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Four Ages of Our Relationship with the Reality: An educationalist perspective

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Abstract

In this article, I try to make sense conventional notions of 'premodernism', 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' as ways of relating to reality, and apply them to education. I argue for the additional notion of 'neo-premodernism' to make sense of recent attempts to engineer social reality. Each of these four approaches coexists and constitutes the four ages: the age of prayer (premodernism), the age of reason (modernism), the age of social engineering (neo-premodernism) and the age of responsibility (postmodernism). I try to trace these ages in modern schooling and critically analyze their consequences and the power relations between teachers and students.

Keywords: premodernism, modernism, postmodernism, dialogism, agency

George Soros, a philosopher, US financial investor and philanthropist, recently claimed that US President George W. Bush and many of his advisors were postmodernists. Although I have heard this claim before, it usually came from Eastern European scholars and I suspected it might involve some kind of linguistic and/or conceptual misunderstanding. In contrast to Soros's (2008) own claims, I feel that his very interesting philosophy is postmodern while Bush's fight with the modern science has been a mark of his premodernism. However, as I will try to show below, Bush and his fellow political neoconservatives in the USA are not traditional premodernists, with whom people of the Age of Enlightenment and Reason fought; rather, they represent a new premodernist strand that probably emerged fully only in the nineteenth century. I think taht this is not just a terminological issue but that it aligns different people and mediates their relations. So it goes, Soros wrote,

> I had not paid much attention to the postmodern point of view until recently. I did not study it, and I did not fully understand it, but I was willing to dismiss it out of hand because it seemed to conflict with the concept of reflexivity. I treated the postmodern view of the world as an overreaction to the Enlightenment's excessive faith in reason, namely, the belief that reason is capable of fully comprehending reality. I did not see any direct connection between the postmodern idiom and totalitarian

ideologies and closed societies, although I could see that, by being extremely permissive of different points of view, the postmodern position might encourage the rise of totalitarian ideologies. Recently, I changed my views. I now see a direct connection between the postmodern idiom and the Bush administration's ideology. That insight came from an October 2004 article by Ron Suskind in the *New York Times Magazine*. This is what he wrote:

In the summer of 2002 … I had a meeting with a senior adviser to Bush. He expressed the White House's displeasure [about a biography of Paul O'Neill, *The price of loyalty* by Ron Suskind (2004)], and then he told me something that at the time I didn't fully comprehend—but which I now believe gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community", which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality". I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore", he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do". (Suskind, 2004, p. 51)

The aide [to the president George W. Bush], presumably Karl Rove[1] did not merely recognize that the truth can be manipulated, he promoted the manipulation of truth as a superior approach. This interferes directly with the pursuit of truth both by declaring it futile and by making the task more difficult through constant manipulation. Moreover, Rove's approach led to the restriction of liberties by using the manipulation of public opinion to enhance the powers and prerogatives of the president. That is what the Bush administration wrought by declaring the War on Terror.

I believe the War on Terror provides an excellent illustration of the dangers inherent in Rove's ideology. The Bush administration used the War on Terror to invade Iraq. This was one of the most successful instances of manipulation, yet its consequences for the United States and the Bush administration itself were nothing short of disastrous. (Soros, 2008, pp. 41–43)

Like, probably, many people I am confused, frustrated, as well as mesmerized by the popularity in academic, artistic and political circles of terms such as 'premodernism', 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. I have found these fuzzy terms useful for the discussion of power relations in education as they help me to orient in diverse ontological orientations, by which actors are guided in their activities. Here, I want to try to make sense of these terms and develop my own limited and somewhat crude interpretations of them in the sphere of education in general, and in the sphere of

power in the specific. I think that these terms capture how actors treat the reality—both natural and social—and orient themselves towards it. Based on the colloquial notion of the 'Age of Enlightenment and Reason', which describes mediation of the reality by reason within modernism, I have come to a conclusion that each of the -isms represents its own 'age', each reflecting the primary mediation of the actors' relationships to the reality. Thus, a notion of age reflects not so much a period in time but a relational regime of power. I wonder which kind of regime or regimes of power I subscribe to ideologically and in the practice of education. I hope that this question may be of interest to other educators and educational scholars.

Postmodernism and the age of responsibility is my primary interest and, thus, my bias. I am aware of the fact that other people (and even possibly myself later on) might find different and perhaps more productive use of the terms, so I want my readers to treat this terminology polemically and partially rather than definitively and authoritatively. I think that comprehensive, comparative and historical analyses of these terms and their diverse uses are still due.

I try to make sense of these philosophical issues in educational contexts—I have found them to be useful for the analysis of education. My primary theoretical, empirical and practical interests are in education. I am a professor of education. I teach future teachers (my undergraduate students) and future researchers of education (my graduate students). Together with my undergraduate students I am involved in guiding school-age children of diverse ethnicities in after-school programs (Matusov, Pleasants, & Smith, 2003; Hayes & Matusov, 2005a, 2005b; Matusov, St. Julien, & Hayes, 2005; Matusov, Smith, Candela, & Lilu, 2007; Matusov, 2009; Matusov & Smith, 2011). In short, I am a practicing teacher interested in dialogic education for agency (Matusov, 2011a; Matusov & Brobst, 2013). I also empirically study education and I am a theoretician of education interested in the philosophy, psychology and sociology of education in general and schooling in particular, with my special interest in dialogic pedagogy and a sociocultural approach (Matusov, 2009). Because of that, I will ground my discussion on the four ages of how we relate to the reality within the practice and theory of education, within particular diverse educational settings in the USA in the last decade. My approach to investigation of the discussed issues is a unique combination of qualitative, pedagogical scenes and philosophy. My goal here is to provide a 'big picture' or crude sketches, and therefore I may reduce the details and complexity of the discussed phenomena that otherwise require much more space.

The Age of Prayer: Old Premodernism

I understand the old premodernism as a special way of relating to the reality through the divine authority. The reality is created and controlled by the divine authority—an unquestionable mighty god (or gods or God) (Rosenblatt, 1982). A god is in charge of the reality and credited for any events (or for the absence of events) that occur in the reality. We can try to impose our desires and hopes on the reality through special addresses to our god(s), such as prayers, sacrifices, thanks[2] rituals, servitude, negotiations, exchange of favors, and so on. Thus, in the old

premodernism, the relationship between people and the reality is mediated by the divine authority, which itself is usually (but not always) mediated by holy texts and holy priests. One can address the divine authority directly (e.g. in a prayer) but one often reads and/or listens to holy texts and/or holy priests to hear what the divine authority has to say. Since the divine authority is almighty, the possibilities for the reality are limitless and the divine authority's providence cannot be known.

Is education, and specifically schooling, influenced and shaped by old premodernism? If so, how and why? In my judgment, old premodernism, with its focus on an authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1991), is extremely influential in modern conventional schooling. Arguably, modern schooling has historically emerged from the school institutions of the Church (Baumann, 2009).

Let me start with an example. Several years ago, I was working with my undergraduate students, future teachers, at an after-school program at a local Latin American community center. I was passing an elementary school girl, probably in second grade, who was working on her math homework, when I noticed that she had written, '$57 - 8 \times (4 + 2) = 78$' in her notebook. I stopped, pointed at 57 and 78 and said, with a smile, 'This is strange. You took out something from 57 and got a bigger number. I love this strange math. If I have 5 candies and I give you 3 but I'll get 10 candies at the end, I'd be happy—this is cool math. I wish it were true!' The girl looked at me, smiled, and then told me, 'This is how our teacher showed it to us. I did exactly how she told us to'. I replied, 'I don't know what your teacher told and showed, but it looks strange, magic and impossible to me. What do you think?'. The girl stopped smiling and said, 'I need to do how we're taught to do. Otherwise, I'll be in trouble and the teacher will yell at me'. She did not make any changes to her equation and kept working on her next math problems.

For me, the issue is not that the teacher had taught a wrong mathematical procedure (I hope not!) or did not teach the girl the math well (which probably was the case). Rather, what is very important for me in this example is that the girl treats the (school) math reality as an authoritative procedural ritual (McLaren, 1993), in which she engages. This school ritual excludes any possibility for her own authorial judgment and agentive understanding. I argue that in this case, the teacher serves as a holy priest of epistemological divine authority to whom the student offers her servitude to avoid punishment and, probably, even to reap some awards in the form of praise and good grades (and, probably, harmonious relations with her parents).

Although the ritualistic nature of conventional school learning is probably most visible when students make curricular mistakes similar to the girl in the case described above, even when the students are 'correct' their correctness seems to be superficial and still ritualistic in nature. For example, I ask many of my undergraduate students, future teachers and experts on passing numerous school tests, why fractions with different denominators are added in such a complicated way and not in a simple way: why ½ + 1/3 equals 5/6 and not, let's say, 2/5. The large majority of my students reply, 'This is a rule'. I ask them why it couldn't be another, simpler, rule, like, for example, adding nominator to nominator and denominator to denominator. They usually tell me that this is 'a wrong rule'. But, what makes this simpler rule wrong? They reply that you would fail an exam if you used it. Similarly, when I ask them

why one cannot divide 5 by zero, they often say that 'it's forbidden'. By whom? Why? This is when my undergraduate students, future teachers, usually get angry with me.

The authorial question 'why?', coming from a student, is often viewed by conventional teachers as a challenge to their authority. When I ask my future teachers how they would reply to their own future students about why they should not use foul language in school, many of my future teachers reply, 'Because I say so! Students should respect the authority of the teacher or they will be punished!' They tell me that they never asked their past teachers 'why?' But, even when a conventional teacher teaches the reasons behind some knowledge, he or she often remains at the level of procedural understanding of conventionality (i.e. 'this is the way we do certain things here') rather than at a conceptual understanding and honest and open testing of the students', the teacher's and other relevant people's authorial ideas. The imperative of the students' unconditional following of school rules penetrates both epistemological and relational spheres of the conventional modern school: students learn the academic curriculum through unconditional obedience to the teacher's procedural rules, assessed by accuracy, and students learn how to behave and relate in the classroom through unconditional obedience to the teacher's procedural rules, assessed by accuracy. The 'correct' answer with no reasoning will be prioritized by the teacher over a student's 'incorrect' answer with the student's deep authorial reasoning. A student's answer to the teacher's information-known, impersonal, disinterested question is prioritized over the student's information-seeking, authorial, interested question. Of course, there are exceptions to that attitude in my students, but that is it —a mere exceptional minority of students (which, of course, requires its own explanation).

My reading of these phenomena is that school learning is experienced by many students as participation in an epistemological ritual that can bring authoritative approval (reward) or disapproval (punishment). Their participation is assessed by accuracy rooted in authority and not by judgment or understanding rooted in their own agency. Students' school mistakes are not similar to students' everyday mistakes (Lave, 1988), perhaps exactly because their own judgment is not usually involved in school activities. When I asked my undergraduate students, 'How do you know that the Earth is closer to the Moon than to the Sun?', many of them replied, 'Because scientists told us that'. I argue that this reference to scientists by my students, future teachers, is *not* similar to our everyday reliance on epistemological authority of experts like doctors, car mechanics, lawyers, politicians, and even scientists. This is because in our everyday life, often we use these experts and their expertise (critically or even uncritically) to inform our own judgment and decision making in the activities driven by our own desires, needs and goals. In contrast, in school, students are involved in participation in ritualistic learning where their own judgments and decision making are bracketed and uninvited—they are often viewed as illegitimate disruptions of the teacher's lesson script (Kennedy, 2005) and ill-spirited challenges to the teacher's authority.

Why do I consider the students' relationship with school curricular reality as old premodernist? I argue that students' school performance is a form of ritualistic prayer to gain approval from their epistemologically divine authority. Participation in this

ritual involves procedural studying, procedural learning and procedural understanding by the students. At the end, those who succeed in school in learning science religion, math religion, literacy religion, history religion and social science religion as their ritualistic performance will have demonstrated accuracy on numerous tests and examinations certified by the holy priests of the divine epistemological authority (Cohen, 1988). These curricular religions provide an illusion of certainty and comforting reassurance that the world is well known and well controlled. Collins and Halverson (2009) call the modern school 'a civic church'.

This old premodernist learning practiced by conventional mass comprehensive compulsory schooling might be enough for successful functioning in a modern highly specialized and bureaucratized society, where people are mutually replaceable functionaries following the rules of others rather than requiring their own judgments. It might provide a useful peripheral background and some basic skills for the future, presumably, more meaningful learning required by professional and vocational education as well as by everyday learning.

However, the issue remains: is it worthwhile for students to spend at least 13 years of their lives (K-12), if not 17 years, counting college education (see Schneps, Sadler, & Crouse, 2003, for evidence of a lack of understanding of elementary physics by Harvard University graduates), on this old premodernist learning in this old premodernist social and institutional environment? Another important question is about the nature of education itself: does old premodernism define education well? Is it a good idea to reduce education to ritualistic learning of the holy text representing the epistemologically divine authority (demanded by accountability standardized tests)? Does learning science religion, math religion, literacy religion, history religion, social science religion serve students and the whole society well? Does it suppress other important skills, values and attitudes in students?

The Age of Reason: Modernism

I see modernism as worshipping the object, objectivity and objectivism through reason (see Rand, 1982, as an example of this tendency; Rosenblatt, 1982). In its dispute with religion, emphasizing an authoritative discourse, modernism has introduced the notion of blind method—scientific research method—that, if applied correctly, unavoidably leads to truth regardless of people applying the method and their subjectivities, i.e. objectivity. Modernism views the reality with its universal and unchangeable laws of nature as completely independent of people and existing 'over there'. Through universal reason, people have to uncover the necessity of the iron logic of the objective world, and through strong will, people must follow this iron logic. Modernist people bounded by universal reason are impartial because they are on the side of the objective truth and inexorable facts. They are outside politics, responsibility, ethics, emotions, duty, self-interest and morality. Modernists are impartial, interchangeable and impersonal because they are objective. They want to acquire a detached 'bird's-eye view' over the world existing 'out there'. Those who do not know the iron logic of objectivity are ignorant; those who know the iron logic but do not follow it are irrational, abnormal and dysfunctional (i.e. objectively sick: reason

and/or will challenged). Since the laws of nature and the iron logic exist objectively outside the human consciousness, people's voices, subjectivities and ontologies are not viewed as important in modernism (beyond data revealing the objective reality behind it). Only the impersonal, faceless content, based on a consensus of the relevant experts, is important. A consensus among the relevant experts about success in practice and experiments is the proxy of 'the truth'. The main role of education is to discipline students' minds and wills by iron logic, universal reason and objective laws of nature: the mind to discover and the will to follow the iron logic unconditionally. Science and education are the two major practices of modernism to achieve progress both in terms of the highest value placed by modernism on them and by means through which modernism realizes itself: science is for the discovery of the truth and education is for its dissemination among people.

The third major practice, besides science and education, is technology and, arguably, it is a troublesome one. It is an application of 'cunning reason', using Hegel's words (1953). Although we cannot defy the law of gravity and we were not born to fly, our reason can outwit nature by using the law of nature against itself. This phenomenon of cunning reason brings an unpleasant dilemma in modernism because, although reason discovers and follows the iron logic of the laws of nature existing outside and independent of the human mind and soul, it also apparently transcends the very same iron logic it is supposed to follow unconditionally. Indeed, the iron logic of gravity is 'out there', but the dream for humans of flying is arguably not 'out there' in the objective reality governed by the law of nature, nor is the social, political, economic, technological infrastructure involved in the invention, design and building of aircraft allowing us to fly. The cunningness of mind—the human desire and dream to fly and the technological, economic, political and social infrastructure required to fulfill this desire—cannot be deduced from the iron logic and the laws of the nature. This surplus of the iron logic in building and transforming the human world—namely the cunningness of reason—reveals itself in societal, cultural, historical and psychological phenomena that are apparently non-objective in their nature.

As far as I know, modernism found two major solutions to this dilemma of cunning reason being a transcendental surplus of the iron logic and the laws of nature—and both of them are unsatisfactory, in my judgment. The first, monistic, solution is to include the surplus of cunning reason in the law of nature itself, arguing that the social and psychological phenomena produced in dreams and ploys of cunning reason are not transcendental but immanent to the iron logic and can be tracked into the objective laws of nature (e.g. the objective laws of social development, the objective laws of brain functioning). Thus, for example, in this immanent solution, aircraft design can be somehow found and deterministically deduced from the objective study of the brain. The theory of everything promised by modern physics (Kaku, 2011) will able to deduce all of our dreams, desires and designs from its formulae.

The second, dualistic, solution is to build a firewall between the reason unconditionally pursuing the iron logic and the objective laws of nature, and the cunning reason dreaming and plotting. The former, natural, domain is the legitimate area of science and technology (in its instrumental aspect) while the latter, social, domain involves the arts, crafts, humanities and technology (in its designer, social

order, aspect). These two unsatisfactory modernist solutions open up pathways for neo-premodernism, as discussed below.

In my view, currently modernism penetrates and shapes education in two main aspects: (1) developing a universally rational autonomous individual in a student (cf. Kant), and (2) promoting research-based teaching as the basis of professionalization for a teacher (discussion of this important aspect is outside the scope of this article). Let me consider the first aspect.

Modernism sets three major curricular goals for teachers and students:

(1) to know well the existing solid, core and important facts and body of knowledge (e.g. the Common Core State Standards initiative currently popular in the USA, see http://www.corestandards.org)

(2) to know well how these solid facts and body of knowledge were discovered and justified (i.e. their rationality, the iron logic)

(3) to know how to discover new facts and knowledge on their own in the future.

Success in these three goals would define a successful becoming of a universally rational being in a student. For example, in teaching physics, modernism abstracts quantum physics as an important fact and body of knowledge that students should know and master. Then, it focuses the teachers on why and how physicists have come to quantum mechanics in their development of the logic of ideas, e.g. what problems and contradictions had existed in the classical planetary model of the atom (i.e. negative particles, electrons, rotate around positively charged nucleus, which lead electrons to emit electromagnetic waves, lose kinesthetic energy and unavoidably collapse into the positively charged nucleus) and how and why the quantum principles became resolutions of these contradictions. Finally, the students need to learn how to identify contradictions in physical models and theories and resolve them in the future.

The strong side of the modernist educational approach is that it focuses educators on the discursive argumentative rationalist nature of knowledge: the students need to learn reasoning rather than socialize in the conventionality of facts sanctioned by the divine authority, as old premodernism suggests. In the modernist approach, the students should not only 'talk science' (Lemke, 1990), through their engagement in conventional uses of scientific terms and procedures, but also 'walk science', through a rational discourse about reasons and causes, proofs and consequences.

I see the biggest problem in the modernist curriculum (and instruction) design in their double purification of the historical development of concepts and double bracketing of students from the development of the curriculum. The first purification involves the modernist reduction of the human drama of the development of quantum physics (or any other historical event) to the progression of pure, disembodied, ideas. Often, the institutional, societal, cultural, economic and political history of a scientific discovery is presented as an interplay between the iron logic of an idea, with its necessity and determinism, and chaotic forces of societal, cultural, political, economic and institutional factors that brought 'luck' and opportunities to the scientists who made the discovery. However, a close, sociological look at how science practice works in institutions shows that the picture is much more complex than just an interplay of

the iron logic and the luck of sociocultural forces (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Latour, 1987).

The second purification involves the modernist reduction of the messy drama of ideas to the 'necessary' and clean progression of ideas by clearing the drama from any dead ends, detours, and so on[3] In my view, it is not only bad history but also bad pedagogy because students do not learn how science really works, but rather they learn the purified science of the logical ascent from less to more sophisticated ideas, which makes historical figures look a bit stupid and childish in the eyes of students: why could they not simply have figured things out earlier and more easily by themselves, as we do in the classroom? This 'vertical' analysis of pure ideas neglects the 'horizontal' valley of ideas that dialogically support a discovery. This distortion does not help the students to understand the foundation of scientific facts (i.e. the sociocultural, economic, political, communal and technological machinery behind any accepted fact), their possible limitations and future possible dramatic changes (Latour, 1987). In my view, the pedagogical issue at stake here is not the comprehensive accuracy of the historical events involving a scientific discovery but rather how science works, which might involve a different type of abstraction from the double purification used in modernist pedagogy.

The first bracketing of students from the curriculum development is about ignoring their pre-existing interests, needs, world views and perception of the curriculum. The second bracketing of students from the curriculum development is about ignoring their here-and-now dynamic flow of life. Until the students can see themselves not in the taught curriculum, the curriculum cannot be actively subjectivized by them (Dewey, 1956). Let's consider double bracketing of students' ontology in modernist pedagogy. Smith (2010) presented his research on an innovative middle school, in which there is time set by the teachers involving recursive discussions of interpersonal issues raised by students. Smith noticed an interesting phenomenon that he called 'the parallel discursive universes': often, the students are involved in ontological discourse about events and responsibilities (i.e. the ontological universe) while the teachers try to move the students into a modernist discourse of purified concepts of Kantian-like moral universals (i.e. the modernist universe):

> ***Ontological Universe#1: 'Being-as-event' discourse of students (Bakhtin, 1993): Students' discourse responds to and reveals the ontological eventfulness of the students' daily lives and everyone's responsibility within these events***
>
> *Andrew* [spontaneous]: I have something to say.
>
> *Student moderator calls on Andrew.*
>
> *Andrew*: Well, sometimes in football, when I make a mistake, people start yelling at me, and it kind of makes me feel bad …
>
> *David*: Andrew, I mean this like in like no offense, but sometimes ***you*** *yell at other people*, and then they start yelling at ***you***, and ***I*** know how it feels. Like, when ***you*** [we] get upset, and it wasn't and [?] … and then if ***you*** [we] yell at somebody **'cause** they did something wrong, and they start

yelling back, and it gets kind of like, it doesn't feel good. **'Cause** like even though **you're** [we're] the one that started yelling, sometimes, like they want to yell back. And then, when it happens, when **I** do it, it makes **me** upset, and **I** end up always losing. Like, it …

[David is now speaking softly as Andrew's crying becomes audible. Some time after the discussion, Andrew expresses his appreciation to David][4]

Modernist Universe #2: Teachers respond to students' eventful discourse with abstract, decontextualized Kantian-like moral universals

Melinda [Grade 5–6 teacher]: *This is actually a good place to pose a question,* because it has to do with this, I'm going to ask it, and I want you to go into groups to talk about it, just like a minute and a half, **what is bullying? How would you define bullying**, **what does bullying look like**? **What is it?** *Just form, you know, talk with some people around you.*

[Students in groups with each other]

Boy [in a perplexed tone]: What's bullying?!

Melinda: When I ask you to talk with someone, I really do mean that you need to talk about it. OK, I would like you to do that.

David [talking to his fellow group members]: Bullying, is that what we're talking about?! Bullying is like mostly having fun at somebody else's expense. Like having fun with [?] during a [?] and getting someone upset.

Melinda: OK, if we could just break out of our groups for a second, because I heard a couple of interesting things that went on with that. So go ahead Danny [asks student moderator to call on students].

In the ontological discourse, the students try to focus on the dramatic events to track the chain of partial responsibility while caring about each other's feelings; in the modernist discourse, the teachers use a dramatic event to trigger a safe, sterile, risk-free (for themselves and, presumably, for the students), non-problematic lesson on universal purified moral categories like 'bullying' which move away from dramatic tensions and responsibility for the past, current and future events (e.g. for Andrew's crying). In the ontological eventful discourse, the participants are located in the ethical here-and-now, addressing each other and demanding responses about their deeds. In the modernist eventless discourse, the participants are located in the bird's-eye view, from above, searching for the timeless and decontextualized procedure to make actors unconditionally right in the abstract, universal future. Modernist pedagogy replaces personal responsibility with the iron logic of universal necessity and its associated rationalist proceduralism (in contrast to the ritual proceduralism of old premodernism).

Modernist pedagogy suppresses here-and-now ontological events and authorial deeds and judgments in favor of universal, eternal, decontextual, 'big' ideas and inquiries (e.g. 'what is bullying'). Like old premodernism, it presets curricular endpoints, known to the teacher in advance, but these curricular endpoints are different. For old premodernism, the preset curricular endpoints are about discrete

bits of knowledge and ritualistic procedures that are viewed as important. In contrast, modernist preset curricular endpoints are focused on the students' rediscovery of the iron logic.

Modernism creates an illusion of absence of authority because people are governed (or should be governed) by the laws of necessity, the universal reason and the iron logic. However, in reality, it manipulates with the students' cognition and desires, usually by exploiting the students' ignorance (and sometimes the teacher's own) to create an impression for the students that the preset curricular endpoints are only possible. As a father of pedagogical modernism, Rousseau, wrote,

> Take the opposite course with your pupil [in child-centered education, which Rousseau advocated, in contrast to conventional teacher-centered education]; let him always think he is master while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will [of the child] itself is taken captive [by the teacher's hidden manipulation]. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength, or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? His work and play, his pleasure and pain, are they not, unknown to him, under your control? No doubt he ought only to do what he wants, but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do. He should never take a step you have not foreseen, nor utter a word you could not foretell. (Rousseau, 1979, p. 120)

The Age of Social Engineering: Neo-Premodernism

The neo-premodernists recognize themselves as ones who create a new social reality and a new truth. They create not just a new reality but also a new 'regime of truth' (Harris & Pressley, 1991). If, in modernism, cunning reason has been tamed by iron logic and the laws of nature, in neo-premodernism, cunning reason is free, wild and at large. 'If social reality is socially constructed, why can't be it constructed in a certain, desired, way by us?!' The means for creation of a new social reality and new truth can be the art of manipulation (Machiavelli, Bush's neoconservatives), science (Marxism, behaviorism) and will (fascism; see the 1935 movie *Triumph of the will* by the German director Leni Riefenstahl). It can be justified by the objective laws of history, by race theory, by communist equality or by dominance (moral, political, military or economic). The new truth is defined by practical success in imposing the new reality on people. There is a long Hegel–Marx–Lenin tradition of conceptualizing the new truth by saying that 'any reality is reasonable by its very existence' (Hegel), 'the practice is the criterion of the truth' (Marx), 'the Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true' (Lenin). Those who succeeded are right and those who failed made some kind of mistakes[5] If those mistakes are not made, the new reality will be achieved.

Despite all these differences in the justifications and conceptualizations of the means for creation of the new social reality, I have defined this means as 'social engineering', which involves a series of social and psychological traps to channel

people's behavior, actions, attitudes, knowledge, desires and perception into the directions desired by the social engineers, while robbing people of alternative options (Matusov, 2009). 'If the social reality is socially constructed, why can't it be us who construct it?'—a neo-premodernist might address his or her community of social engineers. Just compare the following statements made by two Karls: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (Karl Marx); '… while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do' (presumably Karl Rove, Suskind, 2004, p. 51). New premodernism is inherently hierarchical, with social engineers on the top and people, who are objects of social engineering, at the bottom of this social hierarchy. In neo-premodernism, the whole society is divided into social engineers and objects of social engineering or, using behaviorist terminology (Hartmann, 1992), into those who 'control and predict [the] behavior' of others (i.e. social engineers[6]) and those whose behavior is controlled and predicted (i.e. objects of social engineering). Of course, these groups can be flexible in the sense that one person can belong to two hierarchical groups sequentially or even at the same time, depending on different truths that are going to be socially engineered.

For me, the issue in neo-premodernism is *not* its desire to set conditions for others; by itself, it is not social engineering in the sense that I use it here. For example, when a state sets regulative tax policies, which try to encourage certain behaviors in taxpayers, this is not an example of the social engineering that I am talking about because the last word still remains with the taxpayer, who may choose old behavior and pay penalties for that. An alternative to a tax incentive is still legitimate and possible. What makes it social engineering is a conscious desire to set traps for other people so that they unavoidably find themselves at the endpoint that is predesigned by the social engineers. I argue against this social engineering *unconditionally*.

I call this approach to the reality 'neo-premodermism' and not 'new modernism' because this approach focuses on impositions of human desire on the social reality, not unlike old premodernism, but by new means of social engineering rather than by prayer addressing a higher authority. If the morality of old premodernism is rooted in the higher authority of God Almighty, whose acts by definition are moral, the morality of neo-premodernism is rooted in the success of social engineering: 'If we can, we must'. Although social engineering may take a form of scientism so common for modernism, it is only one form among many others, such as the use of will (in fascism, that arguably did not care much about scientism). Deep down, I argue, social engineering violates the positivist spirit of modernism in its belief in the stable and unchangeable reality and the truth. As presumably Karl Rove pointed out (Suskind, 2004), there is a huge difference between the 'reality-based community' (i.e. the modernist community) and the truth-makers', reality-manipulators' community (i.e. the new premodernist community).

I have found four neo-premodernist proclivities in modern education: (1) propaganda, (2) discipline, (3) moral character development (including social justice), and (4) instructional clarity. Propaganda involves deliberate distortion, omission or

rearrangement of truth to mobilize students for certain desired causes such as nationalism, patriotism, loyalty to the regime, war, industrialization, literacy, social justice[7] tolerance, and so on (Matusov & St. Julien, 2004). Propaganda traps students in its distortions of truth and makes it difficult for them to make up their own mind, different from what is expected of them by the reality manipulators. It usually affects humanities and social studies (e.g. history) but it can also penetrate the so-called exact sciences. In the Soviet Union, where I was a physics schoolteacher, some chapters in a physics book started with quotes from propaganda speeches by the General Secretary of the Communist Party. To a lesser degree, the Sputnik era in the USA also focused on the sciences and involved propagandist aspects (Zhao, 2009).

I define the pedagogical neo-premodernist notion of discipline as the teacher's manipulation of students' psychology and their social relations to make the students behave in a way that the teacher wants them to behave. Although many practices of modern educational discipline sound like behaviorism and often heavily rely on it, with schedules of rewards and punishments to boost conditional reflexes in students, discipline is not limited to a behaviorist dogmatic paradigm that denies mentality in people and reduces all psychological phenomena to the interplay of conditional and unconditional reflexes (cf. behaviorism). Sometimes, neo-premodernists employ game theory, viewing students as rational beings who try to maximize their gains while minimizing their efforts, so the teacher has to develop a set of incentives to force the students to do what the teacher wants them to do (Curtis, 2007). Often, neo-premodernist discipline is based on a well-designed system and schedule of rewards and punishments (e.g. a 'token economy') that involve emotional and relational violence, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation of the student's desire, and power, but it can be ill-defined and non-systematic and can even go beyond rewards and punishments and play on more sophisticated psychological and social properties (e.g. trust, dependency, deeply rooted fears, shame, care, responsibility). For example, the teacher might satisfy a student's important psychological or even physical needs so as to make the student feel obligated to unconditionally conform to the teacher's demands. The goal of discipline is to develop such conditions or circumstances that would force the student predictably to do what the teacher wants him or her to do.

The third neo-premodernist proclivity in education is molding the students' moral character and imposing their engagement in social justice (and sometimes social activism). In gist, it is setting an educational goal of making a good person (or 'a new person', e.g. 'New Soviet person') out of all students, a preset endpoint of new premodernism. My students, preservice teachers, are often involved in a debate about the following teaching puzzle: whether or not a teacher is pedagogically responsible when his or her former students commit antisocial or even criminal acts (as an extreme example, a serial killer of children). Is a crime of a former student a pedagogical failure of his or her former teacher? This question has an overtone of a reference to a long religious history of a theological issue: How can God be Almighty if He cannot make humans good? (Zizek, 2008). When education aims at making students good as its preset teaching goal, in essence, it takes away from the students the freedom of choice, including a choice to perform evil deeds. This pedagogical arrest of students' freedom of choice is always done through the trappings of social engineering, often in the name

of a noble cause, for example, social justice[8] (see Smith's and my analysis of Paley's social engineering for social justice in Matusov, 2009).

Finally, neo-premodernism penetrates modern education in its attempt to instructionally channel students' conceptual understanding so that the curricular endpoint that the teacher aims at can be the *only possible one* for the students, epistemologically and comprehensibly. Here, instead of the students' loyalty and commitment (propaganda), the students' behavior (discipline), the students' morality (moral character), the students' episteme is socially engineered by the teacher. Usually in the name of instructional clarity, only one conceptual pathway, 'the right one', is presented to the students and supported by the teacher; all others are either omitted or suppressed, making dissenting thinking difficult for them. Often, my students, future teachers, ask me and their classmates about constructivist instruction involving the exploration of alternatives, misconceptions and exceptions: 'Why bring exceptions, limitations, misconceptions and conditions of knowledge to our future students—they only confuse them?!' In this neo-premodernist instructional approach, the teacher's instruction makes dissident understandings and dissident ideas as difficult as possible (or better impossible) to ensure that the students will predictably adopt the curricular endpoint preset by the teacher (and by the accountability movement through high-stakes testing).

The Age of Responsibility: Postmodernism

As an educationalist inclining towards postmodernism, I have found a few features that are attractive to me in the three other ages of our relationship with the reality. I am attracted to the old premodernist focus on addressivity and responsibility, although I am not interested in addressivity to the divine authority or in responsibility that is based on fear of and conformity to the divine authority. I am attracted to the modernist insistence on a discourse of rationality and on objectivity as resistance to our dreams and desires, although I am not interested in the iron logic, the universal reason and the totalizing laws of nature excluding subjectivity as a positive legitimate force. I am attracted to the neo-premodernist world of possibilities and their insistence on social constructivism, but I am repelled by their manipulations, inherent elitism and disrespect of others.

My version of postmodernism is based on work by Soros, with his emphasis on the notion of 'reflexivity' (Soros, 1987, 2008), and on work by Bakhtin, with his emphasis on 'dialogism', 'responsibility' and 'no-alibi-in-being' (Bakhtin, 1993, 1999). It involves the following five principles that not only describe how things are but also orient us in our human(e) relationship with the reality:

(1) *The world of possibilities*: certain things are possible to create and change through our actions here and now. I call this the *principle of possibilities*. This principle of the reality construction inspires us to dream of a better world.

(2) *The world of impossibilities*: certain things are impossible to create and change through our actions here and now. I call this the *principle of impossibilities*. This principle of the reality resistance warns us of our arrogance in messing with the reality we cannot change.

(3) *The world of uncertainty*: often we do not know and cannot know in advance what is possible and what is impossible, until we try it. Each of our actions (and sometimes inactions) changes the boundary of the possible and impossible but we often do not know this boundary. Truth is the boundary between what is possible and what is impossible at a given moment. When we increase certainty through our actions in one feature, we decrease it in many other features, which often remain unknown to us. I call this the *principle of uncertainty and agnosticism*. This principle of uncertainty reminds us to be humble and careful in our actions.

(4) *The world of dialogue*: we should relate to other people as having consciousnesses with equal rights, treating each other seriously and expecting to surprise each other (Schön, 1987; Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2011b). I call this the *principle of dialogism*. This principle of addressivity to the reality promotes respect in us for other people and for the social reality.

(5) *The world of responsibility*: we strive to be responsible (Bakhtin, 1993). I call this the *principle of responsibility*. This principle of our obligation to the reality calls for our commitment to be morally good and for us to willingly place limits on our desires and actions.

The postmodernist approach realizes itself in education in democratic dialogic pedagogy from and for agency when a postmodernist teacher actively creates a dialogic provocation to provoke a meeting of consciousnesses—the teacher's and the students'—with equal rights, to take each other seriously and to be able to interest and surprise each other (Bakhtin, 1999). It is a pedagogy of possibilities and hope. This dialogic meeting of consciousnesses is not guaranteed but only hoped for. There is also a non-guaranteed hope that in this meeting both the teacher and the student can transcend their ontologically trapped being and can open up new, more humane ontological possibilities for themselves and other people (Bakhtin, 1993).

I want to illustrate the postmodernist approach with a vignette based on a dramatization of a real event and discourse about this event, which I experienced in the after-school environment of a community center for Latino/a minority children. I present this event through an eyes of a modernist educator at that community center, let's call him Mr David, who accuses a postmodernist educator, Mr Jim, another instructor there, of voluntarism in being a leftist neo-premodernist who tries to trick and manipulate a Latino boy named Pedro into becoming 'good'. The following vignette reflects and reconstructs actual discourses, actions and events.

Vignette: 'Liberal crazy Mr Jim' by Mr David

Mr Jim is crazy.

I know Pedro, a 12-year old Mexican boy, very well. He is a little thief. He was caught twice by the police for shoplifting. Everybody knows that he stole a cellular phone from one of our staff at the Afterschool Center. It's true that we did not catch him at that time, legally speaking, but all evidence showed that it was him. I can't count how many suspensions and detentions Pedro has had at school and he probably steals there as well. Kids at the Center actively dislike him—he's slow. He has a bad

reputation for stealing from peers and for unprovoked fighting. I'll never turn my back to him. He's like a little animal—a predator, who is ready to strike you at any moment. I tried to domesticate him and engage him in my Newsletter Club. I socially promoted him by giving him an important role as an assistant editor, although he objectively couldn't do this work independently. But Pedro ended up fighting with the other kids and breaking a mouse on our computer—who else might do it?! I think that he broke the mouse intentionally to sabotage our work in retaliation for me punishing him for fighting.

I think that Mr Jim is a crazy liberal and an irresponsible man. The Center paid $1000 for each of two digital cameras for the kids to learn how to develop digital stories. Mr Jim gives cameras to kids to shoot videos about their home lives, which is fine with me, if those kids are responsible and reliable. Unfortunately, we have very few such kids at the Center. OK, OK, it's risky, but maybe you can try with some other kids as well. But when I saw Pedro signing up to take a camera to his home, I went to talk seriously with Mr Jim.

Mr Jim listened to me with his smile—I hate this liberal smile as if he knows something that I don't know—and replied to me, 'I can't discriminate against a kid. If I opened up a waiting list for all, it means for Pedro as well'. You can't discriminate?! Oh, yes, you can! I can give you a list of Pedro's 1000 criminal misdeeds, if not felonies—how many 'second chances' do you need to give him before you give up? Mr Jim replied to me that we couldn't know the future. 'Couldn't know the future!' Nonsense! It's a matter of pure probability. The kid is stealing, lying and fighting all the time. Is it not a fact?! 'Fact'—Mr Jim agreed with me. Kids like Pedro will end up selling drugs and sooner or later he will be in jail, or will be shot, or will shoot somebody. Is it not the truth?! In his response, Mr Jim told me such nonsense that I'm not sure I can repeat it here intact because it does not make any sense. He said, 'It's truth, but it's a wrong truth. We, educators, are here to try to change this wrong truth'. He said that we should not continue a wrong truth—we should not participate in a wrong truth. I yelled at him, 'Listen to me, Mr Jim, our pedagogy must be based not on liberal wishful thinking but on truth—on truth of probability. And this probability, based on Pedro's delinquent record, clearly shows to us a pattern that it is *highly* likely, beyond any reasonable doubts, that he'll steal your digital camera and sell it out. Other staff members and even kids are telling you not to give a camera to Pedro but you stubbornly don't want to listen to reason. He'll take advantage of you and make a fool out of you and the Center. Then he will provide a model for other kids how to steal when something is so easy to steal that Mr Jim basically puts it in your hands. And no punishment will follow—you just need to say, 'sorry, Mr Jim, I lost it', or something like that. And Mr Jim will excuse you'.

Mr Jim replied to me that his pedagogy is based on hope, a possibility for better life and trust, not on probability and wrong truth. He said, 'Yes, there's risk of losing a camera, maybe even a high risk. But this camera was bought for the kids—to have them learn. The risk of losing $1000 is worth it for Pedro's education, his life. We can't give up on kids. Not any of them. Otherwise, what're we doing here?! I might not be able to access all the kids in need, but it is better for me to fail in trying than not to try at all. When I can't access a kid, you might, or somebody else. Besides,

without risk and occasional failure, success is impossible. Guaranteed success soon becomes arrogant and disrespectful'. 'Pedagogy of hope' is liberal nonsense based on wishful thinking. I asked him, 'How do you know what's possible or what's not?' He replied, 'We don't, until we try'. Unfortunately, and Mr Jim doesn't have his liberal guts to admit it, there are people, young and old, maybe not many, who are genetically criminal or whatever. Some kids are naturally born criminals. You simply can't change them. And kids like Pedro are among them. It isn't truth that's wrong but those criminal people who are wrong. The truth can't be wrong when it just reflects a sad fact. If you don't like the truth, however sad and unpleasant it is, you can't be a good teacher. I stated to him, 'You can't dismiss the past!' And he replied, 'But we must'.

When the day came for Pedro to pick up a camera, I overheard the following conversation between Mr Jim and Pedro:

Pedro: Mr Jim, but it's my turn! Look, it says my name here! (Pedro points at his name on the list.) It's my turn!

Mr Jim: Yes. What's the problem?

Pedro: You have to give me a camera today!

Mr Jim: Yes. I think that Antonio brought it back.

Pedro: Are you giving it to me?! (I saw that many other kids stopped working on their computers and were eavesdropping on this conversation.)

Mr Jim: I thought it was your turn today, right?

Pedro: Right, but are you giving it to me?

Mr Jim: Why not? It's your turn, isn't it?

Antonio: Don't do it, Mr Jim. Don't give it to him—he'll steal it from you. He's a thief! Everybody knows that!

Pedro: Shut up, Antonio! It's none of your business! Mr Jim, are you giving it to me?

Mr Jim: Yep, for three days. Is that enough for you?

Pedro: Yes …. (Pedro takes the camera from Antonio, turns around and looks at it with interest.) Mr Jim, is this camera expensive?

Mr Jim: Very much! It costs $1000. We got this grant for digital stories. We're so lucky!

Pedro: Do you have many cameras like that?

Mr Jim: Only two. You've seen them both.

Pedro: What would happen if a camera disappears? (I knew it—this bastard was preparing to steal it!)

> *Mr Jim*: Then we can't do the digital stories and funny movies we are doing. We probably won't get another grant to buy a replacement because people might say, 'What is the point of giving them money if they lose it anyway?!' I think if we lose this camera, our Center won't be as fun as it is now. It might become a boring and sad place for kids and staff.

> *Pedro*: Thanks, Mr Jim. I'll bring back the camera in three days.

Of course he didn't. After two days he was suspended from both places: from his school and from the Center for talking back to the teacher and the Center's staff member. Actually, I was not surprised. The boy had so much anger inside him. I told Mr Jim that he could kiss his camera goodbye. This game in the pedagogy of hope was over.

However, to my huge surprise, the next day the camera was at the Center. Pedro had forced his father to come up to the Center after his second job and return the camera to Mr Jim, into his very hands. It had never happened before that Pedro could have made a hit and didn't do it.

I know what you might say to me, that Mr Jim was right and I'm wrong that his pedagogy of hope works and my pedagogy of probability doesn't. But it's liberal baloney! It might work one time but in millions–zillions of times it won't work! I don't know what exactly cooks in Pedro's delinquent head but I know for sure— nothing good. Maybe he plans to steal even more from Mr Jim by developing Mr Jim's trust, then he will break it later by stealing even more than $1000! Or maybe he wants to prove to the other people and himself that he can't be calculated. Or maybe his father has finally had enough of it and promised to beat the hell out of him if he steals one more time! Or maybe even he wants to make an exception with Mr Jim and to treat him differently, but you know what? It does not change his criminal nature. I'm a person of hard facts and I don't see hard facts here.

I agree with Mr David that a teacher cannot guarantee a student's actions and cannot make a student predictably good. Neo-premodernist calculation and channeling of people is impossible even when it sometimes works, because it always works only to some degree, as Mr David correctly points out. But even more, I think it is not desirable. In my view, the biggest issue in this case is not whether or not Pedro would return the camera in some predictable manner to Mr Jim, and it is not even about Pedro's miraculous transformation to a better person, but rather it is about Mr Jim reaching Pedro and engaging him in dialogue about responsibility. I think that this process happened in this case, but it might not have.

Mr David interpreted Pedro's questions to Mr Jim as his probing for stealing a camera. I respectfully disagree with Mr David's judgment because I think that Pedro was trying to make sense of why Mr Jim was going to give him the camera despite what Mr Jim knew about him. It was not 'a second chance' or 'the last chance'. It was not a pedagogical strategy-action, in which Pedro was an object of this action. Rather, in my view, it was Mr Jim's proposal for a breakdown of the predictable history of Pedro's distrustful and exploitative relations with other people. It was Mr

Jim's offer of a new and, arguably, better reality for all. In my analysis, Mr Jim initiated a discourse with Pedro on the responsibility of consciousnesses with equal rights. Nothing was hidden from Pedro by Mr Jim. Each of Pedro's questions was treated by Mr Jim seriously and honestly as 'the final questions'[9] (cf. Bakhtin, 1999). Mr Jim was in an event with Pedro. All of Mr Jim's replies were exhaustively directed to Pedro (to and at *you*) without any attempts to secretly 'wink' to any third addressee invisible to Pedro[10] Would it have been different if Mr Jim had tried to act on Pedro by manipulating him into being good? I think that Pedro, who, in my view, was already rather savvy and sensitive to these manipulations by adults in authority, would have cracked the meaning of such manipulation and would have powerfully resisted it (for more discussion of this phenomenon, see Frankl, 2000; Neill, 1960; these sources discuss similar cases and provide in-depth analyses). Their conversation constitutes an event, a disjuncture with the past.

In Mr Jim's arguably postmodernist pedagogy of possibilities and hope, the pedagogical goal is not to make Pedro good and/or to make Pedro behave in the way that Mr Jim wants him to behave. Rather, I think, Mr Jim treats Pedro and himself as imperfectly a good person. This means that people are striving to be good while being involved in diverse, and at times contradictory, obligations to other people and to their own, self-serving and collective, interests, desires, and survival and self-actualization needs. Sometimes people live up to their aspirations to be good but sometimes they (i.e. we) do not. Although the ontological circumstances that the boy Pedro and the adult Mr Jim had faced might be very different, their existential problem of navigation of their life while striving for being good remains similar, and that is why a meeting of two consciousnesses with equal rights interested in each other is always possible (but still is not guaranteed). 'Being good' does not have a universal, value-free, outside the 'here-and-now-with-these-people' context definition based on Kantian rule-based universal morality with its non-participatory bird's-eye view from above. Rather, 'being good' has to be contextually risky (i.e. never fully guaranteed), and participatively judged and defined each time from scratch by the direct and remote diverse participants, who are biased by striving to be good (Bakhtin, 1993). Only this bias, in my view, can guide us to what modernists often refer to as 'the objectivity'; namely, justice, fairness, harmony with the world, truth and peace.

One might ask what postmodernist instruction looks like for other academic curricula such as mathematics, language, art, science, and so on. Elsewhere (Matusov, 2009), I have provided such descriptions and their analysis. The goal of postmodernist education is not to shape students' skills, attitudes, knowledge and perception in some curricular endpoints preset and known in advance by the teacher, but rather to engage the students in historically unfolding (critical) discourses about targeted practices and involving issues with them, to address the students and evoke their questions and replies, to inform them about influential positions and voices, to promote the students' own voices on the subject matter, to face them with issues of their personal responsibility and engage them in consequential decision making. Thus, a postmodern education is essentially dialogic. In the postmodernist view that I promote here, education cannot make students good or even correct, but it can make

them more informed and engaged ('participative', using a term from Bakhtin, 1993): what sense and position the students take out of this informing and engaging is up to their agency, responsibility and conscience.

Conclusion

  The four power regimes associated with the four ages of our relationship with the reality often coexist for the same participants and the same institutional educational settings. They are promoted by the institutional structures and constraints, political power relations, and personal philosophical beliefs about learning and teaching by both teachers and students. In my research, reading and non-systematic observations on educational practices in many countries, the mainstream conventional schools are mainly shaped by old premodernism through its practices as set curricular standards, testing, memorization, unconditional discipline, transmission of knowledge and so on. However, in many countries, there have been growing tendencies to promote the modernist regime of schooling through 'outcome-based teaching', medical models of teaching and 'research-based teaching' (Hargreaves, 1996), focusing on ways of problem solving (but not goal and problem defining, as in postmodernism) and rationalist justifications, rather than on the correct result in instruction and testing (as in old premodernism), and so on. Neo-premodernism exists in a form of socially engineering policies for teachers and students, management by guilt, demanding vision statements that trap the participants, setting rules of conduct by themselves with preset endpoints, and so on. In my view, many innovative schools increase the weight of modernism and neo-premodernism in their regimes. Postmodernism rarely penetrates conventional or even innovative schooling.

  As others and I have documented (Neill, 1960; Tolstoy, 1967; Tolstoy & Blaisdell, 2000; Rogoff, Bartlett, & Goodman Turkanis, 2001; Matusov, 2009), postmodernist dialogic education is possible at least episodically. Is it possible in a school on a systematic basis, beyond particular occasions? Can it be institutionalized? Is it possible on a mass school level? There has been little consensus on this issue. Illich (1983) and Sidorkin (2009) answer in the negative to the last question. Tolstoy (1967; Tolstoy & Blaisdell, 2000) and Neill (1960) insist that for a school to be postmodernist-like, it has to have voluntary (non-)participation and students must have a right to leave a classroom at any moment. I am currently an agnostic on the issue of the postmodernist outlook in institutions, while engaging in active experimentation in my own college teaching and after-school education.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to George Soros, the philosopher.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rove
2. In Russian, the word 'thank' ('спасибо', 'spasobo') originates in the phrase 'Save God' ('Спаси Бог', 'Spasi Bog').
3. An alternative historical–conceptual account of quantum physics can be found in Kumar's (2008) excellent book.
4. Andrew: … it prevented me from yelling at people, and made me understand why people yell at me. … It was what David said made me realize actually. Now everyone thinks I'm a wuss! (Interview, three months after the event).
5. This includes an error of having an untimely wrong desire for the reality, which is often labeled 'voluntarism'.
6. The Soviet totalitarian dictator Joseph Stalin called writers 'engineers of human souls'.
7. Historically, all totalitarian regimes have been established in the name of social justice.
8. There is nothing wrong in social justice as a noble pursuit *per se*, when it remains a person's free choice.
9. Compare with Viktor Frankl's motto, citing Goethe, 'If we take man as he is, we make him worse, but if we take man as he should be, we make him capable of becoming what he can be … So if you don't recognize a young man's will to meaning, man's search for meaning, you make him worse: you make him dull, you make him frustrated. While if you presuppose in this man, there must a spark for meaning. Let's presuppose it and then you will elicit it from him, you will make him capable of becoming what he in principle is capable of becoming' (from Frankl's speech, 'Why to believe in others', 1972, http://www.ted.com/talks/viktor_frankl_youth_in_search_of_meaning.htm).l
10. Later, when Pedro was in trouble, he named Mr Jim and another staff member as the most important adults, besides his parents, in his life, to a social worker.

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