

attending to and appraising critically important principles, theories and values for exploration, assessment and judgment, will find material in Wain's work that will be of signal assistance to them in their studies, research and writing. It is for their use that Wain has been working.

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There is an abundance of thought-provoking themes in Kenneth Wain's *The Learning Society in a Postmodern World*, and in a short colloquium contribution such as this I can address only a selected few of these, and then only in an initial way. I'll proceed by commenting first of all on the historical context in which the author places the book's arguments and critiques. Then I will take up just a few issues that have struck myself as particularly significant, and offer a few points of my own on these. In conclusion, I will comment on what Wain discerns as the best prospects for educational action in our times.

A welcome feature of the book is the historical review in the first two chapters of the fortunes of the lifelong education movement since the late 1960s. That review underlines the movement's democratic and humanist character in its early years, calling attention to an informal but influential sponsorship of lifelong education at that time by bodies like UNESCO. This is contrasted with the economic-vocationalist character of the lifelong *learning* movement which the lifelong education movement subsequently became, particularly under the auspices of bodies like the European Commission and the OECD. The recasting of ideas and realignment of

energies that brought about this major shift are perceptively traced by Wain, with frequent reference to the major policy documents that helped to promote that shift, thereby dispossessing a broader international constituency of practitioners, scholars and politicians of an effective voice in policymaking. In addition to a shift in substance, Wain also calls attention to a shift in philosophical ethos—from a broadly utopian one embodying the aspirations of a democratic modernity in the 1960s and 1970s, to an essentially pragmatist one in the 1980s and eventually to one expressing key features of a fragmented postmodern condition, governed by the values of consumerism and by a rule of performativity. He correctly points out that the ‘reassuring sprinklings of social democracy’ in the official ‘learning society’ documents of the nineties (e.g. Cornelis *et al.*, 1994; European Commission, 1995) do not alter the fact that the production of such documents, and of policies based on them, mark the demise of the lifelong education movement as an educational one. The detailed investigations in Wain’s opening chapters furnish valuable insights into how an inspirational idea can get distorted, or harnessed to contrary purposes, amid the crooked paths of history. These investigations also provide some salutary lessons for how policies and practices in lifelong education might be advanced in the future.

Among the major philosophers with whose arguments Wain engages at length are Alasdair MacIntyre, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, John Dewey and Michel Foucault. I will confine myself to a few points in his engagements with MacIntyre and Foucault. The most familiar criticism of MacIntyre’s often-cited ‘idea of an educated public’ (MacIntyre, 1987) is that it restricts that public to a minority: an intelligentsia conscious of its own standing and responsibilities in society, sharing a broadly similar background of assumptions and informed convictions which arise largely from being schooled in a broadly similar range of canonical texts. From his readings of MacIntyre’s later works, and particularly *Dependent Rational Animals* (MacIntyre, 1999), Wain shows however that MacIntyre’s views on education are not as exclusive as this. The ‘educated public’ idea, Wain argues, can be seen as just one element of ‘MacIntyre’s learning community’. The latter, Wain continues, ‘which is small and local and more intimate and morally and intellectually coherent than a local society, has three kinds of members: educated, independent practical reasoners, and dependent. The first reason about ends, the second about means and the third reason through the proxy of the other members’, (p. 133). Although one could argue with the neatness of the demarcations drawn here (MacIntyre’s more so than Wain’s), the prominence now given to independent practical reasoning by MacIntyre (and by Wain) is the more important issue to note. The educational import of independent practical reasoning, Wain points out, can be seen in MacIntyre’s suggestion that this capability lies potentially within everyone’s grasp (p. 133). It is not something confined to a minority of intellectuals. Wain sees a philosophically fresh warrant, or mandate, for ‘lifewide’ learning here, specifically in the ‘collective responsibility of the community to ensure the lifelong education of its members’ (p. 132). How far this warrant can extend remains questionable however, if, as MacIntyre seems to hold, such reasoning will be about means as distinct from ends. Wain, as I understand him, includes ends as well as means

under independent practical reasoning and rightly sees a significance in this warrant that MacIntyre's limitations on such reasoning might not have even conceived.

Now there is, in my view, a necessity to distinguish between the properly educational practices called for to pursue such a warrant fruitfully, and the incisive political arts required to secure the scope and freedom to engage in such practices. The distinction is not a watertight one of course, any more than is the distinction, say, between medical practice (as conducted by medical practitioners) and the politics of medicine (as conducted by medical practitioners and many others). But the point of the distinction between educational practice and a politics of education is no less real, though considerably less obvious, than in the case of medicine. *The Learning Society in a Postmodern World* carries out intensive investigation of political arts, including those involved in a politics of hope and a politics of suspicion. Despite Wain's probing explorations of educationally relevant points in central works of recent contemporary Western philosophy, I haven't been able to discern in the book a distinction like the one I have just drawn: one that would mark education as an undertaking that is distinct from politics, or at least with a politics of its own distinct kind and with its own arena; a politics arising primarily from the deliberate cultivation of learning over a sustained period, focusing on the actions that help or hinder such cultivation, and on the justification of such actions.

Whether there is here a contrast of emphasis or a more substantial difference between Kenneth Wain's position and my own, including our appraisals of MacIntyre's import for education, remains to be seen, but it may be worth offering a few comments to open up this issue. In the distinction I've drawn in the previous paragraph I'm consciously turning away from a recurring point of controversy in MacIntyre's account of things. That point is his tendency to cherish as a virtue the capacity of a particular community of learners, or tradition of learning, to engage in conflict with 'rival' communities or traditions. Whatever its merits in other arenas, I believe such an agonistic impulse beclouds the more central issues in education, particularly if it occupies the foreground of thought and discourse. John Dewey sought to show to a largely unheeding world, most succinctly in his late work *Experience and Education* (1938), that there are kinds of teaching and learning that distinguish experience which is genuinely educational from that which is not. The heart of my own argument is that such kinds of teaching and learning (and their wide diversity still reveals a detectable family resemblance) earn the right for education to be called a practice with an integrity of its own. MacIntyre's insistence that teaching is not a practice, that it is merely a means (Dunne & MacIntyre, 2002), concludes otherwise. This conclusion separates means from ends in interpersonal actions; a separation which astute educators intuitively see as perilous, even foolhardy. The conclusion also fits smoothly with a paternalistic view that teachers are troopers, without a share in the kinds of decision-making entrusted to leaders. I'll leave that issue for now.

Of all the authors he engages with, the figure to whom Kenneth Wain comes closest in drawing his own conclusions is Michel Foucault (pp. 306–320). More precisely, this is the late Foucault who, while not renouncing his earlier emphasis on resistance, combat and suspicion, now gives a new importance to positive human

agency; particularly through the cultivation of qualities such as self-mastery (as distinct from a normalised self), care of the self (including an ‘undisabling’ care for others), and truth-telling (*parrhesia*). The late Foucault’s stance is characterised by Wain as one of tactical anarchism: one that resists the urge to construct a positive theory (either of government or of the learning society) and remains similarly averse to the lure of utopias and ‘master narratives’. Foucault’s ‘imperative’ as Wain calls it, retains a critical focus on unmasking the workings of power, particularly knowledge-as-power and the practices of learning that it institutionalises. To say that there is something visionary in this imperative is to speak plainly, but also perhaps to speak dangerously, and draw criticisms from postmodernists who detect in any talk of vision in education either a delusion or a potentially oppressive ‘master narrative’. But undisabling doesn’t happen on its own. Neither does it happen through commending it in philosophical writings. Anything like undisabling involves practices—of certain kinds rather than others—that help to bring it about, and to sustain it through youth, adulthood and old age. To be committed to the undisabling of oneself and of others is to move vigilantly beyond critique and to venture into arenas of practice; whether of politics, of education, or any other field of action. It is to recognise moreover that different arenas require different capacities and moral energies, not the least of which might be the capability to do battle with some restraint when, to the best of one’s judgement, the occasion calls for it.

Of course the fallibility of such judgement stands ever in need of perceptive insights. *The Learning Society in a Postmodern World* is replete with these and richly repays successive readings. At the same time, recalling a point I made briefly above, practices that are educational before they are anything else require of course incisive understanding and critically informed judgement. But they also stand continually in need of something further; not of theory to be sure, but of suggestive ideas and memorable examples. These might be discovered, sometimes in unexpected ways, among practitioners themselves, especially in whose practice inspirations remain thoroughly alive. More painstakingly, they may also be yielded by a philosophical literature that is often, and rather myopically, decried as ‘consensualist’ at present—namely the philosophical literature on dialogue. But that is work for another occasion.

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