

EDUCATION, EFFORT AND WORK

*Christopher Winch
Universidade de Northampton.*

In this paper I wish to examine the claims of John White that we are about to enter an era in which PAID work will play a much less significant part in human life than it has hitherto.¹ White draws certain educational implications if this thesis is true. I will argue that there are strong philosophical, as well as empirical grounds for thinking that White's suppositions are not likely to be true. There are, however, still grounds for assessing White's educational proposals on their own merits, while considering that we are likely to continue to live in a world in which work plays a considerable role.

1. Education an way of life

I wish to start by proposing a minimal definition of the concept of education as a preparation for life. In this sense, it is little short of tautologous to say that education is a good thing, for, after all, who would wish to deny that one should be prepared for life in some way or other? This leaves plenty of room for different *conceptions* of education which can include education for self-fulfillment as well as a preparation for work. Needless to say, these aims are not necessarily incompatible although, practically, they may well be in a number of scenarios. In the conception sense, some forms of education may be considered harmful in that they constitute the wrong kind of preparation for life.²

The kind of life we lead is, among other things, a product of the interaction of morality and politics and its direction is, therefore, a matter of political as well as philosophical argumentation. It is not obvious, therefore, that our way of life can simply be predicted from the evolution of the economy. The economy is not itself a sphere of life independent of voluntary control and is shaped, at least in part, according to conscious political decisions, including decisions about how we are to live our lives. To suppose otherwise is to be taken in by deterministic thinking either of the classical or the Marxist variety. In the classical account, aggregates of individually self-interested acts lead to an impersonally determined outcome.³ In Marxist accounts, the self-interested pursuit of surplus value leads to the creation of fixed capital in the form of technology which may lead to something like the scenario that White

describes. However, there are alternative, and more plausible accounts that maintain that the key factors underlying economic evolution depend on the decisions of collective and corporate bodies. These bodies do not necessarily just represent collections of individual self-interest but different collective points of view as to what is the good life in any society.⁴

Social activities in part embody the values of those societies and are carried out, in part, in order to maintain them. Where what are regarded as essential self-regarding virtues such as self-reliance, self-discipline, diligence and co-operativeness are thought to be best secured by an individual being in paid employment, then there are strong reasons for thinking that, even if certain forms of employment become obsolete, society will find new ways of making sure that paid or self-employment continue to be the norm for the overwhelming majority of people. There is plenty of evidence that western capitalist societies do regard paid and self employment in this light and will see that it continues to occupy a significant portion of the time of the vast majority of people of working age.

Humans are social beings; society is the medium for our existence and, generally, we seek the approval of our fellows for our activity. It is essential to our own estimation of our self-worth that we enjoy the approval of others. When this approval depends on the perception of ourselves as being in worthwhile paid employment, this is a strong form of motivation for the individual to seek paid employment. To the extent that this is so and is likely to remain so, one cannot infer that paid employment will disappear under changing technological conditions. None of this is to imply that the mix of virtues thought to be currently desirable should not be changed. Indeed, it is part of my case that there is an individualistic tilt to our current view of the virtues which, paradoxically makes the need for externally imposed forms of authority all the stronger, in order to contain the disorder which the pursuit of individual projects engenders. As part of the recommendatory part of my critique of White and others, I will suggest that a more social and other-regarding approach to the development of character is what is needed in our society and others like it.

2. Work and effort

This section will argue in a more rigorous fashion for the key points made in the previous two paragraphs and, in so doing, will seek to trace the links between work, activity and effort, to explore the moral dimension of these concepts and thus to explain how the capacity for work is a fundamental human characteristic which is misleadingly sometimes described as a need.⁵ Indeed, it is weaknesses in the conceptualisation of work as need that give plausibility to White's thesis concerning the disposability of work.

Effort and necessity

The experiences of trying and of making efforts are an important and unavoidable feature of human life and must be recognised by any education worthy of the name. *Effort* is con-

cerned with the overcoming of obstacles to our own purposes and those of others, and thus with the recognition of necessity in our lives. The encounter with obstacles is fundamental to our existence as beings whose powers are limited, but who, nevertheless, wish to bring our projects to fruition, engage in mutual projects and who have to submit to the exigencies of nature. The experience of the world as resistant to our wills begins in earliest childhood. Our helplessness leads us to seek assistance from others in order that our most basic needs are attended to. Soon we learn to enlist the help of others in a more imperious way, which is not always successful. Rousseau observes that our first cries are prayers and counsels us to beware that they do not become commands. ⁶ Even if one does not accept the likelihood of gross psychological damage that Rousseau believes will result from the satisfying of an arbitrary infant will, there are, nevertheless, grounds for thinking that the realisation of the limited nature of its powers of persuasion are important at this stage in a child's life. This realisation constitutes the beginnings of recognition of the need to enlist the co-operation of others in the fulfilment of its needs and, later, of its more long-term projects.

At the same-time, young children are learning that their actions produce reactions. Sometimes these are of comfort and pity, when a child is suffering or when it has been hurt in some way. Sometimes they are reactions of encouragement and pleasure when the child makes an effort to do something that it has not done before, such as learning to talk and to walk. Sometimes the reactions are of resentment and displeasure when the child does something to hurt or upset another.⁷ These primitive language-games, which occur as part of the child's growing mastery of language, constitute the beginnings of a moral realisation of the child's own finitude, its dependence on others, the need for co-operation to solve life's problems and the requirement to pay due regard to the feelings and needs of others. It is no exaggeration to say that these are lessons that a human being never stops learning if they are well taught at the outset, but which are never learned adequately if they are not. In this sense moral education is a part of general education and a key lesson learned, if it is effective, is that the approval and co-operation of others is vital to our success in most of what we do. In this sense, the approval of others is a need, but it is not strictly based on a biological drive,⁸ but exists as a condition of flourishing for beings whose fate is unavoidably social.

These early episodes of learning are not automatic, as it has become fashionable to think. It is observed, correctly, that much of early learned behaviour, such as communicating and walking, has an instinctual, animal basis. From this it does not follow that they are instinctive *behaviours*. The point is that learning to communicate, to move, to feed in ways that are appropriate to the society that one is growing up in, involve a recognition of, and adaptation to, norms which are those of that society. An essential part of learning to do these things involves a recognition of and adaptation to the requirements of others.

To return to the question of the effort that a child has to make; learning to communicate, for example, involves not merely mastering a vocabulary and syntax, but developing an

ability to get the willing attention of others and to make oneself understood and to understand and respond to the responses of others. The picture that Chomsky and others present of neural linguistic circuitry being 'switched on' as a result of minimal exposure to the mothertongue, is a travesty of the truth.⁹ It does not follow from the fact that a child need not make self-conscious efforts to make itself understood that it does not make efforts. Neither does it follow from the fact that early action has an instinctive basis, that it is *effortless* instinctive behaviour. The experience of a world that is not wholly subject to our will is fundamental to our learning anything and to our making efforts in order to do so. Insofar as successful learning is necessary for us to act effectively, making efforts is necessary to acting effectively in many parts of our lives. The expenditure of effort is an unavoidable and pervasive feature of learning and acting.¹⁰

As children grow older, society's demands of what they need to learn become more complex and the actions that they themselves accomplish and the projects that they try to undertake become more complex, more dependent on the co-operation of others and more long-term in their ambition. This is not to say that there may be children who find themselves in a position, such is their social power, that they have to make very little efforts to secure what they want. Children in such a position may be in moral hazard if the micro-environment of their upbringing is seriously misleading as to the demands that a larger stage will bring to bear on their abilities to act and to respond to the expectations of others. Even if it is not, there are dangers attached to a child's failure to notice the complex interdependence of human life and the need to pay due regard to the expectations, needs and desires of others in the pursuit of its own life. Rousseau was, no doubt, correct in seeing that the upbringing of the young can be done well or badly (although this was hardly an original insight) but wrong to think that doing it well could only be done in the absence of a socially-based normative structure. On the argument above, such a structure is a necessary condition for any sort of education that is to stand a reasonable chance of success. More fundamentally, it is inconceivable that one could learn to communicate outside such a structure, so that there is an important sense in which the encounter with the normative nature of human life is unavoidable when one is learning as a child.¹¹

A fundamental condition of human well-being is satisfaction of the wish to be approved of and accepted by others, not only as a member of one's society but as someone recognised as an *active* member of society, who can both pursue their own ends and contribute to the fulfilment of societal ends. In order to do this, people need to grow morally as well as intellectually and physically. Thus the development of enduring traits of character, (often called the virtues), which contribute to the flourishing of both individual and society, are a vital part of education.

Since moral education is preparation for living well with other people it is a central part of any education. It must be developed in particular social contexts, initially the family and

the school, but later in other, less explicitly educational, contexts. The virtues practised in any particular society constitute, to a large extent, what counts as the good in that society. A society whose sense of its worth is partly constituted by the practice of other-regarding virtues such as trust, charity and sociability will practice, and educate children to practice, those virtues for their own sakes. The same point applies to the more self-regarding of the virtues, such as perfectionism, persistence and industriousness.¹² Moral education is thus connected with the satisfaction of intrinsic social goods which only manifest themselves in social situations: domestic, economic, public and political.

“Industrial training is not just the acquisition of manual or mental skills but it is also, and it increasingly needs to be, a process of socialization in work-related values, in a culture and community of work in which extra-functional skills like reliability, the ability to hold up under pressure, and solidarity with others working at the same tasks are highly regarded and rewarded.”¹³

There is no one set of virtues that fit every society’s ideas of what constitute the good life, although it is arguable that a minimal core are required in any (see Gray).¹⁴ Not only may the particular virtues vary, but the balance between social and other-regarding virtues may vary from society to society and may also vary diachronically, within societies. Thus to characterise morality in a meta-ethical sense as concerned with the cultivation of virtue is not to say very much about the particular virtues that will be cultivated in any one society. This is important to the debate about the place of work in human life since it is often maintained that *autonomy* or the ability to carry out one’s own projects is a central human need. On the view being developed here, the degree of autonomy regarded as a suitable framework for the practice of virtues will vary from society to society and, to the extent that it is a universal human need, will only be so in the minimal sense that some form of self-directedness is a necessary condition of happiness.

Ability to act as a background human condition

The capacity for voluntary action is necessary for us to carry out projects. If the arguments above are correct, that capacity has to be exercised through the application of effort. No philosopher has argued that the capacity to act is not a fundamental feature of human life, they have, however, disagreed about the importance of *work*. Voluntary, effortful activity in the pursuance of a project determined by oneself, in co-operation with others, or at the behest of someone else is a commonly accepted necessary condition of an activity’s counting as work.

White, in common with others, defines work as activity designed to bring about some end-product outside itself.¹⁵ My own view is that definitions, even of this minimal kind, are not helpful because the employment of terms such as ‘effort’, ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ is too complex and context-dependent to be susceptible to watertight definitions. For example, some

work is involuntary (eg. slave labour), while other work does not have an end-product (eg. breaking stones or picking oakum in a nineteenth century prison). Some leisure activity on the other hand, does have an end-product (eg. putting up shelves in one's house). In some contexts 'effort' means 'conscious physical exertion' (running up a hill while out of condition), while in others it means 'trying a bit harder than usual' (eg. in making conversation with one's distant relations). The most we can do is make a series of contrasts, bearing in mind that they may not always apply in particular contexts. There is a general point, though, and it is that work involves activity of some kind and that effort involves overcoming some kind of barrier (even if it is just the inclination to read the newspaper rather than make conversation with a distant cousin). But these general points are enough to develop the case that I wish to make.

We can say that purposive activity which involves some degree of effort is a pervasive and central feature of human experience in societies like ours and that, consequently, any education worthy of the name would prepare children for that experience in ways appropriate to the values and way of life of the society in which they are growing up. In our society some fairly general, but useful points can also be made about this. First, there is a moral dimension to our activity insofar as it affects the well-being of ourselves and others. Second, activity in societies like ours falls into one or other of the categories of domestic labour, voluntary work, leisure or paid employment. Third, a relatively high value is placed on *autonomy* in one or more of these spheres of activity. That is, to some extent, the means and the ends of the activity are at least partly determined by the individual who is to carry it out. The more autonomous one is in one's activity the greater is the latitude to choose means and ends. It follows readily that greater autonomy has an impact on the autonomy of others and leads to the necessity of systems of rules to regulate cases where one person's exercise of autonomy comes into conflict or potential conflict with that of another.

3. Education and social reproduction

So far, I have looked at the role of effort in the life of a young human being and argued that effort is both unavoidable and socially driven. I have avoided general definitions of activity, work, leisure or effort, seeking only to establish that effort, activity and social cooperation are fundamental to any form of human life. All of this has an inescapable moral dimension. I have also pointed out first, that activity in societies like ours falls into recognisably distinct spheres, second, that it involves, to a greater or lesser degree, the exercise of autonomy. It is now time to look at the role of effort in the maintenance of society as a whole.

Any society needs to produce new members, bring them up within its values and culture and to preserve its institutions, culture and general stock. This will include maintaining and developing the material means of its existence, but also its social, intellectual and moral

capital. Even if technology were to eliminate the role of effort in the first task, it would not follow that it would in preserving the others. This follows from the points made in the previous section. Maintenance of the culture and general stock of a society involves:

1] the maintenance of individual ability and character. This involves the development of knowledge, skill, and self- and other- regarding virtues in individuals.

2] the maintenance of social relationships, institutions and common projects. This involves the deployment of the individual traits described above in projects common to the society. *Social capital* is the common ability to maintain and develop the life of a society through a common culture and forms of understanding, together with modes of co-operative behaviour.

3] Since 1] is a condition of 2] and, on the argument of the previous section 1] depends on individual effort, so too does 2].

4] It follows, then, that education in the broad sense of preparation for life involves effort, since education is a preparation for and condition of the maintenance of human, material, social, moral and intellectual capital and the maintenance of all of these requires human effort. Preparation for life is, then a preparation for making an effort.

5] It further follows that social reproduction requires effort, since being educated does and being educated is a necessary component of social reproduction. But it also follows in a broader sense from the argument in the previous section, since social reproduction requires co-operation in the maintenance and furtherance of common projects, which are bound to encounter obstacles, both natural and social. And since the ability to exert purposeful effort is not innate, but acquired in a social context, the provision of education (in the broad sense) where the ability to exert purposeful, socially co-operative effort is acquired, is an essential precondition of social reproduction.

4. The necessity of work

In the previous section, the necessity for work in the sense of purposeful effort has been established. It is an inescapable part of human life. Work in this broad sense of purposeful, sustained activity is a characteristic mode of existence for human beings, for reasons which should by now be obvious.

Since much of what we call leisure and play, as well as paid, domestic and voluntary employment involves work in this sense, there is little sense in trying to distinguish between work, play and leisure in an abstract way. There will also be overlaps among the categories; for example some play activities, like professional games, involve the participants in paid employment.

The main focus of interest in political and educational debate has tended to be the continuing necessity for paid work. There is no a priori reason why a society should reproduce itself through paid work, although it is hard to see how it could do so without any work (in the sense of purposeful, co-operative effort). The development of technology has led some to think that the necessary labour-time for physical reproduction will diminish, and consequently so will the amount of paid work required, since much of this reproduction is, as a matter of fact, carried out through paid employment. This is, in effect, White's scenario 2.¹⁶

There is a purely formal sense in which this is true, but White's scenario does not correspond to the realities of contemporary society. There are four reasons for this:

First, at the practical level, economic competition means that societies have to constantly develop their abilities to produce (their productive powers) in order to socially reproduce.¹⁷ This involves the development of new skills and institutions which, nevertheless, have an intelligible continuity with those that already exist (see below). Both classical and marxist political economy have tended to ignore the importance of productive powers and Fukuyama has only recently drawn attention to one aspect of these, namely social capital.¹⁸ But, as List maintained, they also involve the means of social and spiritual renewal through the creation of assets that are not directly tradeable, like religious faith, physical and social well-being, health and safety.¹⁹ They also include the social element of human capital, namely the institutions, traditions, practices, attitudes and virtues that underpin economic activity, such as guilds and apprenticeship systems and the skills, values and virtues that they reproduce in the rising generation. Some skills take generations to build up, through constant improvement and adaptation to changing conditions, these require social institutions to sustain the individual skill and are intergenerational in character.

Second, the maintenance of social capital involves the maintenance of the social contexts in which the practice of virtues which constitute much of that social capital find their mode of expression. It is no easy matter to change such contexts in a drastic way. These do not just include such general social virtues such as consideration for others, politeness, charity, or a disposition to citizenship, but also more specifically occupationally-oriented virtues. Some of these are of an other-regarding kind, such as solidarity, co-operativeness and helpfulness. Others are more self-regarding, such as a striving for personal self-improvement or excellence, a degree of competitiveness or the desire to be approved of by others.

This point is nicely brought out by List. Writing of Germany after the devastation of the Thirty Years War, he remarks:

*"Only one thing the Germans had preserved; that was their aboriginal character, their love of industry, order, thrift and moderation, their perseverance and endurance in research and in business, their honest striving after improvement, and a considerable natural measure of morality, prudence and circumspection."*²⁰

Third, in our society, paid labour is the most recognised and prestigious way of making intelligible the connection between effort and individual benefit. (Maybe the balance has tilted too far in this direction in recent years, for example through the bringing of childrearing into the sphere of paid work). In other words, the maintenance of socially valuable virtues and institutions (social capital) requires the maintenance of paid work as a central feature of the life of such societies. This will remain true even if we were to ignore the imperatives outlined in the first point above.

Finally, White's thesis seems to fall into the 'lump of labour' fallacy, that is, the idea that each society has a fixed amount of socially necessary labour to perform. The picture behind the lump of labour fallacy is something like this; a domestic household has various necessary tasks that need to be carried out: clothes to be washed, dishes to be cleaned, floors to be vacuumed and so on. Given that these tasks take members of the household say, fifteen hours per week, it would seem to follow that if the introduction of a washing machine, a dishwasher and a robotic vacuum cleaner were to reduce this necessary labour-time to five hours, that the household would therefore only have five hours of necessary tasks to carry out and ten hours free for other purposes. It follows, of course, that the household would have ten hours available for other purposes (assuming that the introduction of the machinery does not, of itself, generate more work), but it does not follow that it would have ten more hours available for non-domestic labour. That would only follow from a decision to use the available ten hours for other purposes. If the members of the household decided that more time should be spent on tasks which are now considered to be necessary, but which were not previously possible, like decorating, repairing and gardening, then it is not difficult to see that the amount of necessary domestic labour could quite easily remain constant.

It can easily be seen that much the same situation could apply to a society. Societies can come to a view of the amount of labour that is needed to sustain them. Granted, the way in which they do this need not be a conscious decision on the part of an individual or group (but neither is this necessary in the household), but, nonetheless, they may do so and this view may change, depending on a number of background factors. These may include, for example, increased expectations. Just as the hypothetical household raised its expectations of the labour required to include decorating and gardening, so can a society change its views on, for example, the degree of health, hygiene and education that are acceptable. Or it may come to a view that more consumer goods or leisure services are a necessary part of that society's way of life. Yet again, it may come to take the view that the sexual division of labour between domestic work and paid work is no longer socially just and so create new amounts of paid work for women, including paid child care for working mothers. The factors that underlie such changes in employment orientation are complex but collectively they have much more than a narrowly economic rationale.

In fact, societies arrive at very different views at different periods of their history about

the amount of work that they require to be done, and these views only partly arise from the recognition of the physical necessity for renewal and reproduction. Also of great importance is the view that a society takes of what is socially necessary in the sense of what is required for civilised life and what view it takes of moral necessity, that is of the degree of work of whatever kind that is necessary to maintain the moral integrity of society and its members, together with the social capital of the society as a whole.

One can conclude that White's thesis ignores two key factors in the maintenance of societies in general. The first is the inescapability of social, purposeful effort. The second is the moral and social importance that a society places on different kinds of work and the fact that a common view of the different balance of these factors can change. He also ignores the imperatives of economic competition and the central role of paid employment in the maintenance and development of social capital and hence productive powers in societies like our own. Whatever the merits of his educational prescriptions, they do not follow from the validity of his general thesis.

I am not claiming that current social arrangements concerning the centrality of work are beyond criticism. Indeed, there is a case to be made for saying that paid employment assumes an exaggerated importance in modern, particularly Anglo-American society. Two examples illustrate this: first the phenomenon of 'presenteeism' whereby workers create a favourable impression by being ostentatiously present in the workplace before and after normal working hours, even though their contribution to production is not enhanced thereby; second, by the efforts of the current government to move the mothers of even very young children into the workplace in order to instill the 'work ethic' into them and their children.²¹ I am, however, claiming that paid work, unpaid work and activity involving effort are all likely to play a central role in the lives of our societies for the foreseeable future.

5. Education, work and effort

It was argued in Section II that an inescapable feature of life is the experience of necessity. The world is not wholly subject to our will and we experience it, to a great extent, as a range of different obstacles to be negotiated if we are ever to carry out any of our own projects. This necessity appears in various forms, which include the need to remove physical obstruction, the need to renew our lives and the lives of those who depend on us and the need to engage others in co-operative enterprises in order to fulfil our own needs. In addition, the wish to be well-regarded is not only a precondition of this last requirement but an affective demand on social creatures like ourselves.

But it follows that our ability to deal with and overcome necessity only exists to the extent that we are able to apply ourselves, sometimes to our physical and mental limits, in order to confront it. In order to do this, we must care about what we do, it must matter

deeply to us whether we succeed or not. And, given that it does, we need to exert ourselves and make efforts, both mental and physical, to succeed. Many of these efforts will consist of gaining and securing the co-operation of others in common projects and will, to that extent, have a strong moral dimension. Given that it is of the nature of life to confront various forms of necessity, it is unavoidable that any education is, at least in part, a preparation for overcoming necessity. It follows from the arguments outlined above that Education as a preparation for life will prepare us for necessity and thus for effort in our adult lives. Notice that this argument does not yet yield the conclusion that Education should be for work. However, it is arguable that White does not pay enough attention to the importance of effort in any sphere of life and that therefore his view of education for leisure is, to that extent lacking in a very important element.

The point about effort applies to many kinds of activity, including those that we call 'work'. It applies, for example, to domestic and social life and to voluntary and leisure activities, as much as it does to paid employment. The extent to which such activities are thought to be conditions for the exercise of autonomy and thus a form of intrinsic good in particular societies is to be answered in terms of the context of the activity, the nature of the tasks undertaken and the general value that is attached to autonomy within the society. Of our society and many like it, it can be said that autonomy tends to be quite highly valued, so does the fairly clear compartmentalisation of daily life into discreet spheres of activity: paid employment, domestic life and labour, leisure and social life. Within these different spheres, different virtues tend to be salient, as does the greater or lesser recognition of autonomy. Education in the broad sense has to take account of these pervasive features of the society and to seek to prepare people to achieve a proper balance within their lives between these different spheres. In what follows, I will outline more specific educational consequences of these philosophical points and seek to compare them with White's substantive educational prescriptions.

Effort and learning

White is keen to make the point, following many educational commentators, that much of a child's learning is largely effortless. I have, earlier, given some reasons for doubting that effortless learning is as pervasive as he and others have claimed. However, we can grant that some is, but the question of the importance of learning that requires effort still remains. As a first point, it is worth remembering that we hope that children will not just learn, but that they will learn *well*, that is, that they will acquire a *thorough* grasp of factual knowledge and that they will become *highly* skilled in practical and creative activities; it is a waste of the time of children and teachers to opt for a cognitive minimalism just because this can be achieved without too much effort. It follows then that Education, to the extent that it is a good preparation for life, will involve children in striving for excellence and this cannot but involve a degree of effort.

One can, however, go further and say that such striving is necessary to the enjoyment of learning. One gets satisfaction from overcoming obstacles and from the realisation that one has done something well. White implies that a work-filled school day (he is here using the term 'work' as a synonym for 'effort') must be boring. One can just as easily argue that a day filled with effortless activity is likely to be just as boring and alienating. One can argue about the balance of effort in a school day, it seems perverse to suggest that effort is, in some way, redundant. Even this consideration misses out the central importance of effort, however. If, like White, we consider *autonomous* well being to be an important educational aim²² then this must involve assisting young people to form life objectives and to develop the means to carry them out. In order to do this they need to form an intelligible idea of what it might be worthwhile to aim for and what it might cost in terms of time, effort and the co-operation of others to achieve. It is hard to see how this could be done without the development of character traits or virtues in children and young people, which would involve self-regarding characteristics such as diligence, a degree of perfectionism and persistence, together with other-regarding attributes like co-operativeness, reliability, sociability, loyalty and so on.

These are not mechanical attributes of habit and regularity but should ideally involve carrying out activities with enthusiasm and commitment (in a 'spirited' way), with an awareness of their ramifying importance, not just for others immediately around one, but for the overall significance of one's life and that of the community that one lives in.²³

One might put it this way. Autonomous people need to have aims to strive for. In order that they achieve their projects they need knowledge and skill of a high order, they need a certain strength of character and they need the ability to engage others in their projects in return for assisting them in theirs. It is hard to see how anyone who took autonomy seriously as an educational aim could fail to see the central importance of some kind of virtue-orientated moral education becoming central to the life of the school in all its aspects. Self-regarding virtues are important for many kinds of more individually-based learning but the other-regarding virtues are central for all those educational activities that require co-operative endeavour. Schools alone may not be sufficient for the development of these, however. If the virtues are acquired, as Aristotle maintained, through practising them, then it is reasonable to expect that they be acquired in the contexts most suitable to their exercise. As Streeck puts it:

*"That schools are not an ideal place to create work skills, even and especially if such skills are designed to be broad and polyvalent, is one of the central premises underlying the West German industrial training system."*²⁴

These virtues, misleadingly labelled 'broad and polyvalent skills', are in Germany acquired in a system of dual provision, whereby work apprenticeships are combined with attendance at a vocational school for young people from 15 upwards, who wish to develop a vocation. Vocational training is more than the acquisition of mental and manual skills, but also:

["a process of socialisation in work-related values, in a culture and community of work in which extra-functional skills like reliability, the ability to hold up under pressure, and solidarity with others working at the same tasks are highly regarded and rewarded. To internalise value orientations, at work, and elsewhere, people need role models; teachers, however, can serve this function only to a very limited extent and only for very few, selected roles. Unless one aspires to be a teacher oneself, work-related skills and orientations are acquired not from professional teachers but from more experienced peers in a place of work where technical competence can be blended into, and transmitted together with, attitudinal discipline and diligence." 25

It follows that the exclusive importance of school as a place of learning, particularly in the later years of compulsory education may need to be rethought. At the same time, there must be a continuity between the school's concern for developing self-regulated high standards amongst pupils and their further development in workplace situations. There is a case, as White recognises, for allowing young people an increasing range of opportunities to develop and pursue their aspirations in contexts outside the classroom. This, incidentally, would apply if Scenario 2 (the decline of paid work) were operative, since one would still, if the arguments of this article are right, wish young people to engage in meaningful and demanding co-operative endeavours.

White's own specific proposals rest on the idea that a range of optional activities be available in the latter part of the school day. My proposal is in the spirit of this by suggesting a wider variety of options for young people. I am also sympathetic to the idea that the compulsory parts of the curriculum can be slimmed down, although there is a requirement for a common core to provide the following:

1] generic skills such as numeracy and literacy.

2] knowledge which constitutes the common core of understanding upon which communication and co-operation in society depends (so-called 'cultural literacy').

3] suggests that some History, Geography and Science should be on such a curriculum. However, Technology, Art, Music, more advanced forms of Physical Education and Languages would be non-compulsory. In these cases, those who opted for them would be expected to show a high degree of commitment and a striving for high standards.

My suggestion is that this optional element be gradually expanded so that it includes both school and occupationally-based forms of learning in different mixes as children grow older. Even if such activities are not 'work-based' in the narrow sense, it is hard to see how they would not be 'effort-based' if they are to have an educational, moral or spiritual value for their participants. It also appears to be the case that they will involve a strong degree of co-operative endeavour if they are to be successful.

Conclusion

One of the themes of this article has been the social interdependence of our individual life-projects and the way in which society determines the overall amount of work, of whatever kind, that is appropriate in accordance with the predominant values in that society. These are pervasive features of any society and in ours it is likely to remain the case that paid employment will constitute a major part of the time of individuals for the foreseeable future. It is inevitable that education will prepare children and young people for the kind of life that they will lead as adults and that will be one in which paid employment is bound to play a significant part.

This brings me to the main problem with White's approach; that it is excessively individualistic. He appears to assume that people are individual atoms pursuing their purposes, essentially with minimal reference to others, without expending a great deal of effort on doing so. Only through such a perspective is it possible to advocate the kind of laid-back leisured society of individuals pursuing their favoured projects largely on their own, without hindrance (or help) from other people that he envisages.²⁶ But would such a society be desirable? The danger is that it would fracture, split by the individualistic pursuit of strong autonomy, so that the common perception of a shared way of life, shared values and common projects ceased to inspire people. Furthermore, many would find the near-exclusive pursuit of pleasure, often in a short-term perspective, to the exclusion of more serious or longer-term pursuits, morally degrading. True, certain virtues of sociability, such as friendliness and a sense of humour might come to be highly valued, but other virtues such as loyalty, diligence, patience, trustworthiness and so on, might just as easily come to be less so, when the contexts for their growth and maintenance cease to play a central role in our lives. Many people would regard that as a very undesirable development for our society, because these virtues are not just valued for their extrinsic capacity to bring about certain results, but also because the practice and the valuing of them is considered to be part of what *constitutes* a worthwhile society. The virtues need to be practised for their own sake if they are to become elements of our character, even if it is known that they will also lead, for example, to material prosperity. A good society, most would agree, is one which is not only well-off but populated by people who value, and possess to some degree, virtues that they believe are constitutive of good people.

These virtues can only be cultivated in contexts where people have to join common projects in order to fulfill their own, where they have experience of confronting and overcoming difficulty and where they have to live for others at least as much as they live for themselves and where they, and the communities that they live in, undertake long-term projects. If such contexts are constitutive of human well-being then their possible disappearance must be viewed with the greatest concern. White may well reply that he does not value and would not wish to live in such a society, and that seems to be a reasonable response. But then he can hardly complain if others oppose projects which aim to undermine the contexts that

they believe are constitutive of the kind of life that they consider to be desirable. As far as education is concerned, although one may have, from this perspective, considerable sympathy for some of White's proposed educational reforms, to the extent that they presuppose a shift to a more hedonistic and individualistic conception of the good, they are to be viewed with concern by all who remain committed about to preservation, in our kind of society, of some conception of the common good.

Notes

- 1- J.P. White, *Education and the End of Work*, London, Cassell, 1997.
- 2- For 'thick' content-full definitions of education as a good, see R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, London, Routledge, 1966. For 'thinner', content-minimal, definitions see J.P.White, *The Aims of Education Restated*, London, Routledge 1982, and C.A. Winch, *Quality and Education*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996.
- 3- See Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, (1776), Indianapolis,Liberty Fund 1981.
- 4- Aristotle, *Politics*, edited with an introduction by Stephen Everson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, esp. Books III,IV.
- 5- Eg. R. Norman, *The Moral Philosophers*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983.
- 6- J.J. Rousseau, *Emile*, Book 1, p.76; see also p.80, Paris, Editions Flammarion, 1968.
- 7- P.F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment' in *Freedom and Resentment and other Essays*, London, Methuen, 1974.
- 8- For such an account, see R. Sheaff, *The Need for Health Care*, London, Routledge, 1996.
- 9- Eg. N. Chomsky, *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, Cambridge Mass. MIT Press, 1988, pp.62-63.
- 10- White, unfortunately seems to have been tempted by the Chomskyan account of learning with minimal effort, see op. cit. 1997, pp. 97-101.
- 11- Cf. Norman Malcolm, 'Language and the Instinctive Basis of Human Behaviour', Swansea, University College of Swansea, 1982.
- 12- F. List, *The National System of Political Economy*, (first published in German, 1841), translated into English by Sampson S. Lloyd, New Jersey, Augustus Kelley, 1991.
- 13- W. Strecek 'Skills and the Limits of Neo-Liberalism', Leicester, Centre for Labour Market Studies, pp. 291-300, p. 297, first published, 1989.
- 14- Gray J., *Enlightenment's Wake*, London, Routledge 1995.
- 15- White 1997, op. cit. p.4.
- 16- Ibid. pp. 74-78.
- 17- For the origin of this concept in economics see F.List, op. cit. For an explanation and defence of the concept see C.Winch 'Listian Political Economy; Social Capitalism Conceptualised?' in *New Political Economy* 3,2, 1998, pp. 301-316.
- 18- F. Fukuyama, *Trust*, London, Penguin, 1995.

19- List op.cit. pp.143-4.

20- Ibid. p.81.

21- One may speculate as to the extent that the feminism of the early nineteen seventies, with its stress on the socialisation of child care is behind this development, given the presence of former seventies feminists in central governmental positions in the UK.

22- Cf. White op.cit. Chapter 5, J.P. White, *Education and the Good Life*, London, Kogan Page, 1990.

23- This dual aspect of spiritual education is persuasively argued for by David Carr in 'Towards a Distinctive concept of Spiritual Education', *Oxford Review of Education*, 21, 1, 1995, pp.83-98. although Carr would probably not recognise, as I do, the importance of the spiritual in vocational education.

24- Streeck op. cit. p.297.

25- Ibid. p. 297.

26- White op. cit. Chapter 4.