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FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE, TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE MANIPULATION OF BELIEFS

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Introduction

In this paper I will argue that Hirst's idea of forms of knowledge has a vital contribution to make to the education of teachers. In his 1965 paper, 'School Education and the Nature of Knowledge' (Hirst, 1974), Hirst argued that there are seven distinct forms of knowledge, each with its own unique concepts, distinctive logical structure, testability against experience and unique methods of testing. These seven forms of knowledge were mathematics, the physical sciences, the human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy and moral knowledge. My paper, however, is not an attempt to reinstate forms of knowledge as such, as these have been effectively criticised in the literature (Barrow 1976, Pring 1976, Watt 1974). Rather, I wish to consider a feature of Hirst's argument little noticed in the literature, namely, that he proposed the existence of forms of knowledge as part of his attempt to give content to, and justify, a liberal education. In effect, he developed the notion of 'forms of knowledge' as part of an educational strategy to avoid, or minimise, the manipulation of beliefs. It is my contention that, if we as teacher educators are to properly sensitise student teachers to the dangers of indoctrination and belief manipulation inherent in their classroom practice, we need to introduce them to the problems that forms of knowledge were thought to solve and how the notion of a 'form of knowledge' can be suitably amended to provide a truly satisfactory solution. I should stress that my amendment to 'forms of knowledge' is not how Hirst himself has developed his notion in response to criticism. Rather, it is the outcome of my reflection of what of merit survives once the criticisms of the notion have been taken into account.

A Liberal Education

Hirst puts the search for a content for a liberal education in the context of how to find an education that was not grounded solely in the values that reflect the interests of some minority group (p. 32). Thus, he says, 'arises the demand for an education whose definition and justification are based on the nature and significance of knowledge itself, and not on the predilections of pupils, the demands of society, or the whims of politicians (p.32).

Hirst himself then proceeds to deal with a liberal education as if its purpose is the development of the rational mind. The purpose of having a rational mind can itself be questioned. Hirst gives two answers to this question. The first is his notorious transcendental justification of the rational mind, to the effect that 'to question the pursuit of any kind of rational knowledge is itself self-defeating, for the questioning itself depends on accepting the very principle whose use is finally being called into question' (p.42). I will not examine this justification here. His second justification is that it is an education that 'frees the mind from error and illusion' (p.43). It is an education that enables us to gain "objectivity". "Objectivity" here is an objectivity that is not obtained when education is grounded in values that reflect the interests of some minority group rather than in an understanding of the nature of knowledge itself. Now, Hirst himself does not make the point explicitly, but I believe it to be a permissible interference to conclude from the overall direction of his argument, that failure to understand the nature of knowledge makes people more susceptible to accepting values that reflect the interest of minority groups, that is, it makes them more liable to exploitation. A liberal education, then, is not only justified because it develops the rational mind, but the development of the rational mind is itself further justified because those who possess a rational mind possess something that is of moral significance. If we lack a rational mind we are more likely to treat other people unfairly, to lend ourselves to practices that injure the interests of some for the unjust benefit of others.

If we understand Hirst's enterprise in these terms then we are well-placed to understand why he thought a liberal education required that there be forms of knowledge and how to reform his arguments so that we can both give content to, and justify, a liberal education.

Forms of Putative Knowledge

Hirst's forms of knowledge cover all the kinds of putative knowledge claim that a person might advance. They are, in a sense, forms of putative knowledge in that they cover all the kinds of claim in which a person might pretend to authority or expertise, that is, to knowledge. Every belief falls under one of these forms. If anyone wished to manipulate the beliefs of other people for some political goal or other, then all the beliefs they might try to manipulate would be in one of these forms of belief. Manipulating the beliefs of people can be one way of trying to exploit them if exploitation here is taken to apply to cases where you try to get them to act in accord with your political ideals by means that you would not want other people to use on you to get you to adopt their political ideals, that is, what I call 'unfair' or 'unjust' means. Plato is one example of such an unjust manipulator. So is Rousseau. Each of them has a political ideal they wish others to follow, and each is prepared to use methods that they would not want others to be able to use in the cause of competing ideals.

If one, then, is going to exploit others by the manipulation of their beliefs, then one will want to use most, if not all, of the seven forms of belief that Hirst has identified and, in particular, one will want to ensure that people are prevented from investigating the epistemological status of the beliefs one teaches them in any particular form, or, if they do investigate them, from being inclined to act on this knowledge.

This means that one will want to discourage them from asking whether the form of belief of which some claim is a member, is a form of knowledge or not. This is because their being exploited is dependent on their holding as true either a belief that could be shown to be false if they knew how to test its truth or, alternatively, a belief that can be shown neither to be true nor false because there is no public and repeatable test for its truth. If they are able to investigate the epistemological status of the claims that underpin one's exploitative activities, and they are inclined to act on these, then one's power to exploit them disappears. If one could hide from people the epistemological status of each of Hirst's seven forms, one would be well-placed to manipulate their beliefs so that they accepted one's political ideal. This is best demonstrated by going through each of the seven forms.

Science

A scientific claim is a claim that some law-like generalisation correctly describes the physical behaviour of things. As such, its truth or falsity is best determined by empirical observation under controlled conditions that are sufficiently various to eliminate all plausible competing generalisations, given the state of knowledge of the time. It may well be that the generalisations that best survive such tests are quite compatible with one's political ideals. If one is prepared to exploit others to achieve those ideals, that is, use unjust means to get others to adopt and follow one's ideals, then one will want to ensure that people are taught false generalisations that foster one's ideal rather than the truth. In order to be able to do this, one will have to deceive them about the epistemological status of scientific claims or, if this is not done, deceive them about the nature of the tests done. This means teaching science in an indoctrinatory manner, giving students the idea that what makes a scientific claim true, for example, is that it is uttered by authorities claimed 'scientific' or 'the State', without also getting them to think about the basis of that authority. This is presumably the kind of thing that happened in Russia in the Lysenko affair. Alternatively, one could try to hide from students the full authority that certain claims have in terms of the consensus among appropriately qualified experts who have researched the area, as is the case in the argument of 'young earth creationists'. Plato, for example, would try to restrict scientific expertise to people who had shown their docility and loyalty to his political ideal by having passed through his exhaustive selection process. Even if those who are going to be rulers eventually come to realise that what they thought were scientific truths were in fact lies, they would only have been allowed to become rulers because they

were the kinds of people who would accept the need for the Noble Lie to preserve party power, that is, protect the interests of a section of society over those of the rest, granted that it is in the interests of everyone to be treated as fully an autonomous agent as anyone else. Plato, then, sees the method for obtaining his political ideal to be to play on the ability of rational people to form beliefs on the basis of evidence by manipulating the evidence, by somehow controlling all aspects of information flow so that people appear to themselves to be arriving at independent rational beliefs that bind them to obedience to the rulers when, in fact, their access to information has been manipulated to produce exactly that result. Rousseau criticises Plato for this approach.

In Rousseau's view, the wrong information is too likely to get in and, as long as people can think for themselves, thereby could lead them to reject the official story and thereby lead to the failure of the ideal. Rousseau wants to change people's desires so that their overwhelming desire is to obey the law because they have come to see the law as inescapable and as one they have imposed on themselves. It would not matter then, once they were in this condition, if they discovered that the political ideal rested on false scientific generalisations because they would want to follow the political law more than they would want to believe truth. What is crucial, however, is that they are not allowed to reason about what makes scientific claims true or false before the fifteen years of conditioning from birth have had their effect. Keep them ignorant of reasoning about the relative merits of differing scientific claims until then is Rousseau's advice.

Hirst, by contrast, would be encouraging children to examine any law-like generalisation they are offered and work out what would count as an appropriate test for it, and, within their age limits, test it. He would expect them to think about what a person had to do to become an "authority" or "expert" about such laws and encourage them to believe only those laws that appropriate bodies of such experts had accepted really were laws. None of this is designed to get them to pursue any particular political ideal, other than the ideal that they be autonomous agents free to adopt ideals without unfair manipulation.

History

Historical claims are claims about what happened in the past. They are tested by empirical observation in much the same way as with science in that hypotheses are formed on the basis of previous knowledge about what happened in the past, predictions are made as to what residues of the past will be found under particular conditions, and then checked. Claims about the past are not identical, however, with law-like generalisations about the physical behaviour of things, that is, they are logically distinct set of claims. If one wishes to get people to adopt a political ideal, then teaching false beliefs about the past may be effective, as may ensuring that they do not understand the epistemological status of historical claims. Winston Smith, in *Brave New*

World, helps Big Brother exploit the citizens by his re-writes of history in the Ministry of Truth. This is precisely the kind of Noble Lie that Plato would have supported, when he has Homer's stories of disgraceful acts of the heroes censored. Rousseau too, would control the beliefs children get from history, by eliminating it from the curriculum altogether. He does this because history provides children with contrasting models of human behaviour, encouraging them to think about right and wrong, leading them to challenge the teacher to justify why one model is better than another instead of just coming to experience that this model is as natural and as inescapable as the law of gravity.

Hirst would adopt a different approach to history teaching, and the role of history in the community. He would encourage children to examine claims about the past and think about how these could be tested, in the sense of eliminating conflicting claims. He would get children to think about what a person would have to do become an 'expert' or an 'authority' on some aspect of the past and how they might be able to distinguish those with a legitimate claim to expertise from those without it. He would then encourage them to accept as the best account of the past that one that has the consensus of the largest group of the most appropriate expertise.

Human Sciences

Human scientific claims are claims about the law-like generalisation that explain the behaviour of rational agents, either individually or groups. Such claims are tested by hypothesising what such agents would do under particular circumstances, given a particular account of rationality, then observing whether this occurs, as well as applying similar procedures to eliminate alternative hypothesis. Sociological, economic, psychological and anthropological generalisations fall into this category.

Such claims can be used to foster political ideals eg. claims about the IQs of negroes, or of working class children, or of women. Plato would be prepared to teach false versions of such claims, or to mislead his community about their epistemological status by getting people to believe that such claims could be based on the authority of 'supposed' experts but not providing them with the opportunity to understand on what this authority was based.

Rousseau would refuse to let children be exposed to such generalisations before their conditioning into accepting Rousseau's political ideal as their own freely accepted and inescapable law had finished. Rousseau is totally opposed to reasoning with children. People should only be allowed to reason in a critical sense when it is safe for them to do so, that is, Rousseau, like Hume, treats reason as a slave of the passions. Once the goal of the passion has been established, that is, once the end or purpose of reasoning is fixed, then reason is to be allowed to determine means to that goal. It is not, however, allowed to be exercised at a stage where its consideration of the truth or falsity of claims, or the grounds for them, might challenge the goal itself.

Hirst, by contrast, would get the children to think about these kinds of generalisations much as he would with science and history, thereby reducing the likelihood that they would go along with a political ideal that discriminated against a class, race or sex.

Religion

Religious claims, in so far as they are not subsumable under historical or scientific claims, are claims about what lies beyond space and time, what lies beyond test or check by the senses. Such claims, therefore do not seem candidates for the status of knowledge in that competing claims cannot be adjudicated between in terms of public and repeatable tests that do not presuppose the truth of the very claims being tested. Nonetheless, such claims can be used to manipulate people into acceptance of a political ideal, as Plato advocates on the Republic. The myth of the four metals is a religious myth designed to produce acceptance of one's social status, that is, it provides a further support for the pseudo-sociological claim that talents are distributed on a class basis. Religion, then, can be used to re-inforce the power of the rulers by a set of stories, including promise of reward and punishment, that lead people to obedience to the desired political ideal.

Rousseau deliberately omits religious claims from the child's education. His reason for this is to ensure that children are able to handle the diversity of religious faiths in the world when confronted with them. They should not have been told a religion, only to have their confidence in the teller undermined when their reason operates on the fact that other equally sensible people as the teller believe quite different things.

Literature and the Arts

Literature and the Arts are vehicles for the manipulation of people in that they express a particular conception of some aspect of the world, and convey a particular emotional response to it. This means that the exploiters can use them to expose children (and adults) to a conception of some aspect of the world and ensure that this expression conveys the particular emotional response the exploiters want (either positive or negative). This is the reason why Plato is so concerned with drama, music and dance. If the rulers want to develop in people a sense of obedience, self-control, restraint, then the music and dance of the society have to be monitored to ensure that this is its effect. People cannot be allowed to feel that they have a right to respond to the world in music and dance in their own way, particularly if it is unrestrained and uncontrolled.

Rousseau has similar concerns. Emile cannot be told the fable of the Fox and the Crow because he might draw the wrong conclusions from it which then requires the teachers to reason with him in order to get him to reach the desired conclusion, where upon he learns what the whole of Rousseau's educational structure is designed to prevent - that Emile's belief in this matter is not a law

of nature, of something inescapable that his experience teaches him, but rather is merely the will of another person, something which he, Emile, is as competent to reason about as others.

So neither Plato, nor Rousseau, want people to think about the epistemological status of the conceptions of some aspect of the world, and the response to it, that are presented in literature - at least not until this can do no damage. The Hirstean model, on the contrary, would be getting them to think about contrasting concepts, and asking themselves whether some responses are more appropriate than others, and how to adjudicate between conflicting answers to such questions. It would be trying to get them to put themselves in a position not to be manipulated through the arts.

It would be getting them to think about whether there is anyone who is an expert in what is the right way to respond to some conceptualisation of the world, whether it be in literature, art, music or dance. It would also be getting them to think about exactly in what ways people could be experts on the various arts, and who were the people most likely to have that expertise.

Morals and Philosophy

Any political ideal will want people to act in accord with particular moral rules. If it can convince them that these rules have a unique authority this will make the likelihood of their obedience to these rules greater.

Plato wants the citizens to accept the morality put forward by the Guardians and he wants them to accept this on the grounds that the Guardians have had a training that makes them experts on the good. He will not want them asking questions about the epistemological status of ethical claims, or whether it even makes sense to talk of moral experts.

Rousseau doesn't want ethics taught to Emile in the sense of Emile's being told that some acts are right and others wrong. This encourages Emile to see moral rules as merely deriving from the will of other people and therefore something he can reason with them about, rather than as something his experience has taught him are as inescapable as the law of gravity and as constitutive of his own desires as the desire to live.

If philosophy was taught to children, Plato would want it to be a form of apologetics. Only the rulers would be allowed greater freedom of thought, and even then only because they had shown themselves as a consequence of the education system to value obedience to the group will greater than truth.

Rousseau would not introduce philosophy, if at all, until reason had already become a slave to those passions that served the interests of his particular version of the totalitarian "democratic" state.

Hirst, however, is concerned that the child grows up to be an autonomous agent who is not manipulated by others. The products of his education system would be asking for the reasons for the moral claims they are enjoined to follow, and

would be encouraged to think about what it is that makes an act right or wrong, and how moral disputes may be resolved. They would also think about whether there were moral experts, and if not, what moral implications this had. A similar set of questions would be asked about expertise in philosophy.

Conclusion

Hirst's forms of knowledge, then, do give guidance to the content of, and the justification of, a liberal education. If a liberal education is to be one that is not grounded solely in the interests of a minority group, but has an 'objectivity' to it that is 'based on the nature and significance of knowledge itself' then this can be achieved if we can identify all the forms of putative knowledge on which people base a manipulatory authority. Hirst may well have thought that his seven forms were forms of actual knowledge, but their role in a liberal education remains the same if they turn out to be merely putative forms of knowledge. What is important in a non-manipulatory education is not that people be taught what we believe to be the truth, so it does not matter if truth, and therefore knowledge, is not possible in each of these forms of knowledge. What matters is that they engage, as we ourselves engage, in an open argument under fair conditions about the status of claims in each of these fields. This is what a curriculum based on Hirst's forms of knowledge, treated as putative rather than actual, forms of knowledge would enable us to do. In treating his forms as dealing with actual knowledge Hirst has been shown to be on the wrong track. In not developing the insight that his concept of forms of knowledge provided, however, Hirst's critics have committed the greater error of heading off in the wrong direction.

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