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THE PURSUIT OF CURRICULUM

Schooling and the Public Interest

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Preface

Words that set out as descriptions of fairly specific things or events often become universally applicable. Today, practically any situation involving some kind of learning is liable to be referred to as an instance of *curriculum*. In this book, I want to return the word to a more limited meaning: I shall be talking about the curriculum of schooling—the program or programs offered to students who enter the elementary school aged five or six, and leave secondary school somewhere between the ages of 16 and 18. What is the curriculum? What should students be learning? Who should decide what it is good to be learning? How are such decisions to be made? My concern is not so much to give specific answers to questions of this kind as to discuss what kinds of considerations should lie behind the answers that we reach. Insofar as I offer conclusions, they are personal ones. But as part of the exercise of presenting my own viewpoint, I also provide a general guide to ways in which such questions are approached.

The personal perspective which I describe has developed through conversations with others, some mainly or entirely through the printed word, some mainly through the spoken word. My "pursuit of curriculum" over the last 25 years has been stimulated, shaped, and enlivened by predecessors, colleagues, and students from many countries. In this respect, I acknowledge special debts to Ian Westbury, editor of the series in which this book appears, to Joseph Schwab, to Maurice Holt, to John Meyer, and to Janek Wankowski.

Swells Hill, Gloucestershire, April, 1992.

Prologue

The Pursuit of Curriculum

Most of us can remember a key phrase or utterance which, at some point, helped us to crystallize a half-formed thought. For me, one such occasion occurred during a reading of James March's (1972) paper "Model bias in social action," where he wrote:

> Justice is an ideal rather than a state of existence: we do not achieve it; we pursue it. (p. 414)

The metaphor of "pursuit" seemed, in a number of ways, to be a compelling analogy for my own engagement with the curriculum of schooling. I could not believe that, by taking any amount of thought, it would be possible to devise techniques or procedures to deliver an "ideal" curriculum; and this, it must be remembered, was at a time when speakers at curriculum conferences, who had imbibed too much philosophical theory, or overindulged in planning by objectives, frequently announced the discovery of just such a holy grail. On the other hand, neither was I comfortable with the notion that, in the end, the making and teaching of curriculum was simply an exercise in pragmatism—what I will later be referring to as *operationalism*: just figuring out "what works." But the idea of pursuit seemed to encompass both ends of the problem. To pursue is to be active, to engage with the world, to face its obstacles and opportunities, to recognize those occasions when pragmatism is called for, or when ideals must not be sacrificed. Pursuit always has to be inventive. It takes us into new territory. The solution that worked last time may not be effective this time round. But, and it is an

important but, pursuit has an end in view, and it is the desirability of the end in view that determines the quality of the actions we take in its name. We know that in the world we inhabit, justice cannot be a state of affairs; but without the guidance of ideals of justice, no courts, trials, investigations, or legal enactments will serve the good of society. Similarly, we are never going to realize perfect curricula, but schools, teaching, assessments, and mandates will only serve the good of society insofar as they are guided by curricular ideals.

My main aim in this book is to persuade my readers to look upon curriculum as a pursuit: both to see how the analogy can help us to understand the nature of curriculum problems and discover ways of solving them, and to recognize that this pursuit is something that they themselves could and should be engaged in. Some will take it up as professionals—teachers, planners, researchers—but many, I hope, will have other backgrounds and will engage with curriculum questions as concerned citizens. As many current national reports and initiatives are constantly reminding us, curriculum, like justice, is a possession of society as a whole. If its pursuit is to be successful, it has to be the work of the many, not the few.

The pursuit of curriculum, in its most mundane sense of something that occupies our time and attention, is taken up by people of many different preferences and dispositions. The profusion of claims and counterclaims about what curriculum is, and how we should think about it, can be confusing to anyone who listens to political debate, or goes to the literature for enlightenment. On the other hand, examination of these claims can help us draw up a map of how curriculum is, in fact, thought about. This is the task I embark on in the first part of this book. The positions we adopt on curriculum questions are expressions of a social philosophy. How can social philosophies be categorized? What differentiates them? What implications do they have for the kinds of social action in which we should be engaging? Only as we begin to perceive some kind of map of curriculum thinking can we actively choose what stance we ourselves would like to adopt, or trace out the implications of the attitudes or values that we have already formed. Only as we learn to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of other possible positions can we judge the relative strengths and weaknesses of our own position.

Having sketched a map of the various perspectives that we commonly find adopted in response to curricular issues, I then turn in the second part of the book to an elaboration of the perspective that my own pursuit of curriculum has shaped. This I describe as *deliberative*. As the label suggests, it owes a great deal to Joseph

Schwab's advocacy of deliberation as "the method of the practical" that should be the basis for the resolution of curriculum problems (in Westbury & Wilkof, 1978). My own pursuit has, however, taken me over some different territory from his and led me to some different emphases. In particular, I am more concerned here with curriculum as a public institution, and how that aspect of it is to be accommodated within a deliberative perspective, and relatively less concerned with curriculum as practice and its realization within traditions of liberal education. My most important concern, however, is with the question of how these twin aspects of curriculum—institution and practice—can be reconciled. This dilemma, I believe, is at the root of much of the current concern about curriculum which has been evidenced in the United States by reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *America 2000* (1991) and in Great Britain by developments surrounding legislation for the National Curriculum.

These are thoughts that I pursue in my epilogue, where I trace out the implications of my deliberative perspective for our understanding of current controversies over what should be taught in schools.

I

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CURRICULUM

1

How We Think About Curriculum

In the first part of this book my aim is to draw a map of how people think about the curriculum of schooling and, in the course of that, to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the various positions they occupy. I shall also discuss the nature of the two major dimensions of the map and relate them to philosophies of schooling.

Maps can serve a variety of functions. They can help those who are new to an area to understand its nature and to locate themselves within it. I hope that for beginners in the field of curriculum, my map will serve this purpose. Maps can also help those who already have an interest in an area to understand it better by enabling them to check out features and relationships of features that their own exploration has suggested. I hope that my map will serve that purpose too.

Map making involves selection. We have to make choices about which aspects of the landscape we consider to be important. By doing that, we shape the way in which we and others look at it. At some point, it may be better to throw the map away and try to take an unprejudiced look at what surrounds us. But as long as we use the map to help us think, and resist the temptation to use it as a substitute for thinking, it can be a useful companion.

WHY CURRICULUM?

Why do we need a map of curriculum? Why not make do with maps of learning, teaching, schooling, or education? A straightforward

answer is that people talk about, write about, legislate for, teach courses on, and take credits in curriculum. In other words, it is a *subject*. But that only pushes the question back a stage further. Why is it a subject?

Subjects, which include such things as chemistry, law, and photography, are reflections of social practices. People do chemistry, and in the course of doing it they organize themselves to produce and share knowledge about the activity and also to protect it and extend its scope. Chemistry, as a subject, presents some selection of facts and ideas about the practice and about the institutions that support it. Since it is generally accepted that the practice of chemistry is important within the total range of human activities, many people study it as a subject because they want to know about it, need to know about it, or have to demonstrate some competence in it. Curriculum has become a subject in this sense. We study it and think about it because it reflects a significant social practice that is associated with learning, teaching, schools, and education, but that has a distinctive character of its own.

Our starting point, therefore, is the idea of curriculum as *practice*. At once, we can think of various concrete ways in which we might be involved in the practice of curriculum. We might, for example, undertake curriculum planning, in the understanding that this is not the same as planning learning, teaching, or education. Our curriculum would not be a very good one if it did not result in some learning, but the achievement of learning depends on more than suggesting that something should be taught; it depends also on how the teaching is done, where, to whom, and under what circumstances. Probably we would also think that our curriculum was deficient if it could not claim to be contributing towards education—I use the word "probably" because we could think of curricula that might be designed without concern for education: for example, it is not uncommon to meet with claims that the main object of the school curriculum should be to equip students with the skills that are needed in employment, thus avoiding questions of what is or is not educative. At this stage, I am not concerned with the validity of such proposals. My point is that curriculum as practice has fuzzy edges. Some would prefer to keep it tidy—even to separate it from teaching (we have all heard of the "teacher-proof curriculum," though it is less talked about now than it was 20 years ago). On the other hand, some might think that a curriculum that was not intended to be "educative" was not a curriculum at all and should be separately categorized, perhaps as a "program of training." But the thought that curriculum has fuzzy edges should not worry us. It is in the nature of practices that they depend on,

overlap, or interact with other practices. Chemistry too has fuzzy edges, where it depends on mathematics, overlaps with physics and biology, and/or encounters other kinds of related practices, such as business or politics. At this point, we might just be content to say that the practices of curriculum are inevitably intertwined with other practices, but that they have a unique character centering on particular understandings of the nature and place of formal learning in a society. Exactly what that nature is, and what that place is, are questions open to a variety of interpretations, and it is our immediate business to examine what those interpretations might be. Such interpretations, whether articulated or not, are always of consequence. A curriculum plan, for example, is inevitably a reflection of some stance on what curriculum is and what it should be doing.

Plans are like maps. They too involve selection. We can make them very precise, or quite schematic. We can treat the material they deal with in an even-handed way, or we can choose to lay particular stress on some aspects of it. However, curriculum material can be treated in a much more arbitrary fashion than the material of maps. Generally speaking, maps don't ignore major features such as mountains and rivers—though anyone who has tried to use the kind of city maps dispensed in hotel lobbies knows that this cannot be guaranteed. But the material that is dealt with in curriculum plans is even more open to treatment that emphasizes some features at the expense of others. We need to be aware that the practice of curriculum entails a good deal of personal and collective judgment about what to pay attention to and how to treat it. The plans we make, like the maps we make, embody a world view that we already espouse, or that we come to espouse as we make our plan.

A second aspect of curriculum as practice that we need to think about is the extent to which its nature is culture-dependent. To understand why this dependency exists, we have to appreciate the necessary relationship that all practices have with the institutions which support them. To return to our earlier example, the existence of chemistry as a practice is closely bound up with institutions such as laboratories, university departments, learned societies, academic journals, and so on. It is hard to think of chemistry without thinking about such institutions, and how we think about it inevitably reflects our first- or second-hand experience of these institutions. For example, chemistry as part of a school curriculum is commonly thought of as "not the real subject" if it does not involve experience in laboratories. Curriculum is also the product of an association between practice and institution, and the institutions that support it are immensely variable. Anyone who has direct experience with a country such as France, knows that there curriculum has a very

concrete meaning, because the institutions that support it have a very definite and well-controlled character. Stories of French ministers of education who knew exactly what every child throughout the country (or, in some versions, the empire) was doing in class at any particular moment can be treated as legend. But the legend points to an important truth: for over 200 years, institutions have existed with the political and administrative capacity to specify in great detail what is learned in schools. In the United States, on the other hand, the institutional frames through which curriculum is specified are much more varied and much more open to negotiation, compromise, and tradeoff. "A rough and ready bargain between what some people are prepared to teach, and others to learn" (Reisman, 1958) is a definition of curriculum that is not surprising when penned by an American, but would be astonishing if it came from the hand of someone of French nationality. This is another kind of fuzziness that could easily lead us to an incorrect belief that we are not dealing with a well-defined practice. A comparison with government helps put the problem into perspective. Institutions of government too can be highly centralized or, as in the case of the United States, built around a system of checks and balances deliberately designed to avoid overwhelming concentrations of power. Nevertheless, "government" or "politics" are clearly focused subjects, since their practice assumes an identity that is to a degree independent of the specific institutions that support it. In the same way, curriculum, despite its varied institutional manifestations, has categorical status as a subject of study and research because it reflects a key activity of modern societies, which is institutionalized everywhere in some form, even though the form may not be simple to describe.

Underneath our confusion about what curriculum *is* (because it is entangled with learning, teaching, schooling, and education), and underneath our confusion about *where* it is to be found (because sources of curricular authority may not be readily identifiable), lies an important and distinctive social activity; an activity that needs to be understood not only by those whose professions are associated with it, but also by the public at large, since the nature of curriculum as practice, and of the institutions that support it, are important expressions of the cultures within which we live.

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT CURRICULUM?

In order to draw a map, we need to be able to define territory in terms of two major axes: north/south and east/west are the ones

with which we are most familiar. What axes could be used to map the ways in which people think about curriculum? Once again, we are faced with the kind of question that can only be answered through a process of selection. There are many dimensions that might be considered, and saying which ones are important involves making value judgments. As a preliminary step in arriving at a set of directions for which some importance can be claimed, let us consider some statements that have been made about curriculum. These statements have been taken from written sources and express the views of people who think of themselves as "curriculum theorists." The benefit of this is that we are dealing with a homogeneous group of authors, whose works are readily accessible, so that readers can judge for themselves whether the remarks I have quoted are representative of their thinking. Collections of statements from other sources, such as political speeches or official reports, could be analyzed with similar results.

1. A curriculum is not activities but plans, or a blueprint, for activities (Pratt, 1980, p. 4).
2. At its most scientific, curriculum design is an applied science; like medicine and engineering, it draws on theory from the pure sciences, but itself develops not theory but operating principles to guide decision making in practical situations (Pratt, 1980, p. 9).
3. If curriculum serves any purposes, they are to guide instruction and to furnish criteria for evaluation. Curriculum, therefore, must be a statement of intention, not a report of occurrences or results (Johnson, 1969, p. 115).
4. A major task of . . . curriculum theorizing . . . is the regaining of the Self (Mitrano, 1979, p. 214).
5. Curriculum is brought to bear, not on ideal or abstract representations, but on the real thing, on the concrete case, in all its completeness and with all its differences from all other concrete cases (Schwab, 1978c, p. 309).
6. [Curriculum] has been one of those places where we have told ourselves who we are (Rudolph, 1977, p. 1).
7. Curriculum scholarship, sociological understanding, and the study of political and economic ideologies . . . merge into a unified perspective that enables us to delve into the place of schools in the cultural as well as economic, reproduction of class relations in advanced industrial society (Apple, 1979, p. 15).

8. Questions regarding the nature of one's inner experience, point to that level of existence known as the *lebenswelt*. Let us study this *lebenswelt*, the experience of the educational journey. It is the study of curriculum reconceived, that is, *currere* (Pinar, 1975b, p. 399).

These quotations exhibit a great deal of variety in what they suggest about the ways of conceiving curriculum that guide their authors. One aspect of this variety is the spread of attitudes that we observe towards *curriculum as institution*. Statements such as "Curriculum is an applied science . . ." show acceptance of the institutionalized nature of the activity. Curriculum is seen as being "like medicine and engineering," a socially embedded idea defined by well-known structures within which practitioners work. The institutional aspect of curriculum also emerges, though in a rather different way, in the comment that it "has been one of those places where we have told ourselves who we are." Here the stress is less on the organizational aspects of institutions—the precise arrangements that frame the character of work that is done in the name of curriculum—and more on the institution as an embodiment of an enduring idea shaping the consciousness of the community that holds and supports it. One might compare this with the way in which Americans think and write about the law. For some, the institution of the Supreme Court defines technical aspects of how the law is transacted, while for others it symbolizes the progressive redefinition of the ideals of the Constitution seen as abstract determinants of the way in which citizens understand their relationship to the state. On the other hand, those who interpret curriculum as something essentially significant to the individual—who see it as concerning "the Self"—are, at best, not interested in talking in institutional terms, while those who worry about curriculum as a major source of the "reproduction of class relations" consider its institutional aspects to be oppressive. A midway view is represented by the comment that "curriculum is brought to bear, not on ideal or abstract representations, but on the real thing." Here the existence of curriculum as an institutionalized form is acknowledged, but it is moderated by appreciation of the "real" world that practice has to act upon, and that needs to be set against the tendency of institutions to behave as though generalized ideas and procedures were all that mattered.

Another way of differentiating between the positions represented in the quotations is to ask whether their authors adopt a particular *great idea* that they use in order to discuss or work with curricu-

lum. An example of such a great idea would be "curriculum is not activities but plans or a blueprint for activities." This statement immediately sets firm parameters limiting the kinds of things that can be thought and done in the name of curriculum. On the other hand, it also signals a very positive belief in the efficacy of planning, which is projected not as a problematic activity, but as one that is well understood and for which definite procedures exist. In other words, many possible considerations, and associated problems and opportunities, are set aside through adoption of the idea that the effective pursuit of curriculum activities is a matter of learning and applying a specifiable technique or set of techniques. Not that this will necessarily be a straightforward matter: the application of technique may involve wide-ranging knowledge of procedures, appreciations of different contexts within which they can be employed, and exercise of expert judgment on questions of which procedures are suited to which contexts. But the processes involved will be rather like those invoked when answers have to be found to mathematical problems. Imagination is needed to classify them, but once they are cast as belonging to a particular category, their solutions will emerge from the routine application of established algorithms.

We encounter a different kind of limitation on the range of ideas to be applied to curriculum problems in the reference to "a unified perspective that enables us to delve into the place of schools in the cultural as well as economic reproduction of class relations." Here again, the approach to curriculum is framed by the adoption of a key idea, or constellation of ideas, which exists independently of the subject matter of curriculum, but in this case the immediate issue is interpretation rather than action. Just as a sociologist or historian might interpret events through the lens of functionalism or dialectical materialism, so the subject matter of curriculum can be approached with a definite theory in mind that focuses on particular objects of interest or styles of explanation. In this instance, the theory is a marxist or neo-marxist one, which centers on concepts such as hegemony, alienation, and reproduction. If we ask how this kind of specific focus on curriculum is different from the specificity of the engineering approach, we can look to our first dimension, which measures attitude towards curriculum as institution. Planners in a technical tradition are generally accepting of existing institutional structures and want to work within them in order to accomplish curriculum tasks. Adherents of critical philosophies want to remove or reform them. In both cases, however, ability to work within the perspective depends firstly on accepting the *a priori* philosophy on which it is based, and secondly on mastery of the

expert techniques of action or analysis that it uses. Indeed, great ideas centered on technique and those founded on social and cultural analysis are not necessarily in conflict. Recent writing on curriculum has shown many instances of what has come to be known as "the radicalism of the right," which strongly affirms the necessity of retaining and strengthening existing institutions and at the same time endorses the application of formal procedures for specifying and implementing curricula. However, this alliance is not entirely a comfortable one. Those whose main formative notion relates to the efficacy of the planning process tend to be guided by the opportunities for sophistication in procedure that the academic study of planning raises. On the other hand, those who are driven by ideas stemming from a conservative view of social priorities favor simple forms of intervention, through content-based specifications for curriculum and elementary forms of achievement testing. Thus, adherence or opposition to institutions does not provide a firm basis for distinguishing between forms of leading ideas: more fundamental is the question of whether the primary focus of the idea is on handling problems in a disciplined way, or on abstract analyses of the nature of society and social relations.

What of those who do not base their action or their analysis on such clear-cut ideas? The first thing to say is that the line between those holding very specific, *a priori* views and those whose position is more eclectic is not easily drawn and must be a matter of dispute. We could say that talk of "operating principles to guide decision making in practical situations" sounds a good deal more flexible and open to revision than "curriculum . . . must be a statement of intention," although both formulations might be seen as representing "technical" approaches to curriculum. As we move beyond technicality, we encounter even greater flexibility. If we believe that "curriculum is brought to bear . . . on the concrete case, in all its completeness and with all its differences from all other concrete cases," then we must also believe that no one all-encompassing idea will provide us with the means of answering our practical and theoretic problems. The concrete case is first of all thought of in terms of "completeness," and no theory or technology can respond to the complete range of features a case might exhibit. Secondly, it is thought of in terms of "its differences from all other concrete cases," which suggests that any tool intended to deal with cases in general is inadequate for handling the unique features of one particular case. Therefore, on both these counts, the concrete case itself must determine what ideas and techniques are appropriate to it. More-

over, since the circumstances of a case are unique to a particular moment, and not permanently fixed, judgments about appropriate ideas and techniques must be open to revision. A similar conclusion is suggested by claims that the study of curriculum must be the study of the "*lebenswelt*, the experience of the educational journey." Here, the problem is also the uniqueness of the case, but this time understood as relating to an individual person, rather than to some objective set of circumstances. Individuality is lost as soon as personal actions and desires are held to be explicable in terms of a general theory or idea. If curriculum is held to be an individual possession, then we need to focus on its dynamic aspects, an exercise that will take us so far from the idea of curriculum as object that we are conscious of entering into a new area with new terminology: *currere*, as a verb, stresses process, and this involves the emergence of new states that require new ideas to describe them. Subscription to an overriding theory would limit our ability to aspire to or describe new states, or reconstruct old ones to accommodate new knowledge. Focus on concrete cases or unique individuals implies a willingness to let current circumstance suggest what ideas or techniques may be useful or necessary; none can *a priori* be elevated to a privileged status.

But focus on the case and focus on the individual are not the same, and, again, what helps us to understand the difference is consideration of how these positions treat the institutional aspect of curriculum. We read, in the first instance, that "curriculum is brought to bear on the concrete case." In other words, the institutionalized curriculum precedes the case—there is, for example, a demand from some politically or organizationally legitimated body that a certain level of literacy be achieved at a certain grade level, together with some criteria by which that achievement is to be assessed. We then meet the concrete case: particular administrators in particular schools, and particular teachers in particular classrooms, who face the question of how that curricular "intention" is to be translated into specific activities with specific children. The generality of the intention is confronted with the uniqueness of the case. Curriculum is seen as having two faces, one abstract and institutional, one concrete and practical. Both are held to be important and both are seen as affecting the problem and therefore deciding what ideas and techniques should be brought into play. The notion of *currere*, by contrast, places its emphasis squarely on the individual as defining the concrete, practical circumstances to which curriculum thinking must respond. Curriculum as institu-

tion is, in a way, a given of the situation, but it is a kind of accident, merely providing part of the framing within which essentially personal solutions are sought to the question of how to secure individually satisfying curricular experiences.

Here, then, we have suggestions for two dimensions that are relatively independent of one another and might enable us to map the ways in which we think about curriculum: first, what we feel about curriculum as institution, and second, whether we believe that curriculum is best understood within the perspective of a dominating idea. How we feel about the institutional aspects of curriculum need not determine our attitude towards the adoption of some overriding idea, theory, or technique for handling curriculum problems and tasks. We can be an eclectic supporter of curriculum as institution, or we can support it on the basis of an all-embracing idea; we can eclectically ignore curriculum as institution or reject it on *a priori* theoretical grounds. As with all maps, a middle ground is left for those who prefer not to commit themselves to extreme positions. Using the axes of "commitment to/rejection of/institutions" and "subscription to/rejection of/great ideas" we can usefully describe and differentiate many accounts of how curriculum questions should be thought about and how the tasks of curriculum should be. A map based on these axes has parallels elsewhere; for example, in the results of researches into areas related to curriculum, such as teaching and politics, which have yielded dimensions with labels such as *conservative*, *progressive*, *tough-minded*, and *tender-minded* (see Reid & Holley, 1974). Conservative attitudes tend to be accepting of existing institutions and of the conventions that they embody, but this can be connected with tender-mindedness, that is, concern for the individual, or the individual case, or allied to tough-mindedness, that is, a determination that individual cases shall be subordinate to general principles. We can imagine, for example, that one teacher might fully accept the intention of a state curriculum to realize some relationship between grade level and skills of literacy, but see this as having different implications for different children according to their unique circumstances, while another teacher might regard the officially endorsed objectives as having an importance that overrides individual circumstance. Progressive attitudes oppose the traditions of established institutions, but again this can result either in tender-minded actions that favor piecemeal evolution or tough-minded actions directed to the achievement of revolutionary change, however painful that process may turn out to be. Progressiveness is an index of how far institu-

tions are seen as necessary and, on the whole, beneficial; tender- and tough-mindedness of how far actions based on such beliefs should be directed by *a priori* determinations, or how far guided by circumstances as well as by the demands of pre-established positions.

In later chapters, I will return to the question of the underlying dimensions of the map in order to study them in more depth. At this point, I want to examine some well-documented ways in which we think about curriculum. Maps reveal places where settlement takes place. For whatever reasons of climate or terrain, some places are more comfortable and natural to occupy than others. A map of curriculum thinking shows a similar phenomenon. The perspectives that people adopt are not randomly scattered over the coordinates to which it is drawn. While they are all individual, they tend to cluster around points of stability at which combinations of beliefs and values have some logical harmony, or at which there is a community of interest with centers of power or authority. I shall define and discuss four major points of stability.

SYSTEMATIZERS: CURRICULUM AS PLAN

Systematizers are, in a way, archetypal thinkers about and workers in curriculum. They adopt, consciously or otherwise, a rather pure definition of what curriculum is, which stays close to the idea of "plans or a blueprint for activities," and treats it as something that is legitimately and unproblematically institutionalized. They appear on the map where the coordinates of subscription to a clear, *a priori* leading idea and support for curriculum as institution meet. To a much greater extent than those who adopt other positions, they are concerned about *defining* curriculum, that is, placing limits on what might be understood as belonging within their sphere of activity. An important part of the exercise of definition is to establish boundaries between curriculum and other related interests, especially between curriculum and instruction. The paper from which quotation (3) on page 11 was taken has as its title "The translation of curriculum into instruction," and the sentence before the one quoted reads, "In a previous paper an effort was made to find a useful definition of curriculum, clarify the source of curriculum, and outline very generally its relation to instruction" (Johnson, 1969, p. 115).

Attitudes to curriculum express themselves in language, and language is essentially metaphoric. Here the metaphor is an engi-

neering one. In engineering, we want to design and maintain a whole system. But in order to do that, we need to know where the system begins and ends, and perhaps where and how it has to be coupled to other systems. And the means of getting the whole thing to work is understanding the parts. If we get the parts right, the system will run efficiently and do its job. Breakdowns will be breakdowns of parts. Generally, we assume that the overall design is good, because we took pains over that in the first place, or we inherited a design that seemed to be working well. "Going back to the drawing board" is something we don't really want to do unless we are forced into it. Keeping the system running means monitoring the performance of the parts. We need evaluative feedback on how well they are functioning. The hope is that good results can be assured by maintenance and that fine-tuning can be performed based on such evaluations.

The kinds of metaphors with which we surround social institutions—government, the law, curriculum—define their relationships with the rest of society. The engineering metaphor suggests that the smooth running of the machine may be problematic, but the machine itself is not. It also suggests that the problematic part of the curriculum requires the services of experts—people who understand the design and operation of quite complex machines.

This style of approach to curriculum has its strengths. Insofar as the machine metaphor offers a way of thinking about some aspects of organization, it is useful. Curriculum is about designing learning within institutional contexts, which means that practicalities of organization involving large numbers of people and agencies have to be thought about. Well-meaning efforts to humanize curriculum have been known to degenerate into chaos and confusion. Definitional thinking also has its points. It leads us to such ideas as *objectives* and *criteria of evaluation*, which have a usefulness in thinking about forms of curriculum and why one might be preferred to another.

On the other hand, there are weaknesses of a systematic approach that stem from its mismatch with the realities of schools and classrooms. These are not easily decomposable into parts, and the notion that if we get the bits right, the whole will take care of itself can be seen as simplistic. Even getting the bits right is not as straightforward as it sounds. Evaluative data on human activities are less easy to specify and obtain than data on technical systems. Often they are presented in ways that obscure rather than illuminate problems. Working within narrow definitions of curriculum can serve to insulate us from messages of malfunction.

RADICALS: CURRICULUM AS CULTURAL REPRODUCTION[1]

Radicals stand at the opposite end from systematizers on the dimension of attitude to institutions. They start from an assumption of fundamental malfunction. All institutions as currently constituted, including curriculum, are part of the apparatus that stabilizes the social order and oppresses the majority of the population. But this critique stems from an *a priori* diagnosis of the ills of society and, therefore, in its adoption of a leading idea, shares common ground with a systematic perspective on curriculum. Once again, large assumptions are made that reduce the work of curriculum to the explication of details—in this case, how the curriculum is able to establish and maintain its hegemonic role in society. Curriculum content, grouping procedures, teaching methods, processes of certification, textbook publishing, and so on, can all be scrutinized to show what part they play in this process.

Scope for disagreement does, however, exist. For example, some writers support a conspiracy theory and contend that manipulation of curriculum in the interests of a ruling elite is conscious and deliberate, while others prefer to think of the process of reproduction as something that transcends individuals, who are powerless to modify its effects. There is disagreement about how much free will can be attributed to participants in the system. Some think that social evolution operates in a deterministic way, while others allow that ways of bringing about purposeful transformations are available. ("Achieving critical consciousness" is a phrase often used to describe the nature of such initiatives.) But this does not importantly alter the underlying method associated with the radical position, which starts from a social theory whose main lines are already worked out, and then looks for its exemplification in curricular events and practices. We do not expect to find radical analyses of, say, evaluation procedures, which conclude that they can be better understood in ways other than those suggested by a theory of cultural reproduction.

The strength of a theory lies in its ability to disregard other possibilities. Those who approach curriculum from a position of

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[1] I began to use the word *radical* to describe those who worked with the idea of curriculum as a cultural reproduction when it had a fairly settled meaning. I have stuck with it, in spite of the confusions of modern times, when we hear of "radicals of the right," and when Russians opposed to communism are described as being "on the left."

theoretical commitment have the advantage of being able to claim attention for issues of fundamental importance that might otherwise have been disregarded. Radical writers on curriculum have been responsible more than any others for pointing out the gaps in systematic positions, especially their almost total neglect of questions of what the machine is *for*, in favor of a preoccupation with making it *work*. Radical theory is also useful because it is in its nature to demand data on the activities of schools and students that go beyond the collection of administrative information. It is more interested in the effects of plans than in plans themselves, and therefore offers a productive counterbalance to thinking that operates within a narrow definition of curriculum and tends not to stray far from the perspective of designers acting on behalf of established authorities.

A disadvantage of the strong *a priori* theoretical position is that there are a great many things that fall outside its field of vision, and a great many possibilities it fails to discuss. This is generally true, and not just a problem affecting the radical perspective. Skinnerian psychology, for example, affords an equally deficient view of curriculum. Within its limited range of convenience it provides important insights, but its inherent limitations mean that any attempt to derive from it a general perspective on curriculum will fail in the face of the variety and particularity of curricular phenomena. A further disadvantage of strong theoretical positions, as we have already noted, is that they invariably put strict limits on the number of those who can claim expertise and be seen as qualified to take action or make pronouncements. While a systematic perspective confines understanding of curriculum to technical experts, a radical perspective restricts it to those who support and understand a particular kind of doctrine. It is an added disadvantage that the doctrine is one that is generally unwilling to talk in a constructive way about curricular practices, or curriculum as institution, since it assumes that the institution and the practices associated with it are oppressive, and simply a means of reproducing the stratifications of capitalist culture.

EXISTENTIALISTS: CURRICULUM AS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Existentialists share with radicals a hostility to curriculum as institution. What separates them is the question of where they stand on the dimension of commitment to a leading idea. Whereas radicals

center their critique on a specific theory, existentialists simply assume an antipathy between individuals and institutions, and are then more interested in thinking about what this means for the individual than in elaborating macroexplanations of the mechanisms through which institutions act oppressively. They prefer to talk about what might be achieved now, in the context of existing structures, rather than about what might be possible in some distant future when, after the slow emergence of universal critical consciousness, institutions have been transformed. They are practical, and practicality demands the use of whatever lies to hand in order to deal with immediate wants and desires. Thus, we find them writing and thinking about psychoanalysis, biography, theology, gender studies: in short, anything that deals with the human condition and suggests ways of bringing about improvement. While radicals and systematizers both focus on curriculum as an external phenomenon, existentialists are interested in it as an internal one.

This position can be seen as a counterbalance to the ones I have so far discussed, which have shown no great interest in individuals, preferring to talk about systems and macrostructures and treating people as objects of plans or sources of data for social theory. The existential position provides a base for consideration of the weaknesses of all-embracing approaches to curriculum: in the end, curriculum is not just an institution, whether benign or oppressive, but a cluster of activities that is experienced in different ways by different individuals. What is rational and orderly to one is arbitrary and haphazard to another, what is oppressive to one is liberating to another, for everyone who thinks that curriculum is a place where "we tell ourselves who we are," there is another who finds it a source of mystification. Existentialists urge that we listen to the separate voices of those who are engaged in or by the institution of curriculum. This requires that we be ready to see the problems and opportunities of curriculum in many different lights, that we be open to curricular experience in the same way that we should open ourselves to experience in all the other ways that individuality demands. A further implication is that the idea of the expert must be abandoned. If the curriculum that matters is the curriculum that we personally experience, then everyone is his or her own expert, indeed the only true expert.

The limitation of this viewpoint is obvious. It is happy to relegate to lesser significance the social reality of curriculum as institution. This leaves it without a core around which a coherent set of ideas about curriculum can be gathered, and therefore it lacks any basis for action apart from the individual interest. This is not a judgment

that should be made if the subject matter is to be described as *currere*, since that *defines* it as an individual interest, for which individuals provide their own coherence. But attention to the idea of *curriculum* demands that we give it its historical and cultural due as a significant institution that is definitive of shared practice.

DELIBERATORS: CURRICULUM AS PRACTICAL ART

Within a deliberative perspective, curriculum is seen not as plan, cultural reproduction, or personal experience (though it contains elements of all of these), but as a practical art: the art of discovering curriculum problems, deliberating about them, and inventing solutions to them. Deliberators share with systematizers a recognition of the claims of curriculum as institution, and with existentialists an acceptance of the need for considering a range of practical and theoretic approaches depending on what the subject matter demands, but they share no common grounds with radicals on either dimension of the curriculum map. Their position centers on the meeting point of the institutionalized plan and its practical realization, where "curriculum is brought to bear . . . on the concrete case, in all its completeness and with all its differences from all other concrete cases." Interest in the concrete case moderates claims about the centrality of issues of planning and control, and the focus on difference and the uniqueness of cases leads to dependence on the eclectic arts in preference to theoretic principles. There is no concern to provide precise definitions of curriculum, but recognition of its institutional aspects provides a criterion whereby judgments can be made about what belongs with curriculum and what does not, or about when claims for theory and for the priority of personal interests go beyond what is reasonable. It is focus on the concrete case that leads to emphasis on *deliberation*—the bringing together of diverse sources of knowledge in discussion—as the method of practical problem solving. Only in this way can practical knowledge of cases be allied to general, theoretic propositions in order to yield a guide to action.

In some respects, this view can be seen as offering both the advantages and disadvantages of compromise. It sets limits to the claims of the institution without trying to deny or abolish them. It admits competing and sometimes contradictory explanations while trying to avoid relativism. This would undoubtedly be seen by radicals as some kind of *ad hoc* pragmatism; on the other hand, it could equally be seen by systematizers as yielding too much to local and

individual interests. Adherents of the position, however, would claim that it offers a social philosophy that is both more principled and more intellectually defensible than that advocated or implied by either radicals or systematizers. As well, they would claim to have a positive answer to the question of where expertise is to be found when curriculum work is to be done: it lies with all those who have either a theoretical interest in the general case, or a practical interest in the concrete case. The perspective is not technically or doctrinally circumscribed, and therefore is prepared to *listen* to what other people have to say. This, obviously, is a precondition of deliberation. Deliberation cannot take place under conditions where those with influence know in advance what kind of a decision it must deliver, because it must fit either with institutional requirements or with espoused theory.

Even the appearance of compromise, however, can be seen as a weakness in the deliberative position, both for the possibility it opens up for critiques to be mounted from a variety of directions, and for the opportunities it raises for those with differing views to adopt the forms of deliberation without adopting its spirit. Thus, it is not uncommon to find that a "deliberative" stance is claimed by writers or decision makers whose orientation is thoroughly systematic.

CURRICULUM THINKING AS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

The positions on the map of curriculum thinking can be seen as embodiments of social philosophies. That is to say, the ways in which people think about curriculum issues, or the ways in which they take action to resolve them, reflect their acceptance of a fundamental position on the nature of social questions and of social action. Central to the characterization of such positions, I have suggested, are two questions: should we treat the nature of existing social institutions as determinative of the social philosophy we adopt and of the actions which stem from it? And should we think or act according to predetermined theories and principles? These questions mark out the two major axes of the map of curriculum that I am drawing. In the course of the next two chapters, I will examine these dimensions and trace in more detail their connection to the four perspectives on curriculum that I have described.

2

The Institutional Character of Curriculum

The first dimension of the curriculum map relates to attitude towards curriculum as institution. As we have seen, some writers take a positive view of its institutional aspects, while others disregard them, or subject them to a rigorous, oppositional critique. The notion of *institution* is complex, however, and the various views that we encounter stem from different understandings of its meaning.

From one standpoint, institutions are ideas. Government, for example, can be studied and discussed as an idea apart from the specific structures or activities associated with it in a particular culture. From another standpoint, institutions can be thought of in very concrete ways, in terms of the particular forms of organization that they assume—in the case of government, ministries, agencies, assemblies, and so on. What is common in both situations is that whether an institution is thought of as idea or as organization, it is seen as having a public character. It represents or acts on behalf of a public interest, which transcends the private interests of individuals. In the case of curriculum, perception of this public character may be more or less widespread according to the actual structures that support curriculum activity within a given culture. In most European countries, curriculum is readily experienced by administrators, educators, students, and the public generally as being national, centralized, and legally sanctioned. For many years, the Swedish curriculum, in general outline if not specific detail, has been embodied in an act of the national parliament, and teachers

have fulfilled the role of civil servants with responsibility for seeing that the terms of the act are carried out. In the United States, on the other hand, broad frameworks for the curriculum are decided at the state level, and school districts, schools, and individual teachers shape it in accordance with local requirements. It is not surprising, therefore, that the institutional nature of curriculum is much more readily accepted as a fundamental premise of research and writing in Sweden than in the United States, where curriculum discourse frequently ignores or rejects issues related to consideration of its public character.

CURRICULUM AS INSTITUTION

In Chapter 1, I described an institution as "a socially embedded idea defined by well-known structures." We now need to build upon this minimal definition. First of all, institutions have a character that relates to the significance they have for the whole of a society. Baseball, the law, curriculum, all qualify as institutions because they are socially pervasive. Even if we don't want to be involved with them, it is hard to avoid them, or to be unaware of their manifestations without escaping to a wilderness—and not only are we aware of their existence, we are also aware of intense debates surrounding them. Secondly, this pervasiveness has a national character. Near panic occurred a few years ago at the prospect of an all-Canadian World Series. Would they still sing "The Star Spangled Banner"? And although the Japanese curriculum is looked on with some envy, it is doubtful whether the logically consequent proposal that the U.S. curriculum should be organized and run by the Japanese would be greeted with enthusiasm, any more than the prospect of Japanese ownership of the Seattle Mariners was an occasion for rejoicing. Thirdly, institutions involve activity. The word institution has a rather inert quality, suggesting something that is simply there. But both the idea and the substance of an institution are critically related to the activities of which it is the sum. These activities are engaged in by players of various associated roles—in the case of curriculum by legislators, planners, administrators, teachers, students, and so on. Fourthly, the continued existence of institutions is assured by forms and structures within which role players pursue their activities. These forms and structures are constituted partly by habits and traditions and partly by organizations and formal arrangements, which are often contained within specially designed buildings. Characteristically, these buildings are on

a readily recognizable plan. The institutionalized activities of baseball and curriculum are marked as much by the familiarity of the settings within which they take place as by the patterns of behavior that they follow.

Thus far, however, my description of an institution has been limited to some of its objective aspects. How do we understand the function of institutions? What do they contribute to the fabric of society, or to the lives of individuals or groups within it? At one level, they can be seen as providing a service. Society, as a collectivity, requires the provision of activities over and above those that can be realized by its individual members. Within such a perspective, institutions are seen primarily as organizations—a word that stresses physical aspects of their personnel and their buildings. We ask questions about whether they are needed, how much they cost, how they can be made more efficient, how the services they provide can be improved or made more accessible, and so on. This is a view of the institution that sees it virtually as a domestic matter writ large. Curriculum questions are regarded as extensions, on a larger scale, of the kinds of questions we might ask about learning within the household—which is more educational, a visit to the Smithsonian or a visit to Disney World? Should we invest in an encyclopedia or a subscription to *Scientific American*? What is a fair rate for a piano teacher? It becomes a public issue in that the home cannot certify achievement or provide equipment for a chemistry laboratory and we therefore have to dedicate tax monies to state and school district budgets.

Some would already part company with my argument at this point. The call for certification, or for expensive curricular equipment, could be represented as a sell-out to societal pressures that interfere with individual freedom and impose demands on children in a totally unjustified way. Others, however, would see this kind of interpretation of the *public interest* as far too limited and wish to extend it to embrace a *civic interest*, that is, an interest that was not limited to a notion of what has to be supplied, in a quasicommercial sense, at the societal level, but widened to include the idea that there is a civic realm that is qualitatively different from, and perhaps in some ways greater than, the individual or domestic realm. Underpinning this idea is the ancient notion of a citizenship that goes beyond routine activities of listening to political or economic arguments, forming opinions, and voting. Citizenship is seen rather as participation in a form of existence that is different from that experienced either in the home or the workplace, which draws on different kinds of skills and knowledge, demands different kinds of relation-

ships with other people, and fosters different kinds of virtues and rewards. The private life is incomplete; a total human existence requires access to the civic realm. When we ask of what this civic realm consists, the answer is that it consists of spaces and activities that are institutionalized—of public buildings, law courts, theaters, and schools, of trials, plays, and curricula—that are there not simply to provide services for private consumption, that is, to serve as means to an end, but to be an end in themselves, to constitute an arena within which the civic life can be lived. Such an understanding of the nature of institutions leads to an entirely different view of how we should relate to them. In the first place, it suggests that if we reject them, we are rejecting important opportunities for realizing our human potential, and that of other people—quite a different stance from the one that regards institutions as an obstacle to personal development. In the second place, it is no longer possible to judge the effectiveness of institutions simply in terms of measurable inputs and outputs. How can we measure, in any straightforward way, the extent to which an institution does or does not make a positive contribution to the health and maintenance of the civic realm? We can no more make simple judgments on such a matter that we can calculate the success of a home or a family in terms of measurable costs and benefits.

The implications for attitudes towards the curriculum are obvious. We can be accepting of the idea that curriculum is a social institution, and that this must influence the way we think about it, but, at the same time, limit our view of curriculum to the idea that it is a public service. This might be the basis for some kind of *systematic* approach to curricular activities, which sees them as a means to an end—the provision of services that people need and that they cannot provide for themselves—leading to an emphasis on working within established structures, asking questions about choice, about efficiency, about the monitoring of achievement, and so on. On the other hand, we can go further and see curriculum as one of those civic arenas where "we have told ourselves who we are." As we think about that phrase, we see that *who we are* means more than something about our lives as private individuals. It is talking about our identity as citizens, either of the whole society or of some significant part of it—graduates of a particular school or college, perhaps. We also see that what is at issue is something that does not lend itself readily to measurement. There is no doubt that a sense of who they were has played an important part in the careers of college graduates, as many biographical accounts testify, but this is not a curricular effect that lends itself to quantification. Those who take this

wider view of curriculum as institution see the curriculum as about more than learning in the sense of achieving familiarity with facts and ideas, or acquiring skills and competence, and in support they can point to the historical reality that state schooling systems were set up with such ideas in mind. For the 19th-century founders of such systems in Europe, North America, and Australasia, the curriculum was both end and means in relation to the civic realm. As end, it taught competencies that were held to be needed, not primarily for personal satisfaction, but for the well-being of society. But the teaching of these competencies was also overtly promoted as a means whereby civic virtues of industry and reliability would be spread throughout the population.

Today, those who choose to see the curriculum as having this kind of institutional role would be more likely to attach to it virtues associated with democratic participation in the civic domain—tolerance, justice, practical wisdom, and so on. Frequently, these are summed up under the rubric of *liberal education*, which, in fact, can assume a number of guises. Liberal education is a theme to which I shall return. For now, we should note that use of this term is usually a marker of interest in, or commitment to, the idea that curriculum should be regarded as an institution serving wider purposes than those of offering some kind of product to consumers of educational goods. If liberal educators use the word goods, it is as plural of good and not as a collective noun denoting merchandise.

We now have to consider what might be contrasted with the institutionalized views of curriculum that I have outlined. There are two main possibilities. First of all, in rejecting or de-emphasizing the institutional view, we could, instead, stress the private nature of curriculum activity and experience. Or, using a different antithesis, we could draw attention to the need to explore curriculum as a practice whose goals and methods are in conflict with institutional demands. I will deal each of these possibilities in turn.

INSTITUTIONS AND PRIVATE INTERESTS

As we have noted, there is no necessary conflict between private interests and support for public institutions such as curriculum. If we see curriculum as offering services necessary to our private interests, which we could not supply for ourselves, then we are ready to accept its institutional features in exchange for the benefits we gain. The public realm becomes an extension of the private. But if the curriculum appears to attempt much more than that, if it is seen as

a project of inducting us into a civic realm with demands and standards of judgment different from those we would accept as private individuals, then, unless our conception of our private interest is a very broad one, we will inevitably see a conflict between curricular and personal interests. This explains the controversy that perpetually surrounds issues of examining and grading students in high schools and colleges. The public interest in standards and uniformity is seen to be in conflict with the private circumstances and interests of students. But some critics go much further than this, and see the institutionalized curriculum as a fatal barrier to personal fulfilment, or even to the furtherance of the interests of society as a whole. A classic instance of this was Illich's (1971) *DeSchooling Society*, where he argued that the functions of curriculum should be devolved to small groups operating outside institutions, since institutional interests inevitably work *against* the interests of society as a whole. Effectively, he was making a case for a return to something like the state of affairs that prevailed when systems of universal education had yet to be developed. Before education was established as a public enterprise, it was a domestic one. Learning took place in the household and in the kinds of workplaces that existed before the establishment of factories. Some kinds of early education, such as that provided in schools for the aristocracy, seem to our modern eyes to escape from this definition, and to present communal features that we associate with institutions. But this can be misleading. We are dealing with a time when private life was a good deal less private than we would think possible. The conditions of an aristocratic school were not so different from those of households familiar to their pupils, where living spaces were common to the upper classes and their servants, and privacy as we understand it virtually unknown. Calls for the "deschooling of society" are calls for much more than that. They imply a return to forms and structures throughout society generally that belong to a forgotten past—not forgotten in the sense that we are unaware of it, but in the sense that we lack the knowledge that could recreate it. Colonial Williamsburg is not a glimpse of a real past, but itself a consumable product that can be viewed within the same perspective as the consumable curriculum. The private life is a modern, post-17th-century invention, just as public institutions like the curriculum are modern inventions—indeed, the development of private life has been claimed as an achievement of bourgeois culture[1]—and the two

[1] "One of the historic achievements of bourgeois culture has been the development of private life" (Williams, 1985, p. 37).

are probably related in some necessary way. However, they are widely perceived as, at the least, offering qualitatively different experiences and, very probably, being in direct conflict with one another. It is not surprising, therefore, that we encounter curriculum writing that raises individual experience to center stage. An example illustrates the kinds of issues that emerge from this approach.

> Pinar and Grumet do not consider curriculum in the ordinary terms of planning, schooling, subject matter, course of study, or behavior, but in terms of what happens within the individual's primary experience. They suggest encountering one's primary experience through a four step method. First, engage in free associative remembrance of the past. Second, meditatively ponder the future. Third, analyze past experience and future aspiration in order to gain better intuitive and cognitive understanding. Fourth, in light of the first three steps, choose what to be. (Willis, 1991, p. 179)

This kind of private view of curriculum is not simply domestic, as opposed to institutional, but private in a very personal way. The most important curriculum question becomes the destiny of the individual as an individual, not as a member of a group, institutionalized or otherwise. Far from teaching us who we are, the curriculum serves as some kind of reference point within our personal project of choosing who we will be. On the other hand, this orientation exudes self-confidence. Not only do we have the right to make such choices, we also have the ability to do so, by working hard at the method that is proposed. The key issue is not about what is on offer, or the manner in which it is offered, but about the use we make of it for our own ends. The quoted passage is neither positive nor negative about the institutionalized curriculum, but, rather, neglectful of it. Elsewhere, however, Pinar (1975a) describes how the curriculum can "impoverish the fantasy life of children," promote "loss of self," undermine autonomy, and atrophy the aesthetic sense (p. 360).[2] It is, in fact, hard to promote a self-centered account of curriculum without characterizing the deficiencies of the institutionalized curriculum as pervasive and endemic. In what has been described as the struggle between the "claims of civility and the rights of nature"(Sennett, 1974, p. 19), the four-step method operates as weapon for establishing the supremacy of the rights of nature. Inevitably, this works against recognition of claims of civility. Explorations of the self focus on the ways in which people are

[2] Pinar describes schooling as "dehumanizing," and equates "the impact of teachers on students" with "the impact of the oppressors on the oppressed."

different from one another in terms of their total personalities, but, at the same time, such explorations also stand in need of authentication, which can only be given by significant others. The group within which authentication can be found is, therefore, small, and its boundaries closely contested. Relations of civility, on the other hand, depend on careful delimitation of the matters on which relationships are based, and hence to a broadening of the group within which they can be constructed. Far from detracting from personal freedoms, such self-conscious acceptance of restraint may favor the preservation of worlds within which freedoms are realizable. We find phenomenology and hermeneutics invoked as the scholarly means by which issues of private curricular experience can be explored, since these are forms of enquiry that set out to erase the bounds of artificially structured discourse. But they should be engaged in with circumspection. We should not forget Heidegger's endorsement of the *Führerprinzip* which, through replacing the civil discourse of politics with the cult of personality, led to incivility on a grand scale.[3]

INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES

A rather different opposition to curriculum as institution is pointed to by those who stress its relationship to practice. In the following discussion, institution refers mainly to the organizational forms that provide arenas for institutional activity, and the word *practice* is used in the sense suggested by MacIntyre:

> By a "practice" I . . . mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity. . . . Practices must not be confused with institutions. Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power

[3] "Martin Heidegger, one of the most influential philosophers of the century, declared in his Rector's inaugural address to Freiburg University: 'No dogmas and ideas will any longer be the laws of your being. The Führer himself, and he alone, is the present and future reality for Germany and its law' " (Bullock, 1991, p. 362).

> and status, they distribute money, power and status as rewards. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 181)

Practice is here defined as something more than the exercise of knowledge or skill. It is an activity that concerns itself with the achievement of goods. But they are goods that are "internal to the practice," that is, valuable in themselves. Teaching, for example, is properly a practice. It could be concerned solely with the achievement of external goods—goods that stand outside the activity—though, in this case, we might be more comfortable referring to it as *training*. But we associate teaching with educating, and educating is something that has to be thought of integrally with the practice, not as something external to it, which can be delivered in the same way that skill or knowledge is delivered. The idea of "goods internal to the form of activity" is bound up with the notion of "standards of excellence." A condition of the practice realizing its internal goods is that it be pursued according to standards that it sets for itself, and not standards imposed from outside on the basis of some measureable output. Institutions, on the other hand, in their organizational manifestations, are centrally concerned with the acquisition and distribution of material goods that are only indirectly linked to the achievement of the aims of practice. This is what gives them such a bad name with those who, like Illich, see them as enemies of virtue. Being so closely concerned with material goods and with worldly ambitions, they are open to corruption and, all too often, succumb to corrupt influences, as the proceedings of Congressional committees frequently testify. Those who criticize them from the standpoint of the individual interest react by wondering why we need them at all, and by asking how the goods they deliver—or are supposed to deliver—might be secured by more private means. But those who are concerned with the well-being of practice see the problem differently. They understand that the maintenance of standards of practice depends on the existence of institutions:

> no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice are always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 181)

For them, the problem is not how to do without institutions, but how to understand the possibilities for reconciling the character of institutions with the character of practices. Those who see curriculum in this light focus their attention on the point where the institutionalized curriculum, with its universalistic objectives and demands, based on "great ideas," intersects with the particularist character of the contexts within which it has to be realized through exercise of the eclectic arts. Boundaries can be seen as things that restrain interaction or help to foster it, depending on whether we think that what lies on the other side is desirable or not. If we think that the institutionalized curriculum can and should play a part in inducting students into the civic realm, then the issue is not how to maintain the classroom as a private place against the intrusions of civil society, but how to define and manage a boundary that shows how private and public can fit together in ways that respect both the standards of practice and the integrity of the institution. This boundary is not generalized and abstract, but has to be practically managed in the interests of specific children in specific classrooms. The coming together of institution and practice is also the coming together of the general and the particular. Within this perspective, the claims of the state to grade and examine and the claims of children to be treated as individuals present not a conflict but a dilemma, the solution of which has to respect both sets of interests, since ultimately they are not separable.

I have discussed three ways in which we can regard curriculum as institution: as a material resource, as a civic resource, or as an obstacle to true education. To these we could add a fourth, which emerged in my earlier discussion of subscription to the great ideas: curriculum as an institution that stands in need of radical reform. The important question to ask about this fourth position is "how will the institution be regarded when it has been reformed?" My impression is that radical reformers usually raise the possibility of reform because they want curriculum to become a civic resource in a transformed society. The critique seldom leads in the direction of abolition and those, such as Illich, who take that path are themselves liable to be criticized (Apple, 1977, p. 93–121). Radical reformers, from Plato onwards, know well enough that a society left to its own devices may not follow the path that the philosopher kings have chosen for it. Control exercised through institutions is one way of ensuring that deviation does not occur. We are, therefore, not confronted with a fourth possibility, but with an extension to the second—curriculum as a civic resource. At one extreme it can be seen as a resource that is open to activities of reinterpretation, of

consensual modification, of adjustment to changing social contexts—a view that would seem to be essential to any project of practically resolving the dilemmas of the boundary between institution and practice—or, at the other extreme, as a device for promoting a predetermined policy of social control.

HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT CURRICULUM AS INSTITUTION?

Ultimately, a preference for one or other of these views must be based on a value judgment, that is, by reference to an underlying philosophical position that informs views about the nature of human existence generally. Any particular position tends to focus on some interests and issues at the expense of others. Without the correction supplied by contrary opinions, we are all too prone to neglect the facets of a complex social phenomenon that escape the spotlight of our own attention. The systematic perspective forces us to look at issues of efficiency, value for money, and public accountability. An existential perspective reminds us of the need to consider individual needs and ambitions. The radical critique points the finger at institutional shortcomings. The appeal of the focus on practice is more to the desire for balance in accommodating all of these more specific viewpoints. But what of the inherent demands of curriculum as a subject of study?

The adoption of a position in relation to curriculum, which means, in effect, subscription to a social philosophy, must, as I have suggested, be a matter of persuasion and not of demonstration. One source of material for persuasion is the nature of curriculum itself. To use the language of this chapter, what kind of an institution is it? Or what kind of a practice? In his book *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre suggests that every practice has its own history, and makes the point that to fully enter into a practice requires an understanding, explicit or implicit, of that history. But, as we have seen, practice and institution are closely interwoven, and neither can be neglected if we want to characterize the nature of curriculum through consideration of its history. How might such a study persuade us of the merits of one position or another as we confront competing claims about what kind of a social philosophy we should adopt?

Some writers have seized on the relationship of curriculum to *currus*, and on that word's commonest meaning, and claimed that its significance comes from the metaphor of the race. We run races

over (or through) various courses and, at the end, prizes are awarded. The truth is more mundane. The diminutive form of *currus* came into common usage to denote passage of time, so that, along with phrases such as *curriculum horae* (the passage of an hour), there also, and quite naturally, occurred *curriculum studiorum* (the time taken up by studies). Such usage has no institutional significance. This was acquired when the notion of simple passage of time in relation to learning was transformed into one that saw that time as structured to contain a sequence that was capable of completion. This transformation began in the European universities in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Before then, knowledge was offered, and was acquired as and when opportunity occurred. There was no fixed notion of what should be studied, by whom, at what age, in what sequence, or with what result. The possibility for movement towards the modern notion of curriculum depended on a conjunction of social and technical factors. The countries of Europe were abandoning feudalism in favor of more centralized forms of government. National cultures were challenging the dominance of classical language and thought. Commerce and industry were being organized on a grander scale. These social trends all depended on the development of forms of discourse and behavior that were public and literate, rather than private and oral. The idea of curriculum was an outgrowth of this process and also became a vehicle for it. Such a development came about through technical innovation in the form of printed texts, which made possible the specification of uniform course content. The conjunction of the resources of printing and interest in hierarchical forms of control and organization led to the development of the textbook, which presented learning as a sequence. Simultaneously, the elaboration of systematic procedures for record keeping paved the way for the idea that students could "complete the curriculum of their studies" and receive degrees and diplomas, which were increasingly valued in societies where objective measures of status were becoming important. Thus, those features of curriculum that are the most likely to divide theorists into opposing camps—regulation, uniformity, hierarchy—were there from the start and necessarily so, since these were the features that gave curriculum its identity as something different from teaching and learning, and launched it as as an institutionalized practice. What was striking was what was different: predictability where there had been idiosyncrasy, the idea of curriculum as a common experience, and the need for the student to deal with public as well as private aspects of learning. But a great deal remained unchanged, or changed only very slowly. Ariès (1973),

in *Centuries of Childhood*, provides extensive and detailed documentation of the inertial quality of learning in France through the 17th and 18th centuries and into much of the 19th. If the idea of curriculum as a public institution was at that point well established, its realization in schools retained much of the nature of the older traditions. Learning continued to be directed to heterogeneous groups of students, to use literate resources such as the textbook in a thoroughly oral manner, and to involve confrontation and antagonism (Ong, 1974).

The next important development in the character of curriculum took place through the 19th century. Again it resulted from a combination of social evolution and technical inventiveness. The 19th century in Europe and North America was the era of the growth of nation-states that claimed for themselves a place on the world stage. Centralization and control went hand in hand with international rivalry and communication, made possible by inventions such as the steam ship, railways, and the telegraph. Nationalism went hand in hand with the launching of new institutions and the transformation of old ones. The 19th century saw an unparalleled burgeoning of institutional activity: post offices, public libraries, department stores, government ministries, and national banks are just some of institutions that were essentially 19th century inventions. Although curriculum was not a 19th century invention, its coupling to national education systems was. The development of the nation-state crucially depended on the creation of symbolic institutions. If we look at the annual reports of the U.S. Commissioner of Education in the late 19th century, we see that not only was there a concern with the setting up of domestic schooling systems, but also intense interest in what was happening elsewhere in the world. The reports are filled with accounts of the organization of schooling not only in the countries of Europe, but also in South America, the Middle East, and Australasia. Schooling systems were flag carriers for the developing nations of the last century just as national airlines are for developing countries today. The principal technical inventions that made this possible were classrooms and systems of grading and certification. These provided the means by which education systems could be rationalized and made comparable across cultures. Once again, what was central to the evolution of curriculum at this point—grading, classrooms, nationalism—are issues that today cause deep controversy over how we should view it. Grading seems to elevate the national interest over the individual interest; classrooms are seen as coercive and alienating arenas that promote failure at least as much as they deliver success; nationalism is associated with support for

governmental attitudes to peace and the environment that seem short-sighted or even immoral. It may be that the harnessing of curriculum to goals of nationhood that took place a hundred or so years ago was something that left serious problems for curriculum as practice, yet it is part of the reality of its history. It seems that major institutions bear for a very long time the marks of the period of their founding. National schooling systems are no exception to this rule. Their involvement with curriculum is a legacy that colors the way we think about it, whatever our basic value position.

But what of more recent history? We might anticipate that the latest technical advances in communication and control systems, together with social evolution in the direction of greater individual freedom of choice and wider access to information, will lead to further change in the institutional nature of curriculum. We should suspect that this will indeed be the case. The fact that governments in the United States and Great Britain can find no better means of responding to failing confidence in schools and curriculum than by reasserting policies articulated at the turn of the century is seen by some as a prime signal of malfunction. But this does not mean that curriculum no longer has usefulness as an institution. Indeed, if it falls as institution, it falls as practice as well. If history urges anything, it is that rather than denying or rejecting the institutional role of curriculum in national schooling systems, we should be looking for new ways of interpreting it. If we are not happy with it, it is because the work of the 19th century founders was done too well. Curriculum has yet to find a truly contemporary role. But if we want it to find that role, we have to address the problem and not choose instead to turn inward to our own private concerns. And our addressing of it will be that much more fundamental if we see curriculum as institutionalized in a truly civic sense, and not simply as a publicly organized means of supplying goods for private consumption. The view we take on this will, to a large extent, be shaped by our attitude to the role that great ideas should play in our thinking about the curriculum. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

3

Ways of Understanding: Great Ideas or Eclectic Arts?

The second dimension of my map of curriculum thinking distinguishes those who embrace great ideas from those who work in an eclectic manner. A similar conception is put forward by Isaiah Berlin (1979) in his essay "The hedgehog and the fox." Berlin is trying to explain what is distinctive about Tolstoy's writing. In the course of doing this, he proposes a way of categorizing not just writers, but intellectual and artistic personalities generally. He warns the reader that "like all over-simple classifications of this type, [it] becomes, if pressed, artificial" (p. 23). But, he adds, "if it is not an aid to serious criticism, neither should it be rejected as being merely superficial or frivolous; like all distinctions which embody any degree of truth, it offers a point of view from which to look and compare, a starting point for genuine investigation" (p. 23).

What is this classification that Berlin is talking about? He explains it by taking as his text a line of the Greek poet Archilochus, which says, "The fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing." He then discusses how these words might be understood:

> Scholars have differed about the correct interpretation of these dark words which may mean no more than that the fox, for all his cunning, is defeated by the hedgehog's one defence. But, taken figuratively, the words can be made to yield a sense in which they mark one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be,

> human beings in general. For there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision . . . a single, universal organising principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance—and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends often unrelated and even contradictory. . . . These last lead lives, perform acts, and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal. . . .
>
> The first kind of intellectual and artistic personality belongs to the hedgehogs, the second to the foxes; and without insisting on a rigid classification, we may, without too much fear of contradiction, say that . . . Dante belongs to the first category, Shakespeare to the second; Plato, Lucretius, Pascal, Hegel, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Proust are, in varying degrees hedgehogs; Herodotus, Aristotle, Montaigne, Erasmus, Molière, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, Joyce are foxes. (Berlin, 1979, p. 22–23)

If we pursue the analogy suggested by Archilochus' text, we could say that both kinds of positions represent advantageous adaptations to an environment. One way of securing a healthy and continuing existence is to learn a trick that works most of the time. Another is to master a repertoire of behaviors that can be inventively combined according to circumstance. In the case of real hedgehogs and real foxes, we can observe that they do not have much choice in the matter. The strategies they employ are determined by a history of adaptation that has endowed them with particular physical characteristics. However, the situation which we, as human beings, encounter is rather different. First of all, we do have the opportunity to choose a strategy. Though the choice we make will be constrained by personal circumstances and historical precedent, scope for selection is always potentially present. Secondly, confirmation that the chosen strategy is appropriate takes place in a complex and indirect way. It is not just a matter of whether it is capable of handling an environment that is the source of the means of survival. For example, human beings may, on the basis of some chosen strategy, make decisions that affect others but not themselves. I will deal with each of these points in turn.

THE CHOICE OF AN INTELLECTUAL POSITION

Perhaps I should follow Berlin in talking of *personalities* rather than *positions*. The traditions within which we commonly work encourage us to conceive of a realm of theory—even of theory concerned with practical action—that is detached from personal preferences

and feelings. But how we think about the world is always to some extent a function of character and experience. Even within rule-bound activities, such as chess or mathematics, styles of thinking can reflect cautious or enterprising personalities, previous success with well-tested lines or triumphs of bold experiment. How much more will this be true of fields that are variegated, uncertain, and controversial. Those who are cautious, stable, and perhaps a little introverted will surely be attracted by the idea of curriculum as engineering, while those who are bolder and more extravert will inevitably feel themselves cramped and confined by such a metaphor (Wankowski & Reid, 1982). We could expect too that experience of curriculum in particular kinds of contexts will be influential. The views that teachers have of curriculum problems will not be the same as those of administrators. However, it is also the case that the appropriateness of our choice of position should not be made solely in terms of individual preference and experience. I return to the idea, raised in the last chapter, that curriculum is a practice with necessary institutional associations. As we think about what ideas might guide us in the formation of personal perspectives, we need also to consider how the character of curriculum stems necessarily from its historical origins, and what this might mean for the choices we make.

Curriculum has been, from its inception, a *literate* notion. By that, I mean it was made possible by the modern—that is, 17th century—acceptance of the idea that words can stand for real classes of objects. Such an idea is old in philosophy—it was espoused, notably, by Plato, one of Berlin's archetypal hedgehogs. But its extension beyond a small group of thinkers was long delayed. Historians point to inventions such as printing as essential to widespread comfort with the idea that words have an objective reality apart from utterance on some specific occasion. The truth is no doubt more complicated than this. However, the case of curriculum is clear enough. Essential to this idea, as we have seen, were the concepts of sequence, completion, and certification. Without sequence, completion, and certification, we can have learning, teaching, and education, but not curriculum. Printing was crucial in the establishment of the concept of sequence. Without the widespread availability of printed texts, learning was, to a considerable degree, adventitious. It depended either on direct access to original sources—by which I mean the actual texts, or excerpts from texts of works of philosophy, poems, plays, manuals, and so on—or indirect access through teachers who possessed texts or had been able to consult them. With printing came the invention of the *textbook*, a compendium of

knowledge *about* texts, which presented it in an ordered and sequenced way. Associated with sequence was the idea of completion. Once overviews of knowledge were accessible through textbooks, it became possible to specify levels of attainment, since judgments could be made about when acquaintance with a topic of study was, for some purpose, sufficient. Then the final piece of the idea of curriculum could be added: a degree or diploma awarded in public recognition of the level of knowledge or skill that had been declared to be attained. (Note that sequence, completion, and certification are all universal notions that require the intervention of institutions to establish and maintain their universalism in the public domain.)

The effect of all this was to create an idea of curriculum that was detached from the circumstances in which any particular act of teaching or learning took place. Today, students in many different places, constituting many different instances of curricular experience, can all feel that they are enrolled in "Sixth Grade Social Studies," "Advanced Placement French," or "Freshman Algebra." This important social process, which has been little studied, has been described by Meyer (1980) as the creation of *institutional categories*. These are divisions of the world that exist in people's minds, independently of any physical manifestations that are associated with them. They are not quite universal and eternal, but they tend towards universality and timelessness. Curriculum has become, in modern societies, an institutional category. It can be promoted, denigrated, written about, or made into an election issue. Governments can preside over a national curriculum just as well as a national debt or a national health service. What these things have in common is, first of all, that whereas they are somewhat abstract in character, their continued existence depends on corresponding organizational categories—schools, the Federal Reserve Bank, hospitals—in a way that the existence of greater abstractions, such as education, prosperity, or health, does not; and, secondly, that they can be seen as the possession of a community. A national curriculum defines sequences of completable, certifiable subject matter chosen to reflect the interests and traditions of the nation that specifies it (as Meyer [1980] points out, "a sure way to know when the US/Canadian border has been crossed is to check out the content of the geography curriculum" [p. 31]). The overarching institutional category of curriculum contains a wide range of subcategories referring to content belonging to subjects or topics of significance, or to content belonging to subdivisions of the student population, classified by age, grade, ability, or destination: the reading curriculum, the junior high school curriculum, the college preparatory

curriculum, and so on. Associated with these are categories that belong more properly to schooling than curriculum: the elementary school teacher, the high school principal, and/or the twelfth grade student. All of these institutional categories, which represent universal ideas, shape and are in turn shaped by the corresponding organizational categories that are their practical embodiment: what happens in classes labeled as "twelfth grade" is influenced by what the universal institutional category of twelfth grade is understood to demand; conversely, that understanding is itself influenced by what happens in many thousands of individual twelfth grade classes.

Thus, according to which side of the coin one examines, curriculum can be seen either as a universal conception, which could be linked with thinking based on unity stemming from great ideas, or as a collection of organizational forms that can be associated with thinking based on the diversity of the eclectic arts. These kinds of associations are evident in the positions that those who deal with curriculum questions adopt. To subscribe to *curriculum as plan* as an organizing principle looks at first sight like an acknowledgement of its character as a system "on the ground." In fact, it is a response to the idea that curriculum and its subcomponents are abstract universal categories and that it is therefore possible to plan in terms of objectives, contents, and evaluations that have a universal reference: what shall be taught or learned in *all* twelfth grade classes within a particular jurisdiction and what significance evaluations of that teaching and learning will *everywhere* have. Equally, radical perspectives, of both left and right, address themselves to curriculum as a universal institutional category in linkage with other great ideas such as hegemony, reproduction, and alienation, or order, tradition, and social cohesion. These are the views of the curricular representatives of Berlin's hedgehogs; of thinkers, writers, and actors, who "relate everything to a single central vision" which then determines the position they take up on particular issues such as testing, grouping, literacy, the role of schools, districts, and states, vocational programs, science programs—anything relating to questions of what is taught to whom and under what circumstances.

Quite different is the orientation of the foxes whose attention is caught by the rich complexity of actual manifestations of curriculum, and for whom such issues are not universal debates, to be settled by meta-arguments based on great ideas, but matters to be appreciated within contexts of real children, in real classrooms with real teachers. As has many times been pointed out, while ideas detached from contexts can be clear and compelling, the working out of ideas within contexts is characterized by uncertainty and

dilemma (Berlak & Berlak, 1981). Those whose focus is on curriculum as an organizational endeavor find themselves as a matter of course compelled to "pursue many ends often unrelated and even contradictory." Teachers, for example, want students to exercise initiative, but also to follow instructions; to apply received knowledge, but also to work things out for themselves. There is no overriding principle that shows them how to do this. They have to entertain many possibilities and make judgments about what kinds of tactics are likely to be effective in some very specific set of circumstances (add that it is often not clear at the time, or even with hindsight, whether the tactic was successful or not and the extreme difficulty of teaching teachers becomes apparent). What I have described could be called *using eclectic arts*: eclectic because that means choosing among a wide range of ideas and procedures, and arts because there is no definite rule about how the choice should be made. But, as Berlin (1979) points out, eclectic arts are not just a way of dealing with the world that circumstance may force upon us: they are also a way of understanding the world that has been adopted by many outstanding thinkers and writers. Since supporters of the great ideas—systematizers and ideologues—seem to have had the biggest say in recent shaping of the world of curriculum, we have been led to believe that intelligence consists in applying principles—picking right answers to problems that are amenable to theoretic or procedural analysis. But most of the matters that are open to discussion, or that demand practical decision, do not have right answers and are not amenable to theoretic or procedural analysis. Therefore, the intelligence associated with the eclectic arts should be accorded at least equivalent esteem, and eclecticism considered alongside the great ideas when we judge how to think about curriculum.

As we consider the choices we have of ways of conceiving curriculum problems and of initiating action to solve them, we can reflect that, with freedom to choose, there also goes a temptation to be irresponsible in choosing. We enjoy freedom of choice because we are not totally constrained by the legacy of necessary adaptation to an environment. Equally, however, removal of the immediate consequences of adopting one strategy rather than another can lead to disregard of the fact that the environment—the institution of curriculum in all its senses—nonetheless does have an historically objective character. Like generals who command their troops from the safety of bunkers far behind the front line—and are well rewarded for it—curriculum leaders of various kinds, whether politicians, planners, administrators, or theoreticians, can enjoy importance and authority while working out great strategic ideas that have little

bearing on the tactical skirmishes of those directly concerned with the realities of curriculum in schools and classrooms. To pursue this point further, we need to look beyond the considerable, though far from all-encompassing, virtues that the great ideas and the eclectic arts both exhibit, and examine the particular vices to which both are prone.

VICES OF THE GREAT IDEAS: IDEOLOGY

The power of great ideas comes from their simplicity. Whereas exponents of the eclectic arts (Berlin's foxes) have to be concerned with understanding the nature of cases before actions or explanations can be ventured on, and then, even beyond that point, have to be concerned with the extent to which explanation may have to be qualified or action modified, exponents of the great ideas adapt cases to fit universal conceptions. They judge that the benefits to explanation and action of a clear and penetrating focus will outweigh what is lost through lack of ability to take particularity into account. However, these benefits accrue only if the great ideas are used with circumspection. Can the diverse cases with which we are concerned really be adapted to fit within a common perspective? Are we prepared, as circumstances change, or as evidence of mismatch or malfunction accumulates, to revise our opinion of the applicability of the perspective? The traditional canons of science demand that we should answer yes to both of these questions. In giving that answer, we would declare ourselves in favor of following what Popper (1963) has called a "second-order tradition" (p. 126ff). A second-order tradition is a tradition of inquiry that carries within it an injunction that its premises and methods be open to scrutiny and to modification in circumstances where they are revealed as deficient. With this he contrasts "first-order traditions," which regard their premises and methods as complete and conclusive. Since the great ideas, by their very nature, tend towards completeness and conclusiveness, and this is what makes them attractive to some who adopt them, there is a persistent likelihood that they will be treated as traditions of the first order. In that case they risk becoming ideologies. Ideologies are ways of thinking that suffer from the double disadvantage of being remote from reality and slow to change in response to evidence of deficiency. Curriculum policies in Great Britain over the last decade have been, to a considerable extent, ideologically driven (Reid & Holt, 1986). A succession of quite expensive initiatives directed at promoting vocationalism, selection, test-

ing, and centrally prescribed curricula has, through neglect of the reality of the experience of curriculum in classrooms, left the schooling system in worse shape than it was before it fell into the hands of the "radical right" in the early 1980s (Holt, 1987b).

VICES OF THE ECLECTIC ARTS: OPERATIONALISM

If the pursuit of great ideas has a propensity to lapse into ideology, the eclectic arts suffer from an equally unhappy tendency to slip into operationalism. Operationalism has been defined by McKeon (1952) as a method that "applies the test of concrete action by translating ideas into processes and seeking verification in discernible results" (p. 86). Like the eclectic arts, it is concerned with practical situations and with the tactics of finding solutions to the problems they pose. The difference is that the eclectic arts also incorporate an understanding of strategy. The deployment, on the basis of situated judgments, of a variety of theories, principles, and procedures, occurs within the compass of an overall view of what curriculum is and what the eclectic arts should help it to accomplish. As in Berlin's characterization, eclecticism is not a way of avoiding fundamental questions of value, but an alternative way of exploring them. Operationalism, on the other hand, deals in a piecemeal way with curricular possibilities. It proceeds on a trial and error basis, making ad hoc judgments about the appropriateness of methods and content. This kind of approach pervades much of the literature that has been produced in recent years by the action research movement (McKernan, 1991). Building on obfuscations of the conceptual differences between research and practice ("All teaching is research"), some action researchers have defined curriculum improvement as a quest for "what works." They have rejected the project of choosing a way of understanding how thought and action are related in favor of an attempt to reduce everything to action, so that "the practical" is demoted from being the philosophical counterpart of the theoretic to being "practice" in its minimal sense of "what people do."

The degeneration of the eclectic arts into operationalism mirrors the lapse of the great ideas into ideology. In the latter case, ideas are allowed to occupy a position of such unreflecting importance that no attention is paid to circumstance. The institutional category of curriculum then risks losing its identity because the reality of its organizational forms is ignored. In the former case, on the other hand, these organizational forms receive exclusive attention, so that the broader ideas that are needed to sustain them are lost sight of.

PUTTING IDEAS TOGETHER

It is clear from the preceding discussion that no one perspective can encompass all the complexity of institutionalized practices such as curriculum. Especially, we have to be suspicious of dogmatic adherence to ideology, or to forms of operationalism. These can be damaging in their effects because they neglect so much that is of critical importance to the development and maintenance of policies that capitalize on the beneficial potential of curriculum, and mitigate its capacity to operate in ways that are ineffective or even harmful. Yet, as we have seen, there is little check on those who, from political offices, central administrations, or places of scholarship, urge upon the system ways of thinking and prescriptions for action that neglect the essential character of the institutions and practices that are the object of their attentions. Ideas are never without consequence, but the consequences are not always visited on those who profess them.

The great ideas are needed in so far as they respond to some essential part of the character of curriculum. I have suggested that, under one of its aspects, curriculum must be thought about in this way. It is an institution that has an existence in the realm of ideas apart from, but related to, its existence in specific organizational arrangements. The curriculum as enacted, however, needs to be thought about in a different way. Its problems have to be solved within unique contexts, and this demands the use of eclectic arts. The practical power of curriculum comes from the achievement of consonance between its institutional and organizational forms: from the conjunction of the workings of great ideas and the eclectic arts.

How is this conjunction to be brought about? First of all, it is dependent on our willingness to maintain positions, whether on one side of the intellectual divide or the other, which can communicate with one another. Ideology and operationalism have nothing to say to one another. The first condition of positions being mutually intelligible is that they should be integrally bound up with commitments to the pursuit of goods (using that word in its moral sense), the nature of which is open to discussion and persuasion. The purposes of curriculum and the means through which those purposes are achieved are no more fixed than the interpretations of justice or the nature of the agencies through which it is dispensed are fixed. The traditions of thought and action that secure the purposes of curriculum or the purposes of justice need, in MacIntyre's (1981) phrase, to be "partially constituted by an argument

about the goods the pursuit of which gives them their particular point and purpose" (p. 206). Secondly, there needs to be clarity about the character of curriculum under its various aspects. Otherwise, we can have no sure sense of when one approach or another is required. The choice of method for understanding and managing complex social phenomena can only be guided by an appreciation of the range and diversity of problems that they present. Understanding of both these points requires that we consider, in some depth, what kinds of problems curriculum does, in fact, present.

THE CHARACTER OF CURRICULUM PROBLEMS

The assumption of my discussion of curriculum problems is that any decision to adopt great ideas, eclectic arts, or some framework of thinking that can allow a place for both, should be based on an appreciation of the subject matter that has to be dealt with. This assumption rests on the further premise that it is indeed possible to characterize problems in ways that guide us towards appropriate theoretic and practical strategies for dealing with them. Explicitly or implicitly, ideological and operational positions deny this. For the former, principles are unquestionable and problems must be made to fit them. For the latter, there is only "what works," and this requires no deep investigation into the nature of problems. (To use a simple analogy, if we find out that some minor adjustment enables us to restart a motor, there is no need to inquire into the principles of internal combustion engines.) But after these exclusions have been made, there must be a wide spectrum of thought remaining, within which there is sympathy for the Aristotelian view that ways of treating problems should be guided by the nature of the problems themselves. On the nature of problems there can, of course, be many opinions, but acceptance of the possibility that the problems we are setting out to solve could have some objective character enables a useful and productive debate to be joined. What follows represents one line of inquiry into the nature of our subject matter.

Problems About Curriculum as Institution

Curriculum problems are of two kinds. First of all, there are problems concerning the character of curriculum as an institutional category. Curriculum is, from one point of view, a transcendent, commonly shared idea that can be thought of separately from its particular manifestations. Commonly shared ideas exist because