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Education, Knowledge and Freedom

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Abstract
This paper examines the role of knowledge in education. It proposes that the arguments of Paul Hirst on liberal education can be updated using the idea of a 'space of reasons' drawn from the epistemology associated with John McDowell. It further argues that for education to flourish within the space of reasons the idea of 'epistemic freedom' needs to be both recognised and developed. Such freedom is particularly exemplified in the ability to form judgements. It is noted that education at all levels has been subjected to processes of 'rationalisation', processes identified by Max Weber over one hundred years ago: these processes severely restrict epistemic freedom. However, the paper argues that Alistair McIntyre's concept of a practice can be used to inform our thinking about subject disciplines. The pursuit of knowledge can therefore be seen in terms of practices which operate within the space of reasons. Moreover, we can see the idea of a practice as a counterweight to rationalisation

1. Introduction

The role that knowledge plays in the education of a person so that they become 'knowledgeable' can be underestimated when the role of pedagogy assumes so large a place in the provision of education both at school level and, increasingly, in universities. Between the activities of teaching on the one hand and learning on the other, knowledge is often reduced to the level of 'content' or mere information. There is, therefore, a need to examine (or, as shall become clear, re-examine) the role that knowledge plays in education. This process has already made some progress with the advent of what has become known as 'powerful knowledge', advocated by the educational sociologist, Michael Young.[1] For Young argues that the acquisition of concepts within a well defined subject discipline empowers

[1] See: Michael Young, *Bringing Knowledge Back In: From Social Constructivism to Social Realism in the Sociology of Education* (London: Routledge, 2008). See also his 'Why Educators Must Differentiate

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pupils and students and, correspondingly, an over-emphasis on the use of learning skills at the expense of knowledge acquisition ill serves young people, especially those who are already at a social and economic disadvantage. Elizabeth Rata has also argued, in a different but related way, that an over-emphasis on the role of experience in learning – 'experiential learning' – risks confirming for children a limited perspective in which knowledge features but lightly.[2] Although sympathetic to the general thrust of Young and Rata's arguments I propose to put forward a more philosophical treatment of the role of knowledge in education and to try to elicit some the implications of this.

In this paper I first of all develop an epistemological perspective that argues for the central role that knowledge plays in education. I do this first of all by elaborating John McDowell's ideas on the 'space of reasons'.[3] I then use this concept to re-interpret and develop the concept of the 'forms of knowledge' associated with Paul Hirst.[4] This argument of Hirst was elaborated over fifty years ago and was a major attempt at providing a firm foundation for the idea of a liberal education. I argue that the forms of knowledge can be seen as inhabiting the space of reasons. I then show how one of the key features of the space of reasons – the making of judgements – is also a key feature of education and learning. For I take it that the epithet 'knowledgeable' is not so much concerned with how much a person knows but what they can do with their knowledge, manifested in the ability to make – and defend – judgements. This is what we want our students to do most of all but there is no reason why the habit of forming judgements should be confined to university education; this is a feature of all types of education, including vocational training.

However, this consideration – the making of judgements – has further implications too: the principle one being the development of what I term the 'epistemic freedom' of the student. For the making of judgements requires the freedom to entertain and

Knowledge from Experience', *Journal of the Pacific Circle Consortium for Education* **2.1** (2010), 9–20.

[2] Elizabeth Rata, 'Politics of Knowledge in Education', *British Educational Research Journal* **38.1** (2012), 103–124.

[3] See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[4] Paul Hirst, 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge' in Richard Peters (ed.), *The Philosophy of Education*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 87–111.

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propose ideas as well as a concomitant responsibility for debating and defending those ideas. I suggest that this epistemic freedom is under threat through the encroachment of what Max Weber termed 'rationalisation' – the process through which rational faculties are colonised by instrumental reason, a feature of ubiquitous bureaucratisation. Finally, I suggest that one way of resisting rationalisation is through strengthening the idea of subject disciplines as practices, along the lines of Alistair McIntyre's conception of a practice.

The trajectory the argument can best be followed if it is borne in mind that a conception of education requires both epistemological support (in the form of the space of reasons) and normative support (in the form of epistemic freedom). The idea is that these come together through subject disciplinary practice. Needless to say, this does not imply that subjects are fixed or inert: indeed, the idea of a practice enables us to think of subjects in a more fluid and inter-connected way.

My aim, then, is to re-state the value of education by stressing the component of knowledge and the need for academic (or epistemic) freedom in education. In doing this the analysis takes account of the recent, post-1980 developments in educational practice by proposing a conception of education that is not based on rationalisation. It is one of the features of philosophy of education that it cannot be entirely credible if it does not acknowledge the effects of policy over time. This additional complexity is unavoidable.

2. Second Nature and the Space of Reasons[5]

I will begin by giving a brief account McDowell's epistemological position. His exposition is wide-ranging but the force of his argument is lost unless its different strands are held together. His starting point is Kant's well-known remark that 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'[6] which McDowell thinks underpins what he sees as a pernicious, oscillating dualism. On the one side is, borrowing from Wilfred Sellars, the 'Myth of

[5] The material in sections 2 and 3 are substantially drawn from the following publication, written by the author: Geoffrey Hinchliffe, *Liberty and Education* (London, Routledge, 2015), 46–56.

[6] Immanual Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), 93: A51/B76.

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the Given'[7] and on the other side is a coherentism that McDowell attributes to Davidson.[8] The problem with relying on the 'given' is that it is not clear how the relation between sense experience and concept can be considered as one of genuine justification since unalloyed, bare sense data is simply 'other' to conceptual thought. Hence we are obliged to veer towards Davidson's view that the only thing that can count for holding a belief is another belief. Yet this approach, McDowell thinks, condemns us to a 'frictionless spinning in a void'[9] and we are recoiled back to the myth of the given in order to find some kind of constraint or underpinning to our beliefs. Davidson's solution to this (that the relation of belief to the world must be causal) is certainly an explanation of our beliefs (or conceptual scheme) but is not a *justification* of them: for I cannot justify those beliefs in terms that make sense from the standpoint of those beliefs, according to McDowell.

McDowell's proposed solution is in two stages. First, he insists that receptivity at its most basic, passive level is always conceptual: there must indeed be constraint on beliefs but this constraint need not be outside what is thinkable. Moreover, this 'thinkable content' is linked to a wider repertoire of content without which individual bits of receptivity could not be experienced as anything intelligible.[10] It is because of this that 'experience' never comes without conceptual content: for example, in colour discrimination I understand the concept of 'red' as not-blue or not-green and that this understanding characterises colour experience as well so that there is not a two stage process of first, the onset of raw sense data followed by second, some internal processing of this data. Yet, McDowell is also insistent that this conceptualised experience does act as a constraint upon belief which potentially can answer to world's being 'thus and so'.[11] But it is the second stage of the solution that moves the whole argument up a gear. McDowell proposes that humankind has a 'second nature' in which sensory processes and other experiences that we share with the natural world become saturated with conceptual

[7] William Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* in H. Freigl and M. Scriven (eds) *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol 1* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1956), 298–9.

[8] Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' in D. Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 137–158.

[9] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 11.

[10] Op. cit. 28.

[11] Op. cit. 26.

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meaning. This formation and acculturation is analogous to the development of ethical dispositions and practical reasoning so that what McDowell is proposing is an Aristotelian form of habituation which extends beyond the ethical into the domain of the epistemological. That is to say, the ways in which experience itself is formed is through a receptivity that is itself conceptualised. This habituation into the world, through the formation not only of dispositions but through the development of our very cognitive faculties re-enforces the idea that experience is always impregnated with conceptual content.

McDowell also appeals to the concept of *Bildung*: second nature is a function of upbringing and self-formation.[12] What this suggests is that the development of second nature is not only the inevitable by-product of linguistic practices but is also something that can be purposefully shaped and nurtured. And this development may not only occur at the level of belief but also through what might be termed the aestheticisation of experience. The sculpting of the antennae of experiencing – the cognitive and emotional process through which content is drawn in and interpreted – is something that can be purposefully crafted. It is not that experiences – in terms of their content – are somehow neutrally drawn in and then subject to an internal processing which varies depending on what kind of personal dispositions and character a person has developed. Rather the very mode of experiencing itself – i.e. the character of the experience – is subject to cultural and educative formation. Second nature is not a black box, internal to each of us, marked 'personal development'; rather it is manifest in all the different ways in which the process of experiencing itself takes place.

Thus the idea of the space of reasons emerges as the realm in which justifications for beliefs are sought, from the standpoint of agents who have developed a second nature. It is conceptualised experience, in the form of beliefs, that enable there to be a space of reasons since it becomes possible to challenge experience at the level of justification. On the one hand, the space of reasons constitutes the structure within which meanings and intelligibility emerge; on the other hand, it is not merely self-generating without any constraint. The space of reasons does not dissolve the dualism of mind and world: rather, it provides a way of thinking through that relationship.

In a later paper, McDowell links experience to judgement so that it is proposed that 'what we need and can have is the idea of a case of receptivity in operation that, even while being that, is an actualisation,

[12] Op. cit. 87–88.

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together, of conceptual capacities whose active exercise, with the same togetherness, would be the making of a judgement.'[13] If we construe judgement as making up one's mind about how things are – as coming to have a view of the world – then we can see that the process of judging is emblematic of what the space of reasons is about because, of course, my judgement may come to be questioned by others and, indeed, by myself. In judging I am proposing a view of the world which is quite different from merely *asserting* that things are thus and so. The space of reasons must be able to permit more than mere assertion and counter assertion if the process of justification is to be given room. Moreover, the process of judgement (as opposed to assertion) would not be possible without the possibility of constraints on what seems reasonable. And these constraints do not merely arise from the counter-judgements of others but also from their having a world in view that is the *same world* for each. For without this there would merely be so many conceptual schemes each with their own, separate world in view: the very essence, that is, of an epistemological frictionless spinning in a void.

It may be thought that a different view of McDowell's perspective is feasible. This could take the form of treating the justificatory character of the space of reasons as essentially naïve, a realm that in time will be replaced by a naturalist discourse that will be satisfied with descriptions of states of affairs (be they mental or non-mental) and causal explanations of them. Nature is best considered, on this view, as the 'disenchanted' realm of law which is impervious to human design and intentionality. According to McDowell such a standpoint sets up two, contrasting (and ultimately futile) paths: first, that of 'bald naturalism' (which insists that our space of reasons be recast so that it coincides with the realm of law[14] and 'rampant platonism' (in which the space of reasons is cut off from nature entirely and permitted to pursue its own, introverted and unfettered purposes).[15] The problem with bald naturalism is that its reductivist programme in effect writes spontaneity out of the relation between mind and world; the problem with rampant platonism is that spontaneity – the operations of the understanding, suitably structured – is treated as *sui generis* and nature treated as a mere side effect of its deliverances. McDowell's position can be seen as an attempt to think through the tensions between mind and world

[13] John McDowell, 'Experiencing the World' in *The Engaged Intellect* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 249.
[14] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 76–77.
[15] Op. cit. 77–78.

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and at the same time resisting temptations to dissolve one of these two terms into the other.

What starts as an epistemological problem of the relation between mind and world is addressed not only through an alternate epistemology but also through an historicisation of knowing and belief in the account of second nature. The clear implication of McDowell's argument is that education and learning take place in the space of reasons. Does the development of second nature take place simply through participation in a language community or can it (or indeed, must it) be subject to further guidance, development, art and purpose? Presumably the nurturing of the space of reasons must surely be a purposeful endeavour: paradoxically, the development of the realm within which spontaneity flourishes cannot be left to chance. Yet the development of second nature should not be supposed to take on the character of extrinsic, instrumental purpose as if learning to live within the space of reasons is merely a goal that can be achieved through extra hard work and forward planning. This is not only because the process of learning and acquiring second nature is one of living a life but also because the constraints on the space of reasons – encountering a world that is 'thus and so' – ensures that the best laid plans and goals may be frustrated. The development of second nature is not a process that can be brought about by means of a comprehensive pedagogic strategy. The role of pedagogy must be conceived on more modest lines.

Would the extrusion of the realm of law from second nature imply that scientific approaches to learning are inherently misguided as an attempt, knowingly or not, to fashion human sensibility in ways of non-spontaneity? What McDowell calls 'bald naturalism' is a form of reductivism – whereby the space of reasons gets overwritten by natural law. We can see, once we reject bald naturalism why the space of reasons must be sui generis (without lapsing into rampant platonism). The implication is that approaches to teaching and learning that are dictated by science (e.g. by forms of behaviourism) amount to bald naturalism. This implies that teaching and learning must employ the methods appropriate to the space of reasons – justification and judgement. Learning to live within the space of reasons cannot be brought about through causal means.

3. Forms of Knowledge and the Space of Reasons

If the purpose of education is to develop the capacity to act and judge within the space of reasons then what role does the acquisition of

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knowledge play? The seminal essay on the relation between knowledge and education by Paul Hirst, *Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge* is still, in my view, very instructive. The essay is in four parts. The first treats of the role of knowledge drawn from a reading of ancient philosophy which envisages the development of mind through knowledge which both furnishes a knowing of reality in terms of truth and, through this process, also plays a central role in the development of the good life. Knowledge therefore plays, on this reading, both an epistemological and an ethical role. In the second part, Hirst considers certain modern (in fact, mid-twentieth century) proponents of the idea that the purpose of education is to cultivate certain attributes of mind (effective thinking, communication, ethical judgement). He makes quick work of showing that such attributes cannot be developed without disciplinary (subject) engagement in which is embedded what counts as effective thinking, good communication, etc.[16] In the fourth section, Hirst elaborates in more detail what he envisages to be a knowledge-led curriculum, of which the details need not concern us since over the passage of time new disciplines and sub-disciplines have emerged whilst others have receded.[17] It is the third part of the essay that is of most interest.

Hirst begins by disavowing the suggestion in the first part of the essay, namely that the relation between knowledge, mind and reality has a 'metaphysical' basis and initially goes on to suggest that the relation between mind and knowledge is rather 'logical', such that the achievement of knowledge 'necessitates' the development of mind. This thought, however is not developed and Hirst then goes on to suggest that the focus of knowledge is rather 'experience, structured under some conceptual scheme'.[18] 'Experience' is enumerated in terms of 'sense perceptions, emotions or different elements of the understanding' which it is suggested 'are intelligible only by virtue of the conceptual apparatus by which they are articulated'. This sounds as though Hirst, in separating out experiences as such from the conceptual apparatus through which they become known, is sailing perilously close to the muddy waters of the myth of the given. What emerges, however, is that forms of knowledge

[16] Hirst, *Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge*, 90–95.

[17] Originally, Hirst identified seven forms of knowledge were mathematics, the physical sciences, the human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy and moral knowledge. In addition, there were interdisciplinary 'fields' of knowledge.

[18] Hirst, op. cit. 97.

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become coextensive with forms of experience. For, firstly, experiences can only be articulated through conceptual forms – they can only be recognised as experiences of such and such character because they are presented and articulated through a conceptual apparatus. Second, the system of concepts takes the form of publicly known and shared criteria for their application – it is this that allows experiences to be recognised, evaluated and compared. Third, this structuring of experience is not confined to traditional academic divisions of knowledge since 'the forms of knowledge are the basic articulations whereby the *whole* of experience has become intelligible to man'.[19] The generation of knowledge – that conceptual apparatus through which experience becomes intelligible – pervades the whole of experiences of human kind. The clear implication is that experience is constituted through the forms of knowledge: 'it is by its terms that the life of man in every particular is structured and ordered… without its structure all other forms of consciousness, including for example, emotional experiences, or mental attitudes and beliefs would seem to be unintelligible'.[20] This thought is developed further under the fourth characteristic of Hirst's conception, namely that the experiences we undergo must not be thought as primary or foundational but are themselves in part the product of meditation, evaluation and validation of those publicly specified criteria which identify and articulate experiences themselves.[21]

Although Hirst postulated the concept 'forms of knowledge', it will be seen that this could just as well have been recast as 'forms of experience'. It is often supposed that Hirst proposed the forms of knowledge in terms of so-called 'propositional knowledge' – inert statements bundled into disciplinary domains that generations of children and students are obliged to learn, repeat and forget.[22] It is assumed, in other words, that the forms of knowledge are disconnected from experience, whereas in fact they arise from a certain understanding of the structuring of experience. I want to suggest,

[19] Op. cit. 98, emphasis added.
[20] Op. cit. 98.
[21] Op. cit. 97–98.
[22] See, for example, the comments of John White, 'Why General Education? Peters, Hirst and History', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **43** (2009), Supplement 1, 138 where it is suggested that Hirst's view of the curriculum rested on a conception of the value of knowledge as 'intrinsic'. See also Chapter 3, *What is Education For?* by Roger Marples, in R. Bailey (ed.), *The Philosophy of Education* (London: Continuum, 2010), 38 in which the propositional character of Hirst's conception of knowledge is discussed.

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therefore, that to the extent that the 'forms of knowledge' characterise the articulation and intelligibility of experience then they inhabit the space of reasons and are pervaded by this space. Forms of knowledge can be seen as clusters within that space and exemplifying the character of that space, namely giving and justifying reasons. One of the problems, however, with Hirst's theory of knowledge is that he never quite differentiated between what McDowell terms the 'realm of law' on the one hand (i.e. the realm of causal explanation, fetishisation of which leads to bald naturalism), and the space of reasons, namely that justificatory realm in which experience of the world is made intelligible. If, then, the forms of knowledge are identified solely with the realm of law it is not difficult to see – indeed, it is perfectly understandable – why so many have had problems with it. Nevertheless, Hirst does make it clear that the forms do include (for example) moral knowledge, literary and aesthetic appreciation as well as the traditional disciplines in the sciences and mathematics.

4. The role of judgement

Apart from the space of reasons/realm of law distinction there is another feature which plays an increasingly major role as McDowell's analysis has developed and which is also a crucial feature of the forms of knowledge, once viewed through the perspective of the space of reasons. This is the role played by judgement, namely the ability to constitute a state of affairs as having certain features and to evaluate their relative importance. Judgement is usually contextual so that the discrimination of a state of affairs is situated within a wider understanding. When we refer to the forms of knowledge as underpinning educational purposes then the ability to make judgements occupies a central place by virtue of its role in the space of reasons. Learning does not only consist of the mastery of concepts and information: what we are looking for is the ability to make judgements.

Philosophically, judgements are not only characterised by verbal expressions but also in terms of mental acts – the *exercise* of a concept. P.T. Geach suggested that we construe these mental acts of judgement as analogous to reported speech *oratio recta*, so that we can understand judgements in terms of mental utterances which also have a physical expression.[23] The crucial piece of Geach's

[23] P.T. Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957). For a summary of Geach see A. Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London: Routledge, 1963), 203–5.

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analysis, for our purposes, is the idea that in judging we have an ability to exercise concepts in a particular way. So whilst 'he judged that *a,b,c* are related in a particular way *x*' can easily be substituted for 'he said *a,b,c* are related in a particular way *x*' this analysis would not convey that the two utterances are different – not in their propositional content but as mental acts. But whilst Geach enables us to focus on the character of a judgement as a mental act his analysis, by itself, leaves us without a clear idea of how that act (in a judgement) is to be characterised. Perhaps, indeed, no generic theory could do this since context plays a crucial role. Thus the judgement of a court judge carries a finality owing to the authority bestowed on her; and the same might be said of the casting vote of a chair of a board of examiners in deciding whether a student's work was pass or fail. In the context of learning, however, judgements carry with them the liability of error and the concomitant risk this involves.

We can supplement Geach's work on the nature of judgement through bringing to bear the notion of illocutionary force.[24] When we suggest, claim, judge, propose or even believe that *x* within an educative context construed in terms of a space of reasons then the speech act carries with it a propositional value that is recognised as being provisional – e.g. 'I was wondering if *x* is the case…' The particular character of the speech act of judging (and its various cognates) is freighted with a supervening intended meaning involving the acknowledgement of provisionality and possible error. It is absolutely crucial in a learning context that this intention is recognised by both tutor and students and that the speaker understands that this intention is recognised.[25]

This reciprocity of recognition enables a person proposing a judgement to take responsibility. This is described by McDowell in these terms:

> '….judging can be singled out as the paradigmatic mode of actualisation of conceptual capacities, the one in terms of which we should understand the very idea of conceptual capacities in the relevant sense. And judging, making up our minds what to think, is something for which we are in principle responsible - something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely

[24] See J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[25] See H.P. Grice, 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review* **66.3** (1957), 377–388.

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> happens in our lives… and this freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom, at least the freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons.'[26]

Engagement with forms of knowledge is therefore a risky endeavour since we are responsible for our judgements and being able to account for them is also what one has to do if one lives within a space of reasons. The kinds of judgements one makes, as far as learning is concerned, will range from the theoretical and the interpretative down to the severely practical. For example, the deliverance of a judgement may be a decision on which form of clinical treatment is most appropriate on the one hand or, on the other hand a judgement that assesses the weight of responsibility accruing to Germany in terms of the causes of the World War I. Either way, the student or pupil, in acting and making judgements thereby becomes accountable. Viewing the forms of knowledge through the perspective of the space of reasons brings this out.

There is also another feature that accompanies the act of judging: namely, the way in which subjective or agent-centred considerations must be laid aside. When Hirst speaks of knowledge that is subject to publicly specified criteria we can see that coming to be acquainted with such criteria helps us extrude personal considerations in reaching a judgment. That one is held personally accountable for making judgements in accordance with impersonal criteria takes some time – perhaps years – in learning and if the beginnings of this are started in primary schooling it certainly takes the whole experience of education at all levels before the appropriate habituation is in place. The paradox of judgement is that whilst subjective perspectives are to be eschewed in reaching a conclusion one is nevertheless held responsible for a judgement in which there is a certain personal investment. The process of education helps learners to practice the art of judgement in which the consequences are by and large confined to the classroom and seminar room – a necessary preparation for the time when one's judgements really start to count.

[26] John McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5–6. See also David Bakhurst, *The Formation of Reason* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 75.

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5. Epistemic Freedom

By 'epistemic freedom' I term the freedom to formulate or construct beliefs and ideas, to discuss these with others and to revise one's ideas accordingly. In order to illustrate this it is convenient to make a distinction between education and learning. Learning can take place under many different kinds of regime, including those intent on keeping children and students in a subaltern status. Unfree individuals still must learn; indeed, learning may be an intrinsic part of the identity of unfreedom. For those who are not free still have many tasks to complete and need to achieve what is expected of them. And although education does indeed contain learning as one of its necessary components it does something else: education promotes epistemic freedom. In particular, it encourages its participants to entertain ideas in the form of formulating, creating, debating, rejecting and accepting. Without a commitment to epistemic freedom education just becomes learning.

Central to the idea of epistemic freedom is the power to generate beliefs and ideas based on evidence, argumentation and the imaginary. By the 'imaginary' is designated that counterfactual world which is construed as being different from or other to the world of evidence and argumentation – components of the given world. It is important that epistemic freedom is not merely governed by the given and the oft-stated requirement that all research must be 'evidence-based'. This already threatens epistemic freedom if the evidence requirement is deemed to be the chief component of belief justification since the possibility of going beyond evidence may be ruled out from the start. Epistemic freedom is typically manifested when we 'entertain' ideas, running through them, back and forth – rejecting some, holding on to others. In contrast to an idea, a belief on the other hand is simply the fixing of a set of ideas – but even beliefs are provisional. One thing that may change a belief is, of course evidence; but it is often wise not to bring in evidence too early in case ideas that are being entertained are knocked out before they have a chance to flourish and make a claim. The key difference between ideas and beliefs is that the latter are motivated. For it is at this point that I take 'ownership' or responsibility for my ideas. Confusion is often caused in discussions when ideas that are merely being entertained by one party are taken as beliefs by another. If this is done deliberately then we might be justified in suspecting that this is an early attempt to inhibit epistemic freedom. For part of the etiquette of exercising epistemic freedom is to give people leeway to entertain ideas and not to presume that every idea that is

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being explored must be a fixed belief. We must all be given time and space to peruse, to wander, to explore; a culture (like ours, often) which insists that entertaining ideas is a sign of weakness and half-baked, flabby thinking inhibits epistemic freedom and in doing so may suppress what it is supposed to prize: innovation. It is never too young to entertain ideas: the cot is a good starting point. We might suppose that someone who never moves from ideas to beliefs is a daydreamer: but only if the entertaining is done in private. For as soon as I mention an idea to another then I lose control over my idea as it follows a trajectory whose destination may be guessed but never (assuming epistemic freedom is operative) certain.

It was Kant who theorised some of the thinking that underpins the idea of epistemic freedom. His idea of freedom derives from the distinction he makes between the empirical and the intelligible. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he says:

> …a subject belonging to the sensible world [would] have, first, an empirical world, whereby its actions, as appearances, stand in thoroughgoing connection with other appearances in accordance with unvarying laws of nature … Secondly, we should also have to allow the subject an intelligible character, by which it is indeed the cause of those same actions as appearances, but which does not itself stand under any conditions of sensibility, and is not itself appearance.[27]

Kant goes on to mention that freedom is not simply to be viewed 'negatively' as merely independent of empirical conditions but it must also be viewed 'as the power of originating a series of events' and as such can initiate 'a beginning in a series of appearances'.[28] It is this notion of freedom that Kant refers to as the causality of freedom (and also sometimes as the causality of reason). The workings of an unfettered reason constitute precisely the power of freedom.

I suggest that it is not necessary to accept Kant's metaphysical structuring around the concept of the intelligible to appreciate the power of what can be seen as the construal of freedom as a formative power – the power of forming ideas. A too narrow concept of learning – especially learning conceived primarily in terms of pre-set learning outcomes – inhibits the development of epistemic freedom – indeed, such freedom becomes something that is simply unrecognised. But this freedom is essential if persons are to be a part of the space of

[27] Kant, op. cit. 468: A539/B567.
[28] Op. cit. 476: A554/B582.

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reasons, which needs to be thought of normatively as well as epistemologically. In the next section I suggest why freedom in education has been undermined.

6. The Rationalisation of Education

Max Weber envisaged the phenomenon of bureaucracy as a core feature of modernity. It was all-pervasive, colonising government, commercial operations and non-commercial institutions. In his *Protestant Ethic*, he famously invokes the the metaphor of the 'iron cage', signifying the development of procedures and behaviours necessary for a modern economic order whilst 'the rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, seems to be irretrievably fading'.[29] Jurgen Habermas provides us with a concise discussion and amplification of Weber's central thesis. According to Habermas, purposeful rationality includes: the development of techniques to reproduce predicted behaviours; the social world so configured that the efficacy of such techniques become progressively easier to achieve; the privileging of ends which preclude ends chosen for affective reasons or relating to tradition; the unwillingness to grant rationality of value postulates or belief systems as regards their content; and, finally and crucially, the development of a methodical conduct and personality in persons themselves.[30]

Habermas speaks of this form of rationality as 'purposive rationality' but if we accept that any kind of practical conduct will have a purposive character then we need to describe this phenomenon in a different way. If the form of rationality described is characterised as 'rationalisation' then we can see that it is rationalisation that gives us the 'iron cage', and not rationality or reason as such. And it seems to me that we can amplify Habermas's account of rationalisation as follows:

a) In the giving and receiving of reasons what counts as a reason is conditioned by requirements of rationalisation and this therefore severely curtails communicative competence viewed as a free activity;

b) Rationalisation does not only disenchant nature but also disenchants those human activities connected with moral, aesthetic

[29] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1930), 181–2.

[30] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 1* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 168–171.

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and even science because the values associated with those spheres are either nullified or become themselves rationalised, i.e. subject to procedural judgements in which content is underplayed;

c) Behaviours compliant with the imperatives of rationalisation are encouraged through status recognition and monetary reward (for example, the need to demonstrate 'pro-active' behaviour). The price of non-conformity is non-recognition and irrelevance. One is expected to comport oneself in accordance with the injunctions of rationalisation so that they become a key part of one's identity;

d) Rationalisation is no longer neutral with respect to values but itself generates values appropriate to the process of rationalisation itself. The most significant of these is achievement and success; these are the goals – the ends of life – that individuals encourage in each other and in which they find the most satisfaction and happiness.

e) 'Change' itself becomes a positive value not only to be welcomed but to be deliberately brought about. In a culture of rationalisation there must be ceaseless activity and it is incumbent on those with authority to make sure their charges never become too comfortable.

Rationalisation pervades policy discourse (both at government and institutional levels) not only in terms of characterising the means for securing goals; it increasingly characterises those goals themselves. It is the language of 'common sense'. Education, for example, is rationalised through the characterisation of learning as an achievement-process in which assessment lies at its heart. This amounts to more than the mere prizing of good results; the entire process itself is driven by a system of monitoring and evaluation at every stage in which teachers – not just pupils – are held to account. A good example of the rationalisation of pedagogy is contained in a standard work of pedagogy addressed at university teachers in which the strategy of 'constructive alignment' is commended, i.e. the alignment of learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment. This is termed by the authors a 'web of consistency' – in which both teachers and students are ensnared.[31] Students are also subject to policies of engagement in learning in order to ensure they attend classes, comply with assessment strategies and take part in learning

[31] J. Biggs & C. Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (London: Open University Press, 2011), 97–99.

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activities.[32] Moreover, the choices made by politicians in respect of education are themselves the choices of rationalisation – these are choices which are deliberately exercised and fostered. In the United Kingdom, at least, nearly all politicians – both left and right – are the champions of rationalisation.

Since the procedures and values of rationalisation are embedded in institutions they pervade the perspectives and practices of all those agents embroiled in them. It is for this reason that the mere invocation of alternate values have limited effect apart from rhetorical value. Epistemic freedom is not entirely abrogated but it is severely curtailed because the activity of learning is driven by procedures that do not derive from the subject discipline itself, but rather from standardised teaching and assessment protocols. If students are to attain good grades it is essential that they understand precisely how they are to achieve this and their concerns in this regard are entirely reasonable. But this is only because the criteria of 'reasonableness' is bounded and pervaded by the process of rationalisation which serves to undermine other possible aims such as those of free enquiry, learning for its own sake, crossing disciplinary boundaries or following the scent of curiosity to see where it leads.

7. Construing subject disciplines as practices

In a brief article published in 1998, Hirst disavows the central thesis which he developed in the 1960's. He suggests that 'social practices and practical reason are the fundamental concerns of education, not propositional knowledge and theoretical reason.'[33] The thinking behind this arises from a pragmatist turn of mind, in which it is held that 'reason operates most fundamentally in the satisfaction of physical, psychological and social needs and interest… what is rational is what is successful in experience'.[34] In some ways, this new approach can be interpreted as having a perspective on knowledge that goes beyond the realm of law ('propositional knowledge and theoretical reason') towards a more expansive view of the reach of the space of reasons, which does indeed reach into the realm of the

[32] For a critique of the student engagement agenda, see Bruce McFarlane, *Freedom to Learn* (London: SRHE, Routledge, 2016).

[33] Paul Hirst 'Philosophy of Education: Evolution of a Discipline' in Graham Hayden (ed.), *50 Years of Philosophy of Education: Progress and Prospects* (London: Institute of Education, 1998), 19.

[34] Hirst, op. cit. 18.

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practical. It follows, therefore, that the 'forms of knowledge' may indeed include what has traditionally been termed vocational knowledge. Moreover, it also implies that even traditional disciplines (history, bio-chemistry) may be taught in practical ways in such a manner as to encourage students in the making of judgements.

Hirst's revision of his earlier thesis suggests a way of countering rationalisation which does not merely amount to a retreat to the reaffirmation of propositional knowledge associated with traditional learning. What is needed, however, is a conceptual framework which enables us to encapsulate the different strands of subject disciplines. Alasdair McIntyre provides us with a promising way in which this could be achieved, through the concept of a *practice*. For a practice generates its own goods and its own goals and purposes; therefore criteria of excellence are internal to that practice. In this way, it could be said that a practice generates its own rationale through an internal logos. Macintyre's definition of a practice is well-known:

> 'By a practice I mean 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 that 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'.[35]

We can see how this might work with subject disciplines on two levels. First, the internal epistemological structure and processes of a discipline generate conclusions, theorems and interpretations through a discourse that, in principle, can operate independently of rationalisation. Second, normative recommendations, because they are the outcome of this internal discourse can address needs and concerns premised on a construction of an agent (for example 'the patient') that does not necessarily depend on the discourse of rationalisation, especially through the suggestion that a practice contains its own internal goods. It is not, of course, that practices, so understood, do not contain activities that are instrumental and rational-purposive: but these kinds of activities are subordinate to, and partly defined by, what constitutes an internal good. A practice, so conceived, may also include both theoretical and practical pursuits, depending on how internal goods are framed. An obvious example here is the practice of clinical medicine; but even more traditional subject disciplines could involve an imaginative approach as to what constitutes an

[35] Alistair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 175.

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internal good. Thus literature could include creative writing whilst the discipline of history has seen the recent growth of public history in which the subject is developed and communicated in non-academic settings.

Moreover, given that long established practices (such as subject disciplines) have traditions, these may act as powerful counterweights to rationalisation. For through a tradition, the present can re-connect with the past so that traditions become part of the present. A practice may be seen as having its own genealogy with its own internal time-structure. That is, a practice can be viewed diachronically so that at any given time its development can be given a genealogical explanation rather than one which is merely synchronic.

I suggest that a practice, so conceived, can serve to keep the depredations of rationalisation at bay and to diminish its effects. Decisions to interpret internal goods through the lens of rationalisation may of course be made and often are: but they are deliberate decisions that can be contested through the invocation of the claims of the internal goods of that practice. But there are problems, all the same.

First, through the process of peer review, disciplines might be expected to retain their own integrity along the lines suggested by the concept of a practice. But what if the bulk of practitioners have succumbed to rationalisation? How would they know? For example, is the oft-repeated injunction that processes of enquiry be evidence-informed driven by a rationalisation that discourages more speculative enquiries?

Second, subject disciplines, considered as practices, require some kind of institutional setting to flourish and so the inevitable question arises as to what, and to what extent, its practitioners owe the institution that enables them to engage in their practice in the first place. Yet whilst institutional demands that derive from rationalisation may be difficult to resist, given that the institution is dependent on a practice retaining its internal integrity perhaps academics are in a stronger position than is sometimes thought. Perhaps academics and students do not have to fashion an iron cage for themselves after all.

8. Conclusion

Taken by itself, a practice may indeed generate internal goods but of a thoroughly disagreeable nature – for example, the elaborate religious ceremonies of the Maya civilisation could culminate in human sacrifice. Hence the need to envisage practices within a wider conceptual context, provided epistemologically by the idea of the space of reasons

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and normatively by the idea of (epistemic) freedom. But, at the same time, practices can be seen as particularised exemplifications of justifying claims through reasons and enabling the pursuit of free enquiry constrained only by the internal goods of a practice – which themselves can be both criticised and justified. The activity of a practice, so construed, exemplifies features of the space of reasons.

Moreover, a practice involves both teachers and students. Part of what is involved in being a 'practitioner' is that one helps to inculcate incipient practitioners into the ways of a practice. Teaching, training, initiating is an important part of what experienced practitioners do. One singular conclusion to draw from this paper – if its thinking is valid – is that pedagogy no longer becomes a practice in its own right.[36] For unless pedagogic methods are seen as part of the activity of a practice whose ends are directed by the internal goods of that practice then the danger is that pedagogy, freed from the moorings of a subject practice becomes an end in itself and consequently prone to being commandeered for extrinsic purposes. Arguably, this is what is happening right now in UK universities: pedagogy takes on both the form and substance of rationalisation. Pedagogy must therefore take a more subordinate position than it does at the moment if educative aims consistent with living in the space of reasons are to be realised. Might it be possible, nevertheless, to fashion a theory of pedagogy which embraces epistemic freedom? Perhaps. But this would require another paper.

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[36] This is disputed – see Joe Dunne, 'Arguing for Teaching as a Practice: A Reply to Alisdair McIntyre', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **37.2** (2003), 353–370.

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