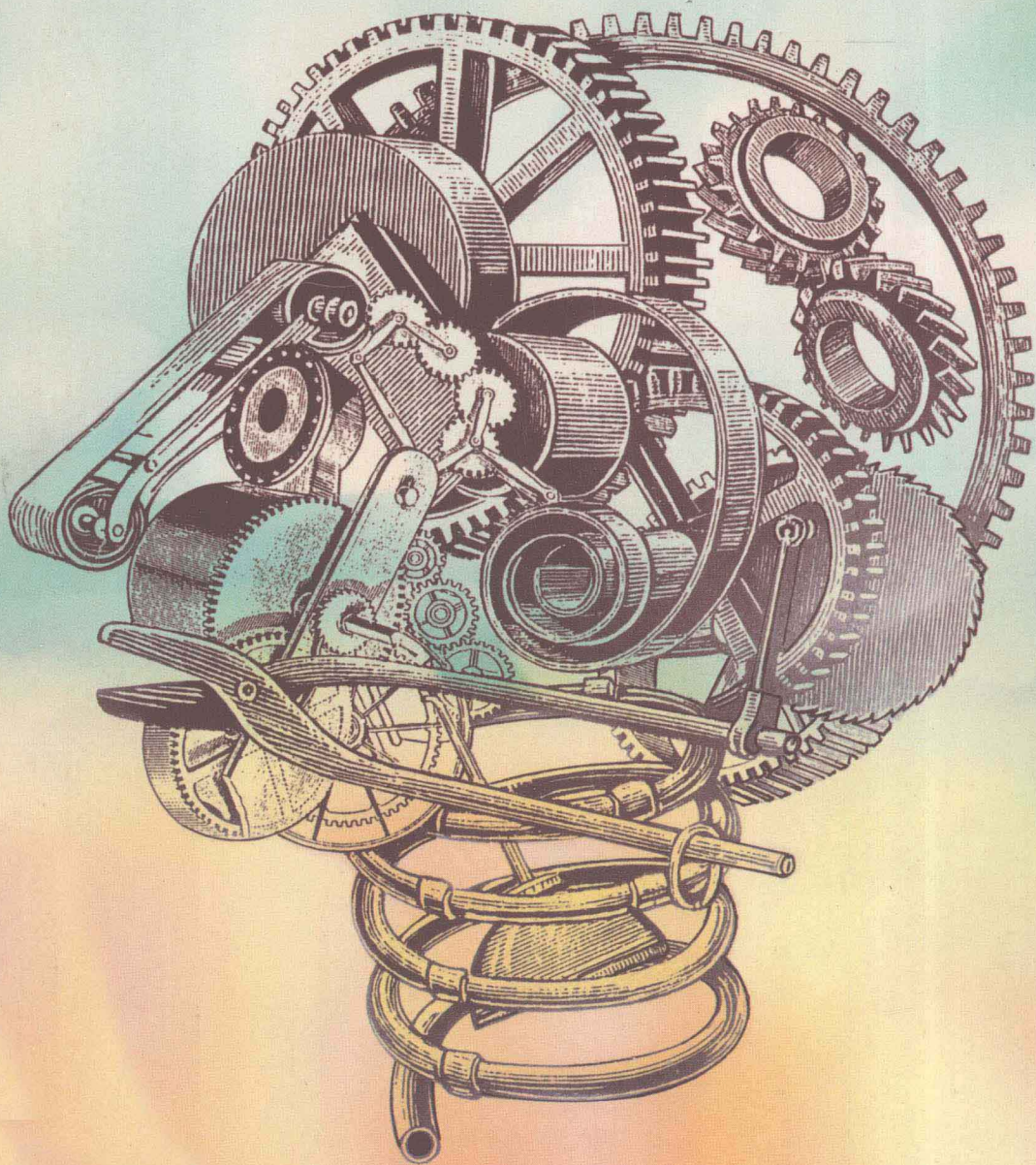


WHEELS IN THE HEAT

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES OF AUTHORITY, FREEDOM,
AND CULTURE FROM SOCRATES TO PAULO FREIRE

JOEL SPRING



Wheels in the Head

Educational Philosophies of Authority, Freedom, and Culture from Socrates to Paulo Freire

Joel Spring

*State University of New York
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About the Author

JOEL SPRING, professor of education at the State University of New York–College at New Paltz, received his Ph.D. in educational policy studies from the University of Wisconsin. His father was born a citizen of the Choctaw Nation in Indian Territory prior to the abolishment of the Choctaw government and the creation of Oklahoma. Professor Spring's current interest in Native American culture and history is a reflection of his Indian background.

Professor Spring is the author of many books including *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television*; *American Education* (now in its sixth edition); *The American School 1642–1993* (now in its third edition); and *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States*.

Dedication and Note on the Title

This book is dedicated to Max Stirner (1806–1856), whose phrase “wheels in the head” serves as its title. Stirner warned that control of the dissemination of ideas through schools was fast becoming an important means of domination by the modern state. He believed that an idea becomes a wheel in the head when the idea owns the individual rather than the individual owning the idea. In his classic volume *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority* (1845), Stirner writes about wheels in the head: “The thought is my own only when I have no misgiving about bringing it in danger of death every moment, when I do not have to fear its loss as a loss for me, a loss of me.”¹

Stirner’s warnings against ideological domination by governments and public school systems eventually destroyed his relationship with his intellectual colleague Karl Marx. Stirner claimed that ideologies, such as communism and liberalism, have the power to dominate individual actions even to the point of self-destruction. For Stirner, an idea truly becomes a wheel in the head when a person is willing to die for it. Stirner’s warnings went unheeded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as countless lives were lost in defense of the ideas of communism, socialism, fascism, colonialism, Nazism, and all other isms.

¹ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, trans. Steven T. Byington (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1963), p. 342. For a full discussion of Stirner’s ideas, see Chapter 3 of this book.

Preface

During the height of the alternative school movement in the early 1970s, I put together a series of lectures on radical forms of education that were later published as *A Primer of Libertarian Education*.¹ My purpose in the lectures and book was to remind advocates of alternative schools that there existed a long history of radical dissent to standard forms of public schooling. I granted the right to translate and publish the book to many organizations throughout the world. Consequently, editions appeared in Danish, Spanish, and Italian. While attending the 1984 celebration in Venice, Italy, of George Orwell's novel *1984*, I was surprised to find the book widely read by radical school reformers in Europe.

Since writing the *Primer*, I have more closely studied the politics of education and the politics of knowledge.² Consequently, I decided to try my hand again at articulating a philosophy of education that might support equality of political power among all citizens. Since the *Primer* is out of print, I decided to build the arguments of this book around material originally explored in the *Primer*. Most of the original material from the *Primer* can be found in Part Two, "Dissenting Traditions in Education."

The present book is written as both a textbook and a statement of educational philosophy. In this book, I discuss and summarize the ideas of most of the traditional philosophers of education from Plato to Paulo Freire. In addition, I tie the discussions together by relating them to my concern with the possible contribution of education to equality of political power. Because of my understanding of the politics of knowledge, I believe that the textbook form is an important means of disseminating knowledge. Therefore my goals are to enlighten and intellectually stimulate the reader, and to contribute to the scholarly debate on the purposes and content of education.

¹ Joel Spring, *A Primer of Libertarian Education* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1975).

² See Joel Spring, *Conflict of Interests: The Politics of American Education*, 2nd Ed. (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, Inc., 1992) and *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

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Joel Spring

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PART ONE

*Autocratic and Democratic
Forms of Education*

Education and the Authoritarian State

In this book, I will analyze differing ideas on what types of control of schools and educational methods will enhance equality of political power. I am interested in how education might contribute to the forming of a democratic society. My definition of a democratic society is one in which all citizens share equal political power. Equality, in this context, refers primarily to political power and not wealth. Also, this definition is different from one that stresses the right of all citizens to select their leaders. For instance, citizens might have the right to vote for their leaders, but their actual political power might be limited by differences in wealth, race, and gender and by citizens' understanding of how to exercise their political rights. On the other hand, as a number of philosophers discussed in this book suggest, it might be possible to create a political structure where differences in wealth, gender, and race do not hinder the equal exercise of political power.

I will begin my study by examining arguments on how education can be used to maintain an authoritarian state. The concepts developed in this chapter will serve as warnings about forms of educational control and methods that might deprive citizens of equal political power. Throughout this book, I will use the concepts of an authoritarian education to evaluate educational proposals that claim to promote freedom and equality. In developing the concepts of an education supportive of an authoritarian society, I will analyze Plato's *Republic* and the proposals of the architect of communist education under Joseph Stalin, Anton Makarenko.

In Chapter 2, I will examine some of the traditional concepts on the relationship between education and the democratic state as embodied in the works of Amy Gutmann, John Dewey, and Henry Giroux. The purpose of this chapter will be to highlight some of the inherent problems in maintaining a public school system in a democratic society. Of particular importance is the problem of maintaining freedom of thought, and the tension between majority rule and minority rights in public schools.

In Part Two, against the background of arguments on how education can support an authoritarian society and the problems of maintaining a public school system in a democratic society, I will examine proposals for using education to maintain freedom and equal political power. In Chapter 3, I will analyze concerns about the use of education to support political despotism as expressed by some of the ideologues of the American revolution and by political philosophers William Godwin and Max Stirner. In Chapter 4, I will examine some of the educational proposals designed to limit the possible use of education to maintain political autocracy. The focus of Chapter 4 will be on the free school movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly the educational philosophies of Francisco Ferrer, A. S. Neill, and Wilhelm Reich. Chapter 4 will introduce the reader to the important concept of the authoritarian personality and how it might be formed in the family and school. In Chapter 5, I will examine the problem of relating education and political power to modern technology and the complexity of contemporary society by analyzing the writings of Ivan Illich and Paul Goodman.

In our time, the issue of political power is enmeshed in the politics of culture and race because of the internationalization of the work force and the resulting increase in multicultural societies. In Part Three, I will analyze current arguments on the relationship between the culture transmitted by schools and political power. In Chapter 6, I will examine the arguments of philosopher Allan Bloom on the necessity of schools transmitting natural rights doctrines and the arguments of E. D. Hirsch on the importance of schools transmitting the culture of the social and economic elite. In Chapter 7, I will examine arguments that racism makes it necessary for dominated peoples to develop ethnocentric schools, such as Afrocentric schools, and that ethnocentric schools should strive to link world cultures together.

Obviously, equality of political power depends on equality between women and men. In Part Four, I will analyze some of the early arguments regarding differences in educating men and women and differences in political power. In Chapter 8, I will review the educational proposals of the major philosophers of classical liberalism, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As I will demonstrate, the educational proposals and political theories of these classical liberal philosophers highlight the basic issues of the politics of gender. In Chapter 9, I will examine Mary Wollstonecraft's response to the educational ideas of Rousseau and contemporary arguments on gender differences. These ideas provide a framework for discussing the relationship between education and equal political power for women.

In the final part of the book, I will review the educational ideas of Paulo Freire and the problems facing education in a global economy. Paulo Freire is certainly one of the most important educational philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century. His intellectual quest is for an educational method that will preserve freedom and equality of power. But, as I will discuss in Chapter 10, there are certain problems in his concept of love and the necrophilic personality. And, in Chapter 11, I will summarize the arguments regarding the relationship between education and equality of political

power in the context of a global economy. The issues of education in authoritarian and democratic states, the problems posed by dissenters to state education, and the issues of multiculturalism and gender take on added meaning in a world of global corporations and an internationalized work force. Any attempts to equalize political power must take into account the importance of the global economy and the global-American popular culture.

PLATO: EDUCATION AND *THE REPUBLIC*

Plato's *Republic* provides the basic outline of the role of education in the authoritarian state. Written as a Socratic dialogue, the book explores the meaning of justice and in the process describes the ideal state. In the dialogue, the education of citizens and rulers emerges as the most important element in creating the ideal state and the ideal individual. Education becomes the method of determining a person's place in society and teaching people to accept their designated places. The censorship of literature and the manipulation of historical instruction are justified as the means of creating social harmony. In addition, the education of rulers is considered the key to assuring that wisdom rules society. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates draws parallels between the psychological organization of the individual and the organization of the state. In other words, education serves the purpose of organizing the state in two ways: It puts each person in his or her correct place in the social hierarchy and it assures the right relationships among faculties of the human mind. In the end, Socrates rejects the democratic state and democratic person for a society and individual lives ruled by wisdom.

The methodology of *The Republic*, the Socratic dialogue, is based on the premise that the knowledge of truth is within each individual, and the role of dialogue is to help the individual discover truth. For instance, in *Meno*, Socrates demonstrates this point by asking a young boy a series of questions that lead the boy to an understanding of how to determine the length of a diagonal of a square. The boy is never told how to determine the length of the diagonal but is asked questions that lead to the discovery of the correct answer.¹

In *The Republic*, the parable of the cave is used to explain the Socratic method. In the parable of the cave, Socrates asks his listeners to imagine that humanity is similar to a group of people chained together in the bottom of a cave. The chains are arranged in a fashion that forces the people to stare at the cave wall and denies them the ability to turn around. Behind them is a fire, and in front of the fire objects are passed that cast shadows on the cave wall. Forced to see only the shadows, the chained individuals believe the shadows represent reality.

Socrates argues that humanity is similar to the chained individuals in the cave because they mistake the shadows of truth for actual truth. The goal of education is not to tell the individuals in the cave what truth is but to help them see the real objects. Eventually, education will help the individual to

emerge from the cave and see “the good.” Socrates argues that most teachers think that understanding is not in the individual and that their job is to put it into the person “as they were putting sight into blind eyes.”² But, Socrates argues in the context of the parable, the power of understanding is already within the individual and the educator should not try to put sight into blind eyes but should turn eyes so that they can see the good.

As Socrates uses the term, “the good” is a combination of the power that creates truth and the ability to know truth. In Socrates’ words, “Then that which provides their truth to the things known, and gives the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea or principle of the good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of understanding and of truth in so far as known. . . .”³ In his plan for educating philosophers, understanding of the good is achieved after the learner progresses through a study of earthly images and objects to a study of ideas and ideals. Existing in the world of ideals are concepts such as perfect beauty and perfect justice. The good is the source of these ideals and the means by which humans can know them.

Therefore, experiencing the good opens the door, according to Socrates, to a knowledge and understanding of ideals. Experiencing the good makes it possible for a person to understand perfect justice, and that person would then be qualified to rule a just state. To know the good means that an individual also knows what is best for all people. Therefore, knowledge of the good would qualify a person to define what is best for all people, what is called the common good. According to this reasoning, it would be logical to conclude that persons who know the common good should be the rulers.

In *The Republic* only the rulers know the good. For Socrates, the ideal state is ruled by philosopher-kings who are selected because they are born with intellectual abilities that can be educated to know the good. This argument gives important power to the rulers. Any state that claims that only the rulers have access to the truth provides a justification for totalitarianism. For instance, in justifying the dictatorship of the Communist party, Lenin argued that the Communist party was the vanguard of the working class and represented the class consciousness of the workers. Therefore, the dictatorial control by the Communist party was justified because it represented truth as it was suppose to be present in the working class. In Germany, Hitler argued that the Nazi party represented the true spirit of the German people. This claim of access to truth resulted in dictatorial control and mass terrorism.

In *The Republic*, the claim of access to the good is used to justify the right of philosopher-kings to lie to the population and to spread myths that justify the social order. Rulers are allowed to lie, according to Socrates, because they know what is true and best for the people. Socrates states: “Then for the rulers of the city . . . it is proper to use falsehood, to deal with enemies or indeed with citizens for the benefit of the city.”⁴ Of course, Socrates argues, no one else should be allowed to lie.

One of the important myths to be spread by the rulers was designed to make people accept their social position. Of course, any myth of this type serves the purpose of reducing social discontent and justifying the power of