

PAIDEIA AND THE SEMIOTICS OF EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT: This paper was sparked by comments made by President of Russia Vladimir Putin about the weakness of democracy. It considers the millennia-old notion of paideia and its ancient aspiration towards autonomy as virtues which are necessary for democracy to prevail in the face of authoritarianism. Paideia or the educational instigation of culture is particularly well described by Werner Jaeger. Cornelius Castoriadis has related insights into how democratic culture can be enhanced and defended. After discussing paideia the paper enlists the semiotics of John Poinot, Charles Sanders Peirce and John Deely as an epistemological basis from which the workings of paideia and the possibilities of autonomy might be assessed. The conclusion discusses education theorist Gert Biesta's concerns with character, democracy, politics and autonomy. It suggests that Biesta's notion of *subjectification* implies a semiotic process of mind which invokes the need for a modern paideia designed to oppose the supposed present deterioration in liberal democracy and its replacement by 'traditional' values which is advocated by Mr Putin.

KEYWORDS: Democracy; Education; Paideia; Semiotics; Dewey; Marcuse; Poinot; Peirce; Deely; Jaeger; Biesta; Castoriadis; Bauman; Vladimir Putin

INTRODUCTION

On June 27th 2019 President of Russia Vladimir Putin was reported as telling the *Financial Times* inter alia:

The liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population... This liberal idea presupposes that nothing needs to be done. That migrants can kill, plunder and rape with impunity because their rights as migrants have to be protected. (Barber and others, 2019, p. xxii)

These comments provoked concerned political responses reported in news media from those who see themselves as defenders of liberal and democratic principles, (Cheung, 2019), (Bennetts, 2019), (Meredith, 2019). President of the

European Council, Donald Tusk was particularly strong in this criticism of these remarks. But this situation suggests a research question: Besides the political, isn't there another quarter from which a response should be expected? Doesn't genuine democracy depend to a large extent on sound education? And thus shouldn't people who society think of as educationalists consider it their duty to rise to the occasion? Is there not a responsibility on vice chancellors as well as on similarly eminent and well rewarded government education ministers and mandarins to join the debate? As the policy setters, helmsmen and helmswomen of the transmission of intellect, surely top educators inherit the sacred responsibility of steering our cultural destiny towards enlightened civility particularly when there are strong counter currents. However there appears to have been a lack of voice or action from this quarter. And as a subsidiary research question: Does this apparent muteness have anything to do with the alleged emasculation of the humanities, (Rosário, 2019, p. 8), (Massing, 2019), (Donoghue, 2008), (THE, 2015)? Or does it reveal a more fundamental intellectual pathology among these leaders? What follows is an argument to establish the responsibility of educational leaders for culture, especially political culture. The paper will go on to offer an epistemology for how this crucial obligation might best be analysed, understood and monitored.

This paper is a discussion of what is surely the best defence and last redoubt of the maintenance of the minimum levels of an adequate democracy. It is not about idealised political forms. That sort of a debate might take a little longer. Instead, while not being misty eyed about the past it will link education back to the eudemonia involved in ancient Greek paideia and Roman humanitas. Like present times, even at their height, classical civilisations were to say the least imperfect. However they provide a model for how imparting knowledge is central to creating the kinds of character in people which is conducive to democracy. This paper will have two main sections and a conclusion. The first is a discussion of paideia. Paideia is a term associated with liberal studies. It was originally the ancient Greek idea of an education which imparted appropriate understandings that would incline people to be able to conceive of and thus hopefully adopt appropriate virtues. Paideia differs from indoctrination because it assists the subject to become intellectually autonomous. It is not just to do with the delivery of skills, facts and understandings. It is also to do with the ability for people to

personally conceive and reflect on their own motivations and tendencies. Rather than being just about knowing it is to do with developing a mature judgement. It is about how particular modes of enlightened consciousness may produce certain types of people who are rationally oriented to particular visions of themselves and the world. The Roman equivalent of paideia was humanitas. But there is a need to avoid mistranslation from the Latin. Paideia and humanitas do not necessarily signify the noble, the righteous, the humane or other traits of civility. Many of those schooled in these traditions were and are culpable of barbaric policies and actions. As much as a Greta Thunberg a Donald Trump might also appear within the same paideia-influenced milieu. But while not a magic potion for invoking the good society it is still a terminology useful for describing the formation and maintenance of the virtues which are hopefully still widespread enough in Western culture to prove Mr Putin wrong.

The second section of this paper will outline semiotics as an epistemological basis for the critique of paideia and its resulting flavours of virtue. That part of the paper will draw largely from John Deely and from the recent interest in the notion of edu-semiotics and other subdivisions of the semiotic field. The argument will be that the semiotic approach is the best way of explaining experience, perception, internal conception and the bases of all kinds of action and agency to do with human character. Semiotics will be proposed as better than phenomenology for example for accounting for the benign creation as well as the pathological subversion of physical and mental agency. Signs and the signification of thought have been a concern of Western philosophy since at least Aristotle. They were debated by the Stoics and Epicureans. They were taken up by Augustine and pondered by the Scholastics for a millennia (Markus, 1957, p. vii), (J. N. Deely, 2001). A highpoint in the Scholastic treatment was that of John of St Thomas aka John Poincot whose central idea was similar to that of Charles Sanders Peirce two centuries later (J. N. Deely, 2009). Consequently the argument will be that for a very long time it has been apparent to some that perceiving, conceiving and deciding how to act is a process which can be labelled 'semiotic'. However it is also apparent that the term semiotics warrants a better understanding and maybe new nomenclature if only because its proponents have now developed it into multiple branches such as edu-semiotics, semio-ethics, bio-semiotics, zoo-semiotics and phyto-semiotics.

The third section, the conclusion, enlists the approach including the emphasis on freedom and democracy, of educational theorist Gert Biesta. It will illustrate how the progressive education style which he advocates inevitably resonates with the concept of paideia. It will also recommend that Biesta's central notion of *subjectification* very much lends itself to a semiotic critique.

PAIDEIA SECTION

In his three volume *Paideia: The ideals of Greek culture* Werner Jaeger who like Nietzsche once held the chair in Greek at Basel wrote:

Areté [living an excellent life which fulfilled one's potential] had from the very first been closely bound up with education. [In fifth century Athens] ...it would then have been unthinkable that education should be founded on anything but membership of the political community. In fact, that is the supreme axiom of all cultural education, and the greatest proof of its truth is the origin of Greek paideia. Its aim was to transcend the aristocratic principle of privileged education, which made it impossible for anyone to acquire areté unless [they] already possessed it by inheritance from divine ancestors. It seemed easy to transcend it by the application of logical reasoning, the new instrument whose power was constantly growing. (Jaeger, 1944, pp. 286-7)

In the 1980s Mortimer Adler wrote about a potential modern paideia in his *The paideia proposal: An education manifesto* (Adler, 1982). This time it was not the revolutionary change from aristocratic controlled superstition to rationalism which guaranteed meaningful membership of the political community. Instead, in Adler's United States it was the achievement of the right to 12 years of education for everyone and the possibility of going beyond that: "In the twentieth century, we demand twelve years of common schooling at public expense for every child in the country;" (Ibid. p. 12). However in a country of such mixed wealth and privilege Adler was highly sceptical that *all* children were in fact enjoying the sort of proper paideia which he and the members of his Paideia Group were lobbying for:

The reason why universal suffrage in a true democracy calls for universal public schooling is that the former without the latter produces an ignorant electorate and amounts to a travesty of democratic institutions and processes. To avoid this danger public schooling must be universal also in its quality aspect. (Adler, 1982, p. 17)

This notion of quality refers to the need for all students to not just receive

liberal studies, but to be liberated by their lifelong education in a way which enables genuine political awareness. Adler alleged that more than half of the school population were predominantly trained for jobs. He invoked John Dewey who early in the century had argued that students only became capable of independent reasoning if education is designed with genuine democracy in mind. Dewey suggests modern education was initially conceived under the influence of: “The "Individualistic" Ideal of the eighteenth century;” (Dewey and others, 2008). This ideal involved trust in the exaggeration of Rousseau’s innate human nature which merely needed setting free. However it was soon realised that: “...an enlightened and progressive humanity, required definite organization for its realization;” (Ibid.). This revision of an already misconstrued Rousseau would have been fine but:

The educational process was taken to be one of disciplinary training rather than of personal development. Since, however, the ideal of culture as complete development of personality persisted, educational philosophy attempted a reconciliation of the two ideas. The reconciliation took the form of the conception of the "organic" character of the state. The individual in his isolation is nothing; only in and through an absorption of the aims and meaning of organized institutions does he attain true personality. What appears to be his subordination to political authority and the demand for sacrifice of himself to the commands of superiors is in reality but making his own the objective reason manifested in the state—the only way in which he can become truly rational... (Ibid)

This view of Dewey about how potentially autonomous minds are subverted by institutional norms is echoed in Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*:

With the vast hierarchy of executive and managerial boards extending far beyond the establishment into the scientific laboratory and research institute, the national government and national purpose, the tangible source of exploitation disappears behind the façade of objective reality. (Marcuse, 1972, p. 39)

Marcuse goes on to explain how people are constantly fooled by the many “liberties and comforts” which are delivered by this “subjection to the production apparatus” which obscures the difference between “false and true consciousness.” Though only Adler used the term; Dewey, Adler and Marcuse can be enlisted in an argument for the necessity of a *paideia*, i.e. a cultural education, which might enable overcoming some of the obstacles to a more adequate reality. What sort of *paideia* might produce a more autonomous access to reality? Jaeger’s explanation of how the original *paideia* functioned gives pointers towards the

answer:

The great educational movement which distinguished the fifth and fourth centuries [BCE] and which is the origin of the European idea of culture, necessarily started from and in the city-state of the fifth century. It aimed as the Greeks understood it, entirely at political education, training to serve the polis...In modern times too, the same development has raised the same urgent questions once again. Only at this state of spiritual development are such problems as those of freedom and authority or education for citizenship and education for leadership, conceived and answered, and only at this stage do they acquire their full urgency as moulders of destiny. (Ibid. p. 288)

Jaeger summarises the content of this education and its predominant teachers: the sophists. In the above and below there are references to moulding or shaping. These restricting concepts will come up again in discussion of Biesta's *subjectification* and his and Castoriadis's references to the limits of autonomy:

We cannot say with certainty whether the sophists used the particular concept of formation or shaping for the process of education: in principle their idea of education would admit it perfectly. It does not matter therefore that Plato was perhaps the first to use the word mould for the act. The idea of shaping the soul is implicit in Protagoras' assertion that harmony and the rhythm of poetry and music must be impressed on the soul to make it rhythmical and harmonious. (Ibid. p. 314)

In this section Jaeger then goes on to make a comment about the teachings of the sophists which some may find quite astonishing:

Before them we never hear of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic: they must therefore have invented them. The new techné [art] is clearly the systematic expression of the principle of shaping the intellect, because it begins by instruction in the form of language, the form of oratory, and the form of thought. This educational technique is one of the greatest discoveries which the mind of [humans] has ever made: it was not until it explored these three of its activities that the mind apprehended the hidden law of its own structure. (Ibid. p. 314)

It is important to underline that Jaeger is here discussing far more than simply equipping those enfranchised in the new democracy with the skills of reasoning, and oratory so that they can run that society. He is talking about education as the process of creating an intellectual structure which enables radically new and improved forms of thinking, reasoning and effective communication. He is writing about the building blocks of mind creation which enable significant numbers of people to effectively think secularly, autonomously, creatively and

rationally. To underline: The list of specific subjects associated with paideia should not be collapsed into the modern sense of a curriculum. It is in this rather obscuring, mundane guise, this shorthand, that moderns tend to talk about the ancient Greek paideia and its later adoption by the Romans. Here is an example from Richard Tarnas which, despite historical contextualisation, can be argued to fall into this trap:

Thus the sophists mediated the transition from the age of myth to an age of practical reason. [People] and society were to be studied methodically and empirically, without theological preconceptions. Myths were to be understood as allegorical fables, not revelations of a divine reality. Rational acuity, grammatical precision, and oratorical prowess were the prime virtues in the new ideal [person]. The proper moulding of a [person's] character for successful participation in polis life required a sound education in the various arts and sciences, and thus was established the paideia - the classical Greek system of education and training which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, natural history, astronomy and the physical sciences, history of society and ethics, and philosophy – the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen. (Tarnas, 2010, pp. 29 - 30) ¹

In the way half indicated by this extract from Tarnas what was originally a three dimensional mind and character forming educational activity can be argued to have become two dimensional and obscure with time. It is for the above reasons that the subjects of ancient Greek paideia are contradictorily recognised and unrecognised by the modern ear. In other words the seven liberal arts of: grammar, dialectic [discursive reasoning] and rhetoric [persuasive, eloquent oral skills] plus arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy should not simply be seen as school subjects. In the sense discussed here they should be thought of firstly as the elements of an intellectual revolution and only secondly as the pillars of Western culture. This revolutionary effect comes out more clearly when Jaeger emphasises that the sophists adopted Pythagorean doctrines in a way which: “altered the history of the world by introducing mathematical instruction” (Ibid. pp. 316 – 317). In other words, in the era of the original sophists, humans acquired radically improved thinking capacities on a mass scale. There was a step change

¹ Some inappropriate gender designations have been left untouched to be faithful to quoted authors. However where these seem to be entirely unnecessary ‘man’, ‘he’ etc. has been changed to [person], [they] and so on.

in how large numbers of people, as opposed to elites, could reason autonomously. The notion of common humanity was significantly changed. Autonomy involves the ability of people to think and act in the ways they want. However, as in Dewey's observation of a psychological: "subordination to political authority" above, social living implies there may be self-imposed mental limitations to these freedoms. Like Dewey, invoking a version of Rousseau, Cornelius Castoriadis deals with this contradiction in some depth. In *Figures of the Thinkable* Castoriadis writes:

Sophocles says it in three words: *edidaxato* [self taught] *astunomous orgas* [the passions, dispositions, the urges that give laws to cities—that institute cities]. Man has himself educated himself in transforming his drives in such a way that they [the drives] become foundational and regulative of cities. Discussing *astunomous orgas* at length is also important for a historical reason. It is here that one finds for the first time explicitly formulated what became one of the great themes of classical political philosophy, from Plato up to and including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, though later forgotten in the intellectualistic aridity that has held sway in this domain for two centuries: it is that "in order to institute a people," as Rousseau says, one must first change its "mores," and mores are basically the schooling of the passions, which requires at least that the law take them into account in the citizens' *paideia*. (Castoriadis, 2007, p. 48)

Elsewhere in his 1989 *First Institution of Society* Castoriadis writes:

When Aristotle says that outside the *polis* [people] cannot be but a savage beast or a god, he knows and he says that the human being is humanized only in and through the *polis*— an idea, moreover, that returns again and again among the ancient Greek poets, historians, and philosophers...Democracy signifies the power of the people; in other words, it means that the people make their own laws—and to make them they must be convinced, as a matter of fact, that the laws are the making of human beings. But at the same time this implies that no extra-social standard for their laws exists—and this is the tragic dimension of democracy, for it is also its dimension of radical freedom: democracy is the regime of *self-limitation*... (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 159)

What Castoriadis is discussing in these two sections is Auto [self] Nomos [law]. Following Aristotle his view is that humanity differs from the non-human when people adhere to a complex set of institutional rules. But these rules are not wholly cultural abstractions. They are rules developed in dialogue with innate anthropomorphic passion. Even at the primeval level people have an urge for invoking rules in a communal setting. Some might suggest that it is unsurprising

that a passion that everyone should obey rules arises when lots of people find themselves living close to lots of other people. However the point being made by the use of ornate ancient Greek wordage and its setting in Sophocles' *Antigone* is a subtle one. Castoriadis is implying that as with the Greek enlightenment, any era's imaginative and poetic creativity has to be recruited in order to delicately modulate initially coarse, emotive demands for rule setting. It is only via the arts and the mores and aesthetics that they support, that it is possible to finesse the best route towards institutional designs that are auto nomos, i.e. self-lawed or democratic. Building the minds – the inwardly accepted realities of great civilisations is a very sophisticated process. Genius and artistry is required if souls are to be engineered to enjoy the greatest amount of freedom while a unifying social spirit still prevails. Castoriadis contrasts the ancient Greek to the modern era where he finds that nowadays the conception and deployment of this needed creativity has been woeful. He frowns at the ways modernist ideologies have delivered a paideia which is mundane and limiting – which is unworthy of the great cultural wealth humanity has inherited. The present paideia does not compare to that produced amid the aesthetic revolution of the Greek enlightenment. Instead, strongly influenced by intense capitalist and neoliberal ideologies, political thought and imagination which might otherwise improve democracy has been stifled in the ways explained by Dewey and Marcuse. Complicated philosophical notions have added to this sophistication in a pathological way. Successive, poorly explained, sometimes tortuous rationalisations and counter rationalisations might be said to have created an idioscopic, a specialist-thinking maze where the mind's interpretant ability in respect of intellectual culture has been over-stretched. In consequence a real sense of how the world is formally ordained to work is privy to only a few – the few who are deemed to be highly educated. The current sociological concerns over Oxbridge and UK Russell Group university entrants would tend to support the argument that there is still a narrowly recruited section of the population who benefit from what is called educational excellence. (OxfordU, 2018), (University_of_Cambridge, 2018), (Reporter, 2016). Excellence is a term constantly employed by university academic boards and governance bodies which anyone familiar with them will confirm. As the web site references from Oxford and Cambridge Universities and the *Tes* reporter imply this group would

tend to be comprised of those already well endowed with what Bourdieu named cultural capital, (P. Bourdieu, 1986). Modernism's extreme disparities of wealth continues to maintain this divide in who the most erudite understandings are gifted to. The notions of idioscopy and the interpretant are dealt with in the below section on semiotics where the conundrum of who gets to know what will be returned to.

To summarise this section: It is not difficult to present an argument that good education is essential for reversing the tendency which Vladimir Putin alleges is taking place. But such an argument must include the contention that reliance on civics classes fundamentally misunderstands the problem, its scale and its depth within the human psyche. The misunderstanding can be illustrated by a simple examination of the modern lexicon. This examination would find the following emphasised words and phrases are out of place in common discourse: There is an urgent need to view education as *paideia* oriented along lines which *produce character*. This is *character* which is *self-consciously* and *responsibly autonomous*. Education understood as *paideia* would also involve Adler's call for economic fairness with everyone receiving *equal quality of education* so that they achieved a mature awareness of the political environment which they live within. This *paideia* could be inspired historically by imagining the ancient Greek poets and playwrights who bravely broke with archaic culture. It would be a *paideia* which would tap into subsequent creativity from Dante, Shakespeare and Blake up to the best of current aesthetics. Nietzsche's *The birth of tragedy and the genealogy of morals* (Nietzsche and others, 1956) as well as the example of Sophocles quoted by Castoriadis give clues to how the ancient tragedians reinterpreted the human condition. They devised the kinds of *virtues* and the kind of social reasoning which has persist up to today despite discouragement in the manner illustrated by Putin. There is a need to acknowledge and encourage more *paideia*-associated content in the 21st century's wide range of powerful art forms. There is a need for the eternal role of contemporary creative arts to be taken more seriously. This is the role of acknowledging, inventing and responding not just to the intellect but also to underlying human passions, what the ancients called *pathos*. This is the way the arts are mid-wives to the constant re-birth, the ever developing project of what humanity is becoming. Contemporary *paideia* needs to be a re-building of the democratic form from the best of relevant ideas not just in philosophy but in

contemporary humanities as a whole. Liberal democratic thinking needs to be rescued from the modernist “intellectualistic aridity” referred to by Castoriadis. Contemporary paideia needs to exude a cultural form worth the full meaning of the term culture. This would be a culture where the mass of people were capable of attaining the best possible range of sophisticated intellectual viewpoints and sentiments from which to see and feel what the economic, science, technology and other processes of their society really are. Enhanced artistic and political vision is needed in order to fashion an optimistic future-oriented culture significantly cleansed of the cant and denial-pathologies associated with giving up on what Putin calls “this liberal idea”.

SEMIOTICS

The translators of Plato and Aristotle imply the concept of sign was common in their era, e.g. in Phaedrus:

Socrates: At the moment when I was about to cross the river, dear friend, there came to me my familiar divine sign – which always checks me when on the point of doing something or other – and all at once I seemed to hear a voice... I am a seer – not a very good one it is true, but like a poor scholar good enough for my own purposes. (Plato, 2005a, p. 242c)

And in Republic:

And so when men unfit for culture approach philosophy and consort with her unworthily, what sort of ideas and opinions shall we say they beget? ... in the case of Theages all other conditions were at hand for his backsliding ... My own case, the divine sign, is hardly worth mentioning – for I suppose it has happened to few or none before me. (Plato, 2005b, p. 6.496c)

More specifically about signs, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* has:

Now the one kind of Sign (that which bears to the proposition it supports the relation of particular to universal) may be illustrated thus. Suppose it were said, ‘The fact that Socrates was wise and just is a sign that the wise are just’. Here we certainly have a Sign; but even though the proposition be true, the argument is refutable, since it does not form a syllogism. Suppose, on the other hand, it were said, ‘The fact that he has a fever is a sign that he is ill’, or, ‘The fact that she is giving milk is a sign that she has lately borne a child’. Here we have the infallible kind of Sign, the only kind that constitutes a complete proof, since it is the only kind that, if the particular statement is true, is irrefutable. (Aristotle, 2001, pp. Bk.1, Ch. 2, 1357b)

Later, as 3rd century CE Diogenes Laertius tells us, Stoics and Epicureans had different notions of sign in their contrasting philosophies:

...hence the Stoic insistence on the intervention of a conceptual intermediary between the sign and the thing signified in the sign-relation: a sign signifies its object [by] virtue of a concept which applies to the object signified. (Markus, 1957, p. 61)

While for the Epicureans:

...the relation of sign to thing signified is not a logical nexus; the inference from one to the other is based on mental association [on] words having fixed meanings. (Ibid. p. 61)

Then later again the church father and former professor of rhetoric at Milan, St Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430) wrote:

Now some signs are natural, others conventional. Natural signs are those which, apart from any intention or desire of using them as signs, do yet lead to the knowledge of something else, as, for example, smoke when it indicates fire. ... Conventional signs, on the other hand, are those which living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds, or their perceptions, or their thoughts... Of the signs, then, by which men communicate their thoughts to one another, some relate to the sense of sight, some to that of hearing, a very few to the other senses. ... But because words pass away as soon as they strike upon the air, and last no longer than their sound, men have by means of letters formed signs of words. (Augustine, 1952, pp. On C. D. Bk. 2, 3, 5)

Deely makes the point in a number of places, e.g. (J. N. Deely, 2009, pp. 4, 10) that Augustine is here contrasting, but not realising the importance of this difference between natural signs such as smoke, breast milk, fever; and cultural signs such as speech and writing. In various publications Deely describes the centuries of debates which ensued among the scholastics about signs. For Deely these debates culminate with John Poinot, aka John of St Thomas (1589 -1644). In *Tractus de Signis* [the treatment of signs] translated by Deely, Poinot writes:

We are speaking, therefore, of the fundament [underlying reason or essence] of a sign and of signification, inasmuch as the fundament represents to a cognitive power [cognising ability] something for which the sign substitutes and is vicegerent [deputises] in representing that something to the power. And we are asking whether this leading and presentation or representation of its significate [the thing signified or indicated] to a power is some kind of efficient causality [thing or agent which *actually* brings it about], or should be placed in some other order of cause [such as

means of bringing it about].

In the act itself of signifying or representing, we can distinguish three things which seem to pertain to making an object present in a power; for to represent is nothing other than to make an object present or united to a power.

The first is an emission or production of specifiers which comes about in a power by the agency of an object and external sign.

The second is the excitation of a power to direct attention, which is distinguished from the impression itself of specifying forms; for even after the specifiers have been received, someone needs to be aroused to attention.

The third is the concurrence {of a sign} with a power to elicit an awareness of a thing signified. To elicit this act, an external sign concurs by means of the intrinsically received specifying form [cultural or natural code], through which it not only concurs in the formation of an awareness of itself, but also of the significate to which it leads. (Peirce and others, 1985 679b 6-44 Question 5)

Here is the notion for firstness, secondness and thirdness which was repeatedly raised in other ways by Peirce as it was by Peirce and is in all modern writings on semiotics. The argument of this section of Peirce continues in a way which becomes more complex than is necessary for the present paper. Suffice it to say that he then goes on to distinguish between, on the one hand signs which involve themselves with the conceiving ability in a way which produces “some new reality” in a kind of discursive manner, and on the other hand signs which are more concrete conveyers of apparently apodictic reality: “...whether from within by God, or from without by a man or some other agency proposing and applying an object to sense,” (Ibid.), i.e. empirically. Two centuries later Peirce categorised a larger and more nuanced number of different sign types than Peirce, for instance: iconic, indexical and symbolic signs.

Here is another quote which may help to clarify what Peirce was trying to explain. In *Outlines of Formal Logic* Peirce deals with semiotics in terms of the enthymeme, that is the incomplete syllogistic proof. Figuring things out with incomplete proof or knowledge involves habitual presumptions. This is something which people necessarily do at every moment of their lives. This is because, other than in the special case of mathematics, it is rarely possible to know anything apodictically:

The third operation of the intellect is carried on by discourse, which necessarily requires inference and consequence by which one thing is deduced from another.

(Poinsot, 1955, p. 103)

Poinsot is here discussing dialectic in relation to thirdness; the third operation where almost never-perfect mental conceiving means enthymeme is far more common than syllogism in dialectic discussion. The use of the enthymeme is inevitable because, constantly talking in syllogism, constantly knowing and communicating in apodictic, scientifically proved facts, is impossible for all of the people all of the time. Peirce reserves the specialist fields of mathematics, philosophy and what he refers to as “idioscopy” – considering by those specially equipped – as nearer to the apodictic. He contrast idioscopy with “cenoscopy” – i.e. more easily or generally observable causes and facts. (Peirce, 1955, p. 66). Despite idioscopy, in general any inter-personal communication, as well as even the most diligent internal pondering, predominately requires trusting guesses. These are conscious or unconscious guesses which reference notions stored from previous cognition or which are being encouraged synchronously across a wide network of real-time mental interaction. That is: asynchronous memory triangulates with other more synchronous information. This is information which may include suspicions, the facial expressions of the interlocutor, what is being tweeted right now and so on - all collected and developed in moment to moment life. This mental management of what is/was originally being represented is the ‘secondness’ i.e. the second operation of the sign. The third operation, the “deduction” in the Poinsot quote is, for the sake of this discussion, the interpretant. However in the below discussion it need to be made clear that the interpretant of a plant is not the same as the interpretant of a human. Human thought interprets while plants also sense and take action as if they were making decisions, but via a quite different mechanism. Since what might be called the rediscovery of semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce in the 19th century this field has been considerably developed. Notable 20th century writers on semiotics clustered around Thomas Albert Sebeok (1920-2001). It became clear that semiotics is not just about thoughts. Instead, to many, semiotics is now seen as a theoretical schema which is applicable to all living processes. Sebeok sums up this omnipresence in his *Global Semiotics* where in the introduction he writes:

In sum global semiotics can be seen as composed of two partially overlapping estates: “normal” semiotics...the subject matter of which is, intrinsically Minds, Models and Meditation; and biosemiotics, all this and much, much more. (Sebeok, 2001, p. xxii).

Much of this vast field can be explained in the same way implicit in Peirce. Peirce's concerns were thought and logic. But what he wrote can be argued to be common to mediated responses to the signals involved in every living process. Just as a word or sign of an object or of an imagination is mediated – that is interpreted in thought – so a plant's orientation to the sun is affected by photons and the photons', or light waves' direction when this radiation impacts. The plant manifests itself as interpretant by the very fact of its being a living organism which is able to react to sunlight in certain ways. In this case the sign-interpreting activity may result in the stems and leaves turning and growing towards the sunlight. All actions involved with life betray this sort of mediation, that is, the reception and potential to make some sort of sense of indications which the living entity is able to detect. The interpretant aspect of semiotics implies some form of analysis by the receiving system which may result in action. The organism may be Socrates, another mind or an oak tree. Whatever it is it has a certain nature which is usually oriented to self-preservation and self-benefit. (Not always of course as in the case of Socrates.) In the case of plants their interpretant can be expressed as their nature. In the case of humans the interpretant involves all sorts of culture-mediated abilities and orientations which have been developed within, or added to the initially anthropomorphic nature of how homo sapiens may have originally mediated their world like other animals.

Semiotics is a complex subject which cannot be properly explained in just a few sentences. This is why it might be useful to borrow from phenomenology rather as the ancient Greek philosophers borrowed in an analogical manner from previously ingrained archaic notions such as those skilfully used by Homer, and Hesiod. That is: semiotics might take from the phenomenologists, what might, for sake of argument, be called surface notions of sensing. Semiotics however would claim to explain more fully how and why living processes actually take place in terms of signs and interpretants at the deeper levels of human or other sorts of nature. Semiotics is therefore more akin to the developments of phenomenology known as post-phenomenology and enaction. What this means should become a bit more clear in the concluding section which will consider education theorist Gert Biesta's notion of *subjectification*. To round off this brief exposition of semiotic theory the paper will now consider the direct application of semiotics to education and to the future by perhaps the most distinguished of

Sebeok's colleagues: John Deely (1942 - 2017).

Deely wrote a chapter in *Edusemiotics a Handbook* edited by Inna Semetsky. Introducing the handbook Semetsky explains:

Edusemiotics is a fast emerging field within both semiotics and educational studies...On the edusemiotic account, knowledge cannot simply be transmitted and teachers cannot simply 'deliver' or 'instruct' in the crudest sense; nor do students ever learn quite what teachers teach. Teaching and learning are about dialogue, discovery, and interpretation: in short, semiosis. (Semetsky, 2017, p. vii)

In his chapter Deely writes:

According to Thomas Sebeok, semiosis as the process of the evolution of signs must be recognized as a pervasive fact of both nature and culture. This is the perspective of anti-dualism adopted by edusemiotics that as such elicits far-reaching implications for educational theory... (p. 2)

...The sign not only stands for something other than itself, but it does so for some third; and though these two relations—sign to signified, sign to interpretant—may be taken separately, when they are so taken, there is no longer a question of sign as a triadic entity but of direct cause to effect on the one hand and of object to knowing subject on the other. The reference to the future (or past) in a third element, the interpretant, is essential. Both points are recognized in edusemiotics that interrogates the very notion of the knowing subject and affirms the future-directed orientation as crucial for education... (p.18)

...Semiotics pertains to a renewal of the foundations of our understanding of knowledge and experience and hence to a transformation of the disciplinary superstructures culturally distributing that understanding (the traditional disciplines as currently founded). In this respect the present arrival of edusemiotics on the semiotic scene as a novel theoretical foundation for education is timely. (p.20)

Elsewhere Deely writes:

My thought as sign vehicle presents them [things I expect to see] to me as objects signified, equally when they are and when they are no longer things in the physical environment able to be encountered "in person". Thus signs work *as an influence of the future upon the present, and the meaning of the past is shaped by that influence* of the future. (J. Deely, 2008, p. 480)

Semiotics can be explained in a more general way like this: Consider a runner bean plant drooping down to the ground with its stem twisted. If tied back up on a bamboo pole, after a few days it will likely twist its leaves and stem round and upwards to face the sun. Considered semiotically this is what has happened: First an initial object or significant, i.e. sunshine fell in a new direction upon the

twisted leaves and stem. This firstness can be considered a sign of the sun's position in relation to the plant as well as a sign of the availability of radiation suitable for photosynthesis. But the sensing of positioning and suitable radiation has involved processing, i.e. doing work in respect of the first sign – the sign that the sun was simply available. The processing leads to the second consequence of the initial sign where position and photosynthesis potential becomes, as it were perceived by the plant in terms of the plant's nature. There is a sort of making sense of the second stage of the sign process, a sort of conceiving. This conceiving is the third stage of the sign process where all sorts of other actions; action, which can themselves be analysed as sign actions, are triggered in the cells of the living system. In Peirce's semiotic terminology this third stage of a sort of conceiving or understanding can be considered the plant's *interpretant*. Alternatively borrowing from Poincaré we could call it a cognitive power of the plant's nature. The interpretant or cognitive power is the concept of how a system is set up to receive, process and respond to signs. Turning the stem and leaves back towards the sun can thus be seen as the third aspect of the sign which is the culmination of the three stage process.

The application of the same theory to education might suggest that the masses of conscious and unconscious communications involved in educational processes can be termed signs which initially have a firstness status. This is like the notion of initial experience in phenomenology. These signs are noticed by neural, including intellectual, that is thinking systems in the student and hence trigger the secondness stage. The now perceived signs interact with anthropomorphic nature and cultural affect in terms which might be discussed in post-phenomenological and enactment theories. This is the thirdness stage of the sign. For Poincaré the third stage is when perceptions are organised into some kinds of conceptions by a cognitive power. For Peirce this cognitive power is called an interpretant. The interpretant is the decoding, affect sensing and action-mandating intelligence. By affect here is meant the cultural sentiments which have been grafted onto, and which modulate people's originally primeval reactions and their later developed rationalisms. The affect is to do with closely culture-bound emotions and social attitudes. Put simply, and perhaps again reverting to phenomenological terminology, all that the above proposes is that people think and emote in relation to how they are intellectually and

psychologically prepared to respond in terms of how their anthropomorphic nature has been schooled to perceive. People think in terms of the qualities of the cognitive power or interpretant which they have developed in concert with their cultural and educational circumstances up to that point in time. People might further develop their comprehension abilities, they might later change their sentiments. But at any one time people can only comprehend within their then ability to reference and imagine. Take the example of a first contact Amazon jungle tribes-person. At the time of contact he or she would be unlikely to have the cognitive power to run an oil corporation. By the same token an oil corporation CEO parachuted into the Amazon jungle would probably not last very long. After ten years of immersion in each other's culture however the outcomes might be different. Or with more nuance: It is instructive to consider the listings of Lords and Ladies, of present and past government ministers, of senior clerics and so on who are alumni on publicly available web sites of Oxbridge colleges. It is particularly interesting to compare these lists to the honour roles of less celebrated former UK Polytechnics. Such a comparison would tend to indicate that democracy offers different outcomes for people educated differently. Not everyone is set up to be able to effectively participate in, to draw from, or to benefit most from what ostensibly is the same culture. Considered semiotically, material factors aside, people are much more likely to beneficially become certain people with certain capacities and potentials in terms of the relevant interpretant, the relevant cultural cognitive abilities which they are endowed with up to any particular time. The ancients understood this better: People were only able to reach *eudemonia* if they prepare for *eudemonia* by seeking virtue. For instance in the *Apology* Socrates explains: "Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and the state," (Plato and others, 2005) [30b]. People from backgrounds enriched in all sorts of ways are better equipped to function socially and economically than those who approach their opportunities unprepared for such enrichment. The child prodigy and self-made billionaire exception-myths are surely merely political devices which attempt to ridicule what can be reasoned as this far more likely outcome. Mortimer Adler for instance insisted that children, especially those from deprived backgrounds, needed preschool education if democracy was to become authentic: "Preschool deprivation is the cause of

backwardness or failure in school,” (Adler, 1982, p. 37). Also, as can be seen on web sites referenced in the paideia section, there is a lively debate over the socioeconomic mix of those who gain entry to Oxford and Cambridge universities:

In 2018, 11.3% of UK students admitted to Oxford came from the two most socio-economically disadvantaged groups... This is an increase of two percentage points from 2014. (OxfordU, 2018).

Both Adler’s claims and the Oxbridge debate are about how some can and some cannot so easily ‘get on in life’. It is a debate which parallels the gifting of eudemonia: that is having, or not having cultural entrée to a happy and flourishing existence. Being equipped by paideia to be eudemonia-capable means in semiotic terms that one’s interpretant, one’s cognitive power, one’s thirdness-potential has to be appropriately enabled so as to process cultural and intellectual signs in a way which aids eudemonia. Aristotle writes around this point in Nicomachean Ethics where for instance he quotes Hesiod:

Far best is he who knows all things himself;
Good, he that hearkens when he counsel right;
But he who neither knows, or lays to heart
Another’s wisdom is a useless wight [1095b]

In terms of semiotic theory as discussed above, those who do not have, and thus are unable to employ, wise interpretant ability will tend to see the world quite differently from those who are so equipped and thus motivated. Not only will a lack in this department reduce their chance of living a flourishing life, in addition because they cannot join in resourcing the community in an enlightened manner they may reduce the eudemonia of their peers. In Hesiod’s terms the ability and motivation to *counsel* humane liberal democracy may be an interpretant capacity – both in substance and in attitude which has or has not been delivered to a potential recipient by the relevant paideia. In theoretical terms this is the same as saying the CEO and the first contact person both see the same jungle (firstness), but one rather than the other is far better equipped mentally and attitudinally. Better paideia means better interpretant ability or thirdness and thus a better perspective from which to understand and act. One and not the other is better equipped to benefit from the processing in a secondness manner of signs common to both. This means that, material circumstances aside, individuals and

consequently their societies are best able and best motivated to construct and protect those forms of democracies and those kinds of liberties for which they have the best power to appropriately process the relevant signs. If Putin is right it would seem that, in Hesiod's words, at the present juncture Western political culture needs to *lay* such signs *to heart* more in order to understand and better promote democracy's benefits. In opposition to authoritarian forms of government there is a need to: "*Hearken when [people] counsel right*". Such a wise semiotic employment would instil the appropriate democratic *habitus*, in Bourdieu's sense of mental and physical attitude: "...the structures of the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and apperception [judgement] of all subsequent experience," (Pierre Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). *Habitus* translates from the Latin as *habit*. Peirce peppered his work with references to habits of mind. For instance:

A cerebral habit of the highest kind, which will determine what we do in fancy as well as what we do in action, is called a belief. The representation to ourselves that we have a specific habit of this kind is called a judgement. (Peirce, 1955, p. 130)

Peirce also wrote: "...what, then, is belief?...the establishment in our nature of a rule of action..." (Peirce, 1955, p. 28) That is, as the notion of *paideia* exemplifies, for an acceptable form of democracy to flourish people need to have more than simple knowledge. In more than just an intellectual manner, they need to have the cognitive power which inhabits the persona of those who function democratically. But this inhabiting involves more than simple reasoning. It involves belief, judgement, attitude and consequently habitual action. The conclusion must be that in terms of semiotics the interpretant, the cognitive power exactly *is* the person. Hence for democracy to flourish, through *paideia* people need to *be* the particular interpretant and their culture needs to *be* a particular reservoir of cognitive power which makes appropriate sense of the world and leads to the right sorts of judgements and actions. Our minds and our culture need to operate at a thirdness level which is well above where Mr Putin would like us to be.

But might the instillation of *habitus* through *paideia* involve some sort of sinister brainwashing, some sort of Orwellian big brother operation? Gert Biesta's *The beautiful risk of education* may help in framing a debate over this quandary. Biesta does not relying on any of the terms used in this paper so far. Instead he

comes up with the neologism *subjectification* to stand for the third of his three fundamental parts of education. For Biesta education is principally about: 1. instilling skills; 2. socialisation; and 3. subjectification. The third and concluding part of this paper is a discussion about the controversy of the moulding or shaping of the mind in relation to politics in the context of Biesta's neologism.

CONCLUSION: APPLYING PAIDEIA AND SEMIOTICS TO BIESTA

The crux of educational theorist Gert J.J. Biesta's *The beautiful risk of education*, would seem to be that educational institutions should not over emphasise their systems of training for qualifications and perceived responsibility for the socialisation of future generations. They need to do these two things, but not in a way which obstructs a more nebulous characteristic of students which he names "subjectification". Borrowing from Emmanuel Levinas and Zygmunt Bauman Biesta suggests that what is sometimes termed the humanity of individuals cannot be explained as their individual nature, or essence, or soul, or identity, or how that particular person sees the world. That is: if they are humans, what we call people are not all separated from each other as distinct moral beings. Instead:

Levinas has articulated a completely different "avenue" towards the question of human subjectivity, one in which an ethical category – responsibility – is singled out as "the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity" (Levinas 1998a, p. 190). (Biesta, 2016, p. 19)

This "articulation" can be related to Castoriadis' evocation of *edidaxato astunomous orgas* - the concept of self-taught passions, or urges that give laws to cities. This is a concept which, according to Castoriadis, has been overlooked by an arid modernist political philosophy. For Biesta, following Levinas, humanity is not what anthropos simply *is*. Rather the notion of humanity is a wider concept. In order for humanity to exist, rather as in any club or institution, by virtue of membership, members have no option but to take responsibility for being what membership entails. For instance they have a responsibility not to be criminals in terms of that particular organisation. Castoriadis says they obtain a passion for this responsibility. Biesta puts it this way:

Our responsibility is simply "there," it is given; our subjectivity, in contrast, has to do with what we do with this responsibility, how we respond to it or, with a phrase from Zygmunt Bauman: "how we take responsibility for our responsibility." (Ibid. p. 22)

Biesta's reason for inserting "risk" in the title of his book is because he is keen that education should be: "willing to take this risk that the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur." Educators should: "not block the event of subjectivity." Although: "whether students will realise their subject-ness, is an entirely open question," (Ibid. 23)

What is being argued here is that people are only truly educated in the full sense, they only realise their full being, their full subject-ness, when they apprehend what they are as human entities. They need to experience themselves as beings which have certain responsibilities within communities and realise that therefore they are subject to certain ethical codes. Whether they reach this realisation and indeed whether they conform to the ethical implications in the style of a Greta Thunberg, or a Donald Trump is another matter. Biesta is advocating a sort of paideia but one which shies away from overt shaping or moulding as mentioned in the paideia section above. Instead these communal forming pressures are implied to be omnipresent. They are always at work by virtue of what it means to be human. The best cultural education would therefore be one which offers the student some way of understanding their position, their role, the expectations which are always upon them by virtue of simply being human. As this is of course exactly what the disciplines of the humanities, i.e. the liberal arts illustrate, it seems odd that such a point is not made more often in defence of those subjects.

Elsewhere Biesta states his project as: "...to reveal the intimate connection between education and democratic politics." (Biesta, 2016, p. 8). In his final chapter he argues against: "...teaching as a science-based or evidence-based profession," instead developing: "...the idea of teaching as virtue based." (Ibid. p. 8). His closest to admitting paideia comes with:

What Aristotle adds to the picture...is that practical wisdom is not to be understood as a set of skills or dispositions or a set of competences, but rather denotes a certain quality or excellence of the person...The ability to make wise educational judgements should therefore not be seen as some kind of "add on" that is, something that does not affect us as a person, but rather denotes what we might call a holistic quality, something that permeates and characterises the whole person and we can take 'characterise' here quite literally, as *virtue* is often translated as "character". (Ibid p. 134)

Earlier Biesta has dismissed a number of risk adverse rubrics embraced by an education industry that panders to misguided professional aims and material productivity. One of these risks is: "...students are not to be seen as objects to be moulded and disciplined..." Biesta also critiques Hannah Arendt's education theory that politics can be divorced from education in terms of psychological development. He criticises her as having a notion that it is only when students eventually attain a mature intellect that they are "ready for democratic politics," (Ibid. p. 8). For Biesta Arendt's approach misses: "...the way in which educational processes and practices contribute to the emergence of human subjectivity or subject-ness." (Ibid. p. 18) His commitment to promoting autonomy and democracy, as well as his thoughts on the limits of these institutions can be gauged thus:

...at the end of the day, as educators we cannot claim that we produce our students. We educate them, and we educate them in freedom and for freedom... education is ultimately a social art not a material art (and this can be seen as another reason why the whole approach emanating from discussion about evidence based practice is misplaced where it concerns education.)... (Ibid. p. 134)

Later he writes:

Notions such as autonomy and rationality play an important role in modern educational thought and practice. While I'm all for autonomy and rationality both notions are not without problems. Is it the case for example that we can ever be completely autonomous? What would that look like and isn't it the case that the border between rationality and irrationality is historical and in a sense political rather than it is simply "there" or can be found deep down inside the human being? (Ibid. p. 142)

Biesta's use of the terms virtue, character, eudemonia (Ibid. p. 133), his references to Aristotle and his concerns with politics, freedom and limitations of autonomy within society link his notions to what was discussed in the first part of this paper. But his difficulty with the existence of any discrete mental essence in people offers an opportunity for further theorisation. His notion of subjectification where the intellect, and presumably the conscience may realise that their existence largely involves an extensive ethics clearly invites an application of semiotics. Rather as the plant's nature mutely responds to sunlight so the human responds to her or his human subject-ness with a much more intricate cognitive dance. They responds, or rather as Biesta fears, they might fail

to respond appropriately, or to respond at all, to all sorts of natural and cultural world signs. Humans, and their education systems involve vastly sophisticated conceiving mechanism. People operate amid oceans of human and mechanically retained memory and other synchronous and asynchronous cognition-influencing institutions and devices which have wide ranges of associated mores and aesthetics. But their thinking mechanisms can only envisage the world in the discrete terms which they have been endowed with and are able bring to bear within these otherwise endless, unfathomable and quite inconceivable realms. Or to put it another way: subject-ness can surely only come about as the result of object signs being signified to a thinking mechanism, that is an interpretant, which is only capable of interpreting in the manner which it is set up to consider things. Thus, to mix a few theorists and restate Biesta differently: There must initially be a pre-existing communal habitus where the ethics of, for instance – responsibility – exists. For Poinot, for Peirce and for Deely this cognitive power, interpretant, or habitus which distinguishes humans from apes can only have come about in a semiotic manner. It is gifted to a person by virtue of their species ancestry and their upbringing within the present manifestation of that ancestry. It is on the basis of this habitus or interpretant, and additions to this conceiving power throughout life, that the person interprets. This is how they orient their ethics including their political demeanour at any one time. But in the contemporary age habitus or interpretant creation is predominantly mediated by the massive education industry. Of course the family and mass media systems are also important, but they have already been influenced by what education says is correct. This means that at base it is educational policy setters who decide how things are to be interpreted. It is they who decide for one thing if the term *paideia* is even known. Whether this term is or is not used it is they who are responsible by other words for its quality and thus the quality of what Biesta calls the subjectification of those who are educated. A long time ago the educational policy setters were the sophists with people like Plato and Protagoras to critique and advocate them. Today there are very well paid vice chancellors and government educational mandarins. Dewey, Adler and Biesta are some of the critics who have questioned their approaches. With the advent of modern forms of democracy, in the UK for instance, there are now non-educationally specific bureaucratic rules for the “skills matrix” of who gets to sit on the governing body of: “a 21st century

university,” (Birrell, 2019). See also the emphasis in schools on skills and competences over “excellence of the person” referred to above by Biesta. These instrumental tendencies do not bode well for a concern for education as a bulwark against the deterioration of democracy. Since, as cited above, at least some respondents have taken Putin’s charge seriously, might it be appropriate that the approaches of paideia and semiotics should be applied in order to critique the effects of this huge industry in this respect? Of course education provides all sorts of economic, health, legal and technological benefits. But might some people agree that it does not prioritise the goal of humane democracy highly enough? Education lays the foundations to what people ultimately think. And because of this its effects can be understood via the notions of cognitive power, interpretant, habitus and subject-ness. Isn’t it time that these thinking tools which originate from education itself were used to bring more attention to an urgently needed discussion? As Biesta might say following Bauman: there is a need for education leaders to consider how they might take responsibility for their responsibility.

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