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Out of weakness: the ‘educational good’ in late antiquity

Ansgar Allen [Forthcoming in *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*]

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the nature of the educational good as it appears in late antiquity, arguing that the ‘good’ variously promised by education is in a state of perpetual deferral. This extends the tradition of ancient Greek philosophy where wisdom is to be forever approached but never realised. Three exemplary cases are considered: the educational good as it appears under the auspices of the Roman tutor; as it is manifested in Christian baptismal practices; and as it is practiced in early Christian monasticism. To lure willing subjects into an educational relationship whose fruits will ultimately never be realised, the educator must respectively employ techniques of seduction, suspicion and diversion.

KEYWORDS: Educational good; late antiquity; parrhesia; baptism; monasticism.

The educational consequences of late antiquity, that period from the second to the eighth centuries, remain neglected. It is common for educators to trace their ancestry a little further, recalling the philosophers of ancient Greece in a way that jumps many intervening centuries [1]. In focusing on the period following the decline of the Greek philosophical schools, I trace their more immediate educational legacies as they were adapted to the needs of a wider society.

In constructing this account I investigate the provenance of a belief so current in our present, that beneath all corruptions education is a self-evident good requiring only further refinement. It appears this conviction will not be abandoned however much education is debased in practice, however much it is reduced to the status of a measurable commodity, to a utilitarian device for ‘getting ahead’. Indeed, the performative busywork which so characterises education today could be interpreted as a desperate attempt to redeem a fallen educational project, as symptomatic of a dogged though directionless refusal to give up on education (Allen 2015). I am struck that despite all such debasements, which supply an endless source of material for a long and established literature of educational critique, the romance of an educational good lives on. This conviction persists even in the limpid gaze of the most despairing educational critic [2]. Against this view, and inspired by a Nietzschean impulse that holds up to scrutiny our most cherished ideals, I take the odd persistence of that educational conviction as my point of departure. In an attempt to dislodge this belief so it may be held up for inspection I turn to some rather ancient educational precursors.

I develop an account of the educational good in late antiquity across three fragments (I-III). The first considers the educational good of the Roman tutor. The second and third fragments address the educational good as developed through Christian eschatology, that part of theology concerned with death, divine judgment, and the destiny of the soul. Early Christian baptismal practices are considered in the second, followed by the more familiar educational territory of the early monastery in the third. I make no attempt to link these fragments systematically, as if aspiring to a comprehensive historical and philosophical account of a period. Rather more modestly, I find traces of an idea that has since come to dominate, namely the conviction that education must if nothing else be good. This conviction is based upon a philosophical sleight of hand I claim, whereby the good of education is forever deferred. Educators, and those in their care, are expected to labour endlessly in the pursuit of a good they will never by definition be able to realise, only approximate. To seduce the educator and those to be educated into the pursuit of a good they will never achieve, a range of strategies are developed. In the first fragment we encounter the case of the Roman tutor who must convince his patron that his soul is sick, and that he requires the tutor's guidance. In the second fragment, those about to be baptised must be similarly persuaded that they are susceptible to all kinds of devilry. By implication, only a lifetime spent in service of an educational good of Christian extraction can save the soul from its fallen state. In the third fragment, we encounter the educational good in the early Christian monastery, discovering again that it is rarely manifested, and can only be approximated through the monk's unstinting effort and unquestionable obedience. In each case, those to be educated must develop a profound suspicion, if not fear of the body, as the seat of distraction if not devilry. The good of education is premised on a prior subjugation of the body.

When related to our educational present, these fragments may appear distant, for indeed they are. Yet here is a possibility we must entertain, namely, that the great educational deferral of late Antiquity might survive, perhaps even thrive in an adjusted form today.

I.

Western education inherits a rather icy perspective from the philosophical schools of ancient Greece, a point of view that denigrates this world in favour of another realm, or this life in favour of another way of living. Notwithstanding substantial variations between each philosophical school (Epicurean, Stoic, Sceptic, Platonist), each recommended its own system of life-denial. Each had its own regimen, which was attached to a decidedly abstract notion of the philosophical, and hence educational good that would be served through one's obedience to its precepts (see Hadot 1995; 2001). Each philosophy insisted on a kind of deferral, operating with deference to the love of wisdom, or *sophia* that was at their root. Conceptions of wisdom varied widely, of course, as did recommendations for how one might work towards it. But common to each school was the following promise: philosophy would only offer a 'foretaste' (Hadot 2004, 4). According to the historian and philosopher of ancient philosophy, Pierre Hadot, a philosopher in this context only ever tends towards wisdom – wisdom can only be approximated in practice and never fully achieved [3]. Unlike the sage whose divine insights are inspired rather than reasoned, the philosopher is at best on the path that approaches wisdom. In the most extreme version of this argument, found in Plato's *Phaedo*, wisdom is fully realised only with 'the release of the soul from the body', that is, upon the philosopher's death (Plato 1993, 64c). The educational message is clear: "You will orient yourself towards wisdom but forever remain in its shadow".

In late antiquity the Greek philosophical schools gradually dissipated. Another type of philosophical training now found favour with the aristocratic Roman elite. Along with the 'barbarian theosophy' of the early Christians (Brown 1971, 72), this rival tradition began to replace the educational figure of the revered philosopher, that teacher of the Hellenic world.

An education in the various teachings of Greek philosophy was now expected of those Roman aristocrats who considered themselves cultured. Conceptions of the educational good taken from classical antiquity that had been crafted in each ancient philosophical school for a limited number of willing converts, were thereby passed on to a far more dispersed and diverse group of jobbing aristocrats, who were rather more concerned with maintaining a cultivated air, than they were with subordinating themselves to a specific philosophical order. Hence, in late antiquity, the Roman model of the educator-philosopher operates rather differently. Attempts are still made to bind

the educator to his pupil in a relationship where the educational good promised by the former is to be believed by the latter. Yet the educator in this era more commonly took the position of a private tutor or counsellor employed by a social superior, rather than the revered head of a philosophical school (see Foucault 2005, 136-44). This added something important to the plight of an educational good that is to be followed but forever deferred. It was now a rather urgent necessity that this promise of an educational good be tied to an art of seduction.

The idea that a philosopher was a 'divine or inspired man' such as Socrates, or a professional entirely devoted to philosophical enquiry, such as Plato, gradually gave way to a more 'deprofessionalised' conception of philosophy (Foucault 2005, 155). Indeed, it was possible to be an educator without being, strictly speaking, a philosopher. Those providing spiritual direction, offering systems for making sense of and giving direction to one's life, no longer spoke from the relatively secure position of a philosophical school. Educators increasingly offered their counsel from positions that were subservient to power, being dependent upon their patrons for support. And so, at its extreme, this position demanded that the educator combine his moral and spiritual superiority – which was the justification for his employment after all – with servile gestures and an almost obsequious level of tact. These hired educators were not latter-day Sophists however, winning customers by promising much and delivering little. At least they did not present themselves so. They continued to work within the tradition of ancient Greek philosophy, which had long been set against cheap imitators of wisdom. Wisdom, for these contemporary Roman tutors represented more than a technique or a body of knowledge that could be bought as and when convenient; it demanded lifelong commitment.

With the Roman tutor we have what would appear to be a significant moment in the history of educational subjectivity. Here we have the makings of a social role in which the educator experiences great responsibility – the care of the soul no less – combined with a nagging sense of insecurity, the perpetual fear that one's masters will decide that one's mastery is no longer required. Hence, as Foucault (2011; 2005, 372-380) observes, there is in the Roman period, extensive discussion about the relationship between *parrhesia*, or speaking freely, and its antithesis, which is flattery. The problem is this: How to prevent the educator and social inferior from only telling his patron what he wishes to hear? How to build a relationship in which frank speech – necessary for reorienting the soul of one's patron no less – can be safely practised?

It seems that the educator responds to this impossible situation by developing and strengthening the relationship that binds the pupil to the teacher. The teacher cannot rely upon reputation or respect alone, nor can the educator expect to hold the pupil's attention by force, since the pupil is now the educator's patron. It is necessary, in other words, to establish an educational tradition that is driven to convince its patrons of the benevolence of education before all else.

This is our scenario then, and my basic argument: In late antiquity the educational good is promoted from a position of weakness, the educator's weakness in the case of the hired teacher. It is the product of a servile relationship between the educator and his patron. It is the expression not simply of a need to convince, but also a need to please. The educator must justify himself to his employer, explaining that the educational remedy he prescribes is worthwhile, even though in the tradition of Greek philosophy it may bring considerable discomfort when it tells him that he lacks virtue, that he may need to fundamentally reorient his being, and so on. In effect, the educator must convince his patron that despite these necessary discomforts, this education he has on offer is essential to his employer's prosperity and wellbeing.

One tactic on behalf of teachers who found themselves in such an unenviable position was to lighten the load of their guidance. Accordingly the educated would be encouraged to exercise only a 'gentle violence on the body' (Brown 2008, 27) as measured as it was forceful. It would be futile, these tutors counselled, to overrule the body in such a complete and tyrannical manner that it be injured through excessive denial and self-discipline. This recommendation had a second advantage, however, since aristocrats were also told, and subsequently told one another (see Brown 2008, 22) that they would not govern others well if they could not first govern themselves. Perhaps rather conveniently from the tutor's perspective, influential patrons were invited to apply the same principle of measure to the government of those beneath them, as they would to themselves.

An exemplary text of this tradition would be Galen's *On the Passions and Errors of the Soul*. This text is educational in a dual sense, defining the role of the educator whilst attempting to educate the taste of those seeking to employ such an individual. The reader is advised that powerful and rich individuals are in need of honest educators, since most educators will remain silent out of fear, or will engage in flattery. Consequently, those wishing to be educated must first make themselves weak [4].

The noble reader is advised: If after several days your guide has not reproached you for your passions, which must assuredly be clouding your reason, assume that he has either been negligent, that he is unwilling to help, or that 'he remains silent because he is afraid to reproach you'. It is for this last reason that you must always 'look upon him as your deliverer' and tell him this, making him promise from the outset to reveal your passions as if he were saving you 'from an illness of the body' (Galen 1963, 33). There will be no recriminations. If your guide still fails to reproach you, employ another (though this too may fail if you have acquired a reputation for intolerance). If you wish to receive honest guidance you must become known as someone who endures if not welcomes unwelcome advice. Such noble individuals will eventually be rewarded by the attentions of many a willing educator who will at last feel free to give 'true correction' (Galen 1963, 35).

Galen presents an argument for the importance of the educator who must be held in esteem, indeed valued most, when his advice and guidance is displeasing. Even insolent educators are to be tolerated with restraint. Those wishing to be educated must realise, Galen claims, that their greatest foe is the self-love which deludes them into believing that there is nothing wrong with their soul: Only 'the wise man is free from fault', and such men are very rare indeed, which 'is why you hear the philosophers of old saying that to be wise is to become like God' (Galen 1963, 34). Most people who aspire to an educated soul will urgently require the assistance of a guide of the type Galen has in mind. This educator will also be a kind of doctor, for these roles were not yet clearly delineated. Indeed, in the medical and philosophical advice of Galen, and also Plutarch, even one's deportment during sex is to be carefully prescribed (Brown 2008, 18). Clearly, this kind of educator must feel free to identify faults of the most intimate kind, where the pupil (who is also potentially his emperor) believes none to exist.

The educator must also make himself weak, though in a different way, since he must still insist on the value of his employment. Despite his long training, his exemplary self-discipline, temperance and tranquillity, his poise and his achievements, he will remain humble, for this humility distinguishes him for service. He will 'look with scorn on glory', holding 'only the truth in esteem', and will remain alert to those passions that might still claim him. He will not decide that all must acknowledge his excellence, which has taken him a lifetime to cultivate, since 'the desire to have all men praise me is like the desire to possess all things', it is symptomatic of greed (Galen 1963, 59). This educator will be content to remain unpopular at times, even resented. Moreover, he will be generous, and

proceed as if any member of the aristocracy, however ravaged by ‘diseases of the soul’ can be redeemed (Galen 1963, 53). The educator will, in effect, commit himself to unstinting effort, combining the poise of an educated man and the airs of a cultivated soul, with the humility of a noble servant, who seduces his master with his generosity of spirit.

In the first century, Emperor Nero’s advisor, Seneca, devises a similar argument in favour of the educator’s frank speech: again we find how the educator should be valued for saying things that one would not wish to hear (Seneca 2004; 2007). In the second century, Emperor Marcus Aurelius was taught by a sequence of social inferiors. Relations with his favourite teacher, Junius Rusticus were at times a little stormy, yet Marcus credits his teacher with not only reforming his character, but also for teaching him the virtue of indulgence, a virtue which Rusticus embodied each time Marcus became irascible. Marcus thereby testifies to the importance of a relationship of tolerance, though now the argument is made from the perspective of the student (Hadot 2001). Essentially we have the same recurring problem: the educator’s role must be justified to those in power, and those in power must in turn justify to themselves the educator’s intrusive advice. This educator must be shown to have the best intentions, to be sincere and devoted. This sincerity and devotion is what gives the educator licence to challenge his patron when necessary, so as to better guide his soul. By speaking freely at moments that are carefully chosen, the educator seeks to establish a bond with his pupil. In effect, the educator declares: “Look, I risk telling you the truth, so I must be on your side.”

By the fourth century, the survival of these educational ideals becomes all the more remarkable against the backdrop of an empire that had become ‘frankly authoritarian’. Indeed, it is tempting to view this entire educational tradition as being rather quaint, if not completely out of touch with the politics of a ‘vast, despotic empire’ (Brown 1992, 7). Despotic rule would have, one presumes, little patience for the cultured refinements of educated persons who still believe in the role of ‘disinterested advisor’, the figure of philosopher-tutor, or more broadly, the educated supplicant, who would ‘sway the will of the powerful’ through the art of honest persuasion. It seems odd at first sight that *paideia* (as this system of education and refinement was more broadly known) was still championed, bringing with it the expectation of ‘a benevolent, because cultivated, exercise of authority’, where all members of the upper class benefit from common codes of courtesy and self-control (Brown 1992, 4). Yet despotism over vast territories requires extended networks of support in order to function, and within these frameworks *paideia*

thrived, greasing the wheels of the imperial machinery by giving it the appearance of respectability (see Brown 1992, 30-1).

More than this, however, it expressed the morality of an increasingly weakened aristocracy, living in a world ‘characterized by a chilling absence of legal restraints on violence in the exercise of power’. A ‘lurking fear of arbitrary violence’, caused elites fearful of maintaining their position to fall back on the advantages of their education (Brown 1992, 50). Educators could in turn appeal to a common fear of that ‘tide of horror’ which ‘lapped close to the feet of all educated persons’ (Brown 1992, 52), who were only exempt from corporal punishment because of their noble status. Educators could appeal to patrons who recognised the advantages of a culture of refinement in which anger is seen as a ‘failure in decorum’, and clemency is viewed as a manifestation of the dignity and poise of the powerful (Brown 1992, 55). It was sufficiently obvious that ceremony and decorum ‘did not simply exalt the powerful; it controlled them, by ritualizing their responses and bridling their raw nature through measured gestures’ (Brown 1992, 56). The noble ideal of character formation was then, a moral formation born of weakness, the weakness of a class of notables seeking to maintain its position. It assured that within the imperial system cultured individuals were still treated as such, and on occasion, favoured members of their class would even be permitted to speak back to the powerful as educated supplicants. This was the context, then, within which the seductions of the educator and employee gained purchase. It would not last. Gradually, the philosopher-educator and educated aristocrat was replaced by the Christian bishop (Brown 1992), who would also seek to give unwelcome advice to his emperor, though this advice was now accompanied by the tacit or implied threat of God’s wrath if left unheeded.

II.

The education of the Roman elite was built upon a need to seduce the patron into believing in the benevolence of the educator, who was also, in many cases, a social inferior. At a similar time, Christian practices addressed to the other end of the social spectrum were establishing their own implicit conception of the educational good. These practices operated in an analogous though opposite way, now convincing those to be educated from a position of power that they are weak and in need of redemption.

At first, Christianity was just another sect gaining influence as the Roman Empire degenerated into a 'colossal bureaucratic apparatus' whose workings most individuals 'could not fathom or influence'. In late antiquity, the Empire's power to 'rouse feelings of citizenship and commitment to the state' was dissipating, leading Roman subjects to seek meaning elsewhere (Sloterdijk 2001, 170-1). Members of the Roman elite employed philosophers in the household who would give their lives meaning and direction. Wanting philosophy for themselves, they looked with disgust at that other great philosophical inheritance, which was to be found in the sects that were sweeping through the Empire, with all their 'vagabonds, preachers, moralists, cults and communities'. In this context, cultivated Romans initially 'turned up their noses' just as much at Christians as they did at other sects such as the tattered, shameless Cynics (Sloterdijk 2001, 171). Christianity would, of course, eventually triumph over its detractors. Not only would it incorporate itself into the ideology of the ruling order, it would also eventually redefine and take over what it meant to be both cultured and educated. The other sects including the Cynics would only survive to the extent that they were incorporated into Christianity.

The 'soul' would eventually become the exclusive property of Christian theology. And with it, the cultivation of an 'educated soul' would become a distinctly Christian pursuit, whereby the most educated amongst us are expected to be the most chaste, the most vegetarian in our desires. This Christian appropriation of the soul was not immediate, however. A first century follower of Christ such as Paul the Apostle, had little interest in the soul as distinct from the body, speaking in the latter case only of the 'flesh'. The flesh stood for the general condition of humankind soon to be judged at the second coming of Christ. This was the plight of human beings 'caught in a hurried instant' as they anticipated the Second Coming (Brown 2008, 49). That hurried instant became rather prolonged, however. As Christ failed to materialise first century Christians were forced to consider the possibility that their collective sojourn on earth would be somewhat extended. It was now worth asking, as the ancients once had, how in this prolonged earthly existence the soul might begin to protect itself from the impulses of the body.

Christianity borrowed extensively from its philosophical predecessors. In 356AD the 'first monk', Anthony the Great is said to have offered the following recognisably Stoic advice: On the day of his death he said; "Live as if you were going to die every day, devoting attention to yourselves and remembering my exhortations". The sixth century monk and abbot, Dorotheus of Gaza said something similar: "Let us pay attention to

ourselves, my brothers, and let us be vigilant, while we still have time... Since the beginning of our conversation two or three hours have elapsed, and we have come closer to death; yet we see without fear that we are wasting our time” (both cited in Hadot 2004, 242-3). Such meditations on death were intended to intensify those processes by which one inspected one’s life. Wisdom, now reconceived as knowledge of God, remained an other-worldly thing approached only through death. The fourth century monk and ascetic Evagrius of Pontus developed the analogous Platonic theme, arguing that the soul is separated from the body as its precondition for knowing God. Hence, the monastic life would be both “a training for death and a flight from the body” (cited in Hadot 2004, 246).

With Christian ascetic practices we encounter in its revised form the philosopher’s desire to educate the passions. This was to be achieved by minimizing one’s pleasure in objects. As the second century convert Clement of Alexandria recognised, whilst pagan philosophers attempted to educate their desires, Christians went much further. In a way that radicalised Stoic indifference, Clement argued that “our ideal is not to experience desire at all” (cited in Brown 2008, 31). In principle, the egoistic self would be so undermined that it would cease to desire completely, allowing the ascetic practitioner to finally arrive at a point where, as Dorotheus of Gaza put it, “he has no will of his own”. This person would not “want things to be as he wishes” since “he wishes them to be as they are” (cited in Hadot 2004, 245).

The body nevertheless remained the training ground for the soul, furnishing it with all manner of distractions that were to be overcome. Ascetic activities such as fasting were designed to reconstitute the body in such a way that body and soul would no longer be enslaved to the appetites (see Brown 2008, 223). Even illness was considered an educational opportunity. Clement advised the following: “You must consider your illness a pedagogue which leads you to what is profitable to you – that is, teaches you to despise the body and corporeal things and all that flows away, is the source of worries, and is perishable, so that you may belong completely to the part which is above, ...making this life down below – as Plato says – a training for death” (cited in Hadot 2004, 246). The body may be loathsome, but it was also the best educational tool one had [5].

These Christian practices were clearly oriented to the formation of a spiritual elite that would occupy positions in the monastery, church and eventually the court of the King. Yet from the outset Christianity was a popular philosophy; hence the Nietzschean line: ‘Christianity is Platonism for the ‘common people’ (Nietzsche 1998, 4). Indeed as

Hadot argues, perhaps here is the key point of distinction between Platonism and its Christian successors (Hadot 2004, 251-2). Whilst Augustine of Hippo adopted a Platonic line – arguing that we must pay attention to the distractions of the body, and educate the soul if we are to contemplate God – from the Augustinian point of view, the problem with Platonism was that it was unable to convert the masses. Christianity is far more optimistic, believing that all souls are in principle recoverable.

The ‘flight from the body’ inaugurated by Hellenistic philosophy persists with Christianity as it develops strategies to control the appetites, restrain the passions, and thereby educate the soul (Hadot 2004, 252). Christianity continues to pursue objectives that remain ultimately beyond our reach. Down below in this life that persists despite everything it is taught to abhor about itself, the message is clear: “You can still aspire to a virtuous life despite all your bodily distractions, despite your debased existence. In pursuing virtue you will begin to find the tranquillity you so desire. So go forth, seek tranquillity, make it your primary objective, but remember the path is difficult; only the most virtuous will come close to achieving it.” Only those who have been educated correctly can approach God. In Christian terms, it is the promised condition for those who have turned their back on evil and come to know God. The early Christian ritual of baptism held such a promise, allowing the baptized to be reborn a little closer to God – their first birth, of course, was in sin.

*

Early Christian baptism involved a death of sorts, imitating the death and resurrection of Christ [6]. Consequently, preparation for baptism could be understood as an ‘enterprise in mortification’ by which one demonstrated the extent to which one was willing to die voluntarily, ending one’s earlier, sinful life through an act of devotion (Foucault 2014, 156). These baptismal rituals demanded rigorous preparation and total commitment, obeying the precept: ‘no baptism without prior teaching’ (Foucault 2014, 105). The soul to be purified would have to be first *educated*, and this education would again be one of denial and deferral.

With this education of the soul there was the potential to extend mortification of the flesh beyond its baptismal confines. Exercises in mortification, such as fasting and sexual abstinence were understood according to a demonology whereby spirits, unable to enjoy bodily pleasures directly, are forced to enjoy them vicariously through their human

host. Consequently, these evil spirits are presumed most active when the body is most moved by those pleasures they seek to share (see Kelly 2004, 126-7). For this reason a quest for spiritual purity on behalf of the Christian becomes associated with a fight to limit pleasurable activities. The vitality of the body is still to be limited, but this exercise in mortification is less oriented towards the death that must precede rebirth, and more towards a constant practice of life-denial that extends either side of baptism. We have here, then, the roots of a practice that could extend to occupy the entire life – a life of denials – of the practicing Christian.

There was some disagreement concerning when, at which point exactly, baptismal purification occurred. Was it during immersion itself, or was purification a prerequisite for baptism? In the former case, baptism in water was perhaps analogous to baptism in blood, where it was believed that the act of martyrdom could also secure one's soul. Unlike martyrdom, baptism in water presented a specific difficulty, as the soul would remain attached to the body after the event. In this case, rather a lot, perhaps too much, was expected of this moment of purification. Hence a whole machinery of self-purification *prior* to baptism was devised. The baptised would not only be expected to believe in the moment of baptism through an act of faith, he or she would now also be expected to commit wholeheartedly to the educational process which preceded it. Foucault identifies this switch with Tertullian, who converted to Christianity towards the end of the second century: "We are not bathed in the baptismal water in order to be purified, but we are bathed in the baptismal water because we are purified" (cited in Foucault 2014, 117). For this prior education involving purification and mortification to be a success, it was necessary to convince the soon-to-be baptised that their education was worthy of attention. And so in a different context, serving a different purpose, we find a familiar problem: how to convince the educatee of the educational good.

There was already as we have seen a pagan response to this problem. At a similar time the Roman elite were employing educators who were expected to offer intimate guidance. According to tutors such as Galen, one's superiors were expected to value this guidance most when it was most unwelcome. It was hoped that 'frank speech' or *parrhesia*, would bind the educator to his pupil, who was also his superior and employer. The Christian solution is rather different, or at least, it is at the point of developing into something very different in the second and third centuries. It is to give the care of the soul over to the pupil. The educator remains in place, but becomes more of an educational conduit than a self-possessed guide. When things go awry, the educator can

now reply: “You have nobody to blame but yourself.” So, we have two subjective techniques, two approaches designed to bind the pupil to the teacher, and by proxy, to the educational good: the obsequious-heroic plea of the Roman educator and inferior, and the knowing look of the Christian teacher.

At the end of the second century, practices of catechesis – those procedures and exercises considered necessary preparation for baptism – were becoming institutionalised. This can be seen in *The Apostolic Tradition*, an early third century text attributed to Hippolytus and considered to be one of the first clear accounts of early Christian baptismal ritual in the West (see Kelly 2004). Its contents are nevertheless disputed, since the original text does not survive, leading scholars to question whether some of the practices described might date from the fourth century or later (see Johnson 2007, 101-110). According to the surviving text, candidates for admission would be presented to the “teachers” by their “sponsors”, as part of an initial examination during which the candidate’s intentions and prior life were put to the test (cited in Johnson 2007, 97). A number of professions were prohibited, including brothel keepers, prostitutes, unfaithful concubines, men who kept concubines, magicians, astrologers, pagan priests, gladiators, soldiers and charioteers (Johnson 2007, 97). Pagan teachers were also excluded (it would appear there was a clear division at this point in history between secular teachers and Christian educators, presumably because the former taught the pagan arts [see Cramer 1993, 16]).

If admitted, the catechumen would be expected to lead a life of some months or years that accorded with rules dictated by tradition. This period of training concluded with another examination of how piously the catechumen had lived since joining. Those considered ready for baptism entered a more intense preparation, involving ascetic practices (such as prayer, fasting, kneeling) that were through their rigor ‘intended to test the authenticity the faith’ (Foucault 2014, 150). Two days before baptism, the catechumen underwent an exorcism carried out by the bishop. As the bishop uttered imprecations to drive out Satan, the catechumen was expected to listen ‘without moving of fidgeting’, proving that ‘the spirit of evil is no longer master of his soul’ (Foucault 2014, 151).

Exorcism was not simply a matter of purging the soul in preparation for baptism; it was a procedure in which those to be purified were expected to manifest the truth that they were ready for baptism (see Foucault 2014, 146). There was clearly a voluntary dimension to baptismal initiation, where it was believed that ‘lack of success in expelling

the alien spirits was due to the candidate's failure to receive his instructions in good faith' (Kelly 2004, 273). Indeed, Cramer (1993, 11) reaches a similar conclusion with regard to the baptismal implications of *The Apostolic Tradition*, claiming that 'uncleanness' at this late juncture was considered the catechumen's fault, since the devil could not have survived this far into the rite without assistance. Augustine's address to his candidates was similarly pointed:

With prayers to God and rebukes we withstand the wiles of the ancient enemy, while you carry on with you own prayers and heartfelt contrition, so that you may be rescued from the power of darkness and brought to the kingdom of light. This now is your task, this is your labour. We heap upon you the curses that his wickedness deserves; but you on your side declare a most glorious war against him by your aversion and your pious renunciation (cited in Kelly 2004, 115).

When baptism occurred, a last test was applied which would finally allow the Holy Spirit to descend into the soul of the baptised. Three questions were asked: Do you believe in the Father? Do you believe in the Son? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? The baptised would reply to each, and be submerged three times (see Foucault 2014, 153; Johnson 2007, 99). Yet the ceremonies continue: "And when he has done exorcising, let him [the bishop] breathe in their face. And when he has sealed their foreheads and their ears and their noses, let him raise them up. And let them spend all the night in vigil, and let them be read to and instructed" (Hippolytus cited in Kelly 2004, 84). The devil, one presumes, was still present and 'fighting for control of his victims' who, once cleansed, had to be safeguarded against re-entry (Kelly 2004, 88). The candidate for baptism had been tested repeatedly, and with increased severity, right until the moment of purification. It was as if everything that could be done had been done to assure success. Procedures had been instituted, attention had been lavished, and at each stage a concerned gaze was fixed on the soul of the candidate only further intensifying the pressure to succeed.

The level of purification achieved was not to be considered absolute. It was necessary to insist that those who had been purified through baptism or any other rite would always 'remain a little impure', at least in this life (Foucault 2014, 121). Hence, the work that must be performed on one's soul would be never-ending. Tranquillity would be desired, and fervently pursued, but never entirely achieved.

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The soul is now understood rather differently, compared to the soul of Greek antiquity. This change can be observed in Tertullian who asserted the inescapable presence of original sin, and hence, the importance of those social conventions that human frailty demands if the soul is to be protected. For Tertullian, nobody however pure will ever have the strength to step outside convention and remain faithful to God. All must submit to the protection of the Church.

Rather schematically, and risking over-simplification, we might describe the transition in the following terms: Unlike the Platonic soul, which had knowledge of higher things but forgot them when it became associated with matter, or the soul of the Neo-Platonists which ‘falls into matter’ (Foucault 2014, 125), becoming ‘harmed and diminished’ by association (MacIntyre 2009, 22), in late antiquity the Christian soul is understood in terms of the original fall of Adam since which it has been diverted by pride, if not indeed occupied by evil. The Christian soul still exists in contrast to the body, and we are to live in the hope that it will be liberated when the latter passes on. But the education of this soul has changed. As Foucault argues, it is not to be educated through a Platonic process of ascent and rediscovery by which it aspires to wisdom (and death), but rather through a constant battle with the evil it contains. The risk, clearly enough, is that the soul’s demons will follow it into the afterlife. Hence the ‘pedagogical drama’ through which the soul is redeemed, is no longer one of ‘progressive illumination’; it has become rather more urgent and dangerous than that (Foucault 2014, 125). This renders even more remote the possibility of achieving a divine state of wisdom through strength of will alone. Perhaps ‘no one can rescue themselves from this condition’, for to do so ‘would require an act of will’, yet ‘every act of will is infected by the very condition from which it needs to be rescued’. It is still worth trying, but success will now be forever reliant upon God’s grace. The Christian subject must labour towards a transformation of the soul that must by definition remain ‘incomplete in this present life’ (MacIntyre 2009, 25).

This pedagogical drama was contingent upon a transformation of the figure of Satan himself. In the Old and arguably also the New Testaments, Satan was not yet viewed as the personification of evil. He was a mere ‘functionary’ of divine government, ‘charged with testing and disciplining Mankind’ (Kelly 2006, 7). As a pedagogical figure, he can be viewed as the ultimate external examiner, a little over-zealous at times, who tests the faith of God’s people. In late antiquity this changed as Satan was demoted from his position in divine government by theologians such as Tertullian and Origen,

becoming instead God's adversary, the personification of radical evil. In educational terms, Satan, the greatest external examiner we have ever known, was henceforth to be cast out from the educational scene. Satan 'the examiner' was replaced by the Satan the bringer of evil. The educational consequences were profound: Since their external examiner had departed from the scene in a cloud of dark recriminations, Christians would now be forced to examine themselves, fearing that if they failed to do so adequately, Satan would return in his more evil guise, and take up residence within.

In this respect the fear of a satanic occupant only serves to intensify the educational mission of Christianity since 'the more Christian one is, the more one is at risk...the more the devil rages' against his expulsion from the soul (Foucault 2014, 125). And so the time of baptism becomes a time of great peril, since the devil or demons facing expulsion will become all the more furious. The path leading up to and ultimately beyond baptism also has its share of danger. Hence, the pupil of early Christianity must take extra care, and pay particular attention to his or her education. This educational commitment is only intensified by fear, by the realisation that the battle against evil is constantly with us. The pupil of Christianity must know that he is always in danger: 'Danger never subsides; he is never safe; he must never relax' (Foucault 2014, 126). The more the soul is educated, the more the devil is to be driven out, the greater the peril. The demand to examine oneself and the (unending) battle against imperfection only intensifies as the examination proceeds: the devil rages most when cornered.

Foucault claims that a new kind of fear is introduced here; 'a sense of fear about oneself, of what one is' which is a more radical in its reach, and constantly present than a 'fear of destiny' or of God's wrath (Foucault 2014, 127). It is the fear that we might fail in freeing ourselves from Satan's grip, with the implication that one must toil ceaselessly until the moment of final deliverance. We might claim that a whole subjectivity and a whole educational tradition, is built upon this fear of the self. Again we observe how the educational good that still haunts us today is developed and promoted from a position of original weakness; in this case, the implied weakness of the sinner who fears for his soul. We discover that education is a constant requirement; one needs to become educated in this pre-baptismal Christian sense, because it is the only resource you have in this fight against the evil that resides in your soul.

III.

Histories of education are more at ease when they locate their object within recognisable institutional confines. From this perspective, early Christian baptismal practices are not recognisably educational, or at least, they hardly seem central to a history of education. Since monastic practices remain with us more obviously in contemporary schools and universities, early Christian monasticism would appear a more fitting topic for discussion. Whilst it is true that early monasteries did indeed incubate and develop educational practices (though they were comparatively marginal institutions educating only a minority of the population, far fewer than those baptised), a history of education which pays monasticism undue attention risks strengthening the conceit of our most educated contemporaries, confining the history of education to its most illustrious ancestral manifestations, conveying the assumed distinction of an ancient institutional pedigree. If we are to disturb the educational good upon which such conceit rests, we must insist on a wider definition of education, whilst doubling back and questioning its strongholds. Hence I consider the educational good as it appeared under early monasticism in this third and final fragment, without wishing it any privilege over the educational good asserted by the private Roman tutor, or that which was inflicted upon the baptised.

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Despite the educated credentials that monasteries would later acquire, becoming famous as places of learning and culture, it is worth noting that monks were initially renowned as uncultured individuals. Crucially, they were devoid of *paideia* (Brown 1992, 71)[7]. The first monks were uneducated, lowly and contemptible.

Upon such foundations Christianity continued its journey into the interior, eventually transforming the grubby ascetic into the disciplined vanguard of a new elite that specialised in spiritual warfare. Here the violence of fourth century monastic vigilantes, ransacking towns for idols, tearing down synagogues and pagan shrines, even forming lynch mobs (Brown 1971, 104), can be viewed as exterior manifestations of those far more constantly exerted inner aggressions by which monks disciplined themselves in acts of pious devotion. These monks were ‘warriors of the spirit’ (Smith 2011, 38) and yet, despite the decidedly militant language some adopted when speaking of spiritual matters (see Smith 2011, 89-96), it was not all violence, or at least, some of

the violence was 'benign' in appearance. Externally speaking, such monastic orders were not only engaged in acts of terror, but also installed themselves as distributors of welfare to those they persecuted (see Brown 1971, 110) establishing a familiar relationship between Christian charity and Christian violence. On an individual basis, the violence of monastic self-discipline was matched by its claim to be the most benignant of exertions ever made upon the human soul.

Attempts to erase the presence of sin were now connected to the production of a form of knowledge about oneself measured according to its cosmic depth. Within the walls of the monastic institution, another interiority is constructed. The 'penitent' is no longer simply asked to exhibit him or herself as a fallen being requiring salvation, rather there is the expectation to divide and inspect his or her being, multiplying its potential for sin.

This newfound depth was cosmic, rather than personal, since the details of a monk's inner life were expressive of exterior forces. Hence, to take the example of sexual renunciation; it was not a matter of treating individual desires, proclivities and so on, as if they were 'lodged in the isolated body'. Rather, the task facing the monk and early Christian 'drew its seriousness' from the cosmic scale of the battle, where those energies pulsing through the body were 'the same energies that kept the stars alive' (Brown 2008, xlv-xlvi). Individual privacy had little meaning in this context.

In this cosmic arena, sex itself was rather upstaged. It was 'overshadowed by the most obscene disruption of all in the texture of the universe' – this being 'the parting of the body and soul at death'. Sexual renunciation or at least discipline, gave a 'manageable face to the diffuse horror of mortality', providing an outlet where Christians could gain some measure of control. By denying those forces which were expressive of life, of that drive for continuity through reproduction, radical Christians were able to 'install a place in the human heart where the footsteps of death might be muffled' (Brown 2008, xlvi). The point was to pre-empt death by practicing mortifications of one's own. This might appear rather excessive, denying what little pleasure life has to offer so as to outwit death, yet for early Christians life itself was hardly preferable. Their earthly existence was considered the 'product of an over-riding demonic tyranny' (Brown 2008, 84) the end of which had been inaugurated by Christ. It was the duty of Christians to hasten the collapse of that tyranny. In this context, one's refusal to perpetuate life by removing oneself from reproduction was eminently justifiable [8].

Mortification of the flesh was however, not entirely negative. In the case of Origen (an influential ascetic who some claim willingly had himself castrated) we can observe a revived Platonism whereby earthly pleasures were considered mere ‘slurred echoes’ of those heavenly delights reserved for the pious (Brown 2008, 173). In a more widespread sense, mortifications were positive in that they were carried out for the sake of the soul, which had been tied during its earthly sojourn to the body that was now in denial. In the monastery, these practices became highly developed. Whilst penitence sought to rescue the soul from its fallen state, monasticism attempted to refine the soul it rescued, turning its attention to those recesses where sin might hide. Monasticism still implied a life of penance, yet penance was now tied to a quest to cultivate one’s soul.

Traceable to the third century, Christian monasticism was initially a way of life practiced by a few solitary figures living alone, or in small groups, either in the desert or on the fringe of society. Generally uneducated, and certainly humble, these figures were outcasts. The subsequent history of Christian monasticism is the history of their institutionalisation, it is a history of the social outcast who becomes socially useful. John Cassian, a late fourth century theologian, is credited with introducing this humble, eastern monasticism to the West in a more respectable institutional guise. He describes how those seeking admission to the monastery must remain at the door of the monastery for ten days, during which the established monks heap abuse on the visitor. Only those who endure such humiliation would be admitted, exchanging their clothes for the habit of the order, renouncing all prior wealth, becoming thereby entirely dependent. The second phase would take a year, during which the candidate would live at the outskirts of the monastery performing menial tasks. Following such tests of patience, obedience, submission and humility, the candidate would finally be admitted (see Foucault 2014, 264-5). An indefinite period followed, during which the novice would be taught to further renounce his will. Any wishes or inclinations that contradicted his orders, even if they were never realised, were to be confessed to an elder. Each monk was expected to ‘obey in everything and to hide nothing’, to ‘obey exhaustively and exhaustively tell what one is’ (Foucault 2014, 266).

Rather importantly for our purposes, the monastic institution was not reliant on the greatness of its teachers or spiritual leaders, who would transfer their wisdom downwards. Indeed, these teachers might even be rather inept if not positively misguided. The monastic life was still a philosophical life in the ancient sense; reorienting the soul towards wisdom, yet it did not require the guidance of a ‘great philosopher’ in

order to function (Foucault 2014, 267-9). This was a sensible precaution indeed, given the susceptibility of all Christians to temptation and sin; for even great monks and spiritual leaders could fall from grace. In the kind of monastic order envisaged by Cassian, and later by Benedict [9], it was the ‘corporate body of the monastery’ rather than the piety of any single leader, which ‘bridles the dangerous assertion of the individual will and its accompanying cravings’ (Coon 2011, 76). Obedience remained absolutely necessary to monastic life, yet students were not obedient because of the greatness of the teacher who knew better than they did what they needed; rather, they were obedient for the sake of obedience, remaining obedient even when the teacher is no longer worthy of it. Elders and teachers were not thereby given licence to fail their students; they too would be subject to the strictures of monastic life. And yet, the monastic institution did not depend upon their excellence. Such teachers did not yet carry the success of education, and the educational encounter, on their conscience.

When obedience becomes the prime directive, what gives obedience its value is ‘neither the quality of the order nor the quality of the person who gives it’ (Foucault 2014, 269). Monastic obedience does not aspire to a relationship in which the master’s competence is passed directly to the student. The fact that the student obeys whatever the order, is more important. Hence Cassian cites with approval a whole number of absurd orders and appalling requests for obedience, to make his point that obedience is an essential condition of monastic life (see Foucault 2014, 269-70).

The monk obeys so as to become obedient, ideally reaching a state of obedience so absolute that he is ready to obey even before he receives the order. Furthermore, when orders are left wanting, the monk must see to it that events take on ‘the form and value of an order’ – the monk fills the world with orders, experiencing everything as an order. Ultimately, there ‘can be no act in the monk’s life that is not a response to an order or, at the least, a reaction to permission given’ (Foucault 2014, 271).

In part the monk experiences everything as an order because he is expected to place himself ‘as low as possible in relation to everyone else’. Effectively the monk, believing himself to be a sinner, must ‘consider himself more humble than any of his companions’ accepting their wishes as if they were orders (Foucault 2014, 273). His extreme humility, giving himself over to the will of others, prepares the monk for the ultimate objective, which is to cease willing entirely. And so, whilst monasteries might be celebrated in the popular imagination for their great endurance, surviving the upheavals

of history so that they could preserve and pass on culture to future generations, their philosophical outlook and educational ethos was one of extreme submission and inertia.

Excessive self-discipline was, nevertheless, to be guarded against. The dutiful monk would need to be mindful that his quest to achieve obedience and submission could pass over into a form of self-destructive hubris. Cassian recalls tales of monks casting themselves down wells, fasting excessively, or crossing deserts without food, in an effort to demonstrate just how catastrophically they had purged themselves of natural inclinations and desires (see Foucault 2014, 291). Despite appearances, these were not acts of extreme piety, but were symptomatic of an obsessive desire for glory. As Foucault would have it, the monasteries of the fourth century were themselves established in response to an 'untrammelled intensification of ascetic practices current at the end of the third and start of the fourth century'. Rather threateningly, these transformed Christian practices into a form of self-mastery where the ascetic would travel beyond the grasp of power, overcoming suffering, becoming indifferent to pain (Foucault 2014, 292). As such, asceticism posed a challenge to Christianity, delivering its practitioners beyond the influence of its institutions and teachings. The most potent ascetics effectively reversed the self-denials of obedience, transforming these denials into a form of 'egoistic self-mastery' that denied access to external power (Foucault 2004, 207-8). To secure their foothold, monastic and ecclesiastical institutions had, therefore, to purge themselves of all these vagrant, self-sufficient, ascetic heresies, and bring all miracles, marvels, punishments and self-flagellations back into the orbit of their influence. This was achieved in part by developing the idea that the devil present within us cannot be cast out alone. He may even lie behind those acts that we consider most holy. And so, excessive fasting, for example, could be the devil's work, as he seeks to weaken those abstaining from food from resisting other temptations. Hence, the monk must learn to exercise discrimination, moderating his devotional activities where necessary, and inspecting every inclination and thought.

This kind of inspection, which seeks to cast out the devil's trickery, including illusions of piety implanted by the devil, can only be carried out under the auspices of an institutional framework where one monk is willing to rely upon the ear of another. This ear must not become too friendly, however. In some early monasteries young monks were expected 'to maintain a distance of one cubit between each other's bodies' (Brown 2008, 246). The monk to whom one confesses does not have to be an intimate, nor does this monk require greater powers of discrimination. The monk to whom one confesses is

an instrument in the moral architecture of the monastery, where the purpose of confession is not necessarily to appeal to another's better judgement. Indeed, the form of confession is more important than the wisdom of the person to whom one speaks. It is designed to turn the monk's inner world 'inside out' leaving nothing within that 'could not be placed unhesitatingly before others' (Brown 2008, 231). In principle, there would be nothing left that could be privately willed; evil forces would no longer be allowed to carry out their devilry under cover.

This distinction is rather important, since it places the operation of power within the practice of confession itself, rather than within the authority of the person to whom one confesses. Foucault takes care to emphasise this point, claiming that in the early monastery 'the quality of the person to whom one speaks, the advice he might be able to give, and his experience' are less important than 'the simple fact of speaking'. The 'main component [of confession] is not the pedagogical or medical role of the master, [but] the fact that one utters it to someone who is basically an x' (Foucault 2014, 306).

Confession expresses and brings to the surface thoughts and feelings, however fleeting, that the monk may otherwise have ignored or been able to forget. Their 'objective content', whether they are true or false, is less important than what they reveal about the preoccupations of the thinker (Foucault 2014, 302). These thoughts are to be sifted through since they are symptomatic of the soul which is given form and made available to inspection through confession. The expectation is that confession becomes perpetual and continuous, allowing the 'flow of thoughts that ceaselessly agitate the monk's soul' to be put under constant supervision (Foucault 2014, 306). This obligation to confess also ties the monk to his community, forcing him to establish a connection in which submission is accompanied by a great deal of disclosure. The monk not only gives up his freedom and renounces his will, he also commits to making himself known, permanently and in almost every detail, so that these details can be acted upon, and perhaps extinguished.

In summary, the educational good of the early monastery was tied to systems of denial by which members would inflict monastic discipline upon themselves as if it were a privilege to do so; only those who were prepared to prostrate themselves before the gates of the community would be admitted. This good was to be forever approached, and never realised despite the tireless devotions of an entire community working according to its regimen. And if the educational good to which all aspired appeared to

manifest itself, either in pious individuals or in pious acts, these individuals and acts were to be suspected for their vainglory.

IV.

The fragments considered above explore how the educational good is translated into late antiquity. Versions of the educational good appear across these fragments, each version indebted to a more ancient metaphysic of deferral. This metaphysic is associated with the Greek conception of *sophia* – a wisdom which can be approached but never fully realised. In each fragment it becomes apparent that the educational good is not simply deferred in late antiquity. This postponement is connected to various techniques that ensnare those to be educated into desiring their subjugation to an educational promise that will remain forever empty. So, we have three fragments, and three systems of deferral building on those ancient promises of Greek philosophy, but extending into systems born of and reinforcing the weakness of those who educate, and those who would be educated by them.

In the first fragment we have the case of the comparatively weak tutor who must convince his patron of his wisdom, an effort that must inevitably be at his patron's expense since the education on offer must at times reorient his soul by domesticating his body. In the second fragment, the educational good is tied to an attempt to convince the soon-to-be baptised of his or her weakness to all kinds of devilry. By implication, only a lifetime spent in service of an educational good of Christian extraction can save the soul from its fallen state. In the third fragment, we have a version of the educational good that scrupulously avoids locating that good in the leading figures of the institution that promises it, tying it instead to an endless process of introspection.

We have, in sum, three influential models, employing techniques of seduction, suspicion and diversion. In the first fragment, those to be educated are seduced into believing in the promise of education in advance, in a way that insists they will not understand the value of that education on offer until they have accepted its authority. In the second fragment, personal suspicion is encouraged in a way that subdues those to be educated, convincing the baptised that only through education will their worst inclinations be reformed, a process requiring constant commitment, and hence entailing another system of deferral and denial. In the third fragment we encounter a strategy of

diversion, where those to be educated in a more formal institutional setting are not to assume that the educational good is best manifested in the highest echelons of the institutional hierarchy. Rather, they are drawn into a set of relations that insists they must refuse to believe the educational good when it appears manifested in this or that pious soul. The monk must constantly inspect his own motivations in seeking to attain the educational promise that the monastic order is built upon.

Three systems of deferral can be found in late antiquity then, which are also systems of subjection. In these contexts the educational good is ever more fervently believed as it is cloaked, tying those who would pursue it to an education in which hope is forced but never realised. The implications of observations such as these for present-day educators may not be immediately obvious. Suggested here, nevertheless, is a line of descent, and a scheme of analysis through which we can begin to interrogate the ramifications of an educational landscape, in which the hope of an educational good, yet to be realised, operates in such a way as to domesticate the activities of those working under its shadow.

Notes

[1] For a rare exception in an edited collection see the chapter by Reydam-Schils (2013) on Stoicism in the Roman imperial era in: *Ideas of Education: Philosophy and politics from Plato to Dewey*.

[2] The only exception to my knowledge is the work of Nick Peim (2012; 2013).

[3] This argument concerning wisdom, the attainment of which is never guaranteed but is to be forever worked towards by the philosopher, is linked to Hadot's controversial but influential argument which holds that ancient philosophy is best understood as a series of spiritual exercises. Philosophy, here defined as the 'love of and search for wisdom', entailed for each philosophical school a certain way of life for which wisdom was a guiding ideal (Hadot 2004: 102). In Hadot's interpretation of the *Symposium*, for example, it is argued that 'philosophy is not wisdom, but a way of life and discourse determined by the *idea* of wisdom' (Hadot 2004: 46). Philosophy is 'defined by what it lacks – that is, by a transcendent norm which escapes it, yet which it nevertheless possesses within itself in some way' (Hadot 2004: 47). This, for Hadot, is part of the 'grandeur and the paradox of ancient philosophy' in that it is 'at one and the same time, conscious of the fact that wisdom is inaccessible, and convinced of the necessity of pursuing spiritual progress' (Hadot 1995: 265). Hadot's case for this conception of philosophy was developed during the course of a long and eminent career, which is beyond the scope of this paper to review (see Hadot 1995; 1998; 2001; 2004). It is notable that Foucault drew attention to

a similar point of distinction, claiming that the ancient and contrasting figure of the sage achieves wisdom through inspiration rather than reason, though ‘nothing obliges him to share his wisdom, to teach it, or demonstrate it’ (Foucault 2011: 17). By contrast, the philosopher-teacher is always on the path approaching wisdom, and unlike the sage, experiences the obligation to teach, an office filled most famously, and most doggedly by Socrates. By contrast to the sage whose wisdom is distant and reserved, the philosopher-teacher’s wisdom is applied, ‘directed to individuals and situations’ in an attempt, however faltering, to assist the philosopher’s interlocutors to live a better life (see Foucault 2005; 2011).

It must be admitted that my point (following Hadot) regarding the nature of wisdom somewhat contradicts late modern attempts at a revival of Aristotelian *phronesis*, or practical wisdom (about which however ‘there is as yet no agreed or settled view’ [Cooke and Carr 2014, 92]), which hope to shore up the vulnerable professionalism of educators under attack from the reductive pressures of audit and instrumental rationality. Against the forces of instrumentalism, scholars of this revived tradition wish to demonstrate that teachers can indeed achieve practical wisdom, that many have already achieved it in all but name, and that this kind of wisdom, which must always by definition evade measurement, is the basis upon which a defence of the teaching profession is to be built. The problem we face, they assert, is that such practical wisdom is misrecognised and under-rated today. Their emphasis, then, is to demonstrate the potential and actual *existence* of practical wisdom in contemporary teaching practice. I would argue, however, that this strategic emphasis serves to divert contemporary scholars from giving due attention to that other component, or feature of wisdom, which is that wisdom in the highest sense is unattainable, though it can serve as an aspiration and guiding idea with very concrete effects on educational practice. (As an aside, it is perhaps notable that Curren [2013, 33] comes close to this position, though from a very different direction and with very different motives, in his critique of the revival of *phronesis* in education, where he argues that this revival has neglected the fact that in the Aristotelian tradition ‘the activity of teaching is unequivocally understood to aim at something beyond itself’.)

[4] ‘If, therefore, anyone who is either powerful or also rich wishes to become good and noble, he will first have to put aside his power and riches, especially in these times when he will not find a Diogenes who will tell the truth even to a rich man or a monarch’ (Galen 1963, 36).

[5] This point is made by Brown (2008, 235), who argues that whilst Christian ascetics may have given the body ‘an almost oppressive prominence’ as if ‘motivated by hatred of the body’, if we retrospectively focus only on such bodily denials we risk missing ‘its most novel and its most poignant aspect’, which was that the defiled body was also seen as the privileged training ground of the soul.

[6] According to one interpretation, the baptismal water was ‘the water of death’, the bath into which one was put, was ‘Christ’s tomb’ (Foucault 2014, 156).

[7] It is worth noting, however that at the same time a whole succession of highly educated Christians, who were ‘master practitioners in Greek and Latin style’, were backing ‘into the limelight that they had brought to bear on the illiterate monks, apostles, and martyrs’ (Brown 1992, 74). Rather paradoxically, Christianity was able to mobilise the high culture of a Roman elite in terms comfortable to them, whilst asserting a religion which claimed to speak to even the lowest members of society in their language.

[8] Brown (2008, p. 257) argues that by the fifth century this radical stance had softened. The continence of monks was now seen as a mark of distinction, allowing them ‘to stand before the throne of God as the representatives of common humanity’.

[9] The influential ‘Rule of Saint Benedict’, a book of precepts concerning monastic life, is attributed to Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century, who was heavily influenced by Cassian. It describes a monastic order run under the auspices of an abbot, a figure who is more a disciplinarian overlord than he is a spiritual guide. The abbot makes sure that the Rule is followed, that discipline is maintained. He is not a great philosopher or theologian, who embodies the poise and virtue to which all aspire (see Coon, 2011).

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