

Pedagogy and Anachronism

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THEY TELL ME that Kerschensteiner is one of the most eminent pedagogues of the hour. And yet for Herr Kerschensteiner, I find, the general end of education is to train useful citizens, helpful in serving the ends of a specific State and those of Humanity.* For my part, I find it difficult to understand how a man of discernment can express himself in such terms. That the thing has been done affords us some indication of how heedlessly far pedagogic ideas have fallen in our time. This triviality of thought proceeds from a number of causes. One of these, easier to describe than the others, in some sense sums up them all. I refer to the constitutional disease of anachronism with which pedagogic theory, by nature, is afflicted.

Pedagogy is nothing more than the application, to educational problems, of a certain mode of thinking and feeling about the world: that is, the application of a philosophy. Whether this philosophy is a rigorous scientific system or a misty ideology has no bearing upon the general problem. The important fact is that the pedagogue almost never has been the philosopher who created the assumptions governing his pedagogy.

The pedagogue who writes a book in 1922 does not base his book on the philosophical ideas of 1922. Since he is not the creator of the new ideas and emotions which tomorrow will dominate the collective spirit, he will have been content to receive philosophical ideas from his teachers, men of the preceding generation perforce. In effect, then, pedagogy formulated and written in 1922 is nourished on the philosophy of 1890. But in addition, since

* Kerschensteiner: *Begriff der Arbeitsschule*, 1922.

a long campaign is needed before the ideas printed in the book succeed in affecting the laws of the land and the life of the schools, it comes to pass that the doctrine of 1922 does not begin to exert its influence and to hold sway in the schools until 1940. Thus we reach the grotesque situation in which the children of 1940 are educated in conformity to the ideas and sentiments of 1890, and a situation in which the school, whose pretension is to organize the future, lives in a continual lag of two generations.

Kerschensteiner's idea, paraphrased above, is a good example of this anachronism. In 1890, the European soul was ruled by a political interpretation of history and of man. It was still thought, with Kant and with Hegel, with Comte and Stuart Mill, that human existence, in the course of the centuries, had been a kind of preparation for the conquest of political liberty and of a certain juridical order called the State. But it is already a quarter of a century since this manner of thinking began to go out, and today only stragglers persist in it, especially those stragglers typical of our time, the "leftist" politicians. I do not believe that there can exist in Europe today a single up-to-date mind that does not laugh at the notion that in the gigantic effort of man there should be selected as the most valuable of his attributes, his mere insipid quality of citizenship. Pedagogues who sincerely want to be abreast of the times must take account of the formidable amplification of horizons which has been achieved in recent decades. In an historical perspective now much greater than ever before, the historic evolution of man takes on an aspect different from what it possessed in the past century. The modern

state and even the *ideal* of this modern state, which seemed to our grandfathers to have a definitive form—a concretization of the landscape of history—now appears like one of many evanescent gestures destined to be dissolved in the incessant flux of human vitality. The cosmic character of history and of man strikes our eye with such force nowadays that whatever happens in the political dimension appears to have only a superficial significance.

For this reason, whoever weighs well the sense of the words “education of man” must guffaw when he reads that the *end* of education, nothing less than the *end*, is the education of citizens. This is like saying, in another set of words, that the end of education is to teach men the use of the umbrella. Citizen! And what about all the other things man is much more deeply, more permanently, than he is a citizen? Who can refuse to see the incredible error of perspective which this pedagogic doctrine entails?

This manner of thinking, in addition to being erroneous, seems to me excessively modest. It is taken for granted in this scheme that pedagogy must adapt itself to politics; whereupon we submit ourselves to another anachronistic factor. When it is assumed that the end of education is to make children into citizens useful for the purposes of a definite state, it is forgotten that on the morrow, when the children become men, the state for which they were

educated will have changed. They are educated for yesterday, not for tomorrow. The best minds of Germany are now taking full cognizance of this error. A generation educated for an imperial state, ruled by traditional authoritarian principles, comes of age and is obliged to live in a democratic parliamentary state.

I do not mean to deny that education should bear in mind that the child of today will be a citizen tomorrow, or, in less circumstantial terms, an active element in a specific and determined historical community. But between this fact and the idea of defining the *end* of education as the fabrication of citizens there lies a goodly gap. And it is not enough to amplify the idea, as Kerschensteiner does, by talking of the ends of Humanity; for one guesses immediately that the ends alluded to also are political, even though vaguely international.

I expect that our century finally will react against this contracting and belittling of the role of education. An exemplary devaluation of everything political is on the way for Europe. From its present position on the first plane of human preoccupations, politics will pass to a more humble rank and station. And to the entire world it will seem, eventually, that it is politics which should adapt itself to pedagogy, instead of the other way around; and pedagogy will then have gained its rightful, sublime position. Plato dreamt of this transfiguration long ago.

“Morbid Democracy” and “Pedagogy and Anachronism” were translated by Anthony Kerrigan