

Education in a Society uncertain of its Values

Selected Books by Wolfgang Brezinka

Philosophy of Educational Knowledge

Basic Concepts of Educational Science

Belief, Morals, and Education

Socialization and Education

Educational Aims, Educational Means,
Educational Success

Education and Pedagogy in Cultural Change

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Contributions to Practical Pedagogy

By

Wolfgang Brezinka

Translation by James Stuart Brice

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

In recent decades, there have been far-reaching changes in the life circumstances of millions of people around the globe. Many in Western societies have come to accept the affluence, social welfare and individual liberty they enjoy as self-evident. Many have adopted a self-indulgent life of luxury and consumption and are neglecting the essential moral preconditions for life-competence and community well-being. The intellectual Left is spreading illusions of a “dominance-free society” without “performance pressure”, with increased opportunities for private happiness and self-fulfillment but without civic duties or obligations to others in one’s life circle. These self-centered attitudes have weakened many persons’ sense of realism and negatively affected the educational system.

But illusions are in the meantime yielding to sober reflection. Many are again concerned about scarcity and economic crises, threats of war, terrorism and societal deterioration. Tendencies toward selfishness and misuse of freedom, irresponsible behavior, waywardness and immorality are increasingly recognized as threats to both society and individual citizens. The decline in the West of support-giving religious, ideological, and moral traditions has led to great uncertainty about values. Citizens increasingly experience this as a burden and are becoming open to reassessment. More and more are seeking to reorient their lives. Anyone responsible for children or youth needs a reorientation with special urgency, because uncertainty in value orientations also creates uncertainty in education.

Are there ways to solve our problems? How can we achieve new clarity on the worldview and moral foundations of education? To what ends should we direct our educational efforts? With what difficulties should we reckon? What means are suitable? What tasks must parents fulfill and which should we assign to teachers? These are among the issues dealt with in this book. It contains contributions to practical pedagogy¹ intended to provide answers to the questions and concerns of parents, teachers and other educators, as well as to those of educational politicians, economic leaders and pastoral counselors. With this book, I would like to stimulate thought and contribute to building consensus on the central

1. On the types, goals and attributes of educational theories see BREZINKA (1978: 236 ff. and 1992a: 209 ff.). For a detailed bibliography of my other publications up to 1997, cf. UHL (1997).

educational tasks of our time.

The present book appeared in German as the third, revised and expanded edition of *Erziehung in einer wertunsicheren Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Praktischen Pädagogik*, published in 1993 by the Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, Munich/Basel. In 1989, the Armando Publishing House in Rome produced an Italian edition (*L'educazione in una società disorientata*). It was also published in 1990 in Spanish (*La educación in una sociedad en crisis*) by Editorial Narcea, Madrid. A Japanese edition (*Kachitayouka jidai no kyōiku*) was issued in 1992 by Tamagawa University Press, Tokyo; and a 1997 Korean edition was released by the Seomoon-dang Publishing Company, Seoul, South Korea.

Also available in English are several other works of interest to readers of the present text. I explain the epistemological foundations of educational theories in *Philosophy of Educational Knowledge. An Introduction to the Foundations of Science of Education, Philosophy of Education and Practical Pedagogy* 1992, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London. I examine the conceptual foundations of science of education and educational practice in *Basic Concepts of Educational Science: Analysis, Critique, Proposals* 1994, University Press of America, Lanham, MD. I analyze the relationship of socialization theories and education in *Socialization and Education: Essays in Conceptual Criticism* 1994, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT. I also discuss certain topics of the current book in *Belief, Morals and Education: Collected Essays on the Philosophy of Education* 1994 (Avebury, Aldershot, UK). My systematic contribution to the empirical science of education appeared in 1997 as *Educational Aims, Educational Means, Educational Success* (Avebury, Aldershot, UK).

These translations are a sign that all highly developed contemporary pluralistic societies are experiencing similar problems. Everywhere in the world we see that ties to religious and moral traditions have weakened, without science being able to find a substitute for them. Everywhere there are struggles for new ways of life that can protect the rights of individual persons without releasing them from community obligations. Everywhere today concern for the religious-worldview and moral preconditions of life competence occupy the center of pedagogical discussion. This book is dedicated to finding solutions to these urgent problems.

I wish to thank James Stuart Brice for an excellent translation and formatting. I have carefully read the text and given it my approval.

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REORIENTATION OF EDUCATION IN A SOCIETY UNCERTAIN OF ITS VALUES

Never before in history have there been such great differences between children's helpless states at birth and the personality qualities needed by life-competent adults in our society. Never before have children had to learn and unlearn so much to be able to live independently and in harmony with the good of other people in their community. There have never been as many possibilities to lose their bearings and come to harm while pursuing their goals. Consequently, more than in the past and longer than ever before, the younger generation is dependent on good education.

Good education presupposes many things, especially that educators should have good mental constitutions and show this in their personal behavior. Children learn above all from examples given by those closest to them. Consequently, they need to experience a sufficient number of good examples in their life space in order to learn the essential social knowledge and skills, attitudes and virtues. With both a desire and a need to learn, they orient themselves largely to other people's expectations. However, this can only happen if their adult educational partners are in agreement, and the same standards are maintained over time. Good education becomes much easier to provide when there are good morals in the shared life space, and both adults and children orient themselves to these ideals. Good morals include ideals that hold for all community members: the socially recognized image of the good person and good way of life. These influence the attitudes of individual persons and support them. At the same time, they constitute shared goals for educating younger generations.

In our society, these prerequisites for good education and its success are seldom completely present. Especially today, when youth take longer to become mature and self-sufficient and face more threats than ever before, in many life spaces there is a lack of morals, shared ideals and consistent standards. Our younger generation must live with a *Zeitgeist* that is morally weak, indecisive and undemanding. Children grow up surrounded by persons who are themselves uncertain of their ideals or suppose that they can get by in life without ideals. They live in a society that, as its leading thinkers admit, is undergoing a severe orientation crisis with unforeseeable outcomes.

Orientation Crisis, Valuation Crisis, Educational Crisis

The orientation crisis is a crisis of value orientation. By this, I mean a crisis of convictions about what has value, what we should or should not do, what we should value more or less highly, what deserves approval and what disapproval. In individual persons, we see uncertainty of value consciousness and value attitudes. In community life, we find a lack of consensus on fundamental norms and a shared hierarchy of goods.

Every value orientation crisis also causes an educational crisis. Uncertainty in valuing leads to uncertainty in educating. A society uncertain of its values is a society uncertain about education. This follows from the simple fact that no one can educate without valuing¹. Education presupposes choices: Those who educate must know what they want to accomplish. They need educational aims and must choose means suitable to reaching them. The aims or ends of education are personality qualities they wish to further in educands (persons to be educated). Relevant educational laws refer to the sum of positively evaluated qualities as “competence”² or “life-competence”³.

Competence is the most general educational aim. Parents, teachers and all other educators have an obligation to influence their children, pupils and dependents so that they acquire and retain the valuable personality qualities necessary for life-competence. Likewise, they should ensure that educands do not acquire negatively evaluated qualities or – if they are present – should eliminate them using educational measures. Every member of society is obligated not only morally, but also legally to protect children and youth “against severe moral, mental or physical damage”⁴.

1. Cf. BREZINKA (1978: 92 ff.; 1981: 148 ff. and 106 ff.; 1992: 82 ff.).

2. German: “Tüchtigkeit”. Cf. *Weimar Constitution* of August 11, 1919, Article 120; *Law for Youth Welfare* of July 9, 1922, § 1; *Constitution of the Free State of Bavaria* of December 2, 1946, Article 126; *Constitution of the State of Hesse* of December 1, 1946, Article 55; *Constitution of Rhineland-Palatinate* of May 18, 1947, Article 25; December 15, 1947 *Constitution of the Saarland*, Article 24. For an interpretation, cf. BREZINKA (1987).

3. Cf. the October 21, 1947 *Constitution of Bremen*, Article 23: “Parents have ... a duty to educate their children to be ... life-competent persons”.

4. August 11, 1919 *Weimar Constitution*, Article 122; similar, *Constitution of Bavaria*, Article 126, Para 3; *Constitution of Bremen*, Article 25; *Constitution of Rhineland-Palatinate*, Article 25. In the phrase “sittliche, geistige oder körperliche Verwahrlosung”, the final term means that due to parental or other neglect, in all regards a child’s development falls greatly below the norm for children of its age. Because of this “Verwahrlosung”, the child is then socially, intellectually, emotionally, morally, physically or otherwise not as it should be. The deviation from

Younger generations can only be educated for competence and protected against developing bad habits if educators possess value attitudes that enable them to make prompt and trustworthy value judgments in the rapidly changing situations of modern life. Among the necessary value attitudes are habitualized agreement with personality ideals set as educational aims and their hierarchy. This also means habitualized rejection of all behaviors incompatible with these ideals. Furthermore, it means that educators should have value attitudes that can help them to distinguish quickly between sources of influence useful for achieving educational aims and ones that can be harmful. Only on the basis of such value attitudes can we make educational decisions that are neither arbitrary nor unwise.

We call value attitudes that are especially important for living *fundamental value attitudes*⁵. Good education also presupposes that educators possess good value attitudes. Moreover, it is clear that educands cannot acquire these attitudes on their own, nor can they maintain them solely through their own efforts. Fundamental value attitudes need reinforcement by external standards and supports: from those close to educands, from communities they depend on and their society's culture.

These relationships are seldom noted. Legislators and public opinion are content to assign parents, teachers and all other professional educators a duty to educate the younger generation in life-competence. They devote too little attention to the worldview and moral preconditions that must be present so that educators can fulfill this duty. The ability to give students a good education and the success of this education depend essentially on the value hierarchies of communities to which educators and educands belong. The inner value orientations of individual persons can be little better than the external value hierarchy they perceive in people close to them. Every value hierarchy has worldview and moral foundations. Hierarchies of values can only provide orientation certainty if these foundations are unambiguous and stable.

It follows from this that we cannot overcome the educational crisis of our time without first overcoming the value-, worldview- and moral-crises that many are experiencing today. We cannot find a solution merely by calling for "courage to educate"⁶. In our society, the problem is not a lack of educational activities, but rather of too many, or at least of too much

the norm is not slight or insignificant, but rather great and harmful: for both the child and fellow human beings. Other possible translations are severe deterioration, deficiency, degradation, effects of serious neglect. Information: SIEGFRIED UHL.

5. "Gesinnungs-Einstellungen". Cf. ROHRACHER (1976: 393 ff.).

6. Cf. the Bonn Forum "Mut zur Erziehung" (Courage for Education) (1978).

useless education. What we need are value communities that teach and reinforce faith in a viable world interpretation and unselfish shared ideals. We often lack strength to bind ourselves to such belief contents and win the younger generation for making such commitments. The value crisis and fears of binding ties are among the sources of our contemporary educational crisis.

The situation would be hopeless if this crisis burdened *all* citizens in all communities to the same degree. Fortunately, this is not the case. Many citizens remain unaffected by the value crisis, and many have already overcome it. There are many close friendships, many successful marriages, and many happy families. Many larger groups exist whose members believe in experience-tested and proven ideals and live according to them. Even persons who are uprooted and uncertain of their values are seldom so in every respect. There are ways to escape the value crisis: we can overcome it. It appears worse when we read published opinions of intellectuals and sensational reports in mass media than when we examine the public's fundamental value attitudes. There are not just signs of decadence, but also many examples of successful lives and much willingness for self-reflection. This can be a starting point for finding a way out of the crisis. How can we find a reasonable, intelligent solution?

We learn the most from mistakes. This holds not only for private but also for public life. Every reorientation depends on critical examination of formerly valid orientations. What was inadequate, one-sided and harmful in the worldview, moral and pedagogical ideas that determined the spirit of the last few decades? What was overlooked, neglected and left undone, despite being necessary not only for individual well-being, but also for the commonweal?

We can answer these questions only if we have standards for evaluating ideas and events. All ideological and political camps agree on two empirical standards: individual mental health and the conditions for preserving a community blessed with peace, freedom and prosperity. While I also support these standards, I believe that taken alone they are inadequate. This is clear simply from disagreements over which attributes belong to these standards. Consider, as an example, belief in God: Is it necessary for a person's mental health? Or is it harmful, as many have claimed? Another example is readiness for military service. Is this still necessary for national survival in a nuclear age? Or is more to be said for willingness to submit to superior military force? Is pacifistic non-violent resistance a viable alternative?

Not only are there differences of opinion concerning standards, but also concerning their application. The intellectual disputes of our times are

over both: not only over value standards and their interpretation, but also over the evaluations we make, using these standards, of specific ideas and norms, states of affairs and events. These evaluations never depend solely on the named standards, but rather, like these standards themselves, are co-determined by underlying ideological and moral basic convictions. The important issues, as I see it, are conservative convictions about our responsibility for valuable stocks of European culture, the limits of reason and science⁷, the value of tradition⁸, the justifiability of authority⁹ and the indispensability of psychologically beneficial myths¹⁰. What does this imply for evaluating the intellectual sources of our situation?

Intellectual Sources of Our Crisis

Countless influences have interacted to bring about our current historical situation. Most readers are familiar with the massive and rapid changes in material life conditions¹¹ over the last century. Therefore, I will concentrate on the most significant intellectual influences affecting value consciousness since the Second World War.

Above all, three intellectual currents have contributed to the crisis of orientation, values and education in our times: *rationalism*, understood as the one-sided overvaluing of reason; *individualism*, understood as one-sided overemphasis on the individual person's self-interest; and *hedonism*, understood as one-sided belief in sensual pleasure, self-indulgence and personal comfort as the highest goods. Each of these intellectual currents in our external cultural environment has influenced our inner culture of personal value attitudes. Each has also influenced educational theories and educational practices.

Let us first examine in detail these three intellectual currents of the modern *Zeitgeist*. To what extent have they co-determined our present value uncertainty?

7. Cf. BREZINKA (1971: 166 ff.; 1978: 253 ff. and 1992a: 45 ff.; 1992: 224 ff. and 1994a: 33 ff.).

8. Cf. LANDMANN (1961: 147 ff.); LORENZ (1973: 68 ff.); BREZINKA (1981: 62 ff. and 1994a: 121 ff.).

9. Cf. STROHAL (1955).

10. In the sense of KOLAKOWSKI (1984). Cf. also BREZINKA (1992: 99 ff. and 1994a: 61 ff.).

11. Cf. BELL (1973); FRITSCH (1981).

Rationalism

This is frequently also called “intellectualism”. It refers to uncritical belief that reason, intellectual abilities or rational thinking suffice for living successful and meaningful lives. A special form of rationalism is “scientism”: one-sided overvaluation of science, scientific ways of thinking and a scientific mentality at the cost of other cultural goods, ways of thinking and forms of consciousness.

Here the terms “rationalism”, “intellectualism” and “scientism” are used in rebuke. The rebuke pertains only to one-sided overvaluation of intelligence and knowledge as goods, combined with blindness to the value of sentimental supports and faith goods. This rebuke does not, however, mean disdain for reason and science. “The accusation against rationalism is thus not directed at too much reason, but rather at reason in the wrong place and in the wrong application”¹².

The guiding spirit of the nineteenth century was uncritical belief in reason and science as the highest goods and in progress through science and technology. The First World War profoundly challenged these beliefs. After that catastrophe, powerful counter-movements arose and found expression in cultural pessimism, philosophical irrationalism, messianic political ideologies and totalitarian movements. They attacked reason as hostile to life, and analytical thinking as destructive of culture and community. Ideologues instead exalted intuition and feeling, myths, uncritical commitment to ideological doctrines and the will to power as superior to reason¹³.

In 1917, a communist dictatorship seized control of Russia; in 1922, fascism came to power in Italy; and in 1933 National Socialism in Germany. Each country’s dictatorial elite indoctrinated its citizens with violent, irrational worldviews and persecuted both adherents of conventional morals and independent thinkers. These totalitarian systems demanded that citizens orient themselves not to analytical reason, but instead should have unquestioning faith in and total obedience to an inhumane ideology and regime. In 1939, the German National Socialist regime plunged Europe into a war of unprecedented violence and inhumanity.

By the time the Allies ended the National Socialist reign of terror in 1945, the German people themselves could look back on years of suffering and were completely demoralized. Those who survived and reflected on the causes were not content merely to hope for the best in the future: “No more dictatorships! No more wars!” They also wanted to break with the intellectual preconditions that had led to war and totalitarian dictatorship.

12. RÜSTOW (1957: 15).

13. For a good overview, cf. HOLM (1963).

Yet this necessitated decisions and actions that are so difficult they are seldom tried. It was much easier to condemn unreservedly everything the Nazis valued and to idealize everything they despised. In many ways, Germany needed a revaluation, and yet not every ideal the Nazis misused, and not all the virtues they distorted deserve total condemnation. Provided they were understood rightly and in a balanced way, these ideals were and remain indispensable for personal mental health and productive community life. It is only necessary to assign them their proper value and to combine them with the neglected opposite pole: sentimental ties with critical thinking, belief convictions with knowledge, readiness to accept authority with courage to examine critically the claims of authorities. Instead, old one-sided attitudes have often simply reappeared in new garb. After hate- and pain-filled years of inhumane oppression, disillusioned citizens turned for help to rationalistic counter-ideals. The promise of enlightenment enjoyed renewed popularity. What effects has this had on value consciousness and education?

i. There has been an upgrading of rational intelligence and critical thinking combined with a downgrading of sentiments. This has meant turning away from a realistic picture of man and the old ideal of balance between reason and sentiment, head and heart, thinking and feeling or, expressed more academically, “noesis” (noetic) and “thymos” (-thymia)¹⁴. From a psychological perspective, there is no doubt that people’s value orientations depend on emotional ties. What gives meaning and support is not rational thinking about a multiplicity of constantly changing goods, but rather enduring love for a few selected ones – whether persons, ideas or objects of nature and culture. In everyday language: We orient our lives to “things we have become attached to” or things “close to the heart”.

To “become attached to” something requires time, care and protection against uprooting. Ties to worthwhile goods can only arise if we concentrate on a few and defend them against competing goods and critique. They cannot flourish in a climate of skepticism and doubt. In traditional life worlds where there was no excess of stimuli, people seldom had to provide for character education. In our pluralistic mass and media society, to the contrary, great educational efforts are needed to make the best of children’s mental receptivity for character-building experiences and to safeguard support-giving emotional ties. This effort has been inadequate in the last few decades.

ii. The consequence of one-sided over-valuation of scientific knowledge

14. Cf. LERSCH (1952: 450 ff.); on the ideal of “balanced education”, cf. BREZINKA (1992: 121 ff. and 1994a: 101-120).

has been insufficient awareness of its limitations and dangers. With regard to limitations, many forgot to consider that scientific knowledge alone is not a satisfactory basis for value orientation. Because people regarded scientific knowledge as the highest good, and because religious, worldview and moral belief convictions cannot be scientifically verified, they were devalued, even though science could not replace them. Instead of acknowledging their usefulness for a community's orientation and spiritual anchoring, critics opposed them as burdensome impediments to the spread of enlightened thinking.

This view would make sense only if scientific knowledge and thinking were suitable to provide evaluative certainty and to create a foundation for community. In fact, however, the sources of community spirit lie in sentimental attachment to shared non-scientific goods whose value people feel and believe in: shared faith, ideals and ways of life, a common homeland, shared history and cooperative public tasks.

The adherents of rationalism were blind to the *dangers* that threaten these support-giving emotional attachments through one-sided furthering of scientific goods. Too much knowledge of differences among people, their ideas and institutions weakens ties people have to their own way of life. Psychological and historical knowledge about the genesis of religions, worldviews, morals and hierarchies of authority can easily discourage faith. Doubt, pessimism, anxiety and feelings of despair may arise from a critical awareness of how open to question and controversy all religious, ideological, worldview, moral and political belief contents are from the perspective of the philosophy and sociology of knowledge. Rationalists who stubbornly cling to faith in science have failed to see that even great knowledge has drawbacks. People were aware of this as long ago as biblical times. *Ecclesiastes* already warned, "For in much wisdom is much vexation; the more knowledge, the more suffering"¹⁵.

The suffering increased by excessive knowledge includes among many other things uncertainty about values. An educational system intended to support the younger generation's mental health ought to do whatever it can to minimize this suffering. Instead, due to naive rationalism, just the opposite has occurred. From the correct understanding that science has great significance for society, people drew a false conclusion. They thought that all societal members should be educated in a "scientifically-oriented" manner – and in all regards: including language, politics, religion and the arts¹⁶.

15. *Revised English Bible. Old Testament* (1989: 575) (*Ecclesiastes* 1: 18).

16. Cf., e.g.: DEUTSCHER BILDUNGSRAT: *Strukturplan für das Bildungswesen* (Structural Plan for the Educational System) (1970: 30 and 33). The German Edu-

This program was inordinately overextended. To accomplish it, educators imposed senseless burdens on great numbers of students. Instead of securing essential knowledge and ability, pseudo-knowledge, hubris and verbosity were favored. Schools were turned over to radical proponents and publicists of scienticity, instead of contributing to education in life-competence and thus also to value certainty. Educational policymakers forgot that besides knowledge, people also need inner support: not just analytical ability, but also love of non-scientific cultural goods and reverence for traditions.

Related to rationalism is also a second intellectual current that has contributed to the valuation crisis of our times:

Individualism

This means an overemphasis on the individual personality, its privileges and interests at the expense of community and attachment to shared norms. Like rationalism, individualism also distorts an essential principle through one-sided thinking. It is one-sided, because it emphasizes only the inherent value of individuals and their basic rights, but not the value of communities, their ways of life and the duties of individual members.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, many reformers have drawn on the guiding ideals of “liberalism” to expand the individual person’s rights and increase his autonomy¹⁷. With the liberation of individuals from traditional dependence on families, estates, lords, dynasties, churches, and authoritarian regimes, there has also been a concomitant decline in emotional protection and orientation security. With the Industrial Revolution, the great increase in population, urbanization and harsh industrial work conditions, people became receptive to new movements that promised to raise their standard of living. Uprooted masses turned for aid and support to the socialist movement¹⁸. Since 1917, when its radical wing established the first totalitarian state in Russia, collectivism has been the chief threat to human freedom. In Germany, this mentality produced a National Socialist reign of terror that Germans were unable to stop by their own efforts.

What led in only twelve years to the ignominious downfall of the German national state began with a program of “common benefit before private benefit”¹⁹. The catastrophe’s survivors now knew the meaning of a

cational Council (1965-75) was an influential semi-public advisory body that proposed sweeping structural changes in German education.

17. Cf. SCHNABEL (1964: 121 ff.); WIESE (1917).

18. Basics on this are found in HAYEK (1956).

19. “Party Program of the NSDAP”, Point 24, HOFER (1957: 31).

“total state” with a “total community ethos”²⁰. One of its propagandists characterized this as early as 1933 in the following terms: “The total state ... represents the total obligation of every individual to the nation. This obligation does away with the private character of individual existence”²¹. In ADOLF HITLER’s own words: “No one ought to be able to say that he has any time left to devote exclusively to himself”²².

After 1945, anyone who had personally experienced this collectivist program in National Socialist Germany was better able to appreciate the freedom of private life and individualism made possible by a liberal democratic state. This awareness was strengthened by knowledge that East Germans and other Europeans behind the Iron Curtain could not escape the control of leftist dictatorships. Until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and 1990, they had to live without liberties that West Germans already enjoyed. Due to their knowledge and comparisons they made, Germans developed a basic orientation to individualism. They came to believe that the highest good was liberty to pursue private interests with as few restrictions as possible. People could even appeal to the German constitution, which guarantees every citizen “the right to free development of his personality”²³, without sufficiently emphasizing the basic duties of citizens as a counterweight to their basic individual rights²⁴. What effects has individualism had on value consciousness and education?

i. One-sided over-emphasis of individual persons’ interests weakened their readiness to accept their place in the community and acknowledge the justified claims of legitimate authorities. Unlimited autonomy became a guiding ideal, and Germans devalued ties to pre-existing communities and their norms. They viewed them simply as limitations on personal freedom and failed to see how much they contribute to inner security and personal value certainty. They considered themselves progressive because they were fundamentally skeptical toward bearers of authority and questioned their regulations. Some even regarded the duty to obey the law as subject to personal discretion: in some cases mitigating circumstances seemed to justify pursuing personal moral or political aims through illegal means such as

20. FORSTHOFF (1933: 45). German: “totale Gemeinschaftsgesinnung”.

21. FORSTHOFF (1933: 42 f.).

22. ADOLF HITLER at the 1935 Nuremberg NSDAP Convention (Parteitag), according to HEHLMANN (1942: 179). With an approving nod to Sparta, ARISTOTLE similarly concluded: “Neither must we suppose that anyone of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the state”. *Politics* VIII, 1 (1988: 185).

23. *Basic Law of Germany (Grundgesetz)* of May 23, 1949, Article 2, Para 1. In: BLAUSTEIN and FLANZ (1994: 106). *Basic Law* (2012).

24. Cf. ISENSEE (1982).

civil disobedience, occupying buildings, blocking traffic, or boycotting university instruction²⁵.

Even for educating the younger generation, “liberation” and “emancipation” were elevated to ultimate principles. The legal justification offered for this was past abuse of power. Thereby people globally demonized authority and power, leadership and obedience. Parents, teachers and school administrators came under attack and yielded to intimidation. Indulgence was considered benevolent and “democratic”, insistence on morals inhumane and “authoritarian”. Children and youth were called on to be critical and “question” bearers of authority and their directives, to insist on their rights in every life domain and to emancipate themselves from dependency.

In Germany, the government supported these tendencies by reducing the age of majority from twenty-one to nineteen²⁶. Policymakers did not consider that in complex modern societies it takes longer to achieve mental and moral maturity, not to mention financial independence. Greatly weakened by this were parental authority and the family’s guiding influence.

ii. *Propaganda for equality has enormously increased the individualistic over-emphasis on personal interests.* The ideal of equality – insofar as it goes beyond legal and political equality – is among the most vague and controversial of all ideals. To a considerable extent, it is furthered by envy of all who have higher rank, are more competent or more successful²⁷. It serves as an ideological weapon to denigrate existing differences in status and income as unjust. Viewed realistically, greater equality can only be gained in exchange for reduced freedom. But in the short-run, a climate of opinion overly sensitive to inequalities provides people in lower social classes with an illusory sense of having greater freedom, because they can more easily evade institutional constraints and the claims of leadership groups for service, obedience to authority and fulfillment of duties. This state of affairs cannot continue for long, however, because every society needs a leadership elite. The only questions left open are which elite should lead and with what value hierarchy and what means society should expect agreement. A fundamental rejection of elites is unrealistic, yet precisely this is what happens when an individualistic *Zeitgeist* prevails.

25. For a critique, cf. WASSERMANN (1985).

26. In Germany, this became law in § 2 of the *Civil Law Code* (BGB) on January 1, 1975. Austria reduced the age of majority from 22 to 20 in 1973 (ABGB, § 21 in *Civil Law Code* No. 108/1873). Switzerland, however, kept 21 as the age of majority (*Swiss Civil Law Code*, Article 14).

27. Cf. SCHOECK (1973 and 1979).

In our time, the *devaluation of service-oriented elites*, their ideals and virtues in favor of permissive, mediocre individualistic morals has contributed greatly to widespread uncertainty about valuations. This arises not only from envy of those who are better off materially, but also from resentment of those who are more competent and strive for moral self-improvement by accepting personal responsibility for higher moral standards. Those who want to work less, but dislike being negatively compared with others who accomplish more, have no alternative but to devalue high achievers and minimize their influence. The consequence is that under the banner of equality, the Left also denigrates differences among people arising from belief convictions and value attitudes.

Misuse of the ideal of tolerance has thereby played an important role. Tolerance means acknowledging and respecting other people's opinions and actions, even if one disagrees with them. Of course, this is an indispensable virtue for getting along with others in society, but its positive name can also be used to justify indifference to religious and worldview attachments. It encourages people to ignore inequalities in the truth content of different ideas and the value content of different ideals. It became common, under the imperative of tolerance, to avoid all criticism of personal ways of living and thinking, no matter how harmful and irresponsible they are. The belief that they should tolerate all non-conforming behavior or ideas has made many persons insecure about their sense of values and increasingly weakened educators' will to educate.

Hedonism

This intellectual current (from the Greek: *hedoné*) also exaggerates a justifiable basic principle: the value of pleasure, consumption, gratifying desires or sensuality for private happiness. Certainly many sorts of pleasure deserve to be valued as goods, but pleasure, gratification and sensual self-indulgence are not the primary goods in life²⁸. If we concentrate on them alone, we will fail to reach our full potential as human beings. If we value them as the highest goods, we will neglect other goods that are more important for individual well-being and the commonweal. People who want increasing amounts of pleasure and goods conducive to pleasure thus risk self-inflicted harm through their neglect of more important goods. Therefore, all traditional wisdom teachings value abstinence as a counterweight: restraining desires, keeping a sense of proportion and exercising self-disci-

28. Cf. BRENTANO (1952: 165 ff.); PAULSEN (1903, Vol. 1: 245 ff.). *Collins Co-build English Language Dictionary* (1987: 677): Hedonism is "the belief that gaining pleasure is the most important thing in life".

pline. Ever greater hedonistic self-indulgence is a symptom of decadence. It arises especially from a negative sense of life, boredom, dissatisfaction, indolence and self-absorption²⁹.

There was little scope for private luxury during the Third Reich, total mobilization of society and the Second World War. Instead, duty and obedience ideals were paramount: readiness to sacrifice personal interests, self-discipline and will to serve. Immediately after the war, people began to have second thoughts about unquestioning commitment to nation and state, but there was still great selflessness in the service of family, relatives, friends and neighbors, churches and other belief communities. By the 1950s and 1960s, Germany had largely overcome war-caused need and privation, and an era of prosperity began, surpassing any it had previously enjoyed. There arose a tendency to avoid community obligations and instead pursue a self-indulgent lifestyle. Germans wanted to make up in the “fat years” for pleasures they had missed in the “lean”. They forgot gratitude for surviving the war; consumerism spread; claims to entitlement multiplied. People became dissatisfied because they took for granted their new high standard of living and increasingly focused on whatever material goods they had not yet acquired.

Increasing numbers of people started caring only about their own interests, understood as the greatest possible material wealth, pleasure and consumption. Soon many people even began to consider it a civic duty to consume beyond their needs, indulge in conspicuous displays of luxury and pursue individual satisfaction, because this helped maintain and stimulate market demand, long after all basic needs were satisfied.

The decline of Christian faith, combined with Cold War fears of a nuclear attack, essentially co-determined the spread of hedonism. NIETZSCHE well understood the prevailing state of mind: “The pursuit of pleasure will never be greater than when it must be seized between today and tomorrow: because the day after tomorrow there may be no more chances to pursue it”³⁰. What effects has hedonism had on value consciousness and education?

The overvaluation of pleasure, enjoyment and indulgence – combined with an individualistic attitude toward life – *has produced indecisiveness in adult attitudes toward morals and impeded young people’s progress toward life-competence*. Individual persons experience moral indecisiveness in feeling torn between excessive claims to freedom and pleasure, on the one hand, and the necessity of accepting responsibilities, restraining drives, and practicing self-discipline, on the other. Externally there is an

29. Cf. SCHELER (1954: 357).

30. NIETZSCHE (1976, Vol. 1: 313).

atmosphere that encourages pleasure seeking, and inwardly people burn with hedonistic desires. Sacrifices demanded by work, profession and community duties no longer seem self-evident, but instead people experience them as burdensome. They view abstinence as a necessary evil instead of a virtue in which they can take pride. This naturally makes it hard for young people to learn to find enjoyment in accomplishment, readiness to serve, self-discipline and self-restraint.

Not only has hedonism divided the minds of many individual persons, it has also morally divided society as a whole. To flourish, society is and remains dependent on citizens' diligence, readiness to obey authority and self-discipline. Those who bear responsibility for the economy, government, public administration and technology do not doubt this in any way. In the socio-cultural domain, however, these necessary virtues have long been disputed. Here radical leftists propagate the ideal of the self-exalted ego rebelling against every constraint and savoring all the pleasures the world can offer.

A new class of opinion leaders has arisen who disparage the very duties and value attitudes essential for the long-term well-being of both individuals and the community as a whole. They promote a nihilistic counter-culture centered above all on youth³¹. This thereby endangers the basic minimum of moral consensus that our children, if they are to become life-competent, must experience in the traditional moral practices of their community.

Ways to Overcome Our Educational Crisis

In the modern world, there are no simple solutions, because there are no simple life situations. Proposals for reorienting education are only useful if they start from pre-existing self-healing powers. Insofar as our educational crisis is a result of value uncertainty, we can only overcome it by helping one another find certainty in our value orientations. In a pluralistic society, this is not possible for everyone in the same way, because citizens' basic worldview and moral convictions vary greatly. What is the chief issue from a forward-looking, democratic-conservative viewpoint? We need a realistic picture of human beings and their education: clarity about shared ideals that ought to hold for our children and ourselves and courage to use the necessary means to achieve these ideals.

31. Cf. BELL (1973: 475 ff.); GEHLEN (1973: 141 ff.); ORTLIEB (1971 and 1978); SCHELSKY (1975); HERSCH (1982); RECUM (1983).

Realistic Picture of Human Beings

For many decades, rationalistic, individualistic and hedonistic illusions about the nature of individual personalities and the conditions for their happiness have dominated the spirit of our age. These illusions are still widespread, but their hegemony is no longer unchallenged. Many people have become more cautious, having realized the harmful consequences of these one-sided teachings. They are thus opening themselves to previously neglected truths. What are the most important insights educators should take into account?

- i.* People are not purely rational beings. They have powerful biological drives that can serve both good and bad ends. By nature, at birth they are unprepared for life and formable, influenceable and in need of learning. Consequently, to achieve inner stability they need discipline and training.
- ii.* For inner stability, they also depend on external support. They need a community with firmly established patterns of life and must experience good customs and morals in order to become and remain morally good.
- iii.* Inner stability is only possible if children experience the sheltered security of growing up in small groups. This security arises from emotional attachments³² to mothers and fathers, other respected family members and persons in their immediate surroundings. Through love and respect for these persons, a group's ideals become the child's personal ideals.
- iv.* Children can gain and preserve inner support only through acceptance of authority. This is initially the authority of persons they love, but later also the authority of supra-personal institutions, of a prevailing belief system and morals, of a long, respected tradition.
- v.* Reason and science alone do not suffice as means of achieving value orientation. Belief systems such as religions, myths and worldviews (or ideologies) remain indispensable, even in modern societies³³, and people are born with a need to believe in and revere them.
- vi.* Knowledge of the good does not suffice to be able to do good things: People must also want the good. Moral life-competence presupposes moral striving: self-control, rejecting the bad and superfluous, concentrating on the essential, consistently doing what is right and practicing self-discipline.
- vii.* As a rule, people strive for moral virtues only if everyone in a clearly understandable life community expects this and is responsive to morals. In

32. Cf. MOOR (1951: 194 ff.).

33. Cf. LEMBERG (1974); BREZINKA (1992 and 1994a).

large groups with impersonal relationships, readiness to strive for a moral life is negligible, and the temptation is strong to free ride at others' expense and exploit public benevolence³⁴.

viii. Education has prospects of success to the extent that necessary pre-conditions are present. This in turn depends on worldview and moral choices and decisions. Fundamental thereby are decisions about shared ideals.

Shared Ideals

At least on paper, there are many educational aims. In all countries, school laws specify personality ideals as aims, and in many states, state constitutions do so as well. Yet, personality ideals are of little use if they are not taken seriously in everyday community life, if people think they apply only to students and their teachers. Children cannot orient themselves solely to what they see and hear in school. They learn from interacting with everyone they encounter in life; they are capable of imitating and in need of adapting. Therefore, the most important things for their well-being are the examples they encounter in their life-world and the ideals accepted there. This holds not only for children, but also for adults. We all need shared ideals of the good person to which we can dedicate not just our children but above all ourselves. Ideals of the good society are no substitute for this.

For decades, in an atmosphere of rationalism, individualism and hedonism, shared *personality* ideals were seldom expected. People avoided confronting the issue, because these ideals inevitably remind us that freedom must have limits and that citizens should work to improve themselves. Instead, we have seen a one-sided promulgation of *societal* ideals that do not demand much of individual persons: freedom, social justice, equal opportunity, social welfare, democratization, co-determination and peace. Along with these societal ideals came individualistic guiding ideals such as "emancipation" and "self-realization", which are purely formal and impose no limitations on what people choose to do. What reorientation is necessary, given this situation?

i. We must abandon the one-sided idealization of intellectual abilities, scientific knowledge and technical skill at the cost of all other life-necessary personality qualities. This also applies to information-based technical knowledge and ability. Scientific-technical skills are fundamentally important, but emotional attachments to other mental goods are and will also

34. Cf. WITTMANN (1980).

remain important.

ii. The vast increase in knowledge, division of labor, learning and action possibilities of our time makes it indispensable for individual persons to specialize. The greater the specialization, however, the more danger there will be that specialists will fail to acquire essential shared personality qualities, and social solidarity will thereby decline. The only thing that can help against this is a personality ideal that consists of two components: harmony of psychological strengths and familiarity with the intellectual foundations of one's culture.

iii. There is no agreement in our pluralistic society on the essential attributes belonging to the ideal of the good person and the indispensable core of our culture. We must discourage people from drawing erroneous conclusions from this fact. It is wrong to discount and abandon values on which people differ, simply because they divide them. If people give up the ideals that are most important for meaning in life in favor of less important ones that everyone agrees on, the result will be a mediocre, homogeneous society whose uprooted, alienated members can easily be seduced.

iv. Our constitutions take into account the co-existence in society of various different religious and ideological beliefs, religious groups and worldview communities³⁵. "Their significance for the preservation and strengthening of the religious and moral foundations of human life is recognized"³⁶. These communities *already possess* shared personality ideals for their members. We must encourage them to self-confidently further their distinctive cultures, which make specific demands on members, instead of feeling intimidated and letting rootless intellectuals destroy them. We must strengthen the pluralism of small communities with their own traditional cultural worlds, because only in such belief-tied private worlds is it possible for individuals to find a psychic haven.

v. A pluralistic state that exclusively depends for morals on all the different group-specific ethos' of its sub-groups is not viable. Conflicts due to the differing ideals of religious, worldview and regional cultural communities can tear a state apart, unless a *basic societal ideal* applicable to all citizens binds these communities together. This must also be an ideal suitable

35. Cf. the August 11, 1919 *Weimar Constitution*, Article 135-141, 146-149; the May 23, 1949 *Basic Law of Germany*, Articles 4, 7, 140; the December 21, 1867 *Austrian Constitution*, Article 14-17; the March 20, 1952 *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Supplementary Protocol*, Article 2. In: BERCHTOLD (1978: 116).

36. *Constitution of Baden-Württemberg* of November 11, 1953, Article 4.

for all the countless people not committed to religious or worldview communities.

In individualistic times dominated by naïve-cosmopolitanism, it is especially necessary to support virtues that secure the common good and uphold the state. It is crucial to reflect on what our constitutions call the “moral code”³⁷. Contrary to the project of “role equivalence” or gender equality for men and women, this includes the separate ideals of the good mother and good father.

It is quite possible to achieve a minimum consensus on a basic societal ideal. We must simply revive and strengthen the already existing agreement on educational mandates and educational aims found in constitutions and school laws. There is no need to start with an empty slate, for we can draw on already existing moral traditions.

vi. In a pluralistic society, we cannot regain lost value orientation certainty unless we make the necessary effort. Only those who summon up and persist in the *will to uphold ideals* can find support and security in these ideals. We must defend personality ideals against two temptations: the demands of our own inner urges and the objections of the critical intellect, which regards ideals as unjustifiable and limiting. In the future, we will only be able to withstand this double pressure if we join with other like-minded persons for mutual support.

Courage to Use Essential Means

The duty to educate the younger generation implies a variety of subtasks. We must fulfill them for many different people under very diverse circumstances. Consequently, there can be no universal means. Nor should educators feel intimidated by the vast number of factors that influence personality development. The more particular details we know about them, the greater the danger will be of overlooking the essential. What viewpoints on means are indispensable for reorientation?

i. We need a public value climate favoring shared personality ideals and affirming all citizens’ co-responsibility for educating their younger generation. Society should no longer expect parents and teachers to rely solely on their own moral resources. They must be able to draw support from widespread public agreement that neither virtue nor moral deterioration is a private matter.

37. German: “Sittengesetz”. Cf. among others the German *Basic Law (Grundgesetz)*, Article 2; *Constitution of Baden-Württemberg*, Article 1; *Constitution of Rhineland-Palatinate*, Article 1.

ii. The best means of helping the younger generation become life-competent is to support good families. There is no adequate substitute for educationally competent parents. Two-parent families with mothers who are committed to educating their children well deserve special support with tax and civil law measures. They should not be disadvantaged compared with two-income married couples and unmarried cohabiting partners. Moreover, we should once again show “housewives” the respect they deserve, as they surely contribute more to community welfare than do many childless “professional women”³⁸.

iii. To support the educationally competent family does not mean that we should neglect the needs of the many troubled families. Obviously, public institutions must support children who lack a secure home. Nevertheless, the deficiencies of particular families do not justify limiting the educational influence of parents in general by introducing compulsory pre-school attendance or all-day schools. No country should organize its educational system as though broken marriages and irresponsible parents were the norm. Regrettable signs of dereliction should not hold the center of attention in educational policy planning, although they should still be among the most important peripheral concerns.

iv. Indirect education is more important than direct. This means organizing life spaces for children and youth so that, on their own, they can learn as much as possible of what they need to know. It also includes creating opportunities for enriching experiences with nature, culture and other people, possibilities for age-appropriate activities and tasks, shielding against both excessive stimuli and seduction to self-indulgent lifestyles. Traditional or newly created social practices with which every member of society conforms are essential: morals, customs, rules and manners. Only if we can again appreciate and educationally employ the support-giving strength of good morals and good customs can we prevent the spread of pervasive moral deterioration³⁹.

v. All value attitudes are rooted in sentiments, in personal emotions. Accordingly, the quality and stability of value orientations depend on satisfying children’s emotional needs for security and shelter, affection and authority figures. Rational instruction about values and norms does not help if children lack emotional ties to revered persons as value bearers and thus have neither a desire to avoid their disapproval nor an aversion to things they condemn. This means that youth can be assisted in finding value orientation only if educators do not shy away from valuations, attachments

38. Cf. ZEIDLER (1983: 597 ff.).

39. Cf. BREZINKA (1971: 243 ff.).

and standards. It is irresponsible to give children information without providing orientation. Parents and teachers must work out and firmly advocate a moral viewpoint, but at the same time, they must make its logic understandable and thereby help children come to terms with it.

vi. After families, schools have the greatest influence on value consciousness – whether in a good or bad sense. Schools are society's most important means of *purposefully* transmitting its shared ideals to younger generations. "Purposefully" does not mean "directly", however. It means, in this case: Society should employ teachers who personally orient themselves to societal ideals and shape school spirit in accord with these ideals. They should plan curricula, personal contacts, festivals and ceremonies that make possible constructive value experiences and further students' receptivity to values, instead of desensitizing them through excessive emphasis on factual knowledge and premature or one-sided demands for critique⁴⁰. Many untried possibilities and thereby major tasks exist for those school politicians and teacher trainers, institutes for teacher training and teachers associations that do not want just to bemoan the value crisis, but instead to overcome it through decisive action.

These are my theses on the most important subtasks for reorienting education. They do not locate education in methods, techniques or organizational forms, but rather in adults' *belief convictions*. There is no simpler or easier way. However, this approach is only possible for self-assured persons who do not see themselves as helpless victims of a society uncertain of its values, but are rather committed to organizing their lives and their circle of influence according to *shared ideals* and thereby to helping others achieve value certainty.

40. Many thought-provoking ideas are offered by HENTIG (1976).