

## PH355 – Philosophy of Education spring 2016

### Lecture I – Kitcher on democracy, education and capitalism

Outline:

I Background Dewey & Mill

II Adam Smith and the general argument A – D

III Obvious responses re step C

IV reformulating Smith's argument and back to Dewey's conception of philosophy

#### I Dewey & Mill

Dewey's conception of philosophy – addressing the question: what is it to live well.  
(*Democracy & Education* p.238)

Philosophy as a general theory of education

Dewey's 3 elements to the thought that education provides knowledge:

- (a) propositional knowledge
- (b) habits and disposition to judge and act
- (c) skills for learning - 'learning to learn'

re relative important Dewey thinks  $c > b > a$   
cp. Wiggins -  $b > a$

Mill 4 perspectives on education:

- (i) individual flourishing
- (ii) citizens participate well in democratic institutions
- (iii) expansion of public knowledge
- (iv) advancement of culture

This is a heady mix, not clear all compatible. Dewey has richer conception of (i) that has individual always culturally embedded and a richer conception of (ii), indeed very ambitious conception of (ii).

#### II Smith

Basic thought – division of labour produces need for education of specialised skills. In that context, individual flourishing in anything like Dewey's conception of liberal education is a luxury.

For Smith: 'mental death is simply the lot of most people under capitalism' (Kitcher p.10)

The point seems to be general, not just a feature of early industrial capitalism:

- A: Economic productivity requires continual intensification of the division of labour
- B: Division of labour requires training to specific tasks
- C: Liberal Ed (Dewey & Mill) is less efficient than one that focusses on B
- D: An efficient education system will lead to impoverished lives.

Kitcher (p.11): Is the Deweyan idea of education just a temporary luxury?

### III response re C

In dynamic economy, C is false. Specialised training is not conducive to economic productivity and innovation. 2 reasons for this:

Built in redundancy to special skills training (need to re-train)

Innovation comes from liberal education

Both need examining and detailed evidence. The big question will be:

For any Deweyan system of education, is there a Smithian one with higher economic efficiency?

Kitcher thinks the answer to this is 'Yes'.

Attacking C amounts to holding (p.13)

...goals that are hard to achieve and strikingly different from those recommended by Smith can be undertaken without loss of economic efficiency.

### IV reconstruction of Smith

4 classes:

- (i) ordinary worker – simple skills
- (ii) specialised worker – skills that take time to train
- (iii) elite worker – skills available to few and focussed on existing technology
- (iv) innovators – skills available to few and focussed on innovation

Deweyan innovation requires more than (iv); it's about living well and requires culture in the full for innovation.

So, is 'search for the good life...an occupation for the privileged few?' (p.16)

Or,

Back to Dewey's conception of philosophy.