

The Economic Aims of Education

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This article explains and defends the idea that economic aims of education are as legitimate as any other, particularly liberal, aims. A particular conception of education is developed, which involves a significant vocational aspect, with two aims: individual fulfilment through employment and social well-being through economic prosperity. This account is to be contrasted both with training, which may be an essential component of education but which is not to be identified with it, and also with instrumental forms of vocational education that do not take into account the need for satisfaction in the workplace. This conception is defended against various possible objections.

The aim of this article is to explain and defend the idea that economic aims of education are as legitimate as any other, particularly liberal, aims. There are good reasons for raising this issue at the current time. First, there is evidence that young people themselves attach considerable importance to vocational aims: 'The vast majority [of children] believed that schools should help them to do as well as possible in their exams and teach them things that would be useful when they entered jobs' (National Commission on Education, 1993, p. 151). Second, a recent statement of the aims of the school curriculum in the UK hardly mentions vocationally relevant aims, despite the evidence cited above (see, for example, DfEE, 2000a). Third, the UK has recently passed major legislation, the Learning and Skills Act, concerning the future conduct of post-compulsory non-higher education in the UK. Finally, the EU has a well-established set of aims concerning vocational education that are relevant to the UK but that have not, to my knowledge, excited either significant philosophical comment or political action in the UK. Vocational education not only concerns the aspirations of people for a satisfying life, but profoundly affects the economic and social prospects of modern societies. Its relative neglect by philosophical commentators is, therefore, highly regrettable.

I start from the view that, as a categorial concept, education is broadly, although not exclusively, concerned with preparation for life, or for particular phases of life. There are three significant aspects to this concept: individual fulfilment; civic participation; vocation. Individual *conceptions* of education, as they can be found in particular societies at

particular times, consist of distinct combinations of these different aspects. Education is a contested concept, and the different conceptions are, in part, manifestations of the contest. Therefore, it is important that persuasive definitions of particular conceptions are not confused with a descriptive definition of the categorical concept which will, necessarily, be minimal in content (cf. Barrow, 1981; Carr, 2000; Peters, 1966). It is worth noting, however, that R. S. Peters, one of those most instrumental in presenting a partial and prescriptive definition of education in the guise of an analytically developed concept, is at least sensitive to the fact that there can be educational forms of what he calls 'vocational training' (Peters, 1966, pp.44–45). In what follows, I explain and defend a particular *conception* of education, which involves a significant vocational aspect, with two aims: individual fulfilment through employment and social well-being through economic prosperity. This account is to be contrasted both with *training*, which may be an essential component of education but is not to be identified with it, and also with instrumental forms of vocational education that do not take into account the need for satisfaction in the workplace (Smith, 1981, Book V, especially pp. 785–786).

INTRINSIC EDUCATIONAL AIMS

One of the difficulties that some philosophers have experienced in recognising a significant vocational aspect to education arises from the influential view that the aims of education are intrinsic to education itself.¹ This could be true of some particular conception of education, but is not generally true. Education can be an intrinsically valuable activity, but this does not imply that its value is *only* to be found within itself. One of the points to stress is that vocational education can itself be an intrinsically valuable activity which also leads to the pursuit of intrinsically, as well as instrumentally, valuable activities later in life. When the aims of education are conceived to be intrinsic to education, then the proper ends of life are seen as the pursuit of educational activities. This is, no doubt, true both of some worthwhile lives and of some conceptions of education. It is not, however, true of education generally.

PREPARATION FOR WORK AS AN INDIVIDUAL AIM OF EDUCATION

Someone who wants to be educated in order to pursue a worthwhile occupation or to earn a living clearly has an aim in mind. Can it be a worthwhile aim that educators can support? I do not see why not. There is no doubt a tension within liberal philosophy of education between the adoption of intrinsic aims and the adoption of autonomy as a primary aim. While it is possible to pursue aims thought to be intrinsic to education as a way of developing autonomy, this is by no means the only way to do so.² I wish to start from this modern autonomy-promoting

conception of liberal education in order to develop a rationale for individual economic-oriented aims of education.

Autonomy in the educational context is thought to consist of three key attributes. First, someone who is autonomous is not just independent with respect to the ways that means are chosen, but also has a measure of choice as to what ends are to be chosen in life. Second, they have the knowledge (including self-knowledge) necessary to make a critically reflective choice about those ends. They need the knowledge to understand what is involved in the choices that they might make, including whether their own interests, abilities and temperament are suited to such a choice. Finally they need to be equipped with the self-mastery to pursue projects to a successful conclusion, in the face of doubts and difficulties (cf. Callan, 1993). Modern liberalism sees the aim of education in individual terms; as the preparation for life of a person who is capable of choosing what he or she considers most appropriate to their self-fulfilment. Whether or not one can agree on whether those individual aims should be only those that society endorses, liberal autonomists would agree that the range of options should normally include these. Most young people see employment of some kind as a key life-aim. Therefore, liberal autonomists ought to be prepared to endorse preparation for employment as a key aim of education, even if they personally attach more importance to the knowledge-based intrinsic aim referred to earlier.³ The option of a life of leisured contemplation does not seem to be excluded by the new aims of the school curriculum. Indeed, cultural appreciation is the aim most specifically described:

It [the school curriculum] should encourage pupils to appreciate human aspirations and achievements in aesthetic, scientific, technological and social fields, and prompt a personal response to a range of experiences and ideas (DfEE, 2000a, p. 11).

It might be replied that the document does also refer to preparation for future roles as citizens and workers, but the non-specific nature of these references, contrasted with the detail given for the liberal aims, very strongly suggests a particular order of priorities in the minds of the drafters of this statement.

That ends are self-chosen is a key feature of autonomy. Autonomy, in turn, is a good, because it entails self-determination in important matters. Its value, in turn, is a consequence of the value of liberty itself as an intrinsic good.⁴ The assumption by liberal philosophy of education is that such ends are worthwhile. The fact that others may disapprove of my ends is insufficient to discount their value to me. If they harm no one else, the fact that I have freely (and possibly rationally) chosen them endows them with intrinsic worth. One could, of course, maintain that employment could only ever be a means to an end. But it is hard to see how an autonomy-promoting educator could maintain this position, since it is clearly possible to choose employment as a life-end freely, and in most

cases society would approve of at least some forms of non-harming employment. In objection, it might be said that most of us have little choice about becoming employed and so that this is hardly an autonomous choice. Such an objection equivocates between the need to work to earn one's living and the choice of working in one's chosen occupation. One may need to work in the former sense, but have considerable choice in the latter. Furthermore, this objection also misses the point just made, that employment can be chosen as an aim for personal, as well as instrumental reasons. Contrast people who follow an education for personal aims, but pursue employment in complete detachment from the main aims in their lives, just to provide the wherewithal to pursue what they do regard as worthwhile.

However, employment also has intrinsic worth as an individually chosen end, in that it constitutes a way of releasing human active capacities in the development and exercise of specific abilities.⁵ What is more, it does so through the exercise of abilities with a distinctive moral dimension, constituted both through the social effects of work and also through the fact that work takes place in a social milieu.

Individuals might choose employment as an aim in a Kantian spirit, in order to obey an abstract moral law, without any 'heteronomous' considerations concerning the satisfaction that employment can give, if they felt it their duty to contribute to society's well-being through work. There is, however, something disturbing about such a suggestion, since it might look as if employment could only be chosen as a worthwhile end to achieve a very narrow form of self-fulfilment, which we might not wish to encourage for such important life choices. Alternatively, employment can be chosen solely for instrumental reasons, to provide sustenance for individuals and their families. Both are bleak choices, because they suggest that paid employment must be a joyless activity, a view taken, incidentally, by classical and neoclassical economics, which views work as a disutility (Marshall, 1890, p. 117).

This view rests on a misunderstanding of the sources of human satisfaction, which rest, to a considerable degree, on the enjoyment of our active powers. The pleasures we gain through the satisfaction of physical appetites are no doubt significant in the composition of a worthwhile life. However, as Dent has pointed out, even sensual pleasure is not just absorbent, that is, the experience of removing a lack, or a discomfort. It is also part of our nature that we experience sensual pleasure through the release of our active powers. So it is also through the enjoyment of our senses, including kinaesthetic sensations, that we experience pleasure. We can, for example, enjoy the sensations of eating, running or looking at a landscape whether or not, in doing so, we are actually satisfying an appetite. 'It is clear, therefore,' Dent writes, 'that hunger and a desire for gustatory pleasure are quite different kinds of desire' (Dent, 1984, p. 49).

Physical pleasure, then, has an active component so that the enjoyment, as well as the fulfilment of our natural appetites is partially constitutive of a worthwhile life.

But an important dimension to intrinsic enjoyment is not fully dealt with in Dent's account. He distinguishes between sense-desire and passional desire, the latter being connected to ends and hence good-dependent. We desire certain things, like the achievement of a happy family life, because we have made this an end, as it seems to us to be a key component of a worthwhile human life (I am not suggesting that this is the case for everyone). This is an example of what Dent calls a passional desire. Passional desires are pursued because of their intrinsic as well as, in some cases, instrumental value. They have a normative component insofar as they are related to higher level goods that are embedded within a society's normative structure.⁶ Such desires can be satisfied absorbatively, through passive enjoyment, but enjoyment can also occur through the release of our active powers in the achievement of them. In the first case, the satisfaction of talking to one's spouse or playing with one's children may arise from one's experience of something that one takes to be intrinsically good (it does not just involve the removal of discomfort as does the satisfaction of a particular appetite). Something like family life can also be enjoyed actively, for example, through involvement in the bringing up of one's children or the care of one's parents. For most of us, such activities are intrinsically worthwhile, and this is not just because of any intrinsically worthwhile non-instrumental pleasure that they may afford us, but also because of their recognised identity or close relationship with goods of ultimate value to us. In this sense, the enjoyment of family life is also of ultimate value since it is one of the possible activities that is constitutive of human well-being.⁷

However, it is important to recognise that the *pursuit* of passional desires can also have intrinsic value. Such activities can be sensually pleasurable and there can be intrinsic value in their enjoyment. But they too can have ultimate value in the sense that their pursuit can itself be partially constitutive of what it is to lead a worthwhile life. For example, building a swing in the garden or earning enough money to take the family on holiday are both activities that I may enjoy in themselves. Such activities are, therefore, in one important sense, of intrinsic value since they are worthwhile, not just to satisfy the goal to which they are primarily directed, but also because they give their own form of satisfaction. Building a swing or working overtime may give pleasure through enjoyment of the work, but they also contribute to something that is intrinsically, and possibly ultimately worthwhile, namely family life. But they are *also* intrinsically worthwhile because they themselves are partially constitutive of a worthwhile life. They are thus of ultimate value since they are themselves, some would say, directly constitutive of an aspect of what it is to live a worthwhile human life. Exercising one's skill, working with other people and creating something useful to others are all activities that are themselves partially constitutive of a worthwhile human life.

There is, then, the possibility of satisfaction that arises from activities directed towards the satisfaction of passional desires, that is, not just

sense pleasure, but an experience that derives from regarding the activity that one is carrying out as either contributing to a good or as good in itself. Some forms of paid employment fall into the category of being in the pursuit of some good, and they too may be actively enjoyed through the exercise of skill, responsibility and partnership with clients or fellow workers. German has a word for this phenomenon, *Arbeitsfreude* or joy in work. The satisfaction of the activity comes from the fact that it is not only pleasurable, but is considered by the worker to be something worthwhile doing in itself. It is quite possible then to see how some forms of paid employment may, through their actual performance, lead to intrinsic, as well as extrinsic satisfactions. If this is true of a particular form of paid employment, then it may be chosen not just as a means to a worthwhile end but, to some extent, as an end in itself.⁸

Obviously, only some kinds of work will lead to either intrinsic satisfaction or worthwhile external goals. Typically such work will require a degree of skill, of working with other people and will, however indirectly, involve some benefit to society. But these considerations should lead us, not to dismissing the value of work, but to ensuring that the kinds of work that we, as a society, offer are of this kind. Thus, the issue of individual satisfaction at work leads to considerations about how society values work and how it organises the opportunities for it, which are questions that occupy the next section. I hope to have shown however, that from the point of individuals, worthwhile paid employment is a legitimate and worthwhile life-goal, which anyone interested in developing autonomy as an educational aim should endorse as an option for those who wish to pursue it. This is not to say that only paid employment should be a legitimate aim, indeed it might be said that in some ways, we as a society are perhaps obsessed with paid employment to the exclusion of, for example, domestic work.⁹

Such 'liberal' aims of vocational education may look alien in the British context, so long dominated by an ideal derived from the education of the English gentry, but such aims have long been taken for granted in Europe.¹⁰ Here, for example, is an extract from the principles guiding the implementation of vocational education, set out in a directive of the Council of Ministers of 2 April 1963:

- To broaden vocational training on the basis of a general education, to an extent sufficient to encourage the harmonious development of the personality and to meet requirements arising from technical progress, new methods of production and social and economic developments.
- To enable every person to acquire the technical skill and knowledge necessary to pursue a given occupation and to reach the highest possible level of training, whilst encouraging, particularly as regards young persons, intellectual and physical advancement, civic education and physical development (Bainbridge and Murray, 2000, p. 3).

THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Given the importance attached to vocational education by children, the omission of any significant vocational aims from the curriculum would be astonishing to anyone not acquainted with British educational culture. It might, of course, be said that children are not capable of making informed and considered choices about their own educational aims, let alone what particular jobs would suit them. The school curriculum, insofar as it reflects the diversity of views within a society, is bound to have aims that partly complement, partly diverge from each other. When, however, a significant aspect of education is omitted from the aims of the school curriculum, we may be confident that something has gone badly wrong with the process of consultation through which the aims emerged.¹¹ One would expect to find aims concerned with the acquisition of basic skills and knowledge and a differentiation of individual and civic aspects of aims. If we accept that, as children grow older, they begin to get a sense of the kind of life they would like to lead, then we would also expect to see further differentiation in the aims, incorporating reference to preparation for work. These might involve giving young people an insight into the nature of life at work, into the implications of career choices, and the opportunity to understand, in a practical manner, the kind of knowledge, understanding and skill involved in different occupations. This, in turn, would be reflected in curricula and schools.¹²

The view that children are not capable of determining the kind of life they would like to lead, sits ill with a liberal autonomy-promoting ethos that tends to emphasise autonomy from an early age. In any event, there are two confusions in such a response. First, it ignores the fact that children are better able to make choices if they can consult with parents and careers teachers, not to mention representatives from occupations which they may be interested in choosing. Incidentally, there is no evidence that the majority of parents are opposed to vocational aims for their children; indeed one would expect that the influence of parents would be considerable in forming children's own views concerning what they wanted from their education. Second, no-one, to my knowledge, has suggested that schools directly undertake preparation for particular jobs. The role of schools in this matter is twofold: to give pre-vocational education, concerned with providing enough information and practical knowledge for children to make informed choices about entry into an occupation, and also to develop character and social skills through participation in a demanding activity relevant to future employment.¹³

The aims of pre-vocational education (roughly for the thirteen–sixteen age range) should be to introduce young people to some of the basic principles underlying their provisional occupational choice, its place in the economy and in society, its traditions and history, and to provide some practical acquaintance with what it is like to work in that occupation (see also Entwistle, 1970). It should aim to equip young people for autonomy in the three senses described above. First it should allow them to make

suitable choices about a possible occupation in the light of knowledge about the nature of the occupation, the basic skills and techniques involved and its history and values. Second, it should also allow young people the opportunity to form a judgement as to whether that occupation is suited to their own abilities, interests and temperament. Third, it should help them develop the self-mastery to pursue a well-grounded interest to a satisfactory outcome in the face of difficulties and obstacles. Pre-vocational education is distinguished, then, from vocational education in that it does not aim to prepare students for a specific occupational role, but allows them to gain an insight into what it is to enter that occupation. It can also be seen that a general liberal education, although it is clearly essential as a prelude to the making of autonomous choices concerning a vocation, is not, in itself, sufficient.

Nothing in the aims of the curriculum explicitly precludes the incorporation of a vocationally-oriented curriculum post-14. However, given that the aims exist partly to *justify* curricular choices, the omission of vocationally specific aims makes it difficult to provide a rationale for vocationally oriented provision and tends to emphasise its marginal character in the larger scheme of things. More unkindly, one might attribute such reluctance to a wish not to incur the expense of equipping schools properly to carry out pre-vocational education. But this would be an especially damaging admission in the context of entitlement. One would in effect be saying that the entitlement of children who wished to directly contribute to the economy as a result of their education should be discounted because it would be too expensive. It is in this context that current proposals for promoting vocational GCSEs should be seen. The stated political aim is to provide a more work-oriented route for young people who wish to develop work-related aims for themselves.

Since we can assume that this measure is mainly designed to engage the interest of the majority of children who currently fail to gain five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, the measure has potentially massive ambitions. However, in the British educational culture a massive shift in emphasis of this kind would, to be successful, need to have the prestige of the state behind it. This would entail considerable investment in buildings and in the hiring of specialist teachers; in other words, a financial commitment. Since the government has not even taken sufficient political action to ensure that at least some work-related aims of education are incorporated into the aims of the school curriculum, it may be doubted whether the real commitment to vocationally-oriented children is all that great. This point raises larger questions about responsibility for vocational education that I wish to turn to in the next section.

To summarise, there has been a failure in British educational culture and policy making to take seriously the aspirations of many, if not most, of our children. Despite the rhetoric about the economic importance of education, when it came to the point, for the first time in the history of state education in England and Wales, of determining in detail, at the most fundamental level, what our education system is for, the result for

work-oriented aims was, in Ernest Bevin's (or was it Sam Goldwyn's?) phrase, 'a complete ignoral'. Whether it is possible to remedy this fundamental failure post-16 is the subject of the next section.

PREPARATION FOR WORK AS A SOCIAL AIM OF EDUCATION

Societies (and the individuals that constitute them) have a vital interest, and hence a right, in maintaining a healthy economy.¹⁴ To the extent that education is necessary to the securing of a healthy economy, society has interests in maintaining forms of education that develop economic aims, and thus a *prima facie* right to develop such forms of education. It is a happy coincidence that many individuals themselves want what society also takes to be desirable. But there is a heavy responsibility on a society to provide the right kind of education for paid employment and, more radically, to take steps to ensure, as far as is possible, that there are appropriate kinds of paid employment for young people when they leave full-time education.

The reason for this is that one cannot say that certain individual aims are legitimate, allow people to spend a great deal of time preparing to attain them and then fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that they are attainable. Such behaviour looks like a breach of faith and the breaking of what is at least an implicit promise. We have to acknowledge that society's endorsement of the aim of achieving worthwhile paid employment imposes certain onerous obligations on society to ensure that young people are indeed in a position to achieve such a goal. It seems that the obligations laid on society have considerable implications for the conduct of both educational and economic policy. First, if taking autonomy seriously implies that preparation of worthwhile work is the legitimate aim of considerable numbers of young people, then there are implications for investment in highly-qualified staff and expensive equipment, both at compulsory and post-compulsory levels of education (Sanderson, 1994). Second, and even more controversially, there need to be jobs available for those who have trained for them. This goes back to the point about breach of trust made earlier.

It might be replied that no government could so control the economy as to guarantee everyone the job that they want. This, however, is not the requirement. No one can be guaranteed just the job that they want, even in a command, let alone a market, economy. It is, however, a very different matter to provide young people entering a labour market for the first time a fair opportunity to find a job in the industry and at the level for which they have trained, within a reasonable amount of time. This goal is achievable through a number of measures affecting both pre-vocational and vocational education at the compulsory level and at the post-compulsory vocational level. These strictures do not, of course, apply to individuals who are pursuing non-vocational courses or who pursue vocational courses for non-vocational reasons, but they arise

from the implicit promise made when preparation for employment is the explicit aim for which a course is offered and pursued.

THE LEARNING AND SKILLS ACT

In order to properly appreciate what is at stake in developing vocational education, it is necessary to look at a broader and more controversial issue: how the economy is run and for what purposes. Few would disagree that consumption is one of the main aims of economic activity, although it is arguable that, in market economies like our own, the circulation and exchange of commodities for profit becomes almost an end in itself. Hence Keynes' remark, in the context of emphasising the role that economic activity plays in fulfilling human need: 'Consumption, to repeat the obvious—is the end and object of all economic activity' (Keynes, 1973, p. 104). However, there has always been a tradition in economics, dating from Aristotle, which sees economic activity, not only as fulfilling human material needs, but also particular conceptions of the good (for example, Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book 1, 9, 1258, p. 14). A distinctive feature of this tradition is that it usually rejects the 'inertial' or 'disutility of work' interpretation of motivation with respect to economic activity.¹⁵

Such a tradition would tend to emphasise the provision of public rather than private goods, the formation of social capital, autonomy in the workplace and environmental protection. But it also emphasises the mobilisation of human spiritual and active powers in the carrying-out of collective projects that are both socially and individually satisfying. It so happens that there is now considerable evidence that the provision of satisfying work that promotes independence and trust, allows the deployment of skill and makes use of teamwork and collective knowledge, contributes to what is sometimes called a 'high skill equilibrium' or HSE.¹⁶ In an HSE, highly skilled and highly-paid workers produce high specification and relatively expensive goods and services, which are sold to relatively affluent consumers, who are, inevitably, highly paid workers themselves. An HSE is a virtuous cycle in which high quality products are made and consumed by well-paid workers doing satisfying work. Movement to an HSE has the further long-term economic advantage of giving developed economies a competitive edge and a heightened ability to adapt in a world where more and more countries are competing in similar areas (Ashton and Green, 1996).

Economies can also be run in the contrary way, where poorly paid low-skilled workers produce cheap but low-specification and low-quality goods and services tailored to the budgets of unskilled, low-paid workers. Such is a low-skill equilibrium or LSE. Economies run as LSEs can be profitable. What they cannot do is provide satisfying work, worthwhile products or long-term economic security through built-in adaptability to changing economic circumstances (Streeck, 1992, Ch. 1). There is now considerable evidence that much of the UK economy is run

as an LSE, while our economic partners and competitors in Europe have, in the main, followed the HSE route.¹⁷ It should be obvious that there are considerable social advantages to running a mature economy as an HSE. One of its key features is relatively high productivity and productivity growth. Here the UK scores badly compared with Europe and this is one of the problems identified by the Learning and Skills Act and the Treasury's own data on UK productivity. These problems can, in turn, be related to low levels of skill and training in the British workforce (DfEE, 1999, para. 1.4–1.6, DfEE, 2000b, p. 23; Her Majesty's Treasury, 2000, p. 5, Chart 1.2).

A skill equilibrium is concerned not only with the mix of activities that can be found within an economy, but also with the way in which those economies engage in those activities. Some economies, for example, might not engage in any computer production or aviation because they do not contain any of the relevant skills amongst the workforce or any demand for such products. However, a low-skill transport system would employ a different mix of technologies and skills to a high-skill one. A low-skill transport system might make exclusive use of steam railways and horse-drawn transport, which require relatively low-skill forms of production and maintenance. A high-skill transport system might use high-speed electrical railways and aviation, which require sophisticated technologies and complex skills to develop and maintain.

Moving from an LSE to an HSE is a prime example of a coordination problem, in which a certain state of affairs, to the advantage of everyone, cannot be readily achieved by individual action. In particular, it looks like an example of a 'prisoner's dilemma' problem where the dominant strategy of individual employers in an LSE is to remain in one. A prisoner's dilemma is a form of coordination situation where it is the dominant strategy of each player to opt for a course that produces an outcome that is not the best that all players could obtain. One important aspect of the transition from an LSE to an HSE is to develop a skilled workforce.

In this case, all employers could gain more if all the employees of all employers were to train, although all employers would incur the cost of training their own employees. However, if an employer were to train while other employers did not, that employer would incur the cost of training but fail to recoup any of the benefits, since the other employers would use the saving gained from not training to 'poach' the trained employees from the employer who trained. Naturally, the optimum outcome for any single employer would be not to train while all the others did. However, since all employers can work out the outcomes of each possible course of action, it is unlikely that any would want to train. The only way to ensure that all employers trained their employees would be to provide some incentive to do so outside the strict confines of the game itself. For example, if all employers were made to bear the costs of training their employees, then they would all have an incentive to train them, since they would all recoup those costs and would not be subject to poaching from other employers, since there would no longer be a shortage of skilled workers.¹⁸

It is a commonplace of liberal thought, and implicit in Hume's arguments for a central authority which could transcend short-term preoccupations, that one of the main roles of the state is to resolve prisoners' dilemmas by taking action needed that works to the benefit of all, but cannot be achieved by instrumentally rational individual action. Much liberal thinking on the role of the state emphasises its role in resolving these kinds of situation (for example, Hume, 1948, p. 100; Raz, 1986, part 1, Barry, 1995). If this analysis is right, then one of the main purposes of state intervention in economic development and training issues should be to resolve such situations. To be quite specific, two issues need to be tackled:

- Appropriate government activity to move the economy to an HSE. There are a variety of different ways in which this could be done, but they all involve a measure of government intervention, even if it is nothing more than creating an appropriate business environment and providing incentives to employers to move into appropriate markets. Of course, it may be that a government would need to be much more interventionist than this. This is beyond the scope of this paper.
- There need to be incentives for employers to provide vocational education. The 'training problem' is itself a prisoner's dilemma, where the dominant strategy for an employer is not to train. Two policies are needed to resolve this: a training levy (or direct funding of training through taxation) and a licence to practise contingent on the obtaining of appropriate qualifications.

All these measures are required to create effective demand for highly skilled personnel from employers. It is against this background that the government's policy on vocational education needs to be judged.

This analysis suggests that, in order to combine the educational aim of providing intrinsically satisfying employment for those who elect to fulfil themselves through work, and the economic aims of providing both prosperity and well-being in a broader sense, for the population, there needs to be a measure of coordination between educational and economic policy. Against this background, the Learning and Skills Act is extremely disappointing.

Although the legislation accepts the widely-held view that the British economy has problems with productivity and levels of skill, it does not accept the conclusions drawn above. Inspection of the Bill makes the reason for this very clear. The orientation of the legislation is towards providing employers with a large measure of control over post-compulsory vocational education and with orienting the whole system to their own perceived needs. In other words, employers' perceived interests are placed before any perceived national interest. Not only do employers not always have sufficient incentives to raise skill levels, but it also is possible that they are not aware of the skills that their employees might need to orient their firms' activities towards a high-skill equilibrium. In some cases, as in the construction industry, fragmentation of enterprises

into small self-employed units has led to extensive de-skilling (Harvey, 2000). This contrasts with the approach adopted in, for example, Germany and The Netherlands, where entry into the construction industry requires an extensive theoretical and practical preparation and where unskilled employees have, at best, a marginal role (Clark and Wall, 1998b). Areas of abstract knowledge that are most suitable for transferable skills (for example, mathematics) have to a large extent disappeared from the construction curriculum since the late 1980s. It may be that the Modern Apprenticeship scheme, which has been successful in restoring this abstract knowledge in some occupations, will, if introduced on a large scale in the construction industry, reverse this trend (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). This, however, depends on employer take-up of the scheme.

By contrast, the German system requires that trainees spend the first year of training between the college and a training centre studying a common course for all construction trainees irrespective of the particular trade which they have entered with their employer. In The Netherlands, the training for a skilled carpenter, which is the dominant trade in the Dutch construction industry, involves the study of applied mathematics, physics and mechanics in modules devised by the Ministry of Education. Students also spend a day a week in the college system studying a curriculum that includes a foreign language and environmental studies (Clarke and Wall, 1998b, pp. 557–558).

The Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) are designed to identify skill needs *as perceived by employers*. There is little provision for the government to identify skill needs that it wants employers to recognise. Neither is there any obligation on employers to train through a levy system or to employ skilled workers through the requirement of a licence to practise.¹⁹ Without these measures, the central point of view and co-ordination necessary to move an economy from a low-skill to a high-skill equilibrium is lacking. There is no reason to suppose that high-skill and satisfying employment will be available for those young people who currently see no incentive in improving their academic performance. Even the provision of vocational GCSEs, necessary though it might be to provide such an incentive, is hardly sufficient. The Learning and Skills Act seems to represent a continuation of the policies in post-compulsory Vocational Education and Training over the past fifteen years, which have, on the government's own analysis, led to the problems that they identify. The Act represents a failure of nerve and vision. The attempt to bring educational and economic objectives into alignment may alienate powerful interests, but it is arguable that politics is about the management of conflict, not its avoidance.

CONCLUSION: YOUNG PEOPLE — EFFORT, TRUST AND DISILLUSIONMENT

The traditional view in the UK, that 'non-academic' youngsters should be 'warehoused' in school until they were ready to enter unskilled jobs at the age of 15 or 16 is now thankfully, discredited.²⁰ In its place has come a

meritocratic ethic of accountability that demands preparation for useful work in what is alleged to be a high-skill and rapidly changing economy. Every parent nowadays is aware of the pressure on schools and children to gain academic qualifications so as to fit them for work. If such pressure is successful, then we can expect to see far more qualified and expectant young people entering the labour market. They will enter it with the legitimate expectation that there will be employment opportunities commensurate with their educational achievements. They will have made the effort, trusting that they will be rewarded. But, as we have seen, there is no evidence that recent governments have been prepared to fulfil their side of this implicit bargain. Maybe they believe that, somehow, the market will provide the jobs commensurate with the qualifications of the young people. But, as we have seen, there are very good reasons for not leaving such matters to chance. We face the prospect of an intergenerational breach of trust and consequent disillusionment on the part of young people who will feel, with some justice, that they have been betrayed. It is hard to justify such a situation after all the rhetoric about the need for 'education' for the contemporary world.

I have tried to indicate that economic aims of education have both an individual and a social aspect. There are different ways of conducting vocational education, some of which are instrumental, some humanistic or liberal. I have advocated the desirability of the latter, as well as the former, both for individual and for social reasons. Vocational education, according to this conception, has an important role, both in allowing individuals to realise their own ends in life and in allowing society to develop paid employment to both provide individual fulfilment and to ensure competitiveness and prosperity. When assessed against these objectives, recent reforms in vocational education in the UK are sadly lacking, in contrast to practice amongst some of our continental neighbours and competitors. When expectations are raised and not fulfilled, not only has a breach of trust occurred, but the social consequences are potentially dangerous.²¹

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NOTES

1. For a recent statement of this view, see Andrew Reid, 1998. But Reid, in common with other commentators, simply takes it for granted that this is so, rather than arguing for it.
2. The most obvious way of doing this is for someone to prepare himself or herself for life as a scholar.
3. These should not be mutually exclusive, since only some people will be willing or able to make significant contributions to knowledge. This leaves open the question of what kind of education is appropriate to everyone else, a question not really addressed by liberals like Cooper (1980).
4. The idea here is clearly related to the view of Kant (1956), that human agency is characterised by the free choice of ends determined by practical reason, but without the metaphysical background of Kant's ethical theory. For a recent defence of the idea of liberty as an intrinsic good, see Raz (1986).

5. The term 'active' is used to denote agency. 'Creative' suggests the production of original work of great merit (Gingell, 2001) and is far too rigorous an expectation for most work.
6. They are related to what Taylor (1989) calls 'hypergoods' which involve at least some recognition of the spiritual dimension of human existence.
7. For a definition of ultimate value in terms of human well-being, see Raz, 1986, pp. 177–178. For Raz, being intrinsically valuable is having value apart from instrumental value. For a good to have ultimate value it has to be partially constitutive of what makes a human life worthwhile.
8. It goes without saying that 'work' in the broader sense, including domestic labour and non-paid employment, can also have these characteristics.
9. The 'end of work' thesis and its implications for education, set out in White (1997) is not convincing as an account of the consequences of automation. Neither does it seem to square with the facts of recent history (see Rojas, 1999). For further discussion of this issue, see Winch, 2000, Ch. 13.
10. For an account of the evolution of different conceptions of education in England and Europe in the nineteenth century, see Green (1990).
11. Green (1990) documents the élitist and undemocratic way in which public education developed in England. Sanderson (1994) shows how even politicians sympathetic to vocational education failed to take measures to preserve and develop it at a crucial period before the end of the Second World War.
12. See Green, Wolf and Leney (1999) and Max Planck Institute (1983) for descriptions of the continental context, which often, as in Germany for example, involves schooling aimed at particular occupational options.
13. I use the term 'job' to refer to a specific employment in an occupation, like train driver, and 'occupation' to refer to a branch of economic activity, such as the railways or catering.
14. I use a conception of rights as interest-based to be found in, for example, Raz (1986), Waldron (1988), McCormick (1977).
15. For a critique and an argument for the view that Keynes did not belong to this school, see Verdon, 1996. For a more general argument concerning the relationship between economics and well-being see Lutz, 1999.
16. See Hodgson, 1999, for a detailed exposition.
17. For a general account see Ashton and Green (1996); for a general explanation of a skill equilibrium see Finegold (1991). For examples from particular industries, see Prais, Jarvis and Wagner (1989), Thompson *et al.* (1995), Mason *et al.* (1997), Clarke and Wall (1996). For recent discussions of the status of the UK as an LSE, see Keep and Mayhew (1999).
18. For explanation of these kinds of problems see Varoufakis and Hargreaves-Heap (1995), especially chapter 5.
19. In case anyone thinks that such intervention in the economy smacks of state socialism, the second recommendation can be found in that bible of neoliberalism, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith, 1981, Book V.
20. I am referring to a systemic failure of the secondary modern system and do not in any way wish to disparage the heroic efforts made by many secondary modern teachers to give their children a worthwhile experience at school. See Taylor (1963) for a careful and dispassionate account of the secondary-modern school.
21. I would like to thank the anonymous referees for comments that have, I hope, improved this article considerably.

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