

## FUNCTIONALIST ARGUMENTS IN GREEK EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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### RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur effectue une brève analyse des arguments issus du fonctionnalisme qui ont prévalu dans les milieux politiques grecs en matière d'éducation, pendant un siècle et demi. L'auteur rejette l'affirmation selon laquelle l'enseignement de la religion orthodoxe est intimement lié à la survie de la société grecque et à celle de la religion elle-même. Il estime que l'éducation possède une valeur intrinsèque, abstraction faite des buts et des fonctions qu'on lui assigne.

### ABSTRACT

This article attempts a concise analysis of different functionally oriented arguments which appear to have prevailed among Greek educational policy-makers over the last century and a half. Focusing on the specific claim made by Greek educational policy-makers regarding the alleged survivalist function of teaching the Greek Orthodox religion to all young Greeks (for the survival of Greek society as a whole and of the religion per se), the author categorically rejects the soundness and the relevance of such arguments. In the same context he argues for the intrinsic value of educational pursuits, since education "cannot be placed in the category of things that have purposes or functions."

In this paper I intend to examine the nature and validity of the argument "X is educationally valuable because it is necessary for the survival of society" by discussing the specific claim made by Greek educational policy makers who maintain: "We ought to initiate all young Greeks into the Greek orthodox religion because it is necessary for the survival of Greek society".(1)

Such grandiose and vague claims have been made by the Greek Orthodox Church and its champions and have been supported directly or indirectly by all the conservative

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parties that governed Greece until 1981. Educational practice has been following official educational policy faithfully since Greece's liberation from the Turks: all Greek children attending public or private schools, from K-12, are systematically indoctrinated into the beliefs of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Elsewhere I have discussed the nature of indoctrination and its detrimental consequences not only for education but also for the quality of social life.(2) Here I shall examine the soundness of the above claim which is an example of what social scientists have called "normative functionalism" - it not only purports to explain the indoctrinatory practices in Greek education, it also aims at justifying them. These indoctrinatory practices are sanctioned by the Greek Constitution which prescribes as one of the aims of Greek education "the development of national and religious conscience"(3) in all young Greeks.

The prevailing view among Greek educational policy makers has been that there are no values specific to education, that education is primarily a means for the survival of Greek society. Their reasoning is not unlike that of Emile Durkheim who claims that "Education is only the means by which society prepares, within the children, the essential conditions of its very existence....Education consists of a methodical socialization of the young." (4) He argues that education has varied according to the needs of different societies: it was one thing in ancient Athens, another in Rome and still different again in the Middle Ages. The different emphases were determined by the distinctive character and needs of these societies. "The Christian societies of the Middle Ages," Durkheim claims, "would not have been able to survive if they had given to free inquiry the place that we give it today. There are, then, ineluctable necessities which it is impossible to disregard. Of what use is it to imagine a kind of education that would be fatal for the society to put it into practice?"(5)

This is exactly the logic of the argument used by Greek educational policy makers. But is it clear and sound? First of all, the argument rests on a presupposition which begs the question; it assumes that society is a biological system or a self-organizing and self-regulating system. Furthermore, it assumes that human societies consist of creatures who are completely controlled by impersonal forces of which they are unaware and which they are incapable of altering. This predetermined organic view of society, which perhaps could be plausibly applied to simple,

homogeneous primitive groups is quite inappropriate when it is applied to such a diverse, flexible and rapidly changing society as modern Greece.

Another a priori assumption, which also begs the question, is the belief that cultural objects (institutions, roles, belief systems, etc.) are interdependent, working toward some kind of normative integration of the whole society. This assumption neglects both conflict and coercion which are present in every human society. It would be more reasonable to accept the view that societies are characterized by a considerable degree of institutional autonomy and that they do not require reciprocal interaction and reinforcement of these cultural objects in order to survive.

A third objection concerns the claim that all cultural objects do have a function. I shall say more about this claim later in the discussion of the nature and value of education.

A second set of objections concerns the nature of the alleged survival function of religion. It is by no means clear what people mean when they claim that religion is necessary for or contributes to the survival of society. In the long-standing debate on the survival value of the Greek Orthodox religion none of the proponents of religious instruction consider religion merely as a useful means for the achievement of a worthwhile end. Such an admission would denigrate religion to the levels of a socially useful myth -- a view shared by some opponents of religious instruction.

Some defenders of religious instruction in the public schools of Greece seem to maintain that religion is a good thing by itself and as well has unintended beneficial consequences for society: it reinforces a positive attitude towards life and a more cooperative attitude towards other people, it reduces anxiety, etc.

These latter claims are, of course, empirical and must be supported by adequate evidence. Even if such evidence were available, however, it would not be sufficient to justify the claims made by the proponents of religious instruction. They must also show that the alleged desirable attitudes religion is supposed to reinforce cannot be developed by other institutions in society, such as the family, various cultural institutions, the schools, etc. I have not seen a shred of evidence that supports either of these claims. Finally, as will be argued later, education implies knowledge and knowledge implies that

something is the case. To the extent that public schools are educational institutions they cannot teach something simply because it is considered by some edifying for society.

The majority of those who support religious instruction in the public schools of Greece claim that the Greek Orthodox religion has an essential, indispensable, or vital function within modern Greek society. Just as the lungs are necessary to keep an animal alive, in a similar way the Greek Orthodox religion is indispensable for the survival of modern Greek society. The enemies of religion, therefore, are the enemies of Greek society! There is a big problem, however, with this impressive claim that makes the Greek Orthodox religion definitional of modern Greek society; it is a tautology. As Bernard Williams put it: "It is tediously a necessary condition of the survival of a group - with-certain-values that the group should retain those values."(6) It is true but trivial that modern Greek society will not survive as a Greek Orthodox society if it abandons Orthodoxy. Durkheim's "ineluctable necessities" are redundant tautologies.

The only instances where functionalist arguments are appropriate are cases in which certain institutions, values, beliefs, customs, etc., are so inextricably connected with the whole fabric of society that any sudden or violent change, suspension, or suppression of them could have much greater consequences for the people than might have been expected. "Such propositions, if established, would of course be of first importance in deciding what to do; but they cannot take over the work of deciding what to do."(7) Since the Greek Orthodox religion is in no such danger today, functionalist arguments are irrelevant.

The third set of problems concerns the ambiguous phrase "survival of Greek society". It is not clear whether the claim is about the individuals who make up Greek society or the various institutions, traditions, norms of social behavior, etc., that one finds in Greek society. If it is about the survival of the individuals then the claim is unfounded, because, as is well known, people can survive under all sorts of social structures. One could argue further that certain beliefs, habits, traditions, etc., are serious obstacles to survival and should be abandoned for the sake of survival.(8) If, on the other hand, the claim is made about the existing institutions, etc., in modern Greek Society, then it is a hollow tautology that aims at preserving the power that the Greek Orthodox Church has within modern Greek society.

Finally, survival, simpliciter, is never the goal of societies, institutions, policies, or programs; it is always a certain quality of survival that people want to attain or maintain. The fundamental issue that must be addressed by educational policy makers is about the nature of values that are specific to education and the quality of life they imply for the individual and for society. The vague talk about survival evades that important issue and confuses our thinking, as do all deceptive educational slogans.

As was mentioned earlier, the assumption of the functionalists that all cultural objects have a function or functions is questionable. There is no question that human institutions, policies, actions, etc., regardless of the goals of their agents, may have unintended consequences. The functionalist assumptions that they do begs the question.

Human beings pursue a great number of activities, some for their intrinsic value (i.e., for their own sake) and others for their extrinsic value (i.e., as means for the achievement of other ends). Educational activities are those that are principally pursued for what is in them rather than for some external purpose. There are several arguments that support this point.

The first argument for the intrinsic value of educational pursuits comes from the way we talk about 'education' and 'training'. We say, for example, that a person can be trained "as a doctor", "for a job", or "in medicine". None of these prepositions, however, can be used with the word education; we cannot say "he was educated for a job", etc. One can acquire "on the job training" but not education.

The second point is that education is not an activity and therefore cannot be placed in the category of things that have purposes or functions. As R. S. Peters (9) observed some time ago, education suggests certain criteria of knowledge and value on the basis of which we judge activities, programs and institutions. It is sad that this important point has not been understood by many who continue to confuse education with schooling, socialization, indoctrination, etc.

Although grammatical rules can not settle philosophical disputes they are often significant signposts. What the logic of the words 'education' and 'training' suggests is what we all know, namely, that human beings do pursue certain activities for their own sake and others purely as means. It would indeed be a very depressing and unbearable truth if people pursued activities only for their instru-

mental value; for, in that case, human life would become eternal slavery without respite. Training without education is the new form of tyranny that threatens our world today. With education, however, training can become a power that can guarantee the preconditions of good life.

FOOTNOTES

1. For such claims see Alexis Demaras, 1 Metarrythmisi pou den Egin (The Reformation that never took place) Athens: Nea Elliniki Bibliothiki: vol. 1, 1973; vol. II, 1974. For a defense of religious indoctrination and the survival value of the Greek Orthodox religion see K. Gregoriades "i Ellinorthodoxi Martyria gia tin agoge ton neon mas", in Logos ke Praxis, vol. II, No. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 82-96 (especially p. 85). This essay is a long reply to an essay of mine that was published in the previous issue of the same journal.

2. See especially "Paideia, Dogmata ke Demokratia" in ANTI: A Bimonthly Political Review, Period B, No. 190 (16-29 October, 1981); "Educating, Socializing and Indoctrinating", Journal of Philosophy of Education, vol. 16, No. 2 (155-165); and "Is Religious Education Possible?" in the same journal vol. 17, No. 2.

3. The Constitution of Greece, Article 16, para. 2.

4. Education and Sociology, (New York: The Free Press, 1956), p. 71.

5. Ibid., p. 64. Italics added.

6. Bernard Williams, Morality: An Introduction (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), p. 21.

7. Ibid.

8. Arnold J. Toynbee, for example, argues in his book Change and Habit: The Challenge of our Time (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) that in order to survive in our nuclear age nations must abandon their habit of going to war in order to settle their differences, and the habit of giving paramount allegiance to some national fraction of the human race and not to mankind as a whole. Likewise, R. Buckminster Fuller argues that in order to survive today we must get used to thinking in terms of our

whole planet rather than national boundaries (Critical Path, Hutchinson).

9 See, for example, his essays "Arms of Education: A Conceptual Inquiry" in Peters (ed.) The Philosophy of Education (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), and "Education as Initiation" in R.D. Archambault (ed.) Philosophical Analysis and Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).