

—— Tomas Wedin, »Ideological continuity and discursive changes in the Swedish educational system«

—— A B S T R A C T ———

In this article I present a reading of the relationship between discourse and ideology. With two curricula for the Swedish upper secondary school as my empirical basis, I suggest that the rather conspicuous differences between the curriculum of 1970 and that of 2011 ought to be considered as manifestations of discursive but not ideological changes. In the concluding remarks, I argue that the way in which the term discourse has come to be used has contributed to this. As a way forward, I contend that the Rawlsian framework, given the social-liberal values which it is supposed to reflect, provide us with political tools to map the most pertinent flaws in the curriculum of 2011.

—— Tomas Wedin is a PhD student, financed by the Centre for Educational Studies, at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, at the University of Gothenburg. He is writing his PhD thesis on the reforms of the Swedish school system in the 1990s.

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■—IDEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY AND DISCURSIVE
CHANGES IN THE SWEDISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

■—In *On Ideology* Louis Althusser distinguishes between a number of Ideological State Apparatuses that, beside the repressive apparatus, contribute to the reproduction of the dominant ideology. Amongst these, he emphasizes the school system in particular, claiming that this apparatus has replaced the church in later-modern capitalist society as the dominant institution of ideological reproduction.¹ Apart from the school, there is no state-controlled institution that is comparable in its influence over subjects. A plausible explanation is the close bond between the capitalist system and the educational system. Ever since the dawn of capitalism, the system has depended on skilled workers, engineers, bookkeepers, etc.; with the structural reshaping of the Swedish economy from a principally industrial one to a service economy, this relationship has further deepened.

In the present article I shall make no further use of Althusser's theory of ideology. Instead, I shall present a reading of the relationship between discourse and ideology by way of analyzing the educational system. In examining two Swedish curricula for the non-compulsory school, one from 1970 and one from 2011, I claim that whilst the political *discourse* has changed (substantially), the dominant *ideology* has remained relatively firm.² The dramatic political changes that have taken place since 1970 and the very different discourses formed in the two curricula ought thus to be considered as underlying *discursive* changes.

The theoretical framework through which I will pursue this investigation is Habermas's theory of science and technology as ideology. Notwithstanding the substantial economic-political changes that have taken place in Sweden during the current period, my contention is that these and their concomitant discursive changes ought to be considered changes within the same scientific-technological ideology. The ideological critique presented share central claims with the critique directed against our post-political predicament, offered for example by Chantal Mouffe. In the conclusion, I relate my negative critique of the curricula to her position and contrast both with the rationalist position represented by Habermas and Rawls.

— Technology and science as ideology

Habermas's conception is distinct from the classical Marxian definition in its emphasis on how ideology and productive forces have merged to such a degree that the scientistic-technocratic core of late capitalism has become an ideology itself.³ This reading contrasts with bourgeois ideology, which justifies laissez-faire capitalism through the idea of a free exchange of equivalents on the market.⁴ In contrast to this »bourgeois ideology of justice«, which is constituted by a *content* of certain normative ideas such as responsibility-based individualism and the related idea of the free market and the axiomatic definition of liberty as non-intervention, Habermas's theory defines ideology as a *Weltanschauung* of late capitalist society.⁵

The point of departure for Habermas is Max Weber's theory of rationalization, in particular Weber's emphasis on the increasing use of purposive-rational action (*zweckrationale Handeln*) in capitalist societies.⁶ Habermas suggests that a consequence of the continuous extension of areas in society to be subjected to the criteria of purposive-rational action is the increasing influence of a second order purposive-rational action, in the form of planning of establishments, improvements and an expansion of *systems* of purposive-rational action.

The rationalization process underway in industrialized societies since the nineteenth century was not the value-neutral transformation that Weber presented it as. It was, rather, an organizational re-formation through which technical rationality became an implicit political force. Essentially interest-driven issues were detached from a social context and transposed onto a »neutral« and rational ground. The rationalization process was not only a mental and organizational transformation but also a process in which an unacknowledged political domination took place. Given the constitutive role that purposive-rational action plays in this process, we ought to consider this Weberian idea as a form of the exercise of control. The interests of particular groups or individuals are not imposed »after« the new technologies have been applied; rather, they are intertwined with the development and implementation of technologies. Technology as a »pure« phenomenon is an illusion; it will always form part of a historical-political project. Under the veneer of rationalization, this new and ever increasing form of domination expands smoothly, contrasting sharply with the earlier, more obvious forms in which domination has appeared. The aim of subordinating nature and improving living standards for everyone motivates the constant increase of productivity. Rather than being a subsystem under

an overarching societal structure, the striving for scientific and technical improvement and the growth of productive forces has become an implicitly dominant goal in itself.⁷

As a consequence of the dislocation of the content of rationality, rationality loses its anterior force as a critical standard and is degraded into an intra-systemic standard. When monopolized by the scientific-technological ideology, critique against the system as such has no place. The ideology of late capitalism need not bother justifying the system with reference to any normative regulation. Instead, technical solutions are offered that keep normative-practical questions depoliticized. The ideological core of this colonialism is the »elimination of the distinction between the practical and the technical«; in other words, all fundamentally practical questions are treated as if they were technical issues.⁸

It is in this sense that *Weltanschauung* ought to be understood. While the various dominant ideologies, such as ordoliberalism, trickle-down liberalism, social democracy, etc., articulate different assumptions and paths, most do so within the confines of an instrumentalist reasoning subordinated the overarching aim of the colonial power, i.e. the axiom of technical development. The essential difference between these different forms of »liberalisms«, promoted as explicit ideologies of content on the one hand, and in the sense of *Weltanschauung* on the other, is the unambiguous direct normative claims of the former and the implicitness of the latter. Ideology as *Weltanschauung* ought to be understood as the horizon in which influential ideologies as content are framed.

— Discourse and its relation to ideology

Given that my aim is to suggest a relationship between discourse and ideology, I have no interest in developing the concept of discourse, but rather to present it in a common sense-fashion that captures the core constituents of the concept. In doing so I shall make use of Stuart Hall's definition of discourse as a set of »ready-made and pre-constituted 'experiencings' displayed and arranged through language«.⁹ Thus, a discourse can be thought of as a productive framework within which our ability to act, speak and think become limited. This way of defining discourse is naturally disputable, but it is undisputable that this way of defining discourse, *grosso modo*, is common in »discourse analysis« today.

Defined in this way, discourse stands in a relatively autonomous relationship to the scientific-technological ideology sketched above. The major difference between the two concepts is, consequently, their different extensions. Whilst a discourse is always identifiable and local, such as school political discourses, ideology as *Weltanschauung* extends widely, forming the horizon. One clear example of their different character can be

made by comparing the free-trade discourse and the discourses that derive from the dependency-school (e.g. the world-system theory) with the underlying scientific-technocratic ideology. The two discourses make different claims about how countries with a relatively low GDP/capita can develop economically, i.e. claims about one distinct and restricted question. Neither, however, contrast with the omnipresent and implicit immediateness that characterize the scientific-technological theory.

However, while most discourses within an ideology (such as the free-trade) are supportive of it, we can also expect to find discourses that are not conducive to the dominant ideology.¹⁰ This applies to a discourse's relation to ideology as content; whereas we can expect most influential discourses to be compatible with the dominant ideology as content (such as the currently dominant economic liberalism), others are not. However, due to the inflation of the term discourse, it has in practice come to be used synonymously with ideology. This is, I believe, an unfortunate development. As I shall argue, there are good reasons for keeping the two clearly separated.

— FROM SPEARHEAD INTO THE FUTURE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CURRICULA —

The curriculum for the Swedish upper secondary school (*Läroplan för gymnasieskolan*) came into force in July 1971.¹¹ The major changes were the replacement of the different types of secondary school with one overarching upper secondary, though with varying lengths of attendance (between two and four years) and the elimination of the upper secondary school qualification: the *studentexamen*. These reforms were part of the post-war attempt of the Social Democratic Party to create a more uniform school system, also manifested in the earlier reform of the primary school system.

A new reformed curriculum for the upper secondary school entered into force in 1994. The preceding governmental report was named »School for formation« (*Skola för bildning*). With this, the term formation was reactivated in an educational-administrative context. In parallel with the new curriculum, a number of school reforms were carried out. Those affecting the school system most deeply were the introduction of a voucher-based school choice system, the replacement of equality with equivalence as a guiding principle, and the transfer of principal responsibility for the school from the state to the municipalities. There was political consensus over these changes, with central decisions taken both by the center-right government between 1991–1994 and the social democrat governments before and after that period. A new center-right government took charge in 2006 (and was re-elected in 2010) with the proclaimed intention to create a »knowledge-school«. The curriculum of 2011 is a product of this intention.

— The school as a spearhead into the future:

The 1970 curriculum

The first two paragraphs of the curriculum quote the national school law, reminding the reader that all school education in Sweden aims at »transmitting knowledge to the pupils and at developing their capacities... and at becoming competent and responsible citizens«. ¹² In the next paragraph we are informed that those who are engaged in the school system should »promote [the pupils'] personal development in order to become free, independent and harmonious persons«. ¹³ Closely related to this injunction is that schools prepare pupils for »living and being active in cooperation with others and for preparing themselves for their role as active members of tomorrow's society, which to a larger extent than today's society will demand co-operation and solidarity between people«. ¹⁴

This support of the pupils is not, however, without limits. Under the headline »the pupil at the centre«, we are reminded that the school handles individuals with different »personalities« and »endowment types« (*begåvningsstyper*). ¹⁵ We are reminded of the constraints limiting efforts within the school system to assist the individual in her/his development. At the end of the day there are *different* pupils with *different* endowment types, and these differences must be taken into consideration. Nowhere does the document problematize the idea of »endowment types«. The idea is an essentialist one, in which the abilities of each pupil are considered inflexible when entering upper secondary school.

Under the heading »individual development«, we are informed of the importance of a continuous stimulation of the interest in studying and »desire to work«. ¹⁶ Continuous stimulation requires a »strong interest in the pupils from the side of the school and an individual adaptation of the teaching to the disposition and abilities of the individual pupil«. ¹⁷ The aforementioned assumption is repeated: the development of the individual is central, but one must not forget that we are dealing with different personality types that put clear constraints on the potential of each individual.

The critical distance vis-à-vis the prevalent order is further underlined when we are presented with the reasons for having a historical perspective on school. With the example of the relations on the labor market, which – we are reminded – ought to be debated in school, we are given an argument for a historical perspective on society. Such an approach, it is assumed, will enable the pupils to discern between states of affairs that they *wish to keep*, and those that they *wish to change* (my italics). ¹⁸ Yet another formulation bearing witness of this focus towards the future is the statement that the school »ought not respond to the needs of the actual society, but that the school becomes a positive force in the societal development«. ¹⁹ The school shall serve as a spearhead into the future.

The idea of the school as an institution guiding the society into the future, as well as the idea of individual development, ought to be considered within the constraints that the labor market and society exercise. These constraints are clearly expressed when the period following high school is discussed; students either immediately take up a vocational career or continue studies at a higher level. The school has a responsibility to give students the special preparation they need and wish, but it is not a task for the school to enable every individual to fulfill her or his interests. Each individual preference must be weighed against the demands from society and the labor market.²⁰ In order to prepare the pupils for working life, it is important that in their schoolwork they engage in tasks that they are likely to face when entering the labor market. The utility-based interest of adapting the educational system to the needs of the labor market is explicitly stated. As in the question concerning individual development, the »open-future« idea must be read within the clear constraints formed by the putative biological lottery as well as the demands of the (prevalent) society and the labor market.

A final noteworthy part of this text is the attention it directs towards the inner desires (*viljeliv*) of individuals. We are told that »a major part of a human life is dedicated to work, and for the pupils the school is a work place. It is there that their need for activity can be captured and, with their own co-operation, canalized in a fashion that creates working joy«.²¹ But the work in school should also create citizens who are willing and able to make active contributions to society in general and be active and engaged in different activities in their spare time.²² Taken together with formulations such as the assumption of a future in which cooperation will be intensified, the contours of a more communitarian societal ideal is prominent.

The ideals expressed in the curriculum of 1970 points in various directions which, considered separately, would be difficult to analyze fruitfully. This is where discourse as an analytical concept becomes useful. Considered in the light of other demands, the contours emerge of a fundamentally communitarian discourse, where stable progress is emphasized along with an ability to adapt to whatever the labor market needs in order to »keep the wheels moving«. Whilst the development of the individual is underlined repeatedly, this desideratum should not be confused with the school as an arena where the interest of the pupils rule; each individual is not only confined to her *own limitations* (as nature, alas, does not disperse her riches equally among children), but also to what *society needs* from her.

— Entrepreneurship, flexibility and knowledge:

The 2011 curriculum

The first sentence of the 2011 curriculum is an affirmation that public education in Sweden rests on democratic principles and that »education within the school system aims at pupils acquiring and developing knowledge and values«. ²³ The main task for the school is to »convey knowledge and create the preconditions for the student to acquire and develop knowledge«. ²⁴

Under the heading »The aim of the school«, we are informed that pupils, through their studies, shall obtain a basis upon which they can construct their *life-long learning*. This is necessary due to »changes in the labor market, new technology, internationalization, etc.« ²⁵ This statement is followed by an admonishment that pupils be enabled to develop their ability to take initiative and responsibility, which in turn is followed by the demand that the school:

— ... shall contribute to the pupils' development of knowledge and attitudes which are conducive to *entrepreneurship, enterprise-orientation and an innovative thinking*. The opportunities for pupils to start and run enterprises are hereby enhanced. Entrepreneurial skills are valuable for professional life, social life and continued studies. ²⁶

This extract indicates a substantially new attitude both vis-à-vis knowledge and in its normative attitudes. It is underlined that the school cannot transmit all knowledge on its own. It is essential that it create the best conceivable »conditions for the formation (*bildning*), thinking, and knowledge-development of the pupils«. ²⁷ Pupils must be aware that new knowledge and understanding are preconditions for personal development, in order to lay the basis for a »positive attitude towards learning«. ²⁸

Yet another concept indicating the centrality of knowledge is the reactivation of the concept of formation, which experienced a renaissance in the school administrative context in 1992 through the official report *School for education* (SOU 1992:94, *Skola för bildning*). In the light of the explicit exhortation to inculcate the value of entrepreneurship throughout the educational system, the ways in which the concepts of *bildning* and life-long learning are interpreted seem rather confined. ²⁹ The idea of life-long learning was first promoted in the UNESCO-report *Learning to be*, published four decades ago in 1973, where problems such as the division of society into classes, alienation from work etc. were discussed alongside increased competition and other economic and technical issues. ³⁰ The concept then disappeared, only to appear again at the end of the 1980s. This time, however, it came coupled with familiar terms such as competitiveness, flexibility, human capital, etc.

Since then, lifelong learning has seldom been omitted in official documents concerning educational strategies.³¹

The historical background to the renaissance of the term *bildning* in a school administrative context is related to the vehement – but not always equally nuanced – advocacy of »knowledge« in Sweden (as well as in other countries) during the 1980s.³² *Bildning* entered the Swedish language through the German noun *Bildung*, which harbors two meanings that can be coupled with two different, but related verbs. On the one hand there is the sense of *abbilden*, according to which depiction, following the idea of the *Imago Dei*, is the central aim. The other way of interpreting *Bildung* is the verb *bilden*. The central idea here is that in the process of *Bildung*, the individual engages in the »formation« of something not an *a priori* given. This clear distinction between the two readings of *Bildung* have, however, been questioned on the grounds that they are notoriously hard to separate.³³

Keeping to the traditional distinction, we can identify clear marks of *abbilden* in the educational goal of furthering our cultural heritage. The *bilden* aspect can be discerned in the goal to inculcate flexibility and the openness to *umbilden* or re-form oneself, expressed in, for example the striving to promote life-long learning.³⁴ With life-long learning and entrepreneurship as aims within education, *bildning* turns into an appeal to the individual to be a moldable production factor, incessantly prepared to adapt to the demands of technological development.

The emphasis on entrepreneurship, rather than the more neutral term creativity, strengthens this interpretation. Given the discursive frame in which the term is embedded, there are good reasons to believe that entrepreneurship ought to be read as *productive creativity*. This way of reading *Bildung* is quite far from most of the various roots from which it developed, but it is nevertheless – in a rather counterintuitive fashion – clearly related to the idea of creating something not given beforehand.

Under the heading »The development of each school«, the 2011 curriculum hints at the motivations of some of the central tenets in the actual educational system. It is desirable, we are told, that the school strive to form »flexible solutions« in order to enable smooth relationships between the different educational levels as well as with the labor market.³⁵ The pedagogical guidance of the board of the school as well as the professional responsibility of the teachers is important for the qualitative development of the school, which is necessary in order to reach the national goals. But in order to make sure that the different schools actually are developing, it is required that the different schools are regularly *evaluated*. Justifications are presented for the voucher system applied (»flexible solutions«) as well as for the need for central evaluations. Discursively, this fits

closely with the general emphasis on preparing the pupils for a »complex reality« where the ability to acquire and »use« new knowledge is essential – in other words to be flexible.³⁶

The curriculum of 2011 is an unusually explicit official document. With entrepreneurship as a guiding concept to be impregnated in the educational system, little is left to the imagination concerning the aims of the recent reforms. In the document, the contours of a positivist approach to knowledge appear, in which flexibility and life-long learning, coupled with the overarching goal of inculcating an entrepreneurial attitude, are key ideas.

— IDEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY AND DISCURSIVE CHANGES: SOME NOTES ON THE CURRENT SITUATION —

The two curricula are indicative of the depth of the societal changes Sweden has undergone since 1970. The social democratic post-war vision, where productivity, wealth redistribution and counter cyclical economic policy danced together to the melody of Keynesianism, had come to an end. As a consequence, Sweden was increasingly becoming the scene of antagonistic political positions. Critique of the state came from the left, who pointed out the continuing reproduction of class society in the educational system and preference given to the needs of the labor market.³⁷ From the right, a reaction slowly but steadily took shape during the 1970s.

When the curriculum of 1970 was written, the oil crisis as well as the dissolution of the Bretton Woods both lay in the future. The complex and rather contradictory curriculum presented in 1970 ought to be understood in view of the »record years« that followed the Second World War. The upper secondary system, it was claimed, ought to strive to »develop« society, without ever losing control of the pupils. Change was encouraged, but always within the confines of the labor market and the needs of society. These desiderata had not been in conflict during the post-war years, but with increased competition from new, recently industrialized states, technical changes and drastically rising oil prices, the rules changed.

When the 2011 curriculum was formulated, the preconditions for economic growth had changed substantially. Closely related to these changes are the information revolution and the concomitant restructuring of the Swedish economy into a service economy. Furthermore, from the end of the 1980s onwards, new economic ideas such as public choice and the closely associated concept of new public management gained influence and substantially changed the political climate. Indicative of this was the surprisingly conspicuous labor market orientation in the 2011 curriculum. When these ideas started to transform into political practices on a large scale with the election of a

right-wing government in 1991, the Social Democrats receded and, in practice, accepted the new discourses on equivalence, responsibility, freedom of choice, etc. (which together formed – and still forms – a peculiar form of hybrid ideology as content, consisting of neoliberalism and a diluted form of social democracy).

Notwithstanding the different discourses in which the two curricula are embedded, the underlying scientistic-technological ideology has remained stable. Though the different discourses – as the two curricula unambiguously demonstrate – have changed dramatically, the dominant ideology has remained not only unchallenged, but has deepened its influence over contemporary society. A clear manifestation of this is the blunt fashion in which the purpose of the educational system is presented in the 2011 curriculum. Economic growth and technological progress are not considered *practical* questions, but givens: goals towards which all are assumed to aim.

One contributing reason to this is, I suggest, the proliferation of the term discourse. As Terry Eagleton has noted, it is hardly coincidental that the *discourse* of discourses surged at a time when radical left-wing critique was on the retreat.³⁸ It seems, *ceteris paribus*, safe to say that any ideology as *Weltanschauung* thrives in a habitat where the potentially critical conception of ideology as content has been replaced by discourse in the way, in practice, it has come to be used. Some discourses have, of course, critically examined the scientistic-technological ideology. However, instead of criticizing it for what it is – an irrational spell that distorts politics and manifests a rationally unjustifiable order – it is pointed out as a »neoliberal« or an »economistic« discourse.

Roughly simultaneous to these tendencies was an increasingly stronger tendency for most parties in liberal democracies to move to the center. Voices were, once again, raised claiming that liberalism had defeated its competitors and that we were now moving towards a politics beyond left and right. The states in the Western world had moved into a post-political condition. This tendency is marked in the political theory of Chantal Mouffe, amongst others. A tenet in her critique of our post-political predicament is that politics in contemporary societies lacks the very life nerve of a vivid democracy, namely the existence of political frictions.³⁹ In an ideal democracy, groups with conflicting ideas respect the right for different groups to have different opinions of the »common« good, but oppose their ideas.⁴⁰ Under the condition that they adhere to the »ethico-political principles of liberal democracy«, they may – or rather ought to – disagree on the »meaning and implementation« of those principles.⁴¹ There is, claims Mouffe, no common ground, no basic structure, as for John Rawls, around which adversaries might agree. Given these irreconcilable positions, necessary

for the thriving democracy, the essential aim is to realize a political climate in which opposing positions can articulate their opinions and challenge each other with *their respective discourses*.⁴²

This depiction of contemporary political life has apparent affinities with Habermas's ideology critique. However, whilst Mouffe stresses the importance of radical plurality and dissociates herself from any rationalist foundation on which a consensus might be reached (as a way out of our predicament), both Habermas and Rawls rely on reasonableness and rationality in their normative positions. Both assume that the normative can be divided into a moral-political sphere – where consensus can be reached between impartial and rational individuals – and an ethical/comprehensive sphere, where a plurality of values can exist (though only those compatible with the framework stipulated in the moral/political domain).

Notwithstanding their different approaches, the procedural one in the case of Habermas and the principle one in the case of the Rawls, both take forms of Kantian autonomy as the point of departure for their respective normative theories. As Habermas's former student Rainer Forst has argued, we can interpret Habermas's position as a form of procedure-oriented Kantianism, where private autonomy is derived from the desideratum of public autonomy, whereas for Rawls public autonomy can be considered a necessary condition of private autonomy (i.e. the principles of fairness).⁴³ Both represent rationalist positions, however since Rawls explicitly stipulates the principles from which the basic structure is derived, I shall take his definition to represent the rationalist position and contrast it to the agonistic pluralism advocated by Mouffe.

Before pursuing this discussion, it should be stressed that it is unclear *how* deep the cleavage actually is between Mouffe and the constructivist rationalism represented by Habermas and Rawls.⁴⁴ The position of the former is that democracy requires competing definitions of the essentially contested concepts of equality and liberty. The only real restriction is that they must remain within the borders of »ethico-political« principles of liberal democracy. If by this we understand the procedural framework, there seem to be a clear difference between Mouffe, on the one hand, and Rawls, on the other, given that the basic structure is quite demanding. It is, however, disputable as to what is necessary for the reproduction of the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy. Furthermore, though the basic structure is demanding, it still leaves open a substantial space for different normative positions: for different ideologies as content, with their concomitant ideas of the human good.

Concerning Mouffe's critique of the Habermas's and Rawls's attempt to draw a line of demarcation between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism, I believe that she is right.

Political liberalism cannot remain neutral vis-à-vis comprehensive positions: the school system is one of the most striking examples of this. Given Habermas's and Rawls's foundational belief in a society constituted of free and equal citizens, where the aim is to find a space where private and public autonomy intersect, it is reasonable to expect that the state assumes a comprehensive role in providing the citizens with the intellectual, practical and technical abilities that they need to come closer to the desideratum of autonomy (political as well as private).

If the state were not to assume this responsibility, instead feigning a more passive policy, the influence of the biological and social lotteries will increase proportionally, and the basic structure will be violated. Furthermore, though the focus of this paper has been on the desired *content*, an educational system in harmony with the basic structure ought to assume responsibility of its *form* as well. By no means all forms – however appropriate the content – are compatible with the basic structure. Whichever form an educational system appears in and whichever content it may consist of – even the complete absence of publicly financed education – will, inevitably, favor some ideologies *as content* at the expense of others. The curricula discussed above will always express some discourse, but it will also, and more importantly, form part of an ideology as content. And none of these ideologies as content, neither the social democratic one of the 1970s nor the current economic-liberal one, have challenged the scientistic-technological *Weltanschauung*.

Confronting this fact, we can, with Mouffe, conclude that the positivistic scientism that permeates the curriculum of 2011 (as well as the concomitant forms of the educational system) is a constituent of a hegemonic neoliberal discourse, and that what the left must do is reframe a new and distinctive alternative (with an educational policy deduced from it), and try to regain the initiative. One such alternative way of framing the problem is the Rawls-*inspired* strategy that I would like to propose. According to it, we would criticize the curriculum of 2011 for violating the principle of fair and equal opportunity in two respects. The first, and weaker, of these two objections is that the current curriculum is strongly biased towards materialist forms of the good (in ascribing a disproportionate importance to skills germane to the labor market), and therefore that it violates the rule of neutrality (beyond autonomy).

The second and stronger counter-argument focuses on the goal conflict between the needs of the labor market and the goal of providing everyone with a fair and equal opportunity. Everyone enters the school with a different social heritage, and if this heritage is not actively countered, it will strongly influence the choices made by pupils. The pupils in a labor market

oriented school will *tend* to reproduce the existing class positions. This is a violation of the principle of equal opportunity: a school that primarily aims at shaping the pupils in accordance with the needs of the labor market will, because of the importance of social background, fail to meet the Rawlsian measure of fairness and equality. The instrumentalization of knowledge about what can be commercialized and the *de facto* demotion of children to production factors is based on utilitarian considerations (which could be motivated through the difference principle); however such concerns are allowed only after the superior principle of fair and equal opportunity is satisfied.⁴⁵ A curriculum conducive to the principle of fair and equal opportunity ought to highlight this conflict and explicitly stipulate that the responsibility of the school to counteract the power of social background takes precedence to any labor market considerations.

This critique is clearly directed from a certain point of view, namely an autonomy-promoting form of social liberalism. Taking seriously the claims of discourse theory, we should carefully consider which terms we use to denote particular social phenomena and refer to the 2011 curriculum in proper terms, namely as a document forming part of an economic-liberal ideology that reproduces the scientific-technocratic *Weltanschauung* of which it is a part.

The curriculum of 2011 is, to be sure, an articulation of a discourse among others. Consisting of a number of »moments« – such as »entrepreneurship«, »flexibility«, »formation«, »knowledge« and »responsibility« – it forms a positivist discourse in the educational field. As such, it is one of a number of different discourses that serves to reproduce the economic-liberal ideology. Discourse ought in consequence to be considered subordinate to ideology – not only as *Weltanschauung* but also as content. When referring to these different but closely associated manifestations of the dominant ideology as discourses, we miss the forest for the trees. The pertinent issue is that these discourses are manifestations of an ideology advocated by a government that pretends to want to construct a just society within a social-liberal framework.⁴⁶ This proclaimed ambition is, as I have argued, something we have very good reasons to question.⁴⁷ ■

■ — E N D N O T E S —

1 Louis Althusser: *On Ideology* (London, 2008).

2 With »curriculum« I here refer to the overarching official documents where broad strokes are drawn concerning which the major aims with the educational system are. It goes without saying that an analysis of such a document can never be more than an investigation of what the formal power *wants* the school to be. How the school works in practice and what it does

to the pupils is a fundamentally different question, which will be left out of this paper entirely.

3 Jürgen Habermas: »Technology and Science as ideology« in *Toward a Rational Society* (Boston, 1971). The article »Technology and Science as ideology« was published in 1968, but the ideas Habermas presents do not essentially deviate from readings of his later works by other commentators such as Jorge Larrain: *The concept of ideology* (London, 1979) and Paul Ricoeur: *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1986).

4 In the way, for example, that Robert Nozick puts in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* in the renowned example of Wilt Chamberlain, Robert Nozick: *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York, 1974).

5 Habermas: *Toward a Rational Society*, 97.

6 Unless otherwise indicated, this text is based on Habermas's article. Italics are my own unless it concerns quotations.

7 Habermas: *Toward a Rational Society*, 93-94. From this central claim, it is tempting to consider capitalism itself as an ideology. Whether this is reasonable or not is, nevertheless, a question that falls outside the scope of this paper.

8 Habermas: *Toward a Rational Society*, 113.

9 Stuart Hall: »Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological effect'«, in *Mass Communications and Society*, J. Curran et al. (eds.) (London, 1977).

10 This interpretation of the relationship between discourse and ideology has some affinities with Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt's theory on the subject. A fruitful idea in their work is the overarching idea that the discourse is something more confined than ideology, and that it can challenge as well as support ideology. On this point their definition clearly coincides with the relation that I have suggested. However, in their approach they make a number of assumptions that rest on lines of thoughts from Althusser and Foucault, among others, which makes their definition of discourse more comprehensive than the »thin« definition with which I wish to use here (see: Trevor Purvis & Alan Hunt: »Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...« in *The British Journal of Sociology* 44:3 (1993).

11 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970. Allmän del* (Stockholm, 1983).

12 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 17.

13 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 17.

14 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 17.

15 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 17.

16 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 22.

17 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 22.

18 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 21.

- 19 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 18.
- 20 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 20.
- 21 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 22.
- 22 *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan 1970*, 23.
- 23 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011* (Stockholm, 2011), 5.
- 24 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 6.
- 25 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 7.
- 26 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 7.
- 27 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 8.
- 28 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 8.
- 29 On the webpage of the Swedish National Agency for Education, the instruction is that entrepreneurship shall permeate the entire education, and that it is just as much a pedagogical approach as knowledge about running an enterprise.
- 30 Edgar Faure et al (eds.): *Learning to be* (Paris, 1972).
- 31 Kjell Rubenson: »Livslångt lärande. Mellan utopi och ekonomi« in Ellström, Gustavsson & Larsson (eds.): *Livslångt lärande* (Lund, 1996), 32-34.
- 32 Tomas Wedin: *Perspektiv på kunskapsskolans framväxt*, 2013 [unpublished paper].
- 33 Thomas Karlsohn: *Originalitetens former* (Göteborg, 2012), 63-71, Victoria Fareld: »Wilhelm von Humboldts frihet som epigenetisk bildning« in *Lychnos. Årsbok för idé- och lärdomshistoria* (Uppsala, 2006).
- 34 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 10.
- 35 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 8.
- 36 *Läroplan, examensmål och gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*, 7.
- 37 Tomas Englund: *Läroplanens och skolkunskapens politiska dimension* (Göteborg, 2005), 276-277, Gunnar Richardsson: *Svensk utbildningshistoria* (Lund, 2010), 151, 156.
- 38 Terry Eagleton: *Ideology. An Introduction* (London, 2007), 218.
- 39 Chantal Mouffe: »Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?« in *Social Research* 66:3 (1999).
- 40 Mouffe: »Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism«, 755.
- 41 Mouffe: »Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism«, 755.
- 42 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London, 2001), 192.

43 Rainer Forst: »The Justification of Justice« in Finlayson & Freyenhagen (eds.): *Habermas and Rawls. Disputing the Political* (London & New York, 2011), 164.

44 Similar debates, concerning whether capitalism could be criticised on moral grounds, were common within the left during the 1970s and the 1980s. Some of the participants were Allen Wood: »The Marxian Critique of Justice« in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1:3 (1972), »Marx on Right and Justice« in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8:3 (1979), Ziyad Husami: »Marx on Distributive Justice« in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8:1 (1978), Kai Nielsen: »Arguing about Justice« in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17:3 (1988). Gerald A Cohen and Jon Elster (and other members of the so called »September group«) are other prominent philosophers who engaged in this dispute.

45 John Rawls: *Justice as Fairness. A restatement* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002), 46.

46 <http://www.alliansen.se/om-alliansen>.

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