Defending the Value of Education as a Public Good

Philosophical Dialogues on Education and the State

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Chapter 3

Education, Ideology, and Critical Thinking

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3 Education, Ideology, and Critical Thinking

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Introduction

The discourse on ideology and education most often focuses on establishing and analysing how educational ideologies relate to their curriculum-related versions. Ideologies most often mentioned in this context include nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism (Gutek 2014), but also include those derived (and applied in the educational practice) from specific normative philosophical, ethical, cultural, social, and political norms. Of note are also educational visions as identified as social efficiency, scholar academic, learner centred, and social reconstruction (Schiro 2013). Ideology is a vague notion which contains a descriptive component and possibly also an evaluative one – the notion of ideology can therefore be recognised as a so-called thick concept, meaning that a phenomenon can be evaluated on its descriptive content and have prescriptive power at the same time (Williams 1985) (see: Alexander 2005; Bartlett 1986; Denzau and North 1994; Freeden 2016; Gerring 1997). Some scholars claim that due to, *inter alia*, rigidity and resistance to critique of theses accepted within an ideology (relating to selected or general aspects of reality, for example, the social), they should not become a part of the educational process as a desirable value (Siegel 1990). Others argue that there exist so-called moral ideologies which form an important educational goal (Alexander 2005). Others still are trying to prove that ideology is at least partially inscribed in education, and that attempts to outmanoeuvre it (e.g. by teaching critical thinking) are often ideologically committed themselves (Biesta and Stams 2001). There is no consensus over which possible ideologies should form the basis for developing educational theories and practice.

Regardless of all the ambiguities concerning ideology and its relations with education, education is a necessary condition (as a tool) for transmission of norms important in a given community (see: Dewey 1938; Gergely and Csibra 2020; Tennie, Call, and Tomasello 2009); this includes ideology. Ideologies, as descriptions, interpretations, visions and everything that is value-related in terms of the entire reality or some of its aspects, are transmitted within formal and non-formal educational processes. The problem with ideology is mainly the content it postulates, but most of all the cognitive (epistemic) attitude

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towards such content (rigidity, lack of (auto)criticism), which *inter alia*: (a) objectifies entities which are subject to ideologisation; (b) is inadequate vis-à-vis dynamically changing reality, does not solve present and future problems (including problems with education) such as climate change and the resulting migrations, globalisation, a multitude of worldviews (and religious views) and technology development (see Buchanan 2018); and (c) directly or indirectly promotes exclusivist attitudes, tribality, excluding people with opposing worldviews.

While speaking of education as a tool for ideology transmission, several factors might be examined. First, the aspects of education that make it a fertile ground for ideology. Second, the external conditions (e.g. socio-political context) which must come into being so that education might fulfil ideologues' goals. Third, whether, and possibly how, this process can be opposed. The answer to the first question leads us to examine the notion of education – the aspects mentioned stem from fact that education is a type of action, with all the intractable features which that implies, such as teleology and normativity – education must fulfil certain goals. This leads to the issue raised in the second question, namely the origin of these goals, who sets them and how. One possible answer points to the state (e.g. the political party(-ies) currently in power). In some countries, the decision-makers in this area are politicians, who define educational content and set educational goals in their own interest or the interest of the group they represent. These politicians have formal and non-formal possibilities to exert pressure in order to implement their agendas. The former include the setting of organisational standards while the latter would for instance denote influence over selection of schools for funding and the employment of their managerial personnel. When politicians' decisions regarding education do not meet the standards formulated for instance within academic discourse, a third question arises – namely how this can be prevented, that is, whether education itself has a proposition for opposing ideologies (including those imposed by the politicians). Here, the answer is the development of rationality-related skills and dispositions, collectively called critical thinking.

This chapter postulates the following, two-part thesis:

i education as a teleological action (and hence normatively committed) constitutes a potential carrier of ideology;
ii the necessary condition for preventing the implementation of this potential is the development of critical thinking, which is not an ideology *per se*.

The above thesis should be understood to imply that (a) education is a planned action of a teleological (means-end) structure for which specific reasons exist, which (b) is connected to the normative involvement of education. This means that (c) in education specific normative standpoints are unavoidably chosen, which organise the entirety of said action. Furthermore, (d) if in an education-providing community a condition is satisfied to the effect that the

responsibility for education rests with the state, the threat of politicising education appears – education may take the form of a carrier of ideology subscribed to by the politicians and/or groups which they represent. (e) In order to minimise or eliminate this threat, it is necessary to develop critical thinking (in terms of skills and dispositions). (f) Such an approach to the subject also has specific, more general consequences for the organisation of educational practice, regardless of whether education is controlled centrally or regionally and regardless of the degree of influence of politicians upon education, there are good reasons to recognise critical thinking as the basic goal of education – it is a method to obtain cognitive and practical resistance to any ideology and is one of the key answers to current challenges and those forecast for the future.

The argumentation to support the above will be as follows. First, I will (a) analyse the concept of ideology and the threats arising from in relation to education, taking into account the role of the state. Next, I will (b) proceed to analyse the issue of critical thinking, using selected concepts and empirical studies to indicate that it is as a requirement for evading ideology. In the summary, I will (d) report on previously conducted analyses and briefly indicate possible problems related to the approach presented here.

Education and Ideology

Education can be, and often is, a carrier of ideology; it promotes specific visions of reality and related knowledge, skills, and attitudes (also moral ones). Being a sphere of praxis (Dewey 1916; Mahon *et al.* 2020), education is an area of transfer of the socially recognised norms of a given community (Tennie *et al.* 2009) and, being normative (Peters 2006), it implements specific desirable states of affairs (e.g. in the form of curricula). These desirable states of affairs (goals) can be ideology-related. The key feature of education allowing its use by ideologues is the fact that, as action, it is the product of a specific end which can be described as normatively committed. This is one of the circumstances of for the ideologisation of education. This end is a general expression of the various concepts of 'living well', of which there are many in the descriptive sense. The general concept of 'living well' is close to the concept of good as a syncategorematic expression, that is, something which obtains a specific meaning only in the context in which it is used (Geach 1956; Hare 1963). Therefore, there can be many actions and complexes of actions determined by a given understanding of 'living well'. Examples include different cultures in which education takes various forms and implements various ends (e.g. with or without a close connection with religion). Often an observation of educational practice in a given cultural context can tell us something about the concept of 'living well' which underlies it. Metaphorically speaking, an educational end is an open door for various manifestations of 'living well', necessarily including those connected to ideology. The aim of education cannot be so general that every possible action is reconcilable with it – this would lead amongst other

things to chaotic and contradictory behaviour. At the same time, it makes sense to note the fact that although education is part of broader social practice (within a specific community), it can be treated as a separate practice due to the ethical and moral standards of that community. In practice, the degree to which education will be connected with them will vary, but one can imagine a situation when education does not promote the norms of the community but, for example, contradicts them. Education can also implement goals set by education experts (including philosophers of education). Therefore, it can be a practice which either inherits its goals from the community, or, being an independent practice, selects its own goals or have them assigned by a specific group to which education is subordinate (e.g. politicians). In each of these arrangements, education can, but does not need to, be a carrier of ideology; education is not doomed to be ideological.

From a general perspective, ideology is a system of beliefs relating to reality and containing a descriptive as well as a normative component. Ideology purports to describe and explain the entirety of reality or a selection of it, and also proposes a vision of how this reality should develop. As such, it gives its own specific answers to problems and, as an action-oriented system of beliefs, it sets the standards of social practice (Bell 2000; Denzau and North 1994; Gerring 1997; Putnam 1971; Sartori 1969; Zmigrod 2022). Some scholars of this issue stress that rigidity of beliefs can be given as another feature of ideology; this is explained as stemming from the conviction that one has the right vision of reality and emotional involvement in particular (Arendt 1973; Bell 2000; Jusup, Matsuo, and Iwasa 2014; Neuman 1981; Sartori 1969). In this sense, for example, science is not an ideology because it allows – at least in theory – for self-criticism in the form, for example, a possible paradigms corroboration. On the other hand, religion which does not allow criticism may be considered an ideology (Zmigrod 2022).

Such an approach to ideology is also consistent with studies showing what in the educational perspective is regarded (at least in academic discourse) as undesirable. Ideological thinking is formed not only under the influence of specific personality traits and social conditions (Jusup, Matsuo, and Iwasa 2014; Sartori 1969; Zmigrod 2021), but it also shapes them. Two models explaining this phenomenon are worth mentioning: the neurocognitive (Zmigrod 2021) and socio-cognitive (Bélanger 2021) models of ideological thinking. The former mainly indicates the role of cognitive processes in bidirectional interaction between brain and ideological environment; the latter stresses mainly ideological factors. In addition to being susceptible to ideology, social context reinforces features responsible for it, influencing cognitive processes and the structure of brain areas connected with them. We see a feedback loop partially reinforcing features responsible for, amongst other things, cognitive rigidity, adaptability to change, resistance to counterarguments, increased proclivity for irrational beliefs, favouring one's own social group and an antagonistic attitude towards other groups. Ideological thinking thus understood obstructs adaptability to changing social conditions (Zmigrod 2021). Certainly, the degree of

intensity of these features depends for instance on the characteristics of a given ideology and therefore on the content proposed within the declarations of that ideology with regard to reality and the degree to which those statements are asserted. In this sense, not every ideology or ideologically committed subject will conform to this description to the same degree.

Ideology can be treated as one of the possible interpretations of the concept of 'living well' and, at the same time, as an educational end. As the initial premise in practical reasoning, it determines both the next steps of reasoning and any subsequent actions, as well as the methods to achieve them. The content of ideology is rigid and, at the same time, specific; it professes a moral and social necessity to conform to specific rules and behaviours, while by limiting deliberation about them it sets a relatively narrow scope for such rules and behaviours. If it be so, ideologues do not need *phronemos*, but an instructor, a technologist.

Within ideology, action is reduced to a specific pattern and its modifications. Education becomes educational technology and, as such, it objectifies its subjects (students, teachers, and indirectly parents) by limiting the possibility of deliberation and free action. Such a sequence of actions is extrinsic in relation to the goal defined in an ideology (e.g. being a specific person); it implements goods external to education, which itself becomes a tool for ideology transfer. In this sense, it becomes indoctrination or pseudo-education (Filek 2002).

In the context of role of the state in education and the resulting threat of ideology, we shall mainly deal with a situation where the goals of education are determined outside of education itself, that is by politicians. More precisely, when not only are politicians actively determining ideologically committed goals, but there is also absence of free action on part of the teachers, when their work is subject to political control. In practice, when politicians have an influence on education, they often use this opportunity to promote values they believe in and in this way they, for example, create their future electorate. Arendt (2006) believed that politicisation is in fact one of the main reasons for a crisis of education. Politicians have many means – both 'soft' and 'hard' – with which to influence education. In order to implement an ideology, they can establish the structure of education over which they have full control, appoint superintendents of education who will guard 'appropriate' content, allot funds to some institutions, and deny them to others to exert pressure on local education management, select the content of the curriculum and obligatory reading and determine teachers' training. In extreme cases, their control can be based on violence, and not merely symbolic. In any case, violence in symbolic and physical form can be applied to every subject of education, including students. Education subject to political and ideological control becomes a negative phenomenon when (a) it becomes unable to respond to challenges, such as climate change, globalisation, migration, technological progress and (b) on account of the resulting rigidity of beliefs and limited deliberation. This becomes also the case when (b1) it directly or indirectly

promotes attitudes excluding other participants of the social life and (b2) objectifies the subjects of education. In this last sense, it is also amoral according to Alexander (2005), since it rejects human subjectivity (e.g. freedom of deliberation). Furthermore, under such conditions (c) it loses the capability of achieving its goals – ideologues for example declare that they will solve social problems, but cannot do this as a result of the features of their ideology itself, often leading to social resistance.

State (political) oversight of education is not necessarily ideological – ideologisation takes place when politicians have full control over education. When this occurs, education becomes a particularistic good, owned by a specific political group. However, when education is treated as a common good, such a situation need not take place. I suggest an analogy to health. Just as the politicisation of healthcare may lead to undesirable consequences (e.g. when the state is run by religious fundamentalists), the politicisation of education can also bring about such consequences. If, however, politicians who manage healthcare apply expert advice in a non-partisan way, the threat is minimised. Similarly in education – in order to limit its ideologisation, it ought to be treated as a common good, where experts (including philosophers of education) are consulted (Wrońska 2022). Politicians, for instance, adhere to expert advice regarding, for example, allocation of financial resources. Education thus understood undergoes evolutionary and not revolutionary changes, reconstructing itself after successive changes of political power.

To sum up, understanding education as an action with teleological structure allows us to explain the phenomenon of its potential ideologisation. This is the case since education always relies on rationales for action associated with a specific, unifying, and regulating end which determines the entirety of that action. Therefore, the problem of its concretisation appears. At this stage, ideology can appear as a system of rigid, descriptive, and normative beliefs concerning reality or its selected areas, with a limited level of criticism (autocriticism), which determines the standards of action (in this case – in education). When education is controlled by politicians, they often use it as a tool for transferring their ideology. Depending on the degree of the intensity of those features, ideology becomes a threat to the education, for instance by objectifying its subjects and limiting the possibility of action. Education, however, is not doomed to be ideological – there exists an educational ideal which is not ideological and allows for limiting ideology wherever it is present. This is critical thinking, which will be analysed in the next section of the chapter.

Ideology and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the remedy for the ideological character of education. It can be treated as having educational potential both as a tool for limiting ideology and a basic educational technique (Abrami *et al.* 2015; Siegel 1980, 1986, 1987). It can be generally characterised as the obligation to meet the standards of rationality, not only in a cognitive sense, but also as a disposition

of positive valuation of such standards. In the proposed model where education is an action with teleological structure, similar to ideology, critical thinking can be understood as a goal that regulates and unifies further rationales and the actions based on them. However, it does so in a different manner than ideology.

In the literature on the subject matter, a substantial amount of attention has been paid to critical thinking in the context of philosophy, psychology, and education, especially in the last few dozen years (Abrami *et al.* 2015; O'Reilly *et al.* 2022). In addition to conceptual analyses, there are also empirical studies on its effectiveness. More critical thinking programmes, that is, operationalised ways to achieve it, appear. Various scholars stress different aspects of critical thinking and consequently propose different programmes (understood here as means) of how to achieve it. These include practical wisdom (Hooks 2010), open-minded thinking (Haran *et al.* 2013), reflective thinking (Dewey, 1910), analytic thinking, scientific reasoning (Gjoneska 2021), constructive thinking (Thayer-Bacon 2000), collaborative reasoning (Clark *et al.* 2003), collaborative learning (Le *et al.* 2018), problem-based learning (Yew and Goh 2016), and Sustained Shared Thinking (Hildebrandt and Musholt 2020).

What distinguishes critical thinking from other educational ideals is the fact that it does not postulate any specific vision of reality or an aspect of it, therefore it does not set rigid standards of reasoning and action. It is a method which may be used to deal with any data (e.g. information). In addition to the background knowledge one possesses, critical thinking postulates developing such cognitive skills as, *inter alia*, observing, experimenting, inferring, generalising, conceiving, being able to assume, identifying fallacious arguments, evidence-based reasoning, and evaluation. The dispositions that it suggests include: respect for reason, truth and the quality of intellectual work, open-, fair- and independent-mindedness, respect for others, and intellectual work ethic (Abrami *et al.* 2015; Bailin *et al.* 1999; Facione 1990; Hitchcock 2017; Leś and Moroz 2021; Mason 2007). This approach to critical thinking is also confirmed in the Delphi Report (Facione 1990) in which students of this subject were given a task to work out a consensus. Therefore, a critical thinker is a person who has broad factual knowledge and is able to use it to conduct cognitive operations, which in turn generate knowledge that can be used as a basis for action, but also someone who appreciates this method of arriving at action. Let us also note in addition that this attitude relates to the subject's own beliefs and therefore is not dogmatic. The character of such a person is permeated by something that Siegel (1980) calls Critical Spirit, an attitude close to Socratic epistemic modesty.

The ideal of critical thinking may be implemented in education only when it is operationalised. To address this, programmes are formulated to show how the educational environment should be organised. One such programme is P4C (Philosophy for Children), but there are others, which, though at a smaller scale, also include specific guidance on how to implement this ideal. For example, Hildebrandt and Musholt (2020) in the Sustained Shared

Thinking method which they propose emphasise the importance of using such expressions as 'maybe', 'I believe', 'I assume'. Hitchcock (2017) asserts that critical thinking can be performed in an 'infusion' model, that is, as a part of other courses, or as a 'stand-alone instruction', that is as a separate course. He formulates practical guidelines for the teacher, such as defining goals, motivating students, using context, a preference for in-depth analysis, using examples and formulating various explanations for the same phenomenon. Clark *et al.* (2003) indicate the high importance of collaborative reasoning, a form of group deliberation which, among other things, supports construction and internalisation of argumentation schemes. On the other hand, Abrami *et al.* (2015) in their meta-analysis of effective strategies for teaching critical thinking (especially in dialogue) emphasise the positive impact of teacher's mentoring.

Critical thinking is more than a construct created by philosophers and educational theorists – the goals defined within this ideal are achievable. In the context discussed here, that is, the education ideologisation of education and the state's role within it, in addition to the referenced study by Abrami *et al.*, we should also mention that of Lantian *et al.* (2021) which shows that people who hold ideological beliefs have relatively poor critical thinking skills and also that critical thinking allows for a reduction in such beliefs. Similarly, studies by McLaughlin and McGill (2017) and Wilson (2018) indicate that critical thinking courses lead to a reduction of pseudoscientific beliefs.

When decisions about education are made by the state (politicians), proposals in the form of critical thinking might be used (mainly in the 'infusion' model as understood by Hitchcock). This can be undertaken both when education is ideologised and as a protection against ideologisation. Therefore, education can limit the impact of ideology, reduce it as far as possible, or eliminate it entirely. In the context of the understanding of education proposed here, critical thinking becomes a goal which is not rigid, in the sense that it does not suggest any beliefs, interpretations or social and moral attitudes, apart from the stance professing the value of rational thought. It equips students with skills which allow them to take action independently when the opportunity arises, thus empowering them. It is critical thinking and not ideology which enables of the right to an open future, emphasised among others by Feinberg (1980), to be accomplished. Even if critical thinking is a method, it still allows the teacher to take a wide range of actions, employing various means and content, thus also empowering the teacher and allowing the realisation of his/her *phronesis*. It also answers to changing social reality and the challenges resulting from it. By promoting epistemic modesty, critical thinking is the foundation of democratic society. Being open-minded, a critical thinker does not absolutise his or her beliefs and allows other people to express their opinions about the shape of the community they belong to.

Describing the ideal of critical thinking, I mentioned that it positively values the attitude of rationality and can be understood, amongst other things, to be a goal within education. This means that critical thinking (a) has content,

(b) unifies and regulates reasoning and action, and (c) promotes specific attitudes. Furthermore, for critical thinking to make educational sense, it has to occur in the context of the transmission of factual knowledge which (d) is always theorised and its choice (e) must be based on some criteria – it is determined by interpretation of the term 'importance' in the conceptual framework of the person deciding to teach specific knowledge. But is not critical thinking yet another ideology?

In order to answer this question, I suggest presenting it in the following form:

i If critical thinking postulates anything, it is a normative standpoint;
ii If it is normative, then it is arbitrarily favoured (assumed) or on account of a criterion beyond it;
iii If arbitrarily favoured, it follows that it is rigid (inflexible, indisputable, unquestionable) and, as such, does not significantly differ from ideology;
iv If it is chosen on account of something else (let us call it a 'rational worldview'), then the reason for which it has been chosen is arbitrarily favoured or on account of a criterion beyond it;

Comment to (iv): the sequence 'x on account of y, y on account of z…' cannot be infinite – it has to have an end, otherwise any action would be impossible. Therefore, I propose rational worldview as the final criterion, albeit other criteria are possible. For this reason, arbitrariness appears in (vi);

v If the reason for which critical thinking has been chosen is arbitrarily favoured, then it is rigid and, as such, does not significantly differ from ideology;
vi In conjunction with the comment to (iv), if choice cannot be made on account of something else, then the choice of the reason for which critical thinking was chosen is arbitrary and hence rigid and, as such, does not significantly differ from ideology;
vii Therefore, the choice of critical thinking as the goal of education is always ideologically conditioned (directly or indirectly).

Such an approach to the problem connects ideology with rigidity – if x is based on assumptions for which no independent rationale is presented (it is rigid), then x is ideological (an ideology). This conclusion is accepted by some theorists studying the issues of ideology and critical thinking in education. For example, according to Alexander (2005) all educational ideals can be considered ideologies; however, some of those can be considered so-called moral ideologies, that is, those which stress human potentiality. Critical thinking and the rationality related to it constitute ideology because they are not free from assumptions: '[…] the rational view fails because it is incapable of offering a rational response, that does not presuppose what it sets out to justify, to the question 'Why be rational?' (p 11). Siegel (1987) dissents, stating that critical thinking is an educational ideal which is not ideologically committed, since rationality precedes ideology, and is in fact a necessary condition for its

criticism – it is rationality that is fundamental, not ideology. Siegel rejects, among other things, the thesis about the necessary politicisation of educational ideals; namely, from the fact that education occurs in a political context, including having political consequences, and thereby is subject to these consequences, it does not follow that a rational justification of educational ideals is impossible; even if educational institutions and practices are not politically neutral, it does not mean that educational ideals cannot be politically neutral. For example, the philosophically justified principle of respect for others is politically neutral, though it has political implications. Siegel is aware that such a standpoint can be rejected – an ideological determinist might say that the aforementioned principle of respect is ideological. But then every positive statement will necessarily have to be ideological. Siegel responds by challenging the very thesis of ideological determinism before stating that in order to formulate it, a determinist must present good reasons and hence assume rationality and not adherence to an ideology. This contradicts the assumption of precedence of ideology rendering the thesis of an ideological determinist of no cognitive value. My views as I present them here are closer to Siegel's, that is to say, I do not consider critical thinking and rationality to be ideological. This is, however, one among many options of conceptualising the problem. I maintain that there are good reasons (good arguments to the contrary notwithstanding) to recognise critical thinking as not ideological and consequently to reject the main premise (iii) of the reasoning presented above.

Additional arguments can be formulated over and above those given by Siegel. For instance, recognition of the thesis that everything which is based on assumptions is ideological leads to accepting every human action and cognitive activity as ideological and hence, that adherence to ideology is an important feature of a human being (man as an ideological being). Any action taken is based on reasons which are finally justified with reasons that are assumptions. Even if some reasons are not assumptions and desires, then (a) it can always be maintained that they are influenced by ideology, or (b) that their implementation assumes ideology (to make desires come true, one needs to assume rationality, which is an ideology). The situation is similar in case of any other cognitive activity. Such an all-encompassing term as 'ideology' loses its utility when applied to the analysis of specific, for example, education-related problems since it obscures an area's internal differentiation. A stricter and more dealienating notion of ideology will allow for a better illustration of a problem, for example, in the classification of educational goals. Alexander's proposal of moral vs. amoral ideologies seems to be one possible solution here – the difference between these types of ideology lies in their attitude to subjectivity (e.g. the permissibility of deliberation), this is related to the fact that – unlike the latter – the former do not indoctrinate. Alexander believes that dividing ideologies according to this criterion allows for a defence of 'moral' goals of education (for instance, those useful in building a democratic society).

I believe that what Alexander considers a feature differentiating moral and amoral ideologies can be considered a feature that differentiates ideologies

from non-ideologies. This is not only a question of semantic convention, but also of a difference (a) in the structure of beliefs – rigidity can be maintained on the level of assumptions, but not on the level of beliefs generated by the subject on the basis of those assumptions, and consequently (b) in emotive relation to them. Moreover, Alexander's proposal does not explain the phenomenon of differentiation in the case of possible conflicts between ideologies. When two subjects have different beliefs, but share a respect for freedom, for example, with regard to deliberation ('moral ideologies'), then disputes between them will be solvable through deliberation – a consensus is possible. On the other hand, when two subjects hold different beliefs and both reject human subjectivity and freedom ('amoral ideologies'), disputes will become conflicts and agreement is impossible.[1] Hence, a solution can be proposed to the effect that if x is based on assumptions for which no independent rationale is presented (it is rigid), this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that x is ideological/ an ideology. Even if critical thinking is favoured on account of a rational worldview and despite the fact that said rational worldview is assumed, it is not necessarily ideological, nor is that which results from it. Rigidity can be a derivative of a thesis of a given worldview (e.g. the thesis that logic and reasoning are valuable cognitive tools), but further theses which the subject generates based on this need not be rigid. First, in the case of rationality and critical thinking, no specific theses are generated which the subject is obliged to accept. Second, theses generated by the subject are open to change. In short, critical thinking proposes a method for gaining knowledge; this concludes the proposal, the rest is up to the subject.

This is not the case with ideology, where rigidity is not only a feature of the theses on which it is based, but also of the content generated by the subject. The content of a subject's beliefs is determined by the content of their ideology and is not open to change. For example, the nationalist belief in the uniqueness of one's own nation determines a nationalist's further beliefs, which will be maintained in specific situations regardless of context. In the case of critical thinking, the result of reasoning is not known to the subject in advance. Even when two critically thinking subjects reach the same conclusions, they reach them independently. The statement that a student must think critically is not analogous to the statement that a student must for example be a patriot. Being a patriot is a possible choice of a critically thinking student, while if a student must be a patriot, then it ought to be impossible for them not to be one. Therefore, equating ideology with critical thinking may be the result of an erroneous understanding of rigidity in either case. In the former, rigidity applies to the subject's entire belief system. In the latter, it applies only to their assumptions. Therefore, critical thinking does not share the feature of rigidity with ideology, at least not to the same degree nor in the same scope. There is a significant enough difference not to assign to critical thinking the description of ideology. In his insightful analysis of ideology, Sartori (1969) argues along similar lines – not all belief systems are ideological. Analysing the features of ideological belief systems, he identifies their rigidity, dogmatism,

and 'ideological passion'. Comparing ideologies and pragmatism, he writes: 'ideology is a belief system based on i) fixed elements, characterised by ii) strong affect and iii) closed cognitive structure. Pragmatism is, conversely, a belief system based on i) flexible elements characterised by ii) weak affect and iii) open cognitive structure'.

Therefore, critical thinking as a goal of education does not need to be understood as another ideology, and there are good reasons to support this. Critical thinking as an end – even if based on other rationale – does not become an ideology, because it is not rigid in the sense presented above. This lends power to arguments professing the advantage of some educational goals over others (this does not however justify populism or dispel the argumentative power of other arguments). In other words, critical thinking does not propose specific beliefs but a way to treat any beliefs, a way which allows their credibility to be assessed, for them to be accepted or rejected before action based upon them is taken. In educational practice, critical thinking always appears in the context of transmission of specific knowledge, which – as I have already mentioned – always belongs to a specific person in given conditions (cultural, political, etc.). It is for this reason only that the ideological context of education is inevitable. However, this does not mean that education cannot be free from ideology or that it cannot limit and protect against it. It can do so as long as it educates rational, critical, and self-critical individuals.

Conclusions

This chapter attempted to justify the thesis that education as action with teleological structure can be a potential carrier of ideology. This would mean that education may (but need not) be ideological and that the necessary condition for absence of ideology is the recognition of critical thinking as the goal of education. Ideologisation of education takes place for instance when the state (politicians) is in charge of it, and the goal of education becomes the transmission of the politicians' shared worldview. The analyses presented in this chapter indicate that education can be understood as an action (or series of actions) the reasons for which are in turn underpinned by a given reason (end) of normative character which regulates and unifies them. Taking action within the broader framework of educational practice requires that this end be specified. This is performed in various ways and by various decision-makers. At the same time, this means some concretisations of educational goals may be ideological. Such a threat appears most commonly when decisions concerning education lie in the remit of politicians. This may result in a system of rigid beliefs with limited criticism (self-criticism), which sets the standards for 'appropriate' reasoning and action. In practice, this leads to objectification of the subjects of education (students), limiting the possibility of deliberation, exclusion of social groups which have different beliefs and inability to adequately respond to changing social reality, and the challenges which students will have to tackle.

However, even when controlled by politicians, education is not doomed to be ideological. This can be averted through a different, non-ideological concretisation of the educational goal, namely critical thinking, which does not propose rigid patterns of reasoning and action, and prepares subjects to make decisions independently, having been previously equipped with specific cognitive skills. Not only does such a goal protect education against ideology, it also makes it subjective, capable of deliberation, understanding others and prepared to face future challenges. It is therefore a necessary condition, *inter alia*, of a democratic society. It is also worth emphasising that if we agree to recognise critical thinking as a goal of education, taking into consideration its close links with philosophy, the conclusion seems to be that philosophical education is a necessary condition for democratic society.

The argumentation presented in this work is only a proposal for the problem's conceptualisation. Obviously, it is not free of simplifications and assumptions and can be a target for many objections. Amongst other things, it can be argued that the concept of ideology is ambiguous and requires clarification, which necessarily entails making choices guided by certain criteria. With critical thinking, the situation is analogous, both in terms of definition and its possible insufficiency when applied in education. All this, however, indicates that the stance presented is one of the possible ways of understanding education, and further studies on the problem can and should be undertaken.

Note

1 ' […] i) If the distinctive elements are fixed (i.e. closed and strongly held), two belief systems are incompatible or mutually exclusive, and the relations between the corresponding belief groups will definitely be conflictual: conciliation is impossible. However the intensity and scope of conflict may vary greatly, for the more numerous the (central) distinctive elements, the greater the hostility; the less numerous, the lesser the occasions of conflict. ii) If the distinctive elements are flexible (i.e. open and weakly held), two belief systems are coalescent or fusible, and the relations between the corresponding belief groups will be consensual: cooperation is likely. Of course, the fewer the distinctive elements, the greater the amalgamation and the convergence' (Sartori 1969, p 409).

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