

# Citizenship and the Joy of Work

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This paper is part of a special issue focusing on key thinkers in the development of German vocational education in the early and mid-20th century. These are ideas that continue to be influential today. They provide an important philosophical and practical challenge to contemporary constructions of vocational education and training.

## Abstract

This article discusses the nature of vocational education and its relation to citizenship as put forward by Georg Kerschensteiner, Aloys Fischer and Eduard Spranger. The chief aim of the article is to respond sympathetically to views which many Anglophone readers may find unfamiliar, given the German context from which they arise. In particular, the article focuses on the nature of work and occupation and why this is important for developing citizenship. In order to aid understanding, the views of Hannah Arendt on the nature of work and labour are contrasted with those of the three authors. Finally, there is a brief discussion of the contents of the UK Government White Paper, *Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*.

## KEYWORDS

arendt, citizenship, occupation, skills, vocational, work

In order to appreciate the articles by Kerschensteiner (1908), Spranger (1958) and Fischer (1920), one needs to put aside, for the time being, one or two preconceptions that one might have, certainly in my case. For example, put to one side any notions that one might have concerning 'work'. Do not think of work as a dull necessity driven by economic need, or perhaps duty, but as having limited value in its own right. On the contrary, we are here being told that pretty much all work (and certainly any work connected with a profession or occupation) has its dignity, its place in developing moral integrity and a certain intrinsic value. Or again, do not think of the individual as having prime value in their own right for here we are told that the individual only realises their potential through service to the community. As President Kennedy so memorably put it in his inaugural address: 'ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country'—this sentiment oozes out of all three papers. And, finally, put to one side any notion that vocational education and training (VET) can be seen as essentially marginal in contrast to the more important educational activity in schools and universities in England. For these three thinkers (especially Kerschensteiner) take the view that VET needs to be made central to the educational endeavour for all children and students. Once one brackets

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off, so to speak, these three preconceptions, one can start to see what these thinkers are getting at and, maybe, what one might be able to learn from them.

After I had read these three papers, I decided to read as well the latest UK government offering on VET, the White Paper (January 2021): *Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*. In it is bemoaned, in several places, the fact that so many 'young people' take the university route rather than one of vocational training. But that merely reflects the current school experience of so many students—Kerschensteiner would not have been in the least surprised, in the light of that experience, that the university route is the one most preferred. And I think this 'bias', if I may call it that—I mean the bias in favour of 'pure' education rather than VET—is also reflected in the preoccupations of educational researchers and even in those of philosophers of education. When, just to take one example, was the last time that vocational education was discussed in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*? How many times over the past twenty years? Yet in England, at least, there is a growing awareness that vocational training is both disorganised and inadequate: Its reform has reached something approaching national urgency and importance. *Skills for Jobs* is an attempt to address this lamentable situation, and if one reads the three authors, one can see what the white paper has got right (and I am very pleased to see that the German system of VET is referred to more than once) but also what it is still getting wrong.

In this short commentary, I will leave further discussion of the White Paper until the end. In the meantime, I will try and show why it is worthwhile reading the three articles and attempt to bring out what I feel to be their leading ideas. I shall contrast the role that work plays in VET (especially for Kerschensteiner) with Hannah Arendt's view of the role of work, as I can reasonably assume that many readers will be familiar with her work. The contrast is quite striking and, indeed, amounts to a cogent critique of Arendt from within that Germanic culture they all shared. I shall also briefly discuss the role of VET in connection with *Bildung* because, taken together, the work of the authors amounts to a sustained critique of what one might term the 'pure Humanities/Science' conception of *Bildung*.

Finally, a small word of encouragement to those embarking on reading these papers. They are imbued with a certain intensity of philosophical idiom, steeped in German philosophy. This is not what anglophone readers normally expect from papers arising from a VET context. But the extra concentration and time needed to fully understand these papers will be worth it.

## CITIZENSHIP AND WORK

Kerschensteiner's concept of the aims of education is stated in a clear and uncompromising way: namely, 'to nurture serviceable, suitable and active members of communities' (Kerschensteiner, 1908). It is explained, in no uncertain terms, that this does not only involve living an acceptable, moral life. A private existence in which one looks only to the welfare of oneself and one's immediate family is not good enough. One must also 'grasp' the tasks of both the community and state and, further, 'have the will and strength to contribute to the solution of these tasks according to his abilities'. (Note that this piece was written in 1908.) Kerschensteiner goes on to say that currently (i.e., back in 1908), these aims are not reflected in the aims of education. Rather, education is seen in terms of knowledge formation through instruction rather than the 'formation of the will'. At this stage, I have to confess that all this sounds rather forbidding and excessively illiberal, to say the least. But a little later on, we are told that current German schooling neglects the 'technical, spiritual and moral advancement' of the child, which involves the development of 'constant reflection' and also 'the courage to become independent'. Kerschensteiner emphasises this trait in particular: 'to test independently, to think independently: that is the most important thing that a school can give a future citizen of the modern state'. So although the aims of education do indeed involve the development of individuals who can be of service to the state, this service is best given by individuals who are knowledgeable and can think for themselves, who are unafraid of failure and setbacks and have the self-confidence to speak out when needed.

This seems to me to be not so much an illiberal, authoritarian educational philosophy as rather suggesting a lesson that is sometimes needed in the anglophone world, namely, that 'liberalism' can take different forms and still be recognisably liberal. Liberalism does not have to take that familiar, anglophone form of the self-sovereign individual who

looks mainly to himself and regards the state with a pervading suspicion. Perhaps it is possible for free individuals of an independent cast of mind to regard themselves as citizens in the service of something bigger than themselves, with responsibilities to match. This, it seems to me, is the spirit that motivates Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer.

Kerschensteiner also has a great deal to say about work. In the article under consideration, he is particularly keen to put forward a type of school that incorporates workshops on its premises so that pupils learn actual work skills at school itself. It is not my concern, here, to endorse this particular vision of schooling. But it is worthwhile considering what Kerschensteiner has to say about the role of work in the development—the formation—of the person. For there is no holding back here; there is a 'joy in work' such that 'only the person who is happy to work is capable of formation'. The joy of work is bound up with the experience of creating an artefact or producing a design that is the product of a person's struggles and repeated attempts to attend to the detail of the product whilst keeping in mind at all times its wider purpose. It is, essentially, a combination of attention to detail accompanied by a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved. And Kerschensteiner makes it clear that such work experience does not solely consist of creation, but it also requires a willingness to calculate the cost of the labour-time involved, the cost of the materials. And although he doesn't mention this, the work experience also has reference to the market for the product and customer expectations. The joy of work is the experience of creating something—an artefact, a service—that has a clear connection with the social and economic world of which the creator is a part. It is this social connectedness that work can bring about and which gives the individual the feeling that he or she actually counts for something. This is what, in Kerschensteiner's view, mere instruction and academic exercises lack, namely, a clear connection with the social world.

It should be noticed that the 'joy in work' is linked to the 'joy of belonging to an occupation'. For the joy that is mentioned is much less likely to happen if a person is merely undertaking a 'job'. What Kerschensteiner is talking about is an occupation (*Beruf*) that sustains persons throughout a lifetime and supplies them with that wider context of networks and connectedness that a mere job can never provide. Thus, the 'joy' referred to is not merely the pleasure of the activity of work but a certain satisfaction over a lifetime. At this point, it may be asked: What about dull, repetitive work? Where is the joy, exactly, in fruit-picking from dawn to dusk? Perhaps part of the answer lies in my son's experience of grape-picking in France a few years ago. It is true that the work was hard; but the farmer provided a decent lunch and a rest period in the afternoon plus a nice rustic meal in the evening, with beer and wine. There were days off, and the pickers built up a little community during the period they were there. Scarcely an 'occupation' you might argue, but at least the activity of grape-picking became a civilised pursuit. At its basis was the respect and welcome the farmer gave to his workers—and I think this is one of the things that Kerschensteiner is driving at when he speaks of the joy of work. I read him as providing an implied critique of his own society: that an over-reliance on cheap labour undertaking repetitive, mindless work is a poor reflection of that society. The argument that cheap labour is an economic necessity is precisely what he wishes to contest, it seems to me. One could even go further and say that for all the authors, vocational development is one way—perhaps the key way—of a society pulling itself up by its own bootstraps so that meaningful work in the sense outlined becomes *more* economically viable than cheap labour.

## HANNAH ARENDT'S CRITIQUE OF WORK AND HOMO FABER

In 1958, Hannah Arendt published her *magnum opus*, *The Human Condition*. In it, Arendt famously drew a distinction between action and work. The former requires a public realm in which humans discuss and debate, through speech, those matters of public concern. For example, the issue of slavery in 18th-century England was the focus of political action, whether this was in the form of Parliamentary debates or in the organisation of petitions. One could say that for us, today, the issue of whether statues of slavers (or, for that matter, of Confederate generals) should be removed is similarly the focus of 'action'. Through action, we try to influence others and (in varying degrees) proclaim that others may influence ourselves. And although actions always have a specific focus, Arendt emphasises that they are unpredictable in their consequences. This, at least, was the achievement of those in Bristol who tipped the statue of

Edward Colston into the harbour. Their consequences are unpredictable because we cannot know in advance how actions might be interpreted and how these interpretations are interpreted and so on.

By contrast, the activity of 'work', Arendt tells us, has definite aims and predictable consequences (Arendt, 1958, p. 144). That is its whole point. Although Arendt speaks chiefly of work in terms of artefacts, I do not think that extending this to include 'services' undermines her point. She goes on to suggest that the only *public* space work needs is the marketplace in which products can be bought and sold. Whether it is the bazaar in a realm of oriental despotism or the San Francisco farmer's market, producers and sellers can come together. But unlike the political space governed by action, in the marketplace, the outcome is entirely predictable: Goods are bought and sold, and the only item of interest, apart from their quality, is their price. Arendt observes (p. 159) that in antiquity (she is thinking of ancient Athens in particular) the doings of *homo faber*, although indispensable for producing both the necessities and the luxuries of social life, were not a fit subject for discussion in the public space, the *agora*. For the great invention of the Greeks was this invention of public space, the scene for action and they did not want (according to Arendt) this space sullied by talk of work. By contrast, in the modern age, public space is filled with talk of work; it consumes most of us for the whole of our lives, whether in producing or consuming what others have produced for us. Yet it is *action* that is truly emblematic of the human being because only human beings (according to Arendt) can initiate events of their own accord, events that did not exist before, and only humans are capable of addressing the unforeseen consequences of what action brings about.

Arendt thinks that the modern emphasis on the importance of work has many baleful consequences. The chief of these arises from the way in which work produces use values through a means–end process of instrumentality; this becomes embedded in both individual and public mentalities. This results in the 'limitless instrumentalisation of everything that exists' (p. 157). Action becomes impossible because its value can only be articulated in terms of how it serves some human end (welfare and security), which itself is articulated along a means–end axis. Thus, from an Arendtian standpoint, Kerschensteiner's emphasis on the role of work in education merely introduces, at an early stage, an instrumentalism for children and young adults. There is no escape from it: Even young teenagers who should have better things to do in their lives are obliged to absorb the glories of instrumentalisation, through compulsory work classes. Put thus, it sounds quite horrific. Such is the charge against Kerschensteiner.

What can be said in reply to Arendt? One line of defence is not, I feel, very productive, though I am sure many are tempted by it. This would assert that Arendt has no business in impugning the legitimate activities of the vast majority of the population for whom work can indeed be a joy and, where it is not, is still regarded as having value. Indeed it has considerably greater value than 'action', which does not produce anything worthwhile except, as the saying goes, 'piss and wind'. Moreover, only those with well-cushioned work can ever have the time to indulge in 'action'. There is, according to this defence, more than a whiff of elitism in Arendt's analysis, an elitism that has its roots in Plato and Aristotle. We moderns have thankfully moved beyond the preoccupations of antiquity.

But the reason why this line of defence is not very productive is that the argument from elitism fails to address (as such arguments usually do) the specific charges that are adumbrated. In this case, hurling charges of elitism at Arendt merely proves her point: that instrumentalism has such a grip on our mentalities we take criticism of it as some kind of personal offence.

However, I think that Kerschensteiner's position offers a more substantive basis of answering Arendt. For whereas Arendt conceives of the act of making as a discrete activity, in terms of the relation between the worker and the artefact that is brought into being, he sees work in terms of an *occupation*, as we have noted. This enables vocational education to focus not only on technical knowledge and relevant underpinning theoretical knowledge but also on the role that an occupation plays within a society, including the history and traditions of that occupation and the way that it has evolved, partly in response to a changing technical environment but also in response to a changing societal environment. The key to this kind of learning is that the learner or trainee is expressing himself/herself through the activity of work in terms of the lived experience of an occupation. Whereas mere 'instruction' keeps the learner at one remove from the subject matter, in this case the subject matter is worked on (both mentally and physically), experienced, reflected on, planned through and discussed so that the learning always has a social content and is never

merely the kind of private activity that Arendt suggests. As noted above, she thinks that producers only come together in the marketplace for exchange purposes; but from Kerschensteiner's perspective, this is a misunderstanding of how learning within an occupational setting actually goes on. Her failure to see that the *homo faber* exists as part of an occupation leads her to assume that the life of the worker is more restricted than it is, or at least, than it can be potentially. As Kerschensteiner puts it:

For the history of a profession is inextricably linked to the history of mankind, and it leads from the simplest economic conditions of the past, through the whole history of crafts, into the complex economic and social conditions of the present, which students learn to understand more easily in this historical manner than in any other. In this way the boy learns about his and his occupation's true interests, their conflict with the interests of other people and other occupations, the manner and possibility of their satisfaction within the interest of the community or state association. (Kerschensteiner, 1908)

It should be added that the employer also plays a civic role in terms of the training of an apprentice because the former assumes the responsibility for the 'formation' of an apprentice: This is not left only to the instructor in the vocational college. In this sense, both the employer and the instructor assume a co-responsibility for the technical, personal and civic development of the trainee, based on his/her initiation into a profession or occupation.

This civic dimension of vocational education enables the term 'education' to be used as well as that of 'training'. For it is indeed the case that the learner has to be 'trained' in terms of being able to perform certain tasks and procedures that become 'second nature', whether it is the painting trainee who must learn how to 'prep' surfaces before applying the paintbrush or the computer programmer who is trained in the techniques of testing code. 'Training' and 'education', therefore, are not activities to be set against one another. Training is never just 'mere' training; it is just one of the key ingredients for the apprentice to become fully educated. (The German term is *Berufsausbildung*, which conveys a sense of 'occupational development'—the 'upbuilding' of the person—and it is Kerschensteiner's claim that this 'upbuilding' is possible in a vocational setting). The reason is that there is a link between training, being educated into an occupation, and citizenship. For only the person who can contribute to a society in an effective and productive way can be a true citizen of that society because it is through his occupation that she serves others and not just herself.

It is, perhaps, worth noting that in British universities, there is a strong and growing tradition of vocational education in which training and education are combined. I am thinking in particular of (for example) schools of pharmacy, nursing and social work, which are now supplementing the more traditional schools of law, medicine and engineering. Furthermore, many courses in the creative arts offer practical experience as well as academic study. These do indeed provide opportunities for *Berufsausbildung* in so far as such programmes and courses are not driven by a narrow 'training' agenda. Students are expected to demonstrate contextual awareness, ethical sensitivity, technical knowledge and appropriate theoretical knowledge as well. This amounts to a 'rich' provision of vocational education in which, as Kerschensteiner suggests, students can learn about 'the manner and possibility of their satisfaction within the interest of the community or state association'. What is interesting, of course, is that it is in UK *universities* (often criticised for their over-academic courses) that a broad and diverse conception of vocational education is being taught.

## EDUARD SPRANGER AND THE NATURE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

These themes pertaining to *education* in a vocational setting are brought out even more strongly in the paper by Eduard Spranger, written nearly 50 years after Kerschensteiner's. Spranger explicitly criticises those historical tendencies in which the 'vocational' was emphasised at the expense of what he refers to as the 'humanisation of the working person' (Spranger, 1958), maintaining that the 'humanitarian ethos must be included in the vocational ethos'. Spranger sets out his thinking early on in his paper by referring to an educational ideal with two focal points: 'the one point located in the vocation and the other in fully developed humanity'. He goes on explicitly to identify the second focal point with 'the

ability and willingness to make moral decisions, to take full moral responsibility and, as a free person from a modest position, to contribute to creating culture in its entirety’.

There are two points of interest here. The first is that Spranger is adamant that to achieve the realisation of the moral person (and by ‘moral person’ is meant someone who participates in the civic and cultural development of a society and not merely someone who performs their ethical duties), more is needed than reading widely and the pursuit of scholarship. We can read this as, in part, a reflection on the limits of a ‘liberal education’ as traditionally understood in the anglophone world. Spranger maintains that educational study, even of the most elevated and rigorous kind, is insufficient in developing moral responsibility. He suggests that this could be developed by including, as part of the curriculum, ‘a framework for world orientation’. I think, ‘world’ here is meant not so much the geographical world but the ‘lifeworld’ of social interactions and their meaning. It is important that each young learner is shown how they belong to a society in which ‘cultural powers’ both shape and also enable the individual to be a participant in their development. Spranger’s basic idea, I think, is that the meaning of an individual life is not exhausted by occupational concerns. Any vocational education needs to address this by showing how the social world in which a student lives does have a meaning and a history of which he or she is a part. Spranger gives the examples of knowing what goes on in the local research institute or an administrative building; of having some knowledge of local museums and theatres. We can see that in some respects, Spranger’s conception of education is not that far removed from the Deweyan conception: For both men, the idea of personal development in part rests on a willingness to lead the student out of herself and into the community. Interestingly, Spranger also maintains that the ‘meaning of humanity always has to be filled with contemporary content’ so that the curriculum can and must change in response to contemporary concerns. We might think of ‘contemporary content’ today as including anti-racism or, possibly, the moral responsibilities of citizens in a pandemic. Thus, educational and vocational study and instruction must be powerfully supplemented by experiences towards and within the wider community.

The second point of interest is slightly more philosophical. For it is clear at several junctures in the paper that Spranger’s conception of morality is Kantian in inspiration. Early on, he links the idea of morality, freedom and the will in his description of what is needed for full educational development. Later, the Kantian theme becomes more explicit when, in talking of a ‘higher self’, he speaks of the ‘subject of universal thinking’ and of a will that is ‘guided by thinking’. Yet what is also clear is that Spranger does not conceive the self as an autonomous abstract entity: So much is evident from my reflections in the previous paragraph. For Spranger, the individual may well have a ‘higher self’ that is ‘guided by thinking’, but it is also a self that can only develop through a thorough immersion in the contemporary world, with all its excitement, its messiness and its imperfections. At this point, I have in mind Sheila Webb’s recent monograph in this journal that defends Kant’s philosophy, including his ethical stance. Webb, in the face of traditional anti-Kantian criticism, maintains that the self of Kantian ethics is not a non-empirical subject, motivated solely by abstract principles in the form of the categorical imperative (see, e.g., Webb, 2020, pp. 1648–1650). Webb is keen to emphasise that for Kant: ‘mind, as a capacity for knowledge, is embodied and his subject is embodied in her everyday life’ (p. 1644). It is this ‘embodied’ subject that Spranger also brings forth in his analysis of the moral subject. Hence, his suggestion that ‘cultural education’ needs to start at home, rooted in local experience, and that a general education (*studium generale*) is unlikely to achieve this by itself. He doesn’t mention the relation between sport and culture, but this is possibly another way of showing younger apprentices the way in which their favourite sports can be regarded, in many ways, as a cultural product.

Onora O’Neil has also written about the way in which reason needs to be viewed in terms of its formation, that it is not ‘given’ to us fully fledged but needs to be developed. As she puts it, ‘the construction of reason needs to be seen as a process rather than a product, as practices of connection and integration rather than a once and for all laying of foundations’ (O’Neil, 1992, p. 292). One of the ways in which ‘connection and integration’ can be achieved is through the practice of a well-founded occupation in which technical knowledge and planning skills need to be combined with an awareness of the ethical implications both for one’s immediate clients and the wider social (and ecological) environment. If we think of the wide variety of occupations as providing a ‘service’, as providing different kinds of benefits, then we can see that this normative dimension is an inescapable feature of occupational practice. Seen in this light,

we can also see how Spranger arrives at the conception of the 'higher self' which is formed, so to speak, through the 'process' of a practice.

So although I have to confess that on my first reading of Spranger, my heart sank a little when I encountered the 'higher self'; on the second reading, I could see better what it was that Spranger was driving at. For the 'higher' self is still an embodied self, not detached from community but endowed with a greater understanding of community and, as a result, a greater self-knowledge as well.

The upshot of these readings, in relation to Arendt's position on the limitations of 'work', is that she badly underestimates the ability and capacity for *homo faber* to take on a wider, and possibly, more fulfilling education. She simply does not see how occupations—*Beruf*—provide a wonderful opportunity for building up a democratic way of life in which vocational competence lies at its heart. One can see here two separate visions of democracy—one that might be termed *occupational democracy* and the other *action-based* democracy. One can also see, in both cases, how there is an accompanying tradition. Action democracies can be traced back to Machiavelli's *Discourses*, taking in the Putney Debates of the English Civil War, the American Revolutionaries and the debates in France in the early 1790s. Perhaps this tradition also includes the struggle of democrats in contemporary Hong Kong and maybe some of the current debates in America concerning race and equality. Occupational democracies can be seen in the growth of the early Dutch Republic and post-war Germany. It is the spirit of occupational democracy that is at work behind the educational success of Finland, at the heart of which is a well-paid and highly regarded teaching profession. Possibly, the burgeoning trade union movement in Britain in the mid-20th century could be seen as a failed attempt to establish an occupational democracy. In any event, it is Arendt's home country, Germany, that has been the exemplary occupational democracy these last 60 years or so. The writings of these authors help to show us some of the thinking that has gone into creating it.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Aloys Fischer's article, which addresses vocational guidance and counselling, may at first seem something of an oddity, especially bearing in mind the fairly low place occupied by 'careers counselling', certainly in the UK. In schools and colleges, careers advice is rarely fully resourced and the profession of careers advisor is not, I think it is fair to say, held in particularly high esteem. Careers guidance is seen as a 'necessity'—every university has its careers office—but such guidance is usually seen as an adjunct to education. Even given the drive to 'employability' that features in many UK universities, careers advisers are not regarded as 'proper' academics and their pay, status and promotion prospects reflect this attitude. By contrast, Fischer emphasises the central importance of guidance to the growth of occupations in a society. It is essential that younger persons receive the appropriate advice and counselling in what I term an 'occupational democracy'. In other words, as well as providing effective vocational education, the provision of vocational guidance must be considered as a crucial feature of the former. Moreover, in a period of transition, whether political or economic, the provision of occupational guidance becomes even more central to the efforts to build up an occupational structure as the basis of an economy. What we term in the UK 'careers guidance' and see as relatively marginal is a big mistake, and the extra resources and funds needed in terms of building up an effective vocational guidance function should be a key policy. Making sure, as much as possible that the right people are in the right professions and occupations should not be left to mere chance: Both for the individual herself and society at large, the stakes are too high. This is what a reading of Fischer, certainly in the context of the UK, seems to imply.

But before I turn to Fischer's specific thoughts on guidance, it is worth noting just three societal influences on what is termed the 'professional restructuring of Germany' (para 9)—remember, this is written in 1920. First, Fischer notes that too often academic qualifications are themselves taken for fitness for professional or occupational competence. The result is not only that recruits into the professions may find themselves ill-equipped for the tasks in front of them; it also tends to downgrade the importance of academic understanding. Fischer wants to preserve the value of an academic education but at the same time the notion that such an education is an automatic passport into professions

and occupations should be discouraged. Second, Fischer bemoans the rise of 'fashionable' subjects, especially in the domains of business and economic studies. These subjects, he professes, do not provide an adequate basis for professional understanding. He cites (para 11) the neglect of agricultural pursuits in favour of such fashionable subjects: I suppose in our day, it would be the neglect of engineering and construction in favour of business and media studies. Some complaints, it seems, are perennial. And third, Fischer is dismayed by the volume of immigration out of Germany, brought on, he thinks by Germany's poverty at the end of the war and what he believes to be heavy economic penalties imposed by the victorious British and French. The more general point here, I think, is that an occupational framework can potentially be undermined not only by outward emigration but also by the import of cheap labour. The answer to this problem is, of course, to maintain occupational standards as well as a fair and viable rate of pay, both of which are compatible with the free movement of labour.

As for the skills required of the vocational counsellor, paragraph 22 of Fischer's paper seems to me an admirable summary. He observes that 'purely factually-minded persons' are unlikely to find the 'right tone in their engagement with the client'. He also observes that a young person may want to 'present himself as favourably as possible' and so the skill of the counsellor is to penetrate through this veneer of confidence in order to find out the true motivations of her client. Just as important is Fischer's belief that younger persons shouldn't be allowed to choose their professions or occupations if by 'choice' is meant that it is up to the client to do what 'feels right' so that the choice becomes the sovereign decision of the fully autonomous individual. It is not that all agency is denied so that the individual is 'directed' into an occupation, but rather that the final choice is an informed one through speaking not only with the counsellor but also with representatives of an occupation. Furthermore, it is likely that a number of meetings with the client may be necessary since one is essentially 'serving a developing personality'. Thus, the vocational counsellor is a full professional in her own right and the training needs to include occupational psychology (para 26) since '*he must be a psychologist*, by nature gifted and interested in understanding people, trained by scientific-psychological studies' (para 28). Finally, any occupation or profession needs to have a clear path of development through relevant education and training the implication here is that some counselling needs to be available at all stages in one's career.

Perhaps some of what Fischer says is overambitious, even today. Sceptics might say he places undue faith in the skills of the counsellor and that choosing an occupation is often, and unavoidably, beset by changes of mind, unexpected difficulties, not to mention the imperative to earn money. Yet despite these reservations, perhaps Fischer does have a point about vocational counselling being taken more seriously. In universities, this could mean that counsellors are attached to schools and departments and have the same status and pay as academics. Outside of universities, it means that vocational guidance becomes an essential feature of vocational education and not just an afterthought.

It could be argued, further, that in times when new technologies create both new occupations and job changes within occupations, there is an even greater need for ongoing vocational guidance throughout a working life. Nor need it be assumed that a person will remain in the same occupation throughout a working lifetime, but again, if a change in vocation is being considered, then professional guidance is even more important. A discussion of the future nature of employment is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should not be assumed that persons must always be at the behest of market imperatives with little or no control over their own lives. The idea of an occupational democracy (discussed above) conveys that structures need to be in place so that both collective and individual agency is not continually undermined by indeterminate and unpredictable economic headwinds. The need for vocational guidance is not undermined by economic change but, on the contrary, strengthened on that account.

## A BRIEF COMMENT ON *BILDUNG*

In a recent article, Alistair Miller has used Kerschensteiner and Spranger's ideas on vocational education as a way of critiquing Humboldt's conception of *Bildung*. Essentially, Miller claims that Humboldt proposes a strongly individualistic concept of self-development through acculturation: the individual needs to 'cultivate detachment' so that our experiences 'contribute to the harmonious formation of our inner self' (Miller, 2021, p. 343). It is clear that the



collective ruminations of Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer amount to a repudiation of this particular version of *Bildung* since what I have termed an 'occupational democracy' is premised on the idea that personal self-development best occurs through being part of an occupational pursuit and tradition. The idea is that occupations, viewed as a combination of technical skills, theoretical knowledge and social understanding can provide the environment for *Bildung* to develop. It is not entirely clear from Miller's article the kind of *Bildung* that he favours, although it is apparent that he envisages *Bildung* as part of a collective cultural tradition and to that extent is a clear repudiation of Humboldt's apparent over-individualistic notion of personal formation. These considerations may lead us to ask: Might the idea of an 'occupational democracy' succeed as the context in which *Bildung* could flourish? Certainly, when one considers the richness of the concept of 'occupation' put forward by all of the authors, one might think so. For an occupation permits the technical, educational and moral growth of the person and surely this is what *Bildung* is all about.

Yet I have my (slight) reservations. It seems to me that despite its many virtues, an occupational democracy has potential limitations, of which one needs to be aware. For the challenge that Humboldt lies down in what might be termed the 'classic' concept of *Bildung* is that one raises one's eyes beyond mere occupation in order to consider the aesthetic and even spiritual dimension of a life. Or even to consider the idea of sheer adventure for its own sake. It is not, I suggest, through occupational pursuit alone that we are:

... well pleased to recognise

In nature and the language of sense

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

Of all my moral being.

(William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles from Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1798/1999)

So in spite of Miller's reservations on Humboldt, it seems to me that room has to be made for the kind of sentiments expressed by Wordsworth. And where would an occupational democracy be without the sheer imagination so valued by William Blake or, for that matter, a sense of Byronic adventure? Perhaps this relates to the 'higher self' that Spranger mentioned. Such a democracy needs to create space for the unknown, for what can be felt rather than put into words, for the 'Mr Tambourine Man' evoked by Bob Dylan:

Take me on a trip upon your magic swirling ship.

Thus, I would suggest that *Bildung* does not fully flourish through occupational practice alone, however rich that practice. More is needed if the imagination is to soar.

## THE UK GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER, *SKILLS FOR JOBS: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR OPPORTUNITY AND GROWTH* (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2021)

I mentioned earlier that I would briefly examine the recent UK government white paper. This is a significant document that directly addresses the needs of VET in the UK, which has been beset by a vast array of different qualifications, uneven funding, weak apprentice schemes and an uncertain role for employers. It would be fair to say that the provision of VET in the UK has historically been piecemeal and often inadequate. The report starts off by saying that 'employer needs will be at the heart of our reforms' and proposes the establishment of Local Skills Improvement Plans (p. 15) in which local skills needs are identified. The idea is to build up a much closer relationship between employers

and training providers so that the latter are more responsive to the needs and requirements of the former. At the same time, a comprehensive apprentice scheme is to be launched and trainees will be enticed through the 'lifetime skills guarantee' (p. 5), which provides a mixture of direct funds and loans over a person's lifetime. The report leaves open a number of practical questions (for example, how exactly does an employer contact a local provider regarding skills requirements), but I assume these can be sorted out over time. There are a fair number of different bodies and committees involved (e.g., the Skills and Productivity Board, which advises the government on national skills requirements) and Ofqual (which is supposed to monitor the quality of provision). What the report clearly does is to map out the role of employers and signals their central role. This is a step forward because in the past, VET provision has been left to local colleges, often leaving students to make their own way through the labour market. To use a popular, if overused phrase, the report attempts 'joined-up thinking'. In doing this, it makes explicit reference on page 15 to the German Dual System, which integrates work-based practice with college-based learning.

What is striking about the report, however, is that most of its pages are spent outlining the regulatory and coordinative processes that the government wants to put into place. These processes are, as it says many times throughout the report, designed to address employer needs. I am not sure (such is the importance given to employers) that this is really a British version of the tried and tested German Dual System. What, it seems, the report wants to produce are good *employees*, rather than good occupational workers, still less the good citizen signalled by Kerschensteiner and his colleagues. I have spoken of an occupational and an action-based democracy; what we have here is democracy by management or *managerial* democracy. What is most striking of all about the approach outlined in the white paper is there is very little indeed on the content of the vocational qualifications. One must presume, if they are employer-led and employer-driven, that these will be primarily competency based. In any event, there is no mention of any technical or theoretical knowledge in the proposed qualifications (to be called T-qualifications). There is no mention whatsoever of the broader claims of citizenship or the notion of 'serving' one's community. What the apprentice is to serve is all too obvious: it is the employer. Nor is it clear that employers will be given the kind of training and education needed to successfully educate and train their apprentices. For this takes time and patience and means that experienced employees are inevitably required to spend time on supporting apprentices rather than devoting their time to their own work. Nor is it clear how the apprentice will receive appropriate work-based practice (as opposed to running errands, etc). Finally, I have my doubts that relying solely on employers for the vocational curriculum will give the depth and breadth needed. Clearly, employer involvement is a central feature—there is no question of that, and this is something the report gets right, in my view. But I cannot help feeling that some academic input might also be required, even in a technical, work-based curriculum.

What the report seems to be lacking is any concept or idea of an *occupation*. Despite its intentions and the regulatory structures it proposes (which to my mind are not all bad), there seems little interest in vocational education as such. What is missing are some of the ideas of Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer in which the richness and variety of an occupational education are expressed. In particular, the links between occupational training and citizenship are unexplored. There is no mention of any kind of general education from which trainees might benefit in respect of local and national culture and history and where a particular occupation fits in.

I was left wondering—which is better? An occupational democracy that produces citizens or a managerial democracy that produces employees? I leave that for the reader to decide.

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