Defending the Value of Education as a Public Good

Philosophical Dialogues on Education and the State

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Chapter 6

Competition in Education from the Perspective of Liberalism and Liberal Education

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Katarzyna Wrońska

Introduction

The concept of competition has a long history in Western civilisation. Beginning from antiquity, references to it can be found in various aspects of cultural life; it is also inherent in social life and education is no exception. Nowadays, more often than not, competition elicits the image of participation in a variety of tournaments, trials, or contests. It also governs the daily life of the school. It is evident that competition is the common denominator of PE classes, games, rankings, trials, or tournaments of one or multiple schools. This is also manifest during other subjects in the form of various contests or Olympiads. The primary point of departure for those who advocate for a competition-based approach to education is mainly its benefits derived from the measurable outcomes of education. Knowledge and skill can be tested and compared based on these student achievements – this approach is commonplace throughout today's systems of education around the world (Rich & DeVitis 1992). On the other hand, however, this approach is subjected to the harsh criticism by those who compare it to a cooperation-based approach, since cooperation is presented as more suitable for the field of education, especially when looked at from the perspective of the well-being and development of the student or when considering the inequalities of education access (Danilewska 2014). The clash between the opponents and proponents of competition can be observed among practitioners and theorists, philosophers, and ideologues of education (Gutek 1997).

This chapter is yet another contribution to the ongoing debate about the value of competition in our civilisation and specifically in education. I assume that it continues to play a useful role in the practice of education at large, but not in the shape or form promoted by educational policies inspired by neoliberal ideology. Therefore, I will be looking for deeper, philosophical reasons to justify it, my intention being not to pit competition and cooperation against each other, but rather to build a consensus between them and make them complementary to each other (Johnson & Johnson 1989). The prefix *co(m)* occurring in both terms suggests that both approaches have something in common.[1] I propose that we return to the conceptual framework of liberal

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education, which allows for competition to occupy an important position as a useful means to noble ends. It is my hope that liberal education, being embedded in philosophy, fuelled by various schools of thought throughout the ages, may prove its worthwhile advocating for civilised competition. I will attempt to prove that revisiting its formula could help us rise to the challenges we face today and meet the needs of both the modern state and those who participate in education, namely its subjects.

The plan for the study at hand is as follows. I will begin by presenting selected examples of references to competition in texts published in various eras of our civilisation. I will then enhance my analysis by introducing the concept of freedom to the equation, under the assumption that it may form a valid relation with competition. I will review various philosophical and ideological representations of freedom, taking their relation to education into account. Therefore, on the one hand, this text will examine the idea of liberal education as grounded in philosophy (DeNicola 2012) and the philosophy of freedom, with special emphasis on the Enlightenment and philosophy of the 19th century, including classical liberalism, as they led to the review and renewal of the liberal arts (Kimball 1986, Wrońska 2013). On the other hand, it will touch on the ideology of neoliberalism which is the basis for contemporary politics in multiple countries, not only democracies. The competition elicited in each case mentioned in the chapter will assume various forms, as there are various approaches to education formulated within the framework of the philosophies or ideologies in question. This will provide me with the basis to try and develop new avenues for cultivating competition in our modern day. As such, it will necessitate including such conceptual categories as mastery and nobility, laudable goals of education, and references to cooperation and self-improvement. In conclusion, the outcome of my research will take the form of criteria identified for the purpose of facilitating civilised competition.

Examples of Competition in the History of Western Civilisation and Its Notions on Education

I shall begin my deliberations with excerpts from the Holy Bible, specifically those letters of St Paul which contain a direct or indirect reference to 'competition'. And so, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the author compares his brothers and sisters in Christ, including himself, to competitors at the stadium. Each and every one of them stands for competition in wrestling (Latin *in agone contendit*, Biblia Sacra Vulgata); to earn the laurel of victory, they deny themselves everything (maintaining abstinence in everything) and 'subdue' their bodies; while the Christian's laurel is to be distinguished in that it is to be indestructible (1 Cor 9.24–27). Similar sports-themed metaphors, this time referencing a race, can be found in the Epistle to the Philippians (Phil 2.16 and 3.14) and to Timothy (2 Tim 4.7). In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, St Paul refers to the 'fervour' of the Corinthians known to him, which 'encourages competition' amid many from the other peoples (here: the Macedonians)

(2 Cor 9.2). Furthermore, he warns against intrigue and dispute, i.e. inappropriate competition (Greek *eris*, Novum Testamentum Graece 1993, p 491), including among other negative attitudes, such as quarrel, envy, wrath, slander, detraction, arrogance, and disorder, which vices cause the destruction of the community (2 Cor 12.20). In this instance, both meanings of *competo* and *aemulatio* resonate – as competition within the meaning of wrestling or zeal, eagerness but also the rivalry which accompanies envy and jealousy. Such a negative characterisation comes to the forefront once more in the letter to the Philippians. Here, St Paul compares commendable love and abiding 'in one spirit, while competing (Greek *synathleo*, Novum Testamentum Graece 1993, p 517) with an equal heart in the faith in the Gospel' (Phil. 1.27), to 'inappropriate competition' in the sense of inciting (Latin *contentione*, Vulgate; Greek *ex eritheias* – egoism, *eris*, Novum Testamentum Graece 1993, p 516) some people against others (Phil 1.17). On the other hand, the 'positive' aspect, within the meaning of zeal (Greek *zelos*, Novum Testamentum Graece 1993, p 499) eliciting a worthy cause, is once more referred to in the Epistle to the Galatians, which praises and suggests it ('it is always good to compete in what is good') (Gal 4.18).

Proselytising among pagans, St Paul would reference the ancient notion of chivalry, firmly embedded in contemporary culture, and also to classical humanism as cultivated by the Greek concept of *paideia*, which had also been adopted and resonated strongly in ancient Rome and its educational institutions. It was in the 1st century CE in Rome that the rhetor and pedagogue Quintilian articulated his praise of public education in the pages of his work *Institutionis oratoriae libri XII*. As he substantiated the merits thereof, he refuted the allegations that peer pressure in school spoiled the learners and that the teacher could exercise a lesser influence on the group of learners. He built his case by enumerating the benefits of education in the company of peers and indicated – apart from socialising, potential friendships or learning from others – the benefit derived from competition (Quintilian 1920).

The 15th and 16th centuries marked the revival of Greco-Roman and early Christian thought, as this significant heritage was revisited in a renewed formula by Renaissance culture, to which the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam greatly contributed. By way of illustration, I will be citing one of Erasmus' work entitled *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, a devotional handbook oriented towards the adult Christian, where he references competition. It is reminiscent of St Paul's guidance reconstructed on the basis of the aforementioned extracts from his epistles. 'To contend with one another in love, gentleness, and kindness, and to submit gladly even to the most lowly when it comes to quarrelling, hatred, criticism, insult, and injury' attains the status of a core Christian tenet (Erasmus of Rotterdam 1988, p 97). Just as St Paul, Erasmus demonstrates various routes leading to good, our ultimate destination attained through the natural possibilities at our disposal as human beings. Among them, we find competition, which can be construed as an aid in the form of a stimulus as it urges one to act in the spiritual realm. Furthermore, such actions

need not divide but may contribute to the formation of a community of individuals pursuing similar goals. All this applies fully to the sphere of education, urging one to acquire knowledge, education, and the art of meaningful communication, goods held in high regard by Erasmus of Rotterdam and expedient on the path to a higher cause (see Chapter 6).

Another example can be found in the 17th century in the pedagogical thought of John Locke. In his major work *Some Thoughts concerning Education* he makes reference to competition as a means towards the moral education of a child. He produced a series of reflections on tempers, virtues, and vices, in particular in Sections 109 and 110, he mentions the frequent desire among a group of children to compete for priority, superiority, and dominance over other members of the group. This behaviour is not always acceptable however, as for instance, when children brag about their financial status or when they get involved in pointless and hostile arguments. In face of this Locke suggests that the tutor or parents try redirecting children's inclination to engage in competition, so that they might for instance compete in readiness to share with others. To praise and reward such competition among children is to teach them virtues such as generosity, kindness, and civility while eliminating vices and bad inclinations such as greed, which is the root of all evil. Locke believed that, when practised on a constant basis, sharing with others through competition would in time help the children derive pleasure from it themselves (Locke 2003, pp 169–70). Furthermore, he was convinced that children's natural activity and stimulation of each other to take action and participate in various games or tests might greatly contribute to their learning (Locke 2003, pp 210–1).

Another rendition of the practice of competition which merits attention is *emulation* as described by the Jesuit Order, which was a major actor in the administration of European schools in the 17th and 18th centuries. These schools also attempted to incorporate the natural tendency to compete into the process of education, moulding it into ambition and drive and employing it towards the pursuit of knowledge and shaping of character. And so, for instance, each student had their opponent assigned from among their classmates who were tasked with spotting his partner's mistakes and suggesting corrections – should some oversight be discovered, this would also be attributable to the opponent. At the same time, entire classes were divided into groups or batches competing against each other. The winners received honorary titles, honours, and awards, handed out to them publicly with great pomp and ceremony (Kot 1996, p 236). This method drew criticism even from among the ranks of the Catholic Church and was especially condemned by Jansenists. For fear that students would indulge in self-adulation and exalt themselves above others, this practice was abandoned entirely. In doing so, attention was drawn to the limitations of competition and its dubious moral value (Kot 1996, p 320).

As I come to the close of this brief presentation of select historical renditions of competition, I will end on a statement made by Władysław Hasior,

one of Poland's leading 20th-century sculptors. He compared the creative process and fine arts to competition and a noble fight in an 'artistic' ring:

> …I believe that it has its origin in sport, this inquisitiveness, this insistence [of the artist] for them to practise relentlessly, and to expect that, finally, something good will come from that. It is in this context that one can see their fellow competitor, a noble opponent on the racetrack….
>
> (Hasior 2018)

This statement was of great value as I developed this work, in which I seek to substantiate competition in education – thought of as a public good – on philosophical grounds. The phrase 'noble struggle' applied to competition allows for grouping its distinct forms according to nobility of cause as their common denominator. This describes those lofty, worthy goals, towards which a group of eager and willing enthusiasts of a given sport, art, or field of knowledge are ready to jointly aspire, by means of a contest, determined to achieve victory, the prize, and mastery of a specific discipline.

Natural and Civilised Competition

Were we to strip away these 'ennobling' dimensions from competition, we would see its natural outline – it would be revealed that competition belongs to the realm of nature rather than culture. Under such circumstances, it resembles the struggle for survival in the state of nature, only in a milder form. Within the framework of the clash of interests between people, competition may turn into merciless rivalry, as one not only strives for something but also against someone. The other becomes a rival, an enemy, an opponent in the fight, and such motives can escalate. However, the struggle for existence also makes people disposed to do the opposite, to associate and defend their common interests (Kozłowski 1909). Regardless, this does not eliminate animosities in their various forms in social, economic, or political life. This brings us to the state, which assumes the role of regulator and peacemaker. Assuming the lack of such safeguards, which today we refer to as the policy of concern for and access to public goods or – in a broader sense – for the equitable distribution of goods in society (Raz 1986, Rawls 1999), noble competition would be prone to become a niche relationship with limited reach and secondary to rivalry, which generates faster more easily measurable returns, especially financial gain.

In the second half of the 19th century, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill combined classical liberal concerns with challenges to democracy and egalitarianism. In so doing, he attempted to reconcile the arguments for the free market with employee interests. Mill criticised socialists for laying the blame on competition as the cause for all economic ills. He contended that, even with competition's drawbacks and malevolent potential, since it may pit people against one another, reinforcing jealousy, it serves a greater good since

it facilitates the development of abilities in individuals, it is conducive to success of innovations. To protect against competition was, as he saw it, protecting vanity, mental dullness, avoiding the necessity of being as active and smart as others (Mill 2006, pp 794–6). The friendly competition he proposed relied on the quality of cooperation being appreciated in the workplace. The aim of the concept in question, as implemented through workers' associations and trade unions, was to remedy the constant animosity between capital and labour, to elevate human life from the conflict of classes in dispute over contradictory interests into friendly competition, inspiring the pursuit of common good, raising the dignity of labour, inspiring a sense of security and independence in the working class and having the daily routines of said class converted into a school of social sympathy and practical intelligence (Mill 2006, pp 769–94).

From today's perspective, education is among public goods. The underlying assumption that I make here is that the innateness of competition has enabled us to attain its civilised, ennobled form, to a large extent with its very involvement and – to be more precise – thanks to the notion of liberal education, hence also the liberal arts (Horowski 2014). In their shadow, competition could thrive and be employed as a method for the fulfilment of a model of education that would ever harbour autonomous values (that is, valuable as an end in themselves), in which people could pursue and prepare for worthwhile activities and shape their character (Peters 1970, Carr 2003, DeNicola 2012).

Competition and Freedom

Not unlike freedom, competition does not belong to a single philosophy, let alone ideology. The notion of freedom was encouraged by different philosophies, beginning in antiquity, with its strong republican overtones (Skinner 1998, Himmelfarb 2005). Liberalism did not call it into existence; the same applies to competition (as evidenced above). However when freedom is discussed, both generally and within education, it is ascribed the status of an end, while competition is commonly considered to be a means, a method to facilitate the achievement of goals. Within liberal education, competition has for many centuries had the opportunity to enact noble goals. I strongly posit that when utilised for mercantile, economic purposes without a philosophical/humanist foundation, competition should never be allowed to enter the field of education, to appropriate it into yet another arena for rivalry, provided that we accept the status of education as a public, not private, good.

As we examine the philosophical thought of classical liberalism (from Locke, through Smith, Ferguson, Franklin, to J.S. Mill), we may remark that it has strong resources of its own with which to support of the notion of competition within its conceptual framework of freedom, human being, and morality (Turnbull 2003). The neoliberal version of competition, however, relies on different sources, particularly of an economic, political, and technocratic

nature, within which education is embedded. From a classical liberal perspective, especially that of British origin, irrespective of its utilitarian approach, education and the knowledge on which it is based, including the elective liberal arts and the moral character of pupils, were considered internal goods, regulated by their own laws rather than regarded as means to different ends (Mill 1931, Wrońska 2018, 2023b). Education was thought of in terms of intellectual and human capital, seen as a private asset in possession of respective individuals who might dispose of it at their discretion, because it was assumed that individuals would put it to best use, both for themselves and for others. On the other hand, the state was tasked with protecting individuals through the law and public-benefit institutions established for this purpose, from anything which would hinder the fulfilment of individuals' goals. The atmosphere of privacy in education was meant to make competition favourable, for it to become an aid in guiding individuals in the pursuit of their own aspirations, development, improvement, and to help them achieve related goals in the process.

Competition and Liberal Education from the Perspective of Liberalism and Neoliberalism

From its very onset, liberalism, as part of its respect for human nature, valued the advantages offered by competition; in this it was similar to humanism. However, this was initially applied only to the education of the upper classes, capable of affording the cost and expenses of education in private public schools. It was in those schools that team sports were cultivated and young gentlemen were set the goal of shaping their character (Turnbull 2003). Just as freedom, competition within the confines of education was associated with an elite and cultivated among for the chosen few (according to Aristotle's model). This enabled children from the upper echelons of society to practice social relations, as they were in a group with their peers, and to prove themselves, including through various trials and tournaments. Simultaneously, Enlightenment notions of public education were coming to the forefront of public debate. These included the dissemination of education, which had begun to be seen as an important factor in the development and prosperity of nations. Said postulates were predominantly non-liberal, yet the liberality of education continues to be deemed the legacy of the 18th century. Furthermore, one could postulate that they strengthened not only liberal education, but education at large (Siegel 1987, Postman 1999, Wrońska 2014).

Modern liberalism should embrace this heritage. It ought to advocate for the right to education, allowing individuals to thrive through the cultivation of diverse pursuits, including the liberal arts, not limited to vocational or utilitarian content preparing for a future profession (Hirst 1974). While liberalism had not changed its approach to education and continued to defend its private status, not appending egalitarian postulates alongside liberal ones, it ossified around a neoliberal, free-market stance.

As liberalism leans towards neoliberalism it defies its classical liberal antecessors and Enlightenment foundations, furthering a doctrine which ignores modern challenges and the demand for egalitarianism. While knowledge is the individual's choice, an individual can only be interested in knowledge that meets utilitarian criteria. However, if the state is also to perceive education in this manner, it ought not present its education policy as one ensuring the fulfilment of public goals, since under those circumstances it only pursues private, individual goals. Neoliberalism is inclined to commodify education and to use it for its own purposes. This constitutes a form of betrayal and abandonment of the ideals of education, including its prototype, the classical Greek *paideia*. Philosophers of education ought not to remain silent with regard to the issue in question. It is a requisite that the state rises above vested interests, nationalism, or economic calculation and relies on a deeper substantiation of educational aims. The task at hand is for us academics-philosophers of education to be the intermediary between the world of politics and public, social, and private spheres. The philosophy of education proposes multiple ways in which we might make sense of education. These options certainly include the notions of liberal education as they meet the expectations of all those considering education not only in its utilitarian aspects, but also as a sphere which facilitates self-realisation, self-improvement, and the cultivation of humanity within ourselves.

Liberal education today, overshadowed by neoliberal policies which govern the state and education, is fighting for its rights and attempting to reassert itself. However, without the support of the state, which runs scientific and educational institutions, it faces a sustained decline in importance, becoming an elitist practice reserved for the chosen few who can afford to invest in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (passions) and self-development. At the same time, the majority, including those most vulnerable, becomes reliant on subsidised education for utilitarian purposes, and it is imperative that the latter meets the criteria of contributing to economic development, one's professional life, and career choice (Nussbaum 1997, 2010). Under such circumstances, rivalry and the self-interest inherent in it – the variant of competition present in nature, may replace noble competition associated with autotelic (selfless) liberal education, but also cultural or humanistic education (Wrońska 2023a). Therefore, the state can further the destruction of education as a practice with its own intrinsic goods governed by human rights. Instead of strengthening public education with access thereto provided to everyone, liberal education and noble competition may once again become the privilege of the chosen few. In light of this I propose and appeal to those in positions of power (i.e. those in charge of our system of education) to conduct policy aimed at restraining the process of neoliberal instrumentalisation and politicisation of the sphere of education, in favour of broader and deeper educational goals, in accordance with education's own goods and rights (Hogan 2011, Wrońska 2019). This will enable autonomous, tolerant, sensitive individuals to thrive (DeNicola 2012, p 243) and in the long run will also contribute to economic prosperity.

Noble Goals and Mastery and Excellence in Education

Throughout history, noble and laudable goals of education have been embedded in various philosophies, from ancient *paideia*, through Christian philosophy, Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment philosophy (notably Scottish ethical thought), to contemporary virtue ethics, philosophy of dialogue, phenomenology, and other currents in the humanities. These contained proposals still relevant today: to compete with others for the laurel of victory, to achieve the distinction of being the best, the winner, the champion, to develop and improve oneself (to break down one's own barriers to development and to keep setting the bar higher and higher for oneself; to unlock one's potential), and to elevate humanity in fair play competition.

The road to mastery as an aspect of education requires efforts to be made so that it is reinforced, strengthened, and substantiated. Without them, education may lose the spirit of noble competition and accept that it is limited to a basic, mercantile, commercial, service-oriented, utilitarian, self-interested, material dimension. As such it would not be able to offer support as it could only reproduce itself relying on basic, even biological human needs and lower passions, i.e. the desire for profit, possession, envy, jealousy, and fear. However, there is no return to the past or recreating what once was. The elitist style of liberal education, a cultivation of reverence for great books, has come under well-deserved criticism. This approach has revealed a series of deficiencies of liberal education. Apart from elitism, other shortcomings include aestheticism, excessive individualism, and even selfishness and arrogance (DeNicola 2012). Nel Noddings questioned the very potential to educate good people in this tradition. Without abandoning the concept of excellence, she has uncoupled it from the tradition of cultivating one's character and reference to the ideal. Instead, she has augmented the educational space with caring and relationality, reasoning that excellence could be made an experience attainable by children in their everyday practice of educational pursuits (Noddings 1993, 2013). I consider this criticism to be well-deserved. It enables us to seek new ideas and reasons in favour of liberal education as a plane of noble competition. In many countries today, liberal arts have a place in the curriculum, but – at least in Poland – this does not necessarily fulfil the criteria for liberal education as the result is most often encyclopedism and not voluntary, independent inquiry, critical thinking, scepticism, and openness to dialogue (Wrońska 2014, Maliszewski 2014). On the other hand, liberal arts faculties and colleges provide an offer that only a select few can take advantage. It can be stated with certainty that such an offering is unsatisfactory for the world of today.

Perhaps in face of the challenges before modern-day egalitarian societies, competition will require other resources to curb the tendencies of market neoliberalism, those from beyond the domain of liberal education. It seems that currently an emphasis laid on excellence in the field of education (though differently construed) can be viewed as an attempt to seek a common denominator and space for dialogue between those who defend liberal education and

those who criticise it. A similar role may also be played by other notions, such as self-actualisation or self-realisation; however, I will here attempt to support the concept of competition by referring to the reasoning of Mill and Nussbaum. Mill presents competition in the workplace in favourable terms as it lays the ground for cooperation in the pursuit of the common good. Nussbaum on the other hand lays emphasis on the value of narrative imagination and compassion as cultivated in liberal education together with other dispositions of humanistic character, as necessary as they are for modern democracy. In the end, both viewpoints (liberal and humanist) enable us to turn out attention to cooperation and collaboration and the potential connections they might have to competition. Mill's liberalism provides for their straightforward adoption, while for Nussbaum competition seems to have been replaced entirely with alternative dispositions. I propose that we compare their relation to each other in the space of education. I assume that coupling them under democratic conditions and on behalf of democracy could do more good than separating and pitting them against each other.

Proposals and Challenges for Today – Towards Complementarity of Competition and Cooperation in Education

I shall begin with a specific example of student activity in a school environment, namely the activity of student councils. In Kraków, the City Hall has been organising a contest between student councils for many years. Its aim is to inspire grassroots initiative and commitment in young people at school, as they are prompted to take joint action with others. The situation changed when the principles of rivalry were incorporated into the contest rules and regulations. Such an approach proved to be counterproductive as school self-governments began to outperform one another, competing against one another for the highest-ranking position. Later on, the organisers had to curb this competitive spirit of the contest, as it had turned into a leitmotif governing the actions of the young participants.

I do not wish to suggest however that this competitive aspect ought to be abandoned altogether and replaced with cooperation. It may be factored in as useful stimulus, but in submission to noble goals which unite and shape the spirit of cooperation. Furthermore, when pursued together in a cooperation-friendly environment open to mutual understanding, support, care, and assistance, competition may prove useful, a natural motivating force, and a source of energy for action. This would be the proper environment for pupils and students both at home and at school.

Cooperation can only occur in face of a common goal, whereas only worthy causes are justifiable in education. Therefore, education must provide the opportunity for practising the skills required for cooperation by focusing students on joint initiatives. This engenders a space which allows for bonding and the creation of close-knit teams, ensuring mutual assistance, compassion, and support. This could serve as the grounds for binding competition with

cooperation, never for it to be considered in isolation or instead of cooperation. It would seem that cooperation rather precedes competition since its prerequisite is a collaborative environment as well as a parallel perspective. Without it, one may easily succumb to the strategy of market-oriented calculation (according to the mindset of win, lose, gain, loss). With regard to education this would lead to its instrumentalisation.

The modern perspective of egalitarian societies considers cooperation to be a value worth promoting. To write about it is easier, as there are more philosophical reasons to justify it and more schools of thought referring to it. Competition is thought of as a practice that stands in contrast to cooperation. On the other hand, it is easy to picture omnipresent rivalry not only against the natural backdrop of playgrounds, where children interact constantly competing against one another, but also in the school environment, provided that we cease to foster laudable initiatives oriented towards community and creativity in the process of education. Teaching cooperation may prove a greater challenge. Under such circumstances, it would be beneficial to intertwine cooperation with competition, made familiar, but nevertheless containing rivalry, viewing cooperation as an advanced and postulated practice of education. This concept seems to apply to group contests especially well. Both methods, although different from each other, including their different justification, do not have to be considered contradictory. In fact, they can complement each other and intertwine to form a complementary construct. This approach is evidenced by examples from liberal, civic, and sport education, where these two components can be united for a worthy cause of, for instance, self-fulfilment and achievement in a particular discipline, sport, social activity, or other forms of interpersonal interaction.

Education is governed by its own laws and ought not to be underestimated. Assuming it is better than the initial state (constituting reform) it will also prove useful rather than useless (Mill 1931, Peters 1965, 1970). Nowadays, with education universally deemed a public good, we are faced with the question whether the state ought to apply methods analogous to those of the individual (in line with the laissez-faire approach that an action is permissible as long as it does not violate the law). In other words, is it appropriate for the state to support public action according to principles of free market competition (applicable to private entrepreneurs)? (*cf.* Chapter 8).

Nature juxtaposed with civilisation allows us to see, on the one hand, the mechanism of rivalry subject to the law of nature and, on the other hand, competition as subject to civilisational and cultural norms (fair play, respect shown to those bettered, universal kindness, compassion, openness to cooperation, etc.). From a genetic standpoint, rivalry preceded competition and cooperation, but from an ethical one, priority should be given to cooperation as backed by human reasoning, defending dignity against harm, suffering, illness, alienation, and the other plights of our fellow humans; we all share the need to come together and provide one another with help and support. There is no room for competition when we face tragedy. We are required to supersede our natural

impulse with a moral one, a voice of the heart, an ethical imperative to provide help and to cooperate. However, cooperation does not confine itself to this dimension. It may unify and engage many of us to fulfil positive initiatives. The presence of individual competition must however also be considered. Competition serves to counterbalance the power (dominance) of a community and its claim to the superiority of its causes over those of individuals.

Cooperation, like rivalry, can be seen as a strategy in the struggle for existence. The focus of the first is on agreement, the second – on competition. Cooperation, when denoting the act of joining forces to embark on the pursuit of common, laudable goals, distinct from self-interest, is a higher form of human and social relations. As long as competition orients itself towards noble, laudable goals it brings us even closer to cooperation – it may require the skill of cooperation so that challenges arising from noble competition are met.

Criteria for Modern Competition – Summary

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the above. The juxtaposition of cooperation and competition allows the latter to be construed as a compromise, a means to reconcile private goals with public ones, liberal education with vocational education, the law of nature with culture and civilisation. The product is a civilised rivalry, which is:

1 based on the natural resources of individuals, but
2 at the same time ennobled by:
   a the norm of humanity (the best wins, competition does not render others enemies or adversaries) and/or
   b the content of liberal arts education (as opposed to knowledge which is directly useful); and
3 to be superseded by cooperation in a state of danger, which – above all else – requires that resources are pooled and actions taken together to put an end to the crisis and avert conflict rather than compete for the laurel of victory.

Liberal education may be the common ground between cooperation and competition on account of its distinctive characteristics. These are as follows:

- the drive to explore reality, to experience and understand the bounty of culture and civilisation,
- the desire to improve oneself through the effort and discipline necessary for inquiry and research, including acquisition of knowledge,
- voluntary involvement in creative process in collaboration with others, and
- communication, discussion, exchange of thoughts and views, reasoning, persuasion, questioning, dialogue.

(Wrońska 2023a, pp 118–9)

The above features ensure protection against extreme forms of rivalry, such as unrestrained and merciless antagonism, which destroys community and dialogue. Furthermore, they are safeguards against domination and stifling of the individual by the community during cooperation, when the community attempts to reduce the individual's goals to the ones pursued by the collective (through their identification and subordination).

Fortunately, there were multiple factors that contributed to the development of liberal education. It began prior to liberalism, as freedom and competition, which also pre-empted it. Liberalism lent them a new dimension; liberal education included them in the process. Without further inquiry, a neoliberal variety of liberal education emerges, elitist in nature, accessible to the chosen few who can afford it, serving to honour the wealthy and directed at free and independent individuals attracted to the comfort of disinterested studies.

Yet the legacy of classical liberalism (the Enlightenment up to Mill) in education is not to be disregarded, as it contributed greatly to liberal education. Even competition, endowed with laudable goals and principles by the liberal arts on one hand and on the other with appreciation for its relevance and applicability to all spheres of life by liberalism, enables us to find the association between education and life, making it simultaneously highly valued and useful. As long as education teaches to think, and develops imagination, sensitivity, tolerance, and a critical stance (including that directed at oneself) it is liberating and allows for an independent, responsible, and committed life (DeNicola, Nussbaum). Liberalism was and remains invested in liberal education (Mill) as the latter makes reference to free choice (voluntarism). It can therefore be considered a stimulus for versatile development and autonomous life.

Before competition can be included among useful educational and didactic means today, several conditions should be considered to work as criteria with which to evaluate the employment of competition:

- the development and application of fair play principles,
- the relation between the contest and knowledge, competences, and skills,
- the perspective of individual excellence within a particular group or social practice,
- the utility of achieving object goals (and so not to be used against people),
- optimally to be conducted in leisure time/non-compulsory,
- an atmosphere of trust and sense of belonging to a group,
- equality of participants, with cooperation underlying and ever present as an alternative to which one might revert.

Note

1 see https://www.etymonline.com/word/competition

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