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INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY
AND POLITICS OF EDUCATION

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Dear Larry:

You asked what resulted from my studies this summer in Germany that the Institute made possible. Most importantly, I gained a clear idea of how to proceed further with my inquiry.

Recall that I wanted to get a surer sense of the German resources for a history of educational theory and cultural criticism during the last two hundred years. With respect to the past, what I found by and large confirmed what I had suspected: the humanistic heritage of Kant, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, von Humboldt, Fichte, Hegel, Schliermacher, et al. merits greater emphasis than it has received in American histories of education. This revision would allow the familiar standbys--Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel--to be put in their proper context. What surprised me was not what I learned about the past, but what I learned about the present: slowly, browsing in bookstores, thumbing through magazines, listening to radio discussions, reading student newspapers, wall grafitti, bulletin board notices, reflecting on various encounters with various people, trying hard, as one does in strange surroundings, to get a sense for the life around one, for its vital concerns; slowly I realized that the historic issues I was studying were still alive.

As in America, so too in Germany, the philosophy and politics of education is of great current interest. Educational policy is perceived to be important for politics, economics, and social relations; culture, art, and science; the mores and modes of daily life. Men, with good minds and different points of view, are raising again the fundamental questions. And they are doing so in an historic context, the context of the very tradition that I went to study. The questions being raised involve the great perplexity of how to adapt and apply an imperfect yet valuable heritage to the whirling complexities of contemporary experience. On becoming aware of these questions, I saw a fascinating way to treat my subject, a way that will, I think, remedy some of the subject's customary defects.

My summer studies reminded me how educational theory and cultural criticism always arise from vital, human issues; they arise from endeavors that have their reality in the present tense, in the human, all-too-human uncertainties of men acting on one another, of men hoping, planning,

aspiring to give a definite form to their lives, a form they deem desirable, possible, worth working for. Yet history, with its retrospective view, with its penchant for the past tense, often does not impart the tension, the ambiguity, the many sidedness of the past. The failure to present living complexity seems particularly serious in American histories of European education: the foreground, the background, companions and adversaries are missing; a series of great, good men "do their thing"; rarely is there a living conflict of ideas between different points of view, each with its strengths, each with its weaknesses, each with its share of truth and its share of folly.

An important reason for this lack of fullness is that the American historian and his audience have generally had at best only a hazy sense both of present European debates about educational policy and of the historic background to these debates. Americans exist by virtue of an effort to escape the distinctions of the old world, and our perception of European peoples falls too easily into national stereotypes, the characteristics of which have then to be explained by the historian. Thus we miss the fact that the European nations exist not from the homogeneity of each, but because each is a different spectrum of diversities and a different system for maintaining these diversities in a productive tension. Everything, each advance and each regression, comes from the conflict and cooperation of these diversities; these are the source of significance, the basis of debate, the stakes in every question.

My aim, thus, is to display to Americans the living elements, and the historic roots of contemporary European educational theory and cultural criticism. What questions are being raised? Who are the personalities putting them? Why are these men so concerned? What new ideas do they offer? With what new experience do they contend? How do they use their heritage--in a spirit of glowing nostalgia, defiant rejection, cool unconcern, or studied selectivity? What is the scope of their achievements? Do they speak only to their immediate fellows or do they transcend the locus of their work? My aim is to bring the skills of the historian to bear on present European debates about education and culture, not in scientific fashion to record an objective, static picture of the present, but in a critical, selective manner, one in which I try to display its dynamic movements. In this, my highest hope is to extract an understanding of the long-term prospects of "culture in Europe" that would be analogous to the understanding of "democracy in America" that Tocqueville once extracted.

Take for example the group of writers around Verlag Suhrkamp, one of the more dynamic publishing houses in contemporary Germany. They include some of the leading figures in literature and thought; they share a point of view--left-wing libertarianism, I would call it; and they are giving it tremendous resonance. Educational reform is a topic of major concern to the editors of Suhrkamp and to a number of their better writers, notably Jürgen Habermas and Theodor W. Adorno. It would be easy and superficially accurate to describe Suhrkamp as the major sounding board for

the New Left in the BRD; but it would be more accurate, and ultimately informative, to describe it in a larger historical perspective, one going back to the young Hegelians, the Frankfurter convention, and the idealism--philosophical and characterological--of Rheinish liberalism. Viewed this way, the Suhrkamp writers gain roots, a pertinence to ingrained German traditions and problems; the characteristics of their work that do not fit the stereotype of the New Left become more apparent. And these characteristics--a stark modernism, a clearness of thought and expression, a respect for theory and criticism--are their more important ones. Moreover, on becoming aware of Suhrkamp, its predecessors and contemporary importance, on learning to reckon with it in the German present, one perceives the continuous importance of its predecessors--not because they were ever dominant, but, on the contrary, because they were once active parties, who were frequently eclipsed but never excluded, in earlier debates about pedagogical policy.

With this example, I want to suggest no personal conversion to Suhrkamp's ideology, but to indicate concretely how a survey of contemporary German culture and education would help bring its past to life, resurrecting its forgotten elements, and manifesting its vital tensions. Another instance would be the current debate over the character and purpose of the university. Most of the positions articulated in the German debate would not be unfamiliar to Americans abreast of our own debate. Yet one of the central specters haunting discussion in Germany is Wilhelm von Humboldt; contemporary Germans disagree what his university ideal was, whether or not it is out-dated, whether it was ever implemented, who now speaks for it, and whether it can be transcended. By going back to von Humboldt one understands much better the character of the contemporary debate (not only in Germany but in the U.S. as well), and by beginning with the current discussion, one perceives von Humboldt's centrality and is dismayed at how he has been ignored in American histories of European education.

My aim, then, is to seek out, comprehend, and illuminate such an interplay between past and present. My procedure will be to begin with West Germany. I have returned laden with books and articles on cultural policy and with references to many more. I intend to survey the major papers and the influential journals, and to query representative public figures by letter and--with some--by personal interview, to find out which issues are the ones that command concern. I want to assess the various positions I find in the light of my understanding of Western and German history and culture; I want to deal with my findings in the spirit of the critical historian, estimating the relative significance of the different positions, explicating their potentialities and limitations. I want to present these characterizations and judgments by means of essays and then a book to as wide an American audience as I can reach.

If this first stage of my project does not flounder, I want to proceed apace to similar studies of the current pedagogical issues and cultural

milieu of other European countries. This expansion of the scope of the work will actually begin before the German portion has approached completion, for the most significant question that the whole project might answer depends on its having a European, not merely a national scope. The rather unrefined proposal I made to the Institute last November concerned the themes of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in the history of modern European education. So does the present proposal, and in a more precise, workable manner. Any supranational, cosmopolitan reality of Europe must be found, if it is to be found outside the impossible dreams of idealists, in the definite, distinct particulars of immediate experience. To put my hypothesis baldly: any cosmopolitan bond that may exist, exists not in superficial similarities, but in common principles, which work in different localities to produce the external differences that mark Europe. To test this hypothesis one must see if one can find common principles at the source, creating Europe's endless diversities. Hence, to find the whole--if it can be found at all--I must look separately at its different parts.

To carry through this project, I must improve some of my tools of inquiry, but I have no doubt that I can make those improvements. As you know, I can read French, Spanish, and German with reasonable facility and can labor at Italian with profit if not yet pleasure. A major part of my effort this summer went into studying German, and I am on the way to learning to speak and write it correctly. I intend to do the same with French, Spanish, and Italian over the next few years, which should remove any barriers of communication. Aside from developing the requisite language facility, I foresee few difficulties impeding research: by the nature of the subject, the material is highly public and open to anyone with the will and diligence to seek it out.

In comparison to its potential significance, the costs of the project should be modest. The whole undertaking fits well with my teaching, for in my major course, "Religion, Class, and Politics in European Education," I will be surveying the contemporary cultural issues, and their historical background, that are being raised in the principal countries of Europe. Thus I can concentrate my effort, for a significant part of my research will coincide with my preparation for the course. In addition, I want to devote my summers for the coming years, as well as my sabbatical three years hence, to the project. To facilitate the summer work I would need a summer salary. Also, some money for travel expenses would help me to discuss the issues directly with their protagonists. With overhead charges and typing costs, I think an annual budget would come to about $6,000, and I would like to sustain that for five to ten years.

I realize that the Institute cannot make such a grant from its limited funds. I would like very much, however, to see if I can get funding elsewhere for the project to be carried out as part of the Institute's activities. Results from the work would be ready in two, possibly three, stages. From

work on Germany during the coming academic year (1970-71) and the following summer, I would expect to begin publishing my findings in the academic year of 1971-2. A second stage would cover the next five years or so in which I would publish my conclusions for France, Italy, the Benelux countries, and perhaps Switzerland and Austria. A third stage would involve a synthesis on the culture of Europe. Owing to this rhythm of the project, I would be quite happy now with a two-year grant with the possibility of its further extension being conditioned on the quality of the results of the first stage.

I hope the Institute will find this project suitable for inclusion among its activities. In any case; I am deeply grateful to the Institute for making possible a fruitful summer of study in Germany.

Sincerely yours,

Robbie

Robert McClintock
Associate Professor of
History and Education

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