child-rearing in an era of post-modernity?

First, it is assumed that, given the means of contraception and changed laws to liberalise abortion, most children are brought into the world voluntarily and intentionally by their parents. Second, most children are brought up by at least one of their parents and the majority by both. Though many marriages nowadays end in a divorce and granted that the number of single parents has considerably increased, the majority of children nevertheless have a relationship with both of their parents. Consequently, something like an "educational practice" is still very likely to occur in the context of the family. How can such a practice be characterised?

Normally, the bringing of a child into the world may be expected to indicate a willingness on the part of both parents to enter into a relationship with that child when it arrives. It goes without saying that for the parents this period in their lives will be one of deliberation and planning, for it is in the nature of human beings that what they do is a manifestation of their will and intentions rather than simply the result of something that happens to them. Deciding to have children brings with it a number of duties, such as bearing the cost, looking after them, living together with them at least until a certain age, sharing a number of material goods, being there when needed, being prepared to listen: in short, being prepared to care for them. That much seems uncontroversial but problems arise when decisions have to be made concerning for instance the amount of time or resources to be devoted to the children.

As is so often the case, it is easier to indicate what is not acceptable than to develop a positive account of what should be done. As studies concerning the right to state intervention show, it is far from clear what is in the child's best interests (see for instance De Ruyter, 1993). In cases of fostering and the placing of children in care or where the courts have to make decisions because divorced parents cannot come to an agreement and also in educational matters, a number of options may have to be considered, both because a number of

different means can often be taken to achieve a particular end and because there may be a wide divergence of opinion regarding the ends to be achieved in education and child-rearing. Such considerations make abundantly clear the unavoidable social embeddedness of education in general.

That a number of options are open does not imply that anything goes. Because human beings are as they are, human flourishing implies certain things. Though the end does not determine exhaustively what one has to do, there is a necessary relationship between the two. In this sense morality is necessarily instrumental to human needs without ever being reducible to them. This Aristotelian thought is relevant to the determination of the aims of education. Though individual and cultural plasticity is considerable, not everything can be brought into accord with our “nature”. But we can in this modern age reject our culture in ways that were impossible before. What is called pathological or deviant behaviour is, however, culturally determined and, whether one likes it or not, the judgement of others may play an important role in our personal well-being. Here again the necessarily social embeddedness of human life is evident.

In terms of parental practice this may seem to point to a necessary limitation in the structure of the family. The acceptance of pluralism at the level of society cannot be simply duplicated at the family level. While it is possible to accept that different conceptions of the good life exist, for the individual who leads a particular life, this is a merely cognitive acceptance. As that person decides to live with someone else as husband and wife, divergence of their beliefs is only to a certain extent possible. To care for one’s children means among other things to care for what they care for, and this will set limits to what is acceptable. It is difficult to love what is radically opposed to what one believes in, but it is hardly possible to live with what one hates. I stressed the limitation that is brought with this living close to each other (as opposed to living together but apart). It is possible that this will cause a problem for the child depending upon the kind of basic beliefs the parents hold and the extent to which they regard them as indisputable. But that may be thought a fair price to be paid for a life in which not everything is the same, a practice in which not all is indifferent, and in which a child’s existence is embedded.

Some means-end reasoning, and some manipulation may be part of the context of giving meaning to life. Children cannot be taught everything rationally. Parents have a duty to prevent their children from destroying their lives or their future as long as society places children in their charge. Parental apathy must surely sometimes be blamed when children fail to develop a sense of what is morally acceptable. To remain indifferent to everything children do is, in an important sense, to neglect them. Although it may be difficult to determine in abstract terms what is “in” and what is “out”, in particular cases this does not usually seem to present grave problems. Though society may sometimes need to bring either parents or children to reason, differences between them in matters of great importance do not arise that often, or may frequently turn out to be of less dramatic significance than at first appears. We must, however, sometimes also expect that, in deciding what belongs to the good life certain contradictions may ultimately remain, tragically, irreconcilable. Such is unavoidably the nature of human life.

Given the lack of social consensus concerning what is valuable, it is important for parents to make clear what is important and valuable for them in their way of life, and why. For even where values ultimately turn out to be misguided and are later abandoned, the process of criticism and moral development cannot begin unless some concept of the good, the right and the valuable has first been experienced. The justification for the initiation into particular values thus depends upon what parents have found valuable themselves. Parents are necessarily – and perhaps again tragically – limited by who they are themselves in their offerings to their children. To ask for a justification beyond this point is to enter a circular debate. It goes without saying, however, that together with making explicit their adherence to particular beliefs, parents must be careful to indicate also that other alternatives are possible, but that these do not appeal to *them*. Making explicit what one stands for will be *the* response to keeping the process of valuing ongoing. Extreme cases aside, constant intervention to “improve” family life is difficult to justify. Such monitoring of human relationships not only

carries with it the danger of suffocating all spontaneity and truth to oneself, but it does not seem to be either necessary or, in many cases, possible given the lack of social consensus referred to earlier. Though things might be different in a particular family, changing them may not necessarily be for the better nor may the present situation be seriously harmful for children in general. Education and upbringing are essentially embedded both within the fabric of everyday family life and in the life and practices of the wider community of which the family forms a part. This will be particularly so where the family enjoys religious affiliation with its own assumptions and values in relation to family life and the rearing of children.

The educational practice of parents could be described as a relationship that people have sought themselves, in which they are prepared to invest much of their time, resources and themselves, and which makes them proud of “what they have made” of their children and feel deep sorrow if their children cannot lead satisfactory lives. The relationship they have themselves engaged in is in some sense also in fact “for the rest of their natural life”. How can they not care about what their children care for and the values they live by without their own lives being fraudulent? The tension this creates between their own autonomy and the envisaged autonomy for their children makes it a difficult, but also a particularly worthwhile human experience. This may not have altered over time, but the certainty parents once thought they possessed, has had to be reconciled with the fact that ultimately our most fundamental beliefs are without foundations. Economic necessity has also been lessened (there were no alternatives for children in the past) and the belief that children are persons and not merely *potentially* persons has been widely accepted. The idea among parents that one was always right combined with being in authority almost exclusively based on physical and economic power, has generally been replaced by a sense of reasonable but by no means mindless doubt.

Though liberals may sometimes question the right of parents to impose their way of life on children in this manner, it is a central tenet of the liberal outlook, both that many versions of the good life are possible and that among such versions there is no definite criterion of choice. At very least, there must be a presumption that many chosen ways of life (secular or religious) are of sufficient moral value for it to be permissible for children to be brought up according to their values, customs and traditions. Even in these post-foundational times, however, this assumption may be defeasible in relation to the child-rearing practices of some groups and it may sometimes be thought reasonable for a humane, caring state to intervene where such practices appear demonstrably inhumane, oppressive or corrupting. It is sometimes thought a difficulty for the liberal point of view that the liberal is obliged to hold that such upbringing must be compatible with the child’s eventually becoming capable of autonomous choice (Hobson, 1984; McLaughlin, 1984) On the face of it, a fundamentalist might reasonably retort “Never mind her autonomy. Her salvation is more important. The weasel words of the liberal are the seductions of the devil”. It is disingenuous of liberals to deny that there is something of a problem here, obliging them to fall back on their own fundamental assumption that we enter the world as separate and equal beings and that the right to choose a way of life which is assumed by the parent cannot ultimately be denied the child, either by physical coercion or by indoctrination or the denial of access to education and wider knowledge. This is the burden of the oft-quoted American case of *Yoder versus Wisconsin*. In support of his position the liberal may also point out that for many faiths it is important that the believer should not only follow the religious precepts but should choose to do so voluntarily. She may also add with Mill (1910) that if a way of life is truly good, any additional knowledge, speculation or enquiry is bound to strengthen rather than undermine it.

In the modern world in which the life of children will rarely resemble what that of their parents has been, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents to envisage a precise future for their offspring. Nor is it any longer appropriate to regard their parental role as one in which they are obliged always to be right as well as possessing absolute power and authority, though they may be as aware as ever that what they do for their children will make a significant difference to their lives.

The answer to the question whether child-rearing can still be seen as a practice should in my opinion be positive. The practice parents initiate their children in encompasses the complex network of relations with others, the values they and others live by, the many activities that make up for them a worthwhile life. These spheres of interaction are rule governed and what is “taught” is not only the how of it, but at the same time the judging and ways of acting that continuously takes place. They deliver the necessary elements that make self-descriptions possible together with the implicit understanding on which social practices rely. In some sense these are conserving, at the same time, because of the way they are learned and enacted, they make other things possible and have their critical potential overall written into them.

Child-rearing should therefore still be seen as a practice in the account that has been argued for. Governments and experts should do well to be reluctant to intervene in the social practices that have developed. This is not to argue that anything goes nor that advice can never be sought, but to insist on the complexities that have to be taken into account which surpass a discourse of effectiveness and output as well as codes of conduct and rulings of courts of law. Talk of skills and behaviour in this context destroys what is really at stake: to lead a meaningful life, to be initiated into what is ‘real for us’ and what we value. Philosophy of education should not give up to correct the one-sided picture that society now dictates. To give people the space to do that is what is truly the consequence of Cavell’s argument to give a voice to all those who are involved. It is beyond costs and benefits and beyond the rhetoric of the entrepreneurial self. Only restoring such a place for child-rearing as a practice will do justice to the responsiveness each child is entitled to.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on previous work done in collaboration with (in alphabetical order) Nick Burbules, Michael Peters, Jim Macmillan, Jim Marshall and Colin Wringe.