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THE SCHOOL AS A CONSERVATIVE FORCE

Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities

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(translated by J. C. Whitehouse)

It is probably cultural inertia which still makes us see education in terms of the ideology of the school as a liberating force ('l'école libératrice') and as a means of increasing social mobility, even when the indications tend to be that it is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a *social* gift treated as a *natural* one.

As processes of elimination occur throughout the whole of the period spent in education, we can quite justifiably note the effects they have at the highest levels of the system. The changes of entering higher education are dependent on direct or indirect selection varying in severity with subjects of different social classes throughout their school lives. The son of a manager is eighty times as likely

to get to university as the son of an agricultural worker, forty times as likely as the son of a factory worker and twice as likely as even the son of a man employed in a lower-salaried staff grade.¹ It is striking that the higher the level of the institution of learning, the more aristocratic its intake. The sons of members of managerial grades and of the liberal professions account for 57 per cent of students at the École Polytechnique, 54 per cent of those at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (noted for its 'democratic' intake), 47 per cent of those at the Ecole Normale and 44 per cent of those at the Institut d'Études Politiques.

However, simply stating the fact of educational inequality is not enough. We need a description of the objective processes which continually exclude children from the least privileged social classes. Indeed, it seems that a sociological explanation

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can account for the unequal achievement usually imputed to unequal ability. For the most part, the effects of cultural privilege are only observed in their crudest forms—a good word put in, the right contacts, help with studies, extra teaching, information on the educational system and job outlets. In fact, each family transmits to its children, indirectly rather than directly, a certain *cultural capital* and a certain *ethos*. The latter is a system of implicit and deeply interiorized values which, among other things, helps to define attitudes towards the cultural capital and educational institutions. The cultural heritage, which differs from both points of view according to social class, is the cause of the initial inequality of children when faced with examinations and tests, and hence of unequal achievement.

CHOICE OF OPTIONS

The attitudes of the members of the various social classes, both parents and children, and in particular their attitudes towards school, the culture of the school and the type of future the various types of studies lead to, are largely an expression of the system of explicit or implied values which they have as a result of belonging to a given social class. The fact that different social classes send, despite equal attainment, a different proportion of their children to *lycées* is often explained by such vague terms as 'parental choice'. It is doubtful whether one can meaningfully use such expressions except metaphorically, as surveys have shown that 'in general there is a massive correlation between parental choice and options taken'—in other words, parental choice is in most cases determined by real possibilities.² In fact, everything happens as if parental attitudes towards their children's education—as shown in the choice of sending them either to a secondary school or leaving them in the upper classes of an elementary school, and of sending them to a *lycée* (and thus accepting the prospect of prolonged studies, at least, to the *baccalauréat*) or to a *college d'enseignement général* (and thus accepting a shorter period of education, until the *brevet*, for example)—were primarily the interiorization of the

fate objectively allotted (and statistically quantifiable) as a whole to the social category to which they belong. They are constantly reminded of their fate, by a direct or indirect intuitive grasp of the statistics of the failures or partial successes of children of the same kind, and also less directly, by the evaluation of the elementary school teacher who, in his role as a counsellor, consciously or unconsciously takes into account the social origin of his pupils and thus, unwittingly and involuntarily, counterbalances the over-theoretical nature of a forecast based purely on performance. If members of the lower middle and working classes take reality as being equivalent to their wishes, it is because, in this area as elsewhere, aspirations and demands are defined in both form and content by objective conditions which exclude the possibility of hoping for the unobtainable. When they say, for example, that classical studies in a *lycée* are not for them, they are saying much more than that they cannot afford them. The formula, which is an expression of internalized necessity, is, we might say, in the imperative indicative as it expresses both an impossibility and a taboo.

The same objective conditions as those which determine parental attitudes and dominate the major choices in the school career of the child also govern the children's attitude to the same choices and, consequently, their whole attitude towards school, to such an extent that parents, to explain their decision not to let the child go to secondary school, can offer as a close runner-up to the cost of study the child's wish to leave school. But, at a deeper level, as the reasonable wish to get on through education will not materialize as long as the real chances of success are slim, and although working-class people may well be unaware of their children's 2 in 100 chance of getting to university, their behaviour is based on an empirical evaluation of the real hopes common to all individuals in their social group. Thus, it is understandable that the lower middle class—a transitional class—lays more emphasis on educational values as the school offers them reasonable chances of achieving all they want by mixing the values of social success and cultural prestige. In comparison with working-class children, who are doubly disadvantaged as

regards faculties for assimilating culture and the propensity to acquire it, middle-class children receive from their parents not only encouragement and exhortation with regard to their school work but also an ethos of 'getting on' in society and an ambition to do the same at and by means of school, which enables their keen desire for the possession of culture to compensate for cultural poverty. It also seems that the same self-denying ethos of social mobility which gives rise to the prevalence of small families in certain sections of the lower middle classes also underlies their attitude towards the school.³

In the most fertile social groups, such as agricultural workers, farmers and factory workers, the chances of going into the *sixième* decrease clearly and regularly as a further unit is added to the family, but they fall drastically for less fertile groups such as artisans, small tradesmen, clerks and lower salaried personnel in families of four and five children (or more)—i.e. in families distinguished from others in the group by their high fertility—so that instead of seeing in the number of children the causal explanation of the sharp drop in the percentage of children attending school, we should perhaps suppose that the desire to limit the number of births and to give the children a secondary education is a sign, in groups where *both* these traits are noted, of the same inclination to make sacrifices.⁴

In general, children and their families make their own choices by reference to the constraints which determine them. Even when the choices seem to them to follow simply from taste or vocational sense, they nevertheless indicate the roundabout effects of objective conditions. In other words, the structure of the objective chances of social mobility and, more precisely, of the chances of a social mobility by means of education conditions attitudes to school (and it is precisely these attitudes which are most important in defining the chances of access to education, of accepting the values of norms of the school and of succeeding within the framework and thus rising in society) through subjective hopes (shared by all individuals defined by the same objective future, and reinforced by the group's pressure for conformity), which are no

more than objective chances intuitively perceived and gradually internalized.⁵

A description of the logic of the process of internalization, at the end of which objective chances have become subjective hopes or lack of hope, would seem necessary. Can that fundamental dimension of class ethos, the attitude to the objective future, be in fact anything but the internalization of the objective future course of events which is gradually brought home to and imposed on every member of a given class by means of the experience of successes and failures? Psychologists have observed that the level of aspiration of individuals is essentially determined by reference to the probability (judged intuitively by means of previous successes or failures) of achieving the desired goal.

'A successful individual', writes Lewin, 'typically sets his next goal somewhat, but not too much, above his last achievement. In this way he steadily raises his level of aspiration. . . . The unsuccessful individual on the other hand, tends to show one of two reactions: he sets his goal very low, frequently below his past achievement . . . or he sets his goal far above his ability.'⁶ It is quite clear that a circular process occurs: 'If the standards of a group are low an individual will slacken his efforts and set his goals far below those he could reach. He will, on the other hand, raise his goals if the group standards are raised.'⁷ If we also accept that ' . . . both the ideals and the action of an individual depend on the group to which he belongs and upon the goals and expectation of that group',⁸ it can be seen that the influence of peer groups—which is always relatively homogeneous from the point of view of social origin as, for example, the number of children going to *collèges d'enseignement général*, *collèges d'enseignement technique* and *lycées* (and, within these, their spread through the various types of education offered by each) is very much a function of the social class of the children—reinforces, among the least privileged children, the influence of the family milieu and the general social environment, which tend to discourage ambitions seen as excessive and always somewhat suspect in that they imply rejection of the individual's social origins. Thus, everything conspires to bring back those who, as

we say, 'have no future' to 'reasonable' hopes (or 'realistic' ones, as Lewin calls them) and in fact, in many cases, to make them give up hope.

The cultural capital and the ethos, as they take shape, combine to determine behaviour in school and the attitude to school which make up the differential principle of elimination operating for children of different social classes. Although success at school, directly linked to the cultural capital transmitted by the family milieu, plays a part in the choice of options taken up, it seems that the major determinant of study is the family attitude to the school which is itself, as we have seen, a function of the objective hopes of success at school which define each social category. M. Paul Clerc has shown that, although both scholastic attainment and the rate of entry into the *lycée* depend closely on social class, the overall inequality in the rate of entry to the *lycée* depends more on the inequality in the proportion of those of equal attainment who enter the *lycée* rather than on inequality of attainment itself.⁹

That means in fact that the handicaps are *cumulative*, as children from the lower and middle classes who overall achieve a lower success rate must be more successful for their family and their teachers to consider encouraging further study. The same method of double selection also comes into operation with the age criterion: children from peasant and working-class homes, usually older than children from more privileged homes, are more severely eliminated, at an equal age, than children from the latter. In short, the general principle which leads to the excessive elimination of working- and middle-class children can be expressed thus: the children of these classes, who because of a lack of cultural capital have less chance than others of exceptional success, are nevertheless expected to achieve exceptional success to reach secondary education. But the process of double selection becomes increasingly important as one rises to the higher levels of secondary establishments and ascends the socially selective hierarchy of subject departments within them. There, once again, given equal achievement, the children of privileged classes go more often than others to both the *lycée* and the classics side of the *lycée*, the children of underprivileged strata

mostly having to pay for their entry to the *lycée* by relegation to a *college d'enseignement général*, while the children of well-to-do classes, who are not clever enough to go to a *lycée*, can find a suitable alternative in a private school.

It will be seen that here too advantages and disadvantages are cumulative, because the initial choices of school and subject department determine the school future irreversibly. Indeed, one survey has shown that results obtained by arts students over a series of exercises aimed at measuring the comprehension and manipulation of language and in particular of the language of education were directly related to the type of secondary establishment attended and to knowledge of Greek and Latin. Choices made when entering the *lycée* thus close the options once and for all so that the child's part of the cultural heritage is determined by his previous school career. In fact, such choices, which are a commitment of a whole future, are taken with reference to varying images of that future. Thirty-one per cent of the parents of children at *lycées* want their children to go on to higher education, 27 per cent to the *baccalauréat*, with only a tiny proportion of them wanting the children to proceed to a technical diploma (4 per cent) or BEPC (2 per cent): 27 per cent of parents of children at *collèges d'enseignement général* on the other hand want to see them obtain a technical or professional diploma, 15 per cent the BEPC, 14 per cent the *baccalauréat* and 7 per cent to go on to higher education.¹⁰

Thus, overall statistics which show an increase in the percentage of children attending secondary school hide the fact that lower class children are obliged to pay for access to this form of education by means of a considerable diminution in the area of their choices for the future.

The systematic figures which still separate, at the end of their school career, students from different social milieux owe both their form and their nature to the fact that the selection that they have undergone is not equally severe for all, and that *social* advantages or disadvantages have gradually been transformed into *educational* advantages and disadvantages as a result of premature choices which, directly linked with social origin, have duplicated

and reinforced their influence. Although the school's compensating action in subjects directly taught explains at least to some extent the fact that the advantage of upper class students is increasingly obvious as the areas of culture directly taught and completely controlled by the school are left behind, only the effect of compensation combined with over-selection can explain the fact that for a behavioural skill such as the scholastic use of scholastic language, the differences tend to lessen to an overwhelming extent and even to be inverted, since highly selected students from the lower classes obtain results equivalent to those of the higher social classes who have been less vigorously selected and better than those of the middle classes, who are also penalized by the linguistic atmosphere of their families, but are also less rigorously selected.¹¹

Similarly, all the characteristics of a school career, in terms of schools attended or subjects taken, are indices of the direct influence of the family milieu, which they reflect within the logic of the scholastic system proper. For example, if greater mastery of language is always encountered, in our present state of pedagogical traditions and techniques among arts students who have studied classical languages, this is because pursuit of a classical education is the medium through which other influences are exerted and expressed, such as parental information on subjects of study and careers, success in the first stages of a school career, or the advantage conferred by entry into those classes in which the system recognizes its élite.

In seeking to grasp the logic by which the transformation of the social heritage into a scholastic heritage operates in different class situations, one would observe that the choice of subjects or school and the results obtained in the first year of secondary education (which themselves are linked to these choices) condition the use which children from different milieux can make of their heritage, be it positive or negative. It would no doubt be imprudent to claim to be able to isolate, in the system of relations we call school careers, determining factors and, *a fortiori*, a single predominant factor. But, if success at the highest level of a school career is still very closely connected to the very earliest stages

of that career, it is also true that very early choices have a great effect on the chances of getting into a given branch of higher education and succeeding in it. In short, crucial decisions have been taken at a very early stage.

The Functioning of the School and Its Role as a Socially Conservative Force

It will be easy—perhaps too easy—to accept what has been said so far. To stop there, however, would mean not questioning the responsibility of the school in the perpetuation of social inequalities. If that question is seldom raised, it is because the Jacobin ideology which inspires most of the criticism levelled at the university system does not really take inequality with regard to the school system into account, because of its attachment to a formal definition of educational equity. If, however, one takes socially conditioned inequalities with regard to schools and education seriously, one is obliged to conclude that the *formal* equity, which the whole education system is subject to, is in reality unjust and that in any society which claims to have democratic ideals it protects privileges themselves rather than their open transmission.

In fact, to penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its *de facto* sanction to initial cultural inequalities. The formal equality which governs pedagogical practice is in fact a cloak for and a justification of indifference to the real inequalities with regard to the body of knowledge taught or rather demanded. Thus, for example, the 'pedagogy' used in secondary or higher education is, objectively, an 'arousing pedagogy', in Weber's words, aimed at stimulating the 'gifts' hidden in certain exceptional individuals by means of certain incantatory techniques, such as the verbal skills

and powers of the teacher. As opposed to a rational and really universal pedagogy, which would take nothing for granted initially, would not count as acquired what some, and only some, of the pupils in question had inherited, would do all things for all and would be organized with the explicit aim of providing all with the means of *acquiring* that which, although apparently a natural gift, is only *given* to the children of the educated classes, our own pedagogical tradition is in fact, despite external appearances of irreproachable equality and universality, only there for the benefit of pupils who are in the *particular position* of possessing a cultural heritage conforming to that demanded by the school. Not only does it exclude any questions as to the most effective methods of transmitting to all the knowledge and the know-how which it demands of all and which different social classes transmit very unequally; it also tends to disparage as ‘elementary’ (with undertones of ‘vulgar’) and paradoxically, as ‘pedantic’, pedagogical methods with such aims. It is not by chance that higher elementary education, when it was in competition with the *lycée* in its traditional form, unsettled working-class pupils less and attracted the scorn of the elite precisely because it *was* more explicitly and technically methodical. We have here two concepts of culture and of the techniques of transmitting it which, in the form of corporate interests, are still visible in the clash between teachers emerging from the elementary schools and those following the more traditional route through the secondary system.¹² We should also have to examine the role played for teachers by the pious horror of cramming for examinations as opposed to ‘general education’. Cramming is not an absolute evil when it consists simply of realizing that pupils are being prepared for an examination and of making them aware of this. The disparagement of examination techniques is merely the corollary of the exaltation of intellectual prowess which is structurally akin to the values of culturally privileged groups. Those who have by right the necessary *manner* are always likely to dismiss as laborious and laboriously acquired values which are only of any worth when they are innate.

Teachers are the products of a system whose aim is to transmit an aristocratic culture, and are likely to adopt its values with greater ardour in proportion to the degree to which they owe it their own academic and social success. How indeed could they avoid unconsciously bringing into play the values of the milieu from which they come, or to which they now belong, when teaching and assessing their pupils? Thus, in higher education, the working- or lower middle-class student will be judged according to the scale of values of the educated classes which many teachers owe to their social origin and which they willingly adopt, particularly, perhaps, when their membership of the elite dates from their entry into the teaching profession. As soon as the lower middle-class ethos is judged from the point of view of the ethos of the elite, and measured against the dilettantism of the well-born and well-educated man, the scale of values is reversed and, by means of a change of sign, application becomes pedantry and a respect for hard work grinding, limited pettiness, with the implication that it is intended to compensate for a lack of natural talents. On the other hand, of course, the dilettantism of students from privileged social classes, which is apparent in many aspects of their behaviour and in the very style of their relationship with a culture which they never owe exclusively to school, corresponds to what—often unconsciously—is expected of them by their teachers and even more by the objective and explicit demands of the school. Even minor signs of social status such as ‘correct’ dress and bearing and the style of speech and accent are minor class signs and—again most often without their knowledge—help to shape the judgement of their teachers.¹³ The teacher who, while appearing to make judgements on ‘innate gifts’, is in fact measuring by reference to the ethos of the cultivated elite conduct based on a self-sacrificing ethos of hard and painstaking work is setting one type of relationship to culture against another, and all children are born into one or the other. The culture of the elite is so near to that of the school that children from the lower middle class (and *a fortiori* from the agricultural and industrial working class) can only acquire with great effort something which is *given* to the children of the

cultivated classes—style, taste, wit—in short, those attitudes and aptitudes which seem natural in members of the cultivated classes and naturally expected of them precisely because (in the ethnological sense) they are the *culture* of that class. Children from the lower middle classes, as they receive nothing from their family of any use to them in their academic activities except a sort of undefined enthusiasm to acquire culture, are obliged to expect and receive everything from school, even if it means accepting the school's criticism of them as 'plodders'.

What the education system both hands on and demands is an aristocratic culture and, above all, an aristocratic relationship with it.¹⁴ This is particularly clear in the relationship of teachers to language. Moving to and fro between charismatic use of the word as a lofty incantation whose function is to create in the pupil a suitable receptivity to grace, and a traditional use of university language as the consecrated vehicle of a consecrated culture, teachers assume that they already share a common language and set of values with their pupils, but this is only so when the system is dealing with its own heirs. By acting as if the language of teaching, full of allusions and shared understanding, was 'natural' for 'intelligent' and 'gifted' pupils, teachers need not trouble to make any technical checks on their handling of language and the students' understanding of it, and can also see as strictly fair academic judgements which in fact perpetuate cultural privilege. As language is the most important part of the cultural heritage because, as syntax, it provides a system of transposable mental postures which themselves completely reflect and dominate the whole of experience, and as the gap between university language and that spoken in fact by the different social classes varies greatly, it is impossible to have pupils with equal rights and duties towards university language and use of language without being obliged to hold the gift responsible for a number of inequalities which are primarily social. Apart from a lexis and a syntax, each individual inherits from his milieu a certain attitude towards words and their use which prepares him, to a greater or lesser extent, for the scholastic games which are still to some extent, in the French tradition of literary

studies, games with words. This relationship with words, whether reverent or emancipated, assumed or familiar, thrifty or extravagant, is never more obvious than in oral examinations, and teachers consciously or unconsciously distinguish between 'natural' ease of expression composed of fluency and elegant lack of constraint, and 'forced' ease, common among lower middle- and working-class students, which reflects the effort to conform, at the price of not getting quite the right note, to the norms of university discourse, indicating some anxiety to impress, and too evidently an attempt to create the right impression to be free of all taint of self-seeking vulgarity. In short, the teachers' *certitudo sui*, which is never more clearly seen than in the high eloquence of a lecture, is based on class ethnocentrism which authorizes both a given usage of academic language and a certain attitude to the use which students make of language in general and of academic language in particular.

Thus, implicit in these relationships with language, there can be seen the whole significance allotted by the educated classes to learned culture and the institution responsible for transmitting it—the latent functions which they give to educational institutions, i.e. the task of organizing the cult of a culture which can be offered to all because in fact it is reserved for the members of the class whose culture it is, the hierarchy of intellectual values which gives the impressive manipulators of words and ideas a higher rank than the humble servants of techniques, and the inner logic of a system whose *objective* function is to *preserve* the values which are the basis of the social order. More deeply, it is because traditional education is objectively addressed to those who have obtained from their social milieu the linguistic and cultural capital that it *objectively* demands that it cannot openly declare its demands and feel itself obliged to give everyone the means of meeting them. Like common law, the university tradition merely specified infringements and punishments without ever openly stating the principles underlying them. Thus, to take examinations as an example, it is quite clear that the more vaguely what they ask for is defined, whether it be a question of knowledge or of presentation, and the

less specific the criteria adopted by the examiners, the more they favour the privileged. Thus, the nearer written examinations come to the more traditional kind of 'literary' exercise, the more they favour the exhibition of imponderable qualities in style, syntax of ideas or knowledge marshalled, the *dessertatio de omni re scribili* which dominates the great *concours* in literary subjects (and still plays an important part in scientific ones), the more clearly they divide candidates of differing social classes. In the same way, the 'inheritors' are more favoured in oral examinations than in written ones, particularly when the oral becomes *explicitly* the test of distinguished and cultivated manners which it always *implicitly* is.¹⁵ It is quite clear that such a system can only work perfectly as long as it can recruit and select students capable of satisfying its objective demands, that is as long as it can be directed towards individuals possessing a cultural capital (and able to make it pay off) which it presupposes and endorses without openly demanding it or transmitting it methodically. The only test to which it can really be put is not, it is clear, that of numbers, but that of the *quality* of students. 'Mass education', about which we talk so much nowadays, is the opposite of both education reserved for a small number of inheritors of the culture demanded by the school and of education reserved for any small number of students of any *kind whatever*.

In fact, the system can take in an increasingly large number of pupils, as happened during the first half of this century, without having to change profoundly, provided that the newcomers are also in possession of the socially acquired aptitudes which the school traditionally demands.

On the other hand, it is bound to experience crises (which it will describe as 'a lowering of standards') when it takes in an increasingly large number of pupils who have not acquired the same mastery as their predecessors of the cultural heritage of their social class (as happens when there is a continuous increase in the percentage of children undergoing secondary and higher education from the classes which have traditionally enjoyed it, if there is a similar drop in the rate of selection)

or who, coming from culturally underprivileged classes, have no cultural heritage. A number of changes now taking place within the education system can be ascribed to determining factors which can properly be described as *morphological*. It is therefore clear that they affect nothing essential, and that there is very little question, either in programmes of reform or in the demands of teachers and students, of anything affecting specifically the traditional system of education or its working. It is true that enlarging the social basis of recruitment to the *sixième* would no doubt be a decisive test entailing very probably major changes in the functioning of the system in its most specific form, if the segregation of children according to the hierarchy of types of schools and 'sides' (ranging from the *colleges d'enseignement général* or the *collèges d'enseignement technique* to the classical 'sides' of the *lycées*) did not afford the system a protection tailored to its own inner logic, in that lower-class children, who do not bring to their school work either the keenness to learn of lower middle-class children or the cultural capital of upper-class children, take refuge in a kind of negative withdrawal which upsets teachers and is expressed in forms of disorder previously unknown. It is of course obvious that in such cases it is enough to let matters take their own course to bring crude social handicaps into play and for everything to return to normal. To meet this challenge in a really effective way, the education system should have at its disposal the means to carry out systematic and widespread educational priority programmes of the kind that it can dispense with as long as it is aimed at children from the privileged classes.¹⁶

It would therefore be ingenuous to expect that, from the very way of working of a system which itself defines its methods of recruitment by imposing demands which are all the more effective for being implicit, there should arise the contradictions capable of determining a basic change in the logic of its own working and of preventing the institution responsible for the conservation and transmission of culture from carrying out its task of social conservation. By giving individuals educational aspirations strictly tailored to their position

in the social hierarchy, and by operating a selection procedure which, although apparently formally equitable, endorses real inequalities, schools help both to perpetuate and legitimize inequalities. By awarding allegedly impartial qualifications (which are also largely accepted as such) for socially conditioned aptitudes which it treats as unequal ‘gifts’, it transforms *de facto* inequalities into *de jure* ones and *economic and social* differences into *distinctions of quality*, and legitimates the transmission of the cultural heritage. In doing so, it is performing a confidence trick. Apart from enabling the elite to justify being what it is, the *ideology of giftedness*, the cornerstone of the whole educational and social system, helps to enclose the underprivileged classes in the roles which society has given them by making them see as natural inability things which are only a result of an inferior social status, and by persuading them that they owe their social fate (which is increasingly tied to their educational fate as society becomes more rationalized) to their individual nature and their lack of gifts. The exceptional success of those few individuals who escape the collective fate of their class apparently justify educational selection and give credence to the myth of the school as a liberating force among those who have been eliminated, by giving the impression that success is exclusively a matter of gifts and work. Finally those whom the system has ‘liberated’—teachers in elementary, secondary and higher education—put their faith in *l’école libératrice* at the service of the school which is in truth a conservative force which owes part of its power of conservation to that myth. Thus by its own logic, the educational system can help to perpetuate cultural privileges without those who are privileged having to use it. By giving cultural inequalities an endorsement which formally at least is in keeping with democratic ideals, it provides the best justification for these inequalities.

At the end of *The Republic*, Plato describes how souls about to start another life had to make their own choice of lots among patterns of lives, all possible animal and human lives, and how, once the choice was made, they had to drink the water of

the River of Forgetfulness before returning to the earth. The theodicy Plato’s myth assumes devolves, in our societies, on university and school examiners. But we can quote Plato further,

Then a prophet first marshalled them in order, and then taking lots and patterns of lives from the lap of Lachesis, mounted upon a high pulpit and spoke: ‘The word of the daughter of Necessity, maid Lachesis. Souls of a day, here beginneth another circle that bears the mortal race to death. The angel will not cast lots for you, but you shall choose your angel. Let him whose lot falls first have first choice of a life to which he shall be bound by Necessity . . . The responsibility is on him that chooseth. There is none on God.’¹⁷

In order to change fate into the choice of freedom, the school, the prophet of Necessity, need only succeed in convincing individuals to rely on its judgement and persuading them that they themselves have chosen the fate that was already reserved for them. From that point there is no questioning the divinity of society. We could consider Plato’s myth of the initial choice of lots with that proposed by Campanella in *La Città del Sole*: to set up immediately a situation of perfect mobility and to ensure the complete independence of the position of fathers and sons, only one thing is necessary—the separation of children from their parents at birth.¹⁸

Statisticians are in fact implicitly invoking the myth of perfect mobility when they refer the empirically observed situation to a situation of total independence between the social position of inheritors and that of parents. We should no doubt allow a critical role to this myth and the clues it enables us to create, as they help to expose the gap between democratic ideals and social reality. But even the most cursory examination would make it clear that considering these abstractions presupposes ignorance of the social costs and of the conditions in which a high degree of mobility would be possible.¹⁹

But is not the best way of judging to what extent the reality of a 'democratic' society conforms to its ideals to measure chances of entering the institutionalized instruments of social elevation and cultural salvation open to individuals of different social classes?²⁰ If so we are then led

to the conclusion that a society which allows the most privileged social classes to monopolize educational institutions—which, as Max Weber would say, hold a monopoly of the manipulation of cultural goods and the institutional signs of cultural salvation—is rigid in the extreme.

Notes

1. Cf. P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron, *Les Héritiers* (Editions de Minuit, 1964), pp. 14–21.
2. Correlation frequently occurs between the wishes expressed by parents with children finishing the *cours moyen*, opinions given later on the choice of a particular school, and the real choice. 'By no means all parents want their children to go to lycée. . . . Only 30 per cent of parents with children in *collèges d'enseignement général* or *fin d'études* say yes, whatever the previous achievement of the child may have been', P. Clerc, 'La famille et l'orientation scolaire au niveau de la sixième. Enquête de juin 1963 dans l'agglomération Parisienne', *Population*, 4 (August–September 1964), pp. 635–636.
3. Cf. P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, 'La fin d'un mathusianisme' in Darras, *Le Partage des bénéfiques* (Editions de Minuit, 1966) (*Le Sens Commun*).
4. Analysing the differential influence (exerted by the dimension of the family in various milieux) on the access to secondary education, A. Girard and H. Bastide write, 'Although two-thirds of the children of officeworkers and skilled craftsmen and traders go into the lycées, the proportion is highest in the smallest families (i.e. of one or two children). With these groups, however, children from large families (i.e. of four or more) do not enter the lycée in greater numbers than those of families of factory workers having only one or two brothers and sisters', A. Girard and H. Bastide, 'La stratification sociale et la démocratisation de l'enseignement', *Population* (July–September 1963), p. 458.
5. There is a presupposition in this system of explanation by means of the common perception of objective and collective chances that the advantages or disadvantages perceived are the functional equivalent of the advantages or disadvantages really experienced or objectively verified in that they influence behaviour in the same way. This does not imply that we underestimate the importance of objective chances. In fact, every scientific observation, in very different social and cultural situations, has tended to show that there is a close correlation between *subjective hopes* and *objective chances*, the latter tending to effectively modify attitudes and behaviour by working through the former (cf. P. Bourdieu, *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (Mouton, 1962), part 2, pp. 36–8; Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Oulir, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1960); Clarence Schrag, 'Delinquency and opportunity: Analysis of a theory', *Sociology and Social Research*, 46 (January 1962), pp. 167–175.

6. Kurt Lewin, 'Time, perspective and morale' in *Resolving Social Conflicts* (New York, 1948), p. 113.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
9. P.Clerc, *op.cit.* p. 646.
10. It is probably by reference to a *social definition* of a reasonably obtainable diploma that individual career projects and hence attitudes to school are determined. This social definition clearly varies from class to class: while, for many of the lower strata of the middle class, the *baccalauréat* still appears to be seen as the normal end of studies—as a result of cultural inertia and lack of information but also probably because office workers and the lower grades of supervisory personnel are more likely than others to experience the effectiveness of this barrier to promotion—it still appears more to the upper reaches of the middle classes and to the upper classes as a sort of entrance examination to higher education. This image of the scholastic career perhaps explains why a particularly large proportion of the sons of office workers and lower grades of salaried staff do not go on to study after the *baccalauréat*.
11. Cf. P.Bourdieu, J.C. Passeron and M.de Saint-Martin, *op. cit.* In order to have a complete measurement of the effect of the linguistic capital, it would be necessary to find out, by means of experimental studies similar to those carried out by Bernstein, whether there are any significant links between the syntax of the spoken language (e.g. its complexity) and success in fields other than that of literary studies (where the link has been shown)—for example, in mathematics.
12. See V.Isambert-Jamati, 'La rigidité d'une institution: structure scolaire et systèmes de valeur', *Revue française de sociologie*, 7 (1966), p. 306.
13. Similarly elementary school teachers, who have fully absorbed the values of the middle classes from which they increasingly come, always take into account the *ethical colouring* of conduct and attitudes towards teachers and disciplines when making judgements on their pupils.
14. At the heart of the most traditional definition of culture there lies no doubt the distinction between the contents of the culture (in the subjective sense of an interiorized objective culture) or, perhaps, *knowledge*, and the characteristic means of possessing that knowledge, which gives it its whole meaning and value. What the child received from an educated milieu is not only a *culture* (in the objective sense), but also a certain *style* of relationship to that culture, which derives precisely from *the manner of acquiring it*. An individual's relationship with cultural works (and the mode of all his cultural experiences) is thus more or less easy, brilliant, natural, difficult, arduous, dramatic or tense according to the conditions in which he acquired his culture, the osmosis of childhood in a family providing good conditions for an experience of familiarity (which is the source of the illusion of charisma) which schooling can never completely provide. It can be seen that by stressing the relationship with culture and setting great value on the most aristocratic style of relationship (ease, brilliance), schools favour the most privileged children.
15. The resistance of teachers to *docimology* and their even greater resistance to any attempt to rationalize testing (one has only

to think of the indignant protests at the use of closed questionnaires) are unconsciously based on the same aristocratic ethos as the rejection of all pedagogical science, even though a 'democratic' excuse for it is found in the ritual denunciation of the danger of technocracy.

16. Can the pressure of economic demand impose decisive changes? It is possible to imagine industrialized societies managing to meet the need for trained personnel without any major widening of the basis of recruitment from secondary and more particularly from higher education. If we use only criteria of cost, or rather, of formal rationality, it is perhaps preferable to recruit—in the face of all the claims of educational equality—from those classes whose social culture is the nearest to educational culture, and thus dispense with the need for any educational priority programme.
17. Plato, *The Republic*, Book 10, 617 (Everyman, 1942), p. 322.
18. Cf. Marie Skodak, 'Children in foster homes. A study of mental development' in *Studies in Child Welfare*, University of Iowa Studies, 16(1) (January 1939), pp. 1–56; B. Wellmar, 'The fickle IQ', *Sigma XI Quarterly*, 28(2) (1940), pp. 52–60.
19. Apart from the difficulty of obtaining a precise assessment of mobility, and the discussions on the point in the careers of father and son which should be taken to obtain a relevant comparison, mention should be made of the fact that, as Bendix and Lipset have pointed out, 'perfect mobility' (in the sense of completely equal chances of mobility) and 'maximum mobility' are not necessarily linked, and that a distinction should be made between forced and intentional 'rigidity' or 'mobility'.
20. We should also take into account the differential chances of social elevation given identical use of institutional means. We know that, at an equivalent level of instruction, individuals from different social classes reach varying levels in the social hierarchy.