Pedagogic hierarchies: Plato and Bernstein

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Abstract

'Wherever there is pedagogy there is hierarchy. . ., the language of description should attempt to sharpen its possibility of appearance' (Bernstein, 2001, p.375).

This paper compares the pedagogic hierarchies of Plato and Bernstein and develops a basic theory of pedagogic hierarchy that both could reasonably be seen as ascribing to. It begins with a brief description of two images that convey Plato's understanding of pedagogic hierarchy: the ladder of beauty and the cave metaphor. This is then juxtaposed to Bernstein's pedagogic device, his use of classification and frame, and his theory of horizontal and vertical discourse. Finally, the respective shift upwards of both Plato and Bernstein into the most sacred areas of the unthought is tracked and it is concluded that both Plato and Bernstein can be seen as travellers between the two worlds of materiality and immateriality, although Bernstein provided clearer means to chart the power and control relationships this terrain is always embedded within. Yet in the last instance Plato's great work falls over Bernstein in its ability to self-sufficiently perform what Bernstein can only theorize and research.

Let us begin in a place where student and teacher meet, a place that holds in a disciplined middle ground Bacchalian excess and Apollonian principle – a Symposium where friends and lovers gather to deliver edifying speeches, eat good food, drink some wine, and have a good time. It is in this setting that Plato contrives to provide an account of hierarchy within pedagogy through the speech of Socrates. The medium of love is the device used to travel up the ladder of beauty from its most concrete and physical manifestation to its purest and most abstract form. Love is precisely the power to straddle the various levels of ascent in an integrating spiral. Socrates points to Eros as a desire that has a notion of height and a smack of depth but strives in that liminal space between full knowing and ignorance. It occupies middle ground, a ground that has tasted but not reached. It is the great facilitator between the divine and the worldly, between wisdom and unawareness, between the gods

and man, between the sacred and the profane.[1] In this intermediate world Eros is *both* and *neither*. It is a great spirit, a *daemon,* able to allow communication in the opening between the heights and the depths that otherwise would not touch each other (*Symp.* 202d–204b). It is this force that Socrates uses to climb from the individual, concrete, and temporal to the universal, abstract and timeless. For Plato, structured guidance up and down this Ladder of Beauty is what pedagogy is in its essence.

Socrates' account of how to go about this repeats what he heard at the feet of his own teacher, the high priestess Diotima. It begins with the love of a single body and quickly expands outwards to all bodies before suffering exhaustion and boredom in excess. The more subtle and interior qualities of mind then become increasingly attractive and this expands outwards to a fascination with the socio/cultural institutions and frameworks that encourage and produce good minds as well as the knowledge fashioned from this unity.

> Now he has beauty before his eyes in abundance, no longer a single instance of it; now the slavish love of isolated cases of youthful beauty or human beauty of any kind is a thing of the past, as is his love of some single activity. No longer a paltry and small-minded slave, he faces instead the vast sea of beauty, and in gazing upon it his boundless love of knowledge becomes the medium in which he gives birth to plenty of beautiful, expansive reasoning and thinking (*Symp.* 210a–d).

A hierarchy emerges that includes a previous stage and then transcends it, a hierarchy that expands to gracefully include more and more within its ambit, slowly imparting beauty to everything that crosses its inclusive spiral

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[1] Socrates tells the story of the birth of Love as follows – 'The gods were celebrating the birth of Aphrodite, and among them was Plenty, whose mother was Cunning. After the feast . . . Poverty turned up to beg, so there she was by the gate. Now, Plenty had got drunk on nectar. . . and he'd gone into Zeus' garden, collapsed and fallen asleep. Prompted by her lack of means, Poverty came up with the idea of having a child by Plenty, so she lay with him and became pregnant with Love. . . He takes after his mother in having need as a constant companion. From his father, however, he gets his ingenuity in going after things of beauty and values, his courage, impetuosity, and energy, his skill at hunting. . ., his desire for knowledge, his resourcefulness, his lifelong pursuit of education, and his skills with magic, herbs, and words. He isn't essentially either immortal or mortal. Sometimes within a single day he starts by being full of life in abundance, when things are going his way, but then he dies away. . . only. . . to come back to life again' (*Symp.* 203b–e). There we have it, poverty gaining access to plenty and giving birth to love. A shorter description of the pedagogic enterprise would be hard to find. It frames the whole analysis.

upwards.[2] The ladder increases in both depth and breadth as it expands upwards and inwards. The individual beauty of a single lover is not forgotten, only properly placed in a mind and cultural milieu that is also beautiful. To focus in on individual beauty in a mortal world is to enter suffering, not only because the magnificence of the rest of existence pales, but because that particular manifestation of beauty is destined to wither. Diotima points away from this immersion in particularity towards a structured hierarchy that works from physical individuality to abstract knowledge. It is the taking of a more interior and intensional view. This is the danger of encountering beauty in a specific form, it kisses and wounds, it seduces you with its charm, makes you focus on it to the exclusion of everything else, convinces you that 'this' is the most exquisite and complete experience one can have, and cuts you off from the wine dark sea of beauty all around. Still, it holds a manifestation of beauty and encourages profound thoughts, but it must be placed in the ocean of beauty it swims within, seen as Beauty's child. Hold onto the individual expression of beauty, but see its charm in relation to the radiance that flows all around it and scaffold a path from the one to the other – such is the teaching of Diotima.

A further consequence of the ladder is that the *autonomy* of the lover increases with ascent while degrees of *commitment* expand. As higher levels are reached, the lover is able to work in ways that increasingly release from previous bonds. Seeing that many are beautiful releases the lover from exclusive dependence on one body. Seeing that minds, institutions and principles are beautiful, releases the lover from dependence on bodies. Each release brings with it an expanding area of commitment, until, with the final vision of The Beautiful, the lover is freed from all particular bonds yet committed to all, as we will see again with the Cave Metaphor. For now, let us return to the heights of Beauty.

> 'Try as hard as you can to pay attention now,' she said, 'because anyone who has been guided and trained in the ways of love up to this point, who has viewed things of beauty in the proper order and manner, will now approach the culmination of love's ways and will suddenly catch sight of something of unbelievable beauty – something, Socrates, which gives meaning to all his previous efforts. What he'll see is, in the first place, eternal; it

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2   Hierarchy comes from two greek words: *hieros* meaning sacred; *archein* meaning rules/order. Sacred order. Its first full articulation derives from Pseudo Dionysius and his negative dialectical path that directly uses and theorizes hierarchy as a pedagogic device. A good start is his *Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter 3. We are working with the direct lineage behind his writing – Proclus back to Plotinus back to Plato and his ladder of beauty.

doesn't come to be or cease to be, and it doesn't increase or diminish. In the second place, it isn't attractive in one respect and repulsive in another, or attractive at one time but not at another. . . depending on how people find it. Then again, he won't perceive beauty as a face or hands or any other physical feature, or as a piece of reasoning or knowledge, and he won't perceive it as being elsewhere either – in something like a creature or the earth or the heavens. No, he'll perceive it in itself and by itself, constant and eternal, and he'll see that every other beautiful object somehow partakes of it, but in such a way that their coming to be and ceasing to be don't increase or diminish it at all, and it remains entirely unaffected' (*Symp.* 210e–211b).

The art of pedagogy is to take the student on a path that expands the love of beauty until it touches pure form. It is a hierarchical path that reveals beauty in its most abstract clarity at its highest point, and this imparts meaning to everything else below it.[3]

This is the shimmering vision of Diotima that the older Socrates remembered hearing when sitting at her feet as a young man. She revealed to him the nature of pedagogy – the art of understanding the necessary stages to go through on a path that facilitates seeing the Still Main of Beauty. It is a course that Socrates in his younger years had not fully worked through. As her pupil then, he was still caught up in the earlier stages, as Diotima had wisely pointed out to him (*Symp.* 211d). The young Socrates still got overly excited by the sight of an attractive boy, was immersed in the particular and the sexual, the concrete and the physical, and had not yet glimpsed beauty itself, immaculate and pure. It is

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[3]   The ladder of beauty works with both extensional and intensional types of hierarchy. The shift from one to many bodies is an increase in extension (scalar), the shift from body to mind an increase in intension (complexity). The first works from smallest to biggest, the second works from outermost (simple) to innermost (complex). In both the ladder of beauty and the cave metaphor it is the intensional hierarchy that dominates, although both types of hierarchy work together. So it is that the Forms are the most intensional (at the heart of all that unfolds) with extensional consequence (from their single principle all else flows), but the size and reach of influence does not come from the *size* of the Form, but from its abstract generating power that reaches out from its intensional height to explain extensional range. Bigger does not necessarily mean higher within a hierarchy. It is within the body that one finds the mind and within the mind that one contemplates the Forms. Here actual size does not count. Biology occurs within the parameters of Physics and Chemistry, and Psychology occurs within the realms of Biology – [physical [chemical [biological [psychological]]]]. Within each of these intensional subsets it is possible to have levels of scale that work with components, and wholes nested in each other. For example within the physical we have electrons nested in atoms nested in molecules. The outermost levels are fundamental as all depends on its initial conditions. The innermost levels are the most significant, as these are both the most complex (needing all the other levels to exist) and the most directive (constrain the lower levels within its own systemic functioning).

with these qualifications in mind that we meet Alcibiades, the most beautiful, controversial and desirable of Socrates' students, and it is in this pedagogic relationship that we see the art of pedagogy working with the nature of hierarchy.

Alcibiades arrives at the Symposium already wasted, and pandemonium erupts. He is encouraged to also give a speech on love, but insists that the only person he will deliver a eulogy on is Socrates. He is so drunk that what comes out is the most honest, affecting, searing, and heartfelt description of what Socrates meant to him as a teacher and who Socrates is as a person. Yet it is also a test case for everything Socrates has said about the nature of pedagogy and love. At the feet of Diotima he craved the beauty of young boys, and now here, in full flesh and sexual splendour is the most gorgeous of Athenian men. What effect has the teaching of Diotima had on her student Socrates, will he be able to transcend the Dionysian beauty of Alcibiades? This is the dramatic impetus that drives the second half of the Symposium.

To understand the nature of Socrates, Alcibiades maintains, one must open him up and look inside and there you will find an image of the gods. He is able to reveal this divinity through mere words, words that are so powerful that even when repeated in differing contexts they still have the power to spellbind listeners (*Symp.* 215d). Alcibiades, when hearing the words of Socrates, found himself wrapped in ecstasy – heart pounding, tears flooding – while at the same time feeling deep within himself the inadequacy of how he was conducting his life. Yet Alcibiades was not a compliant victim to the context liberating words of Socrates, he was a robust and stubborn student, refusing to give up a life of ambition, fame and indulgence for eternal beauty. He might have liked the idea of pure form and felt its force, but he preferred to wander around in the quicker pleasures of sex and power with the refrain 'not yet, not yet' easing his way. Such a student would be a worthwhile type for a wise man to educate in exchange for bodily favours. Alcibiades suffered under no illusions and was happy to effect just such a deal with Socrates – body for mind. To this end he undertook the seduction of Socrates, a task that should not have been too difficult, given Socrates' proclivity for handsome young boys and the good looks of Alcibiades. He contrived to get Socrates alone in his house and gymnasium so that a space could be created for the bold declarations of lovers. Yet Socrates' actions in private were no different from that in public. A determined seducer, Alcibiades finally decided on a direct assault, invited him to dinner and got him to stay the night (*Symp.* 217c–e). Socrates greeted his seducer's advances with the following epigram – '[I]t's

only when your eyesight goes into decline that your mental vision begins to see clearly. . .' (*Symp.* 219a).[4]

It is obvious that Socrates had learnt well from Diotima – the physical beauty of Alcibiades could not stand ground with pure Beauty. As the circle of beauty widens from the individual to the ocean of beauty that is existence, true beauty is seen within, in a glimpse that does not look to any outward manifestation, but in a moment of total concentration catches something abstracted from all physicality, shining within one's own mind in an unchanging way. Alcibiades still had his mind fixed on externals and had not turned his mind around into itself, and thus had not begun to walk the inward and abstract path upwards. By brutally demonstrating to his student the paleness of the exterior beauty he held so dear, Socrates attempted to break the hold that physicality had on Alcibiades. Socrates wanted to turn Alcibiades around, stop him pouring his energy into the seething world of time and change, and channel that energy hierarchically upwards into the still point that offers a glimpse of immortality and widens beauty outwards from an individual point towards all of existence.

If the *Symposium* offers us a first take on the hierarchical complexity of the pedagogical task facing the teacher using the modality of love, it is the *Republic* that develops a similar but different pedagogic hierarchy using the modality of intellect. Just as at the heart of the *Symposium* lies the diamond of Diotima's wisdom so does the *Republic* open out to reveal at its centre an image of pedagogic hierarchy in the Cave Metaphor (*Rep.* 514a–517a).[5] Two different vertical paths, one for the heart, the other for the mind.

For the learner to begin a hierarchical journey towards increasing abstraction

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[4]   As in most situations this charged, Alcibiades has not really been listening to Socrates that carefully, and confident in his own beauty, he takes the bold step of taking off his warm winter coat and placing it over Socrates, before climbing into bed with him. It is with a pained voice that Alcibiades continues the tale.

> I put my arms around this remarkable, wonderful man – he is, you know – and lay there with him all night long. . . And after all that, he spurned and disdained and scorned my charms so thoroughly, and treated me so brutally. . . that I got up the next morning, after having spent the night with Socrates, and for all the naughtiness we'd got up to, I might as well have been sleeping with my father or an elder brother (*Symp.* 219b–d).

[5]   A detailed and nuanced account of the metaphor can be found in Strang (1986).

we need to know the initial conditions. Plato describes this as being tied down by chains and forced to look in one direction only, towards the dark end of a cave where shadows play on the wall, cast from a fire behind. All the captives have ever experienced is the dance of shadows, so naturally it is their reality. There is no questioning of what is going on behind them to cause such a display, for it has never been seen. We are in this state in our everyday consciousness; it is our normal taken-for-granted existence at its most elementary level. We are bound tight and then driven by a single context and the manifestations it displays. We chase after its representations, pouring ourselves into them, investing what we are in it, naming it, interpreting it, valuing it, twisting it and criticizing it to suit our desires.

The key point is that there is no recognition of being a prisoner in this state. It is experienced as freedom, and indeed, the captives are free to make what they will of the display in front of them, free to shift the discourses horizontally depending on what their current state demands. It is a freedom held in chains by the inability to work on another level apart from the located one in front of them. It is a freedom that allows for any and all attempts so long as they segment and saturate themselves against the same flat wall.[6] This allows for a sense of *complexification* and 'busy-ness' but not of *complexity* and order. Complexity needs one level ordering or emerging from another, complexification is all about various activities happening on the same level without an ordering device. Put paradoxically, complexity involves simplification. The prisoner suddenly recognizes that all the various shadows have higher ordering devices that simplify the various shadows into stabilizing categories that are hierarchically organized.

Only with the ability to work on another level that places and organizes the first does a pedagogic relationship appear. The only way to understand the nature of shadow is to understand the form that causes it, otherwise all one is doing is playing with more shadow. What the learner must do is turn around and look into what is causing the display. It is a wheeling around of the whole person from being focused on the instability and momentariness of existence towards a more stable force that lies behind the production. As the learner turns from the outside world of display to the inner and more abstract world producing it, a journey out of the cave begins that echoes the *Symposium's* Ladder of Beauty and its shift from the physical to the abstract.

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[6]   See Bernstein, 1996, p.170-171 for a comparative account in terms of horizontal and vertical discourses, well elaborated on by Moore and Muller (2002).

The first thing seen by a prisoner who is set free from dependence on horizontal shadows is a higher ordering device that regulates its lower field. What regulates this higher field is still not clear, this will only become comprehensible as the learner moves vertically up the ladder and it is this logic that is repeated continuously in the Cave Metaphor. Clearly, the 'more real' object is itself a copy of something 'more real' outside the cave but the cave dweller does not know this yet, he is still struggling to make out what this new world and its objects are. Even the firelight is dazzling and obscures his attempt to see the models responsible for the shadows. Yet slowly this new reality stabilizes, with training and discipline the shadow lover is able to identify the new objects seen although she or he does not yet know that these new objects are things made in imitation of the world outside the cave. A Hierarchy of Being slowly emerges and it is a deeper and more complex world that the cave dweller now moves within.

The world beyond the cave is not a physical world that can be touched, tasted and smelt. It is an abstract, immaterial world, but for Plato it is the most real of worlds, a world that contains truth, beauty, goodness as its very Being, a world that never flickers or sways, an eternal world of Being beyond this timeful world of becoming. The pressing pedagogical question that arises is how to introduce the learner to its vertical delights, of how to take the cave dweller to the mouth of the cave so he can emerge into the sea of beauty out there in the 'real' world of Being. It is a question of how to shift a student's interest from the visible towards the intelligible, from physical objects and their models to an increasing hierarchy of abstract forms. It is an education of hierarchical abstraction that Plato is *enacting* for us in words. This journey is a difficult *t*ask, for students still desire the satisfactions offered by the cave with its models and shadows, as we saw with Alcibiades. Besides this, looking into the higher reality that opens out at the cave mouth is a blinding activity, especially when it is only the physical world of becoming that a learner is used to contemplating. The student would still feel that this new world outside the cave is actually the imitation of the 'real' world of the cave. S /he has only a shaky grasp of its movements and forms, and this unfamiliarity makes this new world appear ghostly and vague in comparison to his own locale. Much practice would be needed before the student was capable of contemplating the Forms in themselves. Initially the cave will continually pull the student back with its brunette attractions. Slowly, with diligence and discipline, abstract ideals and principles will begin to emerge as worthy of emulation and honour.

A hierarchical process takes place, with the student continually searching for a deeper reality that underlies the object contemplated, continually questioning assumptions and abstracting until the deepest reality is attained. An integral vision will begin to unfold that holds gradients of reality in perspective until the student is finally able to turn his eyes heavenwards and contemplate the generating source of light that illuminates everything – The Good – that which sits at the heart of existence in the purest, most abstract state. Once this utmost level of abstract contemplation has been reached the student will, for the first time, understand the full nature of existence in all of its complex depth and height, and understand how it fits together. He will have come to an understanding of The Good, the Beautiful, and the True as well as the murkiness of the Cave. The levels of existence will hold together in a graded Ladder that includes and places all in a hierarchy that ranges from darkness to light, concrete to abstract, image to reality, becoming to Being.[7]

Only once pedagogy has taken the student from the depths to the heights can the true nature of this world of becoming be seen. He would rather be a serf in this glorious sphere than king of the shadows. In this newly illuminated world he will see grades of abstraction, running from the purest of forms to its various dependent realizations contained within. Yet an obligation awaits all who have ascended to the heights, it is the call to return to their fellows still chained below and assist them on the journey upwards. It is the call to teach, a call to return from the monad to plenitude, from principle to application, from contemplation to praxis. It is the call to *recontextualize*. Firstly, the teacher mostly has no desire to return to the cave, preferring a world that is close to the production of things rather than having to enter the world of reproduction once again. Secondly, his fellows have no desire to leave their located context. It will sound like a madman's talk to them. Thirdly, as the teacher enters the cave of becoming again, he will be blinded anew, unable to even see the shadows so easily worked with before. He will seem idiotic to the shadow lovers, even more stupid than before he left their company, or be seduced by the shadows again, recalled by the attractions of the flesh. As Propertius

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[7]   This vision has its equivalent in Plato's conception of the Universe, mapped out in the *Timaeus.* In it we meet a Pythagorean astronomer who tells the story of the universe. He tells of a creator who made this world of becoming. 'He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be' (*Tim* 29e). It is this key passage that informs the Great Chain of Being (Lovejoy, 1936) that sits at the heart of pedagogic hierarchy from Plotinus to Dante. For Bernstein the Good can be very jealous indeed.

intones –

> How she let her long hair down over her shoulders,
> Making a love cave around her face.
> Return and return again.[8]

The Cave is a beautiful place, it is only in a widening and deepening reality that it becomes shallow, its diversity segmented and exhausted on the cave wall.

The task of education is to devise the simplest and most effective manner of turning the mind away from its fascination with the world of becoming and make it capable of bearing the sight of real Abstraction. Education becomes the art of correct alignment, of proper orientation, of turning the mind around (*Rep.* 518d–e). But the mind does not come alone into the world. We have to eat, drink and procreate to survive, and these pleasures tend to pull our vision downwards into the flux of unnecessary desires, breaking our wings. Education thus has to begin at an early age, hammering at the chains of desire and indulgence until the mind is freed to turn around and begin the upward ascent to the light with the desires in harness (*Rep.* 519b). Initially this is the task of Music and Gymnastics and that is why it is crucial to be structured regarding what children read. It is pointless using an unaligned text to orientate a child's mind. It falls to primary education to produce a healthy person who is well balanced and in harmony with him /herself and the world. All resources must be sifted through to ensure that they encourage this effect. It is an education in character building, in enabling a person to function effectively and virtuously in this everyday world. It is an education within the Cave. It enables the darkling to increase depth by one, to gain control of desire

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[8]   The opening lines of his poem *O best of all nights, return and return again* (Washburn and Major, 1998, p.164).

and wander around in a useful way throughout the world of becoming.[9] The question remains as to what kind of education would enable a leaving of the Cave and an entering of the Light, of how to close the route of everyday common sense, and open up the road to the Invisible.

Plato's famous recommendation is that of Mathematics. It is an education in abstraction, a shifting of focus from the visible to the intelligible, from becoming to Being. It awakens reason and provides tools for its strengthening until eventually the soul can make a leap towards a level of reality beyond Mathematics – Goodness. In working with numbers it deals with a phenomenon not encountered in the physical world, for there is nothing in the world that has every single unit exactly equal without any remainder (*Rep.* 526a). It thus forces the mind to rely on intellectual rather than physical processes. The lifting of the learner into the heights entails a purging, a complete separation from the physical world, so that a pure contemplation of essence can occur.[10]

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[9] As the learner increases his depth, a simplification of the earlier state occurs as it is placed within a more encompassing vision. For example, the desires of the released prisoner contain necessary and unnecessary components. As he moves upwards, he simplifies his desires by keeping the necessary ones and purifying himself of the unnecessary ones. The same process happens when honour and then reason become the uniting principle, until all that is necessary has been kept and ordered within an increasingly deeper system. It is not a losing of desire but its correct training and placing so that higher desires can be reached. Certain texts like the *Phaedo* point to a more austere vision of the body and the need to transcend it. It is just a living corpse causing difficulty in the reaching upwards of the Intellect towards the Divine. It points to an insistent tension in the Platonic corpus, but as the *Republic* contains Plato's most developed psychology, I keep to its suggestion that all have a place if they perform their correct functions within a hierarchy.

[10] Mathematics also proceeds in stages. Slowly mathematics is able to build up an intelligible world, beginning with a single stream of numbers, expanding this into two-dimensional geometry, then the volumes of three-dimensional space, and finally the nature of solidity in motion (Astronomy) (*Rep.* 526a–528d). In the same way that a cave leaver has to slowly acquaint himself with the new world opening out in front of his eyes – building up from shadows to reflections to objects to contemplating the heavens – so must the student of mathematics build up the dimensionality of the intelligible world he is being introduced to. Even the mathematician must be on guard against his vision spiralling downwards into the physical realm. For example, what tends to happen in Astronomy is the beauty and regularity of the stars takes the mind away from the greater abstract beauty of pure number and form (*Rep.*529b–d).

Once this is achieved, a sea of knowledge opens out to the learner. If s /he manages to work in a totally abstracted world, everything unwraps itself to measurement. Whether it is Music, Astronomy or Geometry, total abstraction allows a great sameness to descend. An affinity between all subjects reveals itself, uncluttering the student's mind and enabling it to see the relation of everything to all. The vertical ascent leads to an integral vision developing that is able to take in local and generic levels of reality as well as having a tool to work across these levels. Yet all of this is only a prelude to the final great leap of learning, it is all only preparation for the best part of the mind to reach out for the best part of reality (*Rep.* 532c). This is the great discipline of Dialectic whereby 'without relying on anything perceptible, a person perseveres in using rational argument to approach the true reality of things until he has grasped with his Intellect the reality of goodness itself' (*Rep.* 532a–b). It is a process of actively questioning assumptions until a point is reached beyond abstraction. Even Mathematics, the technique that turns the mind from the physical to the abstract, has to work with definitions and assumptions that it does not question. The nature of a point, of a number, or of a line is defined but how they came about is left unanswered. 'There is no chance of their having a conscious glimpse of reality as long as they refuse to disturb the things they take for granted and remain incapable of explaining them. For if your starting-point is unknown, and your end-point and intermediate stages are woven together out of unknown material, there may be coherence, but knowledge is completely out of the question' (*Rep.* 533c). Mathematics can only dream about true reality, it is Dialectic that enables the final lifting upwards into The Good. In a radical doubting of all assumptions, in a searching for the context behind the context, in a quest to find the mother of all abstractions, a sudden flash of insight comes with pure mental clarity. A limit point of the thinkable is reached, and as the mind attempts to work at this end point of scepticism it is abruptly pitched into a world beyond assumptions, a first world, a world that makes assumptions possible. The ladder is thrown. It is a peculiar process. On the one hand thought expands outwards, including more and more within its grasp. At the same time it radically simplifies and abstracts as more and more contexts are held within generating principles. Its end result is more than a founding assumption, it is what makes founding an assumption possible and enables an analysis of the founding principles of knowledge structures.

It is an arduous curriculum that entails a good basic education and a thorough grounding in the mathematical sciences, beginning the shift from the tangible to the conceptual. Dialectic is then actively practised to sceptically eliminate

all assumptions and direct the student to the First Principle that informs all. Only then is a student ready to begin the descent back into the Cave as a teacher of others and there he must work until he is able to teach in the cave in an adroit and illuminating way. The blindness of light entering darkness becomes a 'blind' filtering the light within the shadows for those needing to see.[11] At this stage, the teacher is equally comfortable in the world of becoming and Being, skilled in polymorphically working on the interface between the two, unblinded by the continual shifts of perspective needed. Now the ascetic path upwards and the creative pouring downwards hold equally for the adept. Only then can they be guided to the climax of their lives. 'You must make them open up the beam of their minds and look at the all-embracing source of light, which is goodness itself. Once they have seen it, they must use it as a reference-point and spend the rest of their lives ordering the community, its members, and themselves' (*Rep.* 540a–b).[12]

How does the Bernsteinian corpus square up to this archetypal vision of hierarchy and pedagogy? The easiest place to begin is with Bernstein's description of the sacred and the profane and the space that opens between them. Within any society there is a distinction between sacred, esoteric, unthinkable otherness of knowledge and profane, mundane, thinkable knowledge of the other (Bernstein, 1996, p.43). It is a splitting up of the world into immaterial transcendence and everyday mundane materiality. What interests Bernstein is the force that relates these two to each other, a force that

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[11]   Thank you to Derek Mahon for this conceit, found in his poem 'First Love' (*Selected poems,* 2000). The line is 'This is a blind with sunlight filtering through'.

[12]   'Each of you must, when your time comes, descend to where the rest of the community lives, and get used to looking at things in the dark. The point is that once you have become acclimatized, you'll see infinitely better than the others there; your experience of genuine right, morality, and goodness will enable you to identify everyone of the images and recognise what it is an image of. And then the administration of our community will be in the hands of people who are awake' (*Rep.* 520c). We see here an intimate mixing of individual and social levels of analysis that is sustained throughout the *Republic*, indeed, what happens on a social level provides a bigger picture of what happens inside of us according to Plato.

Plato described as Eros in his ladder of beauty.[13] This force must break through meanings that are directly tied to a material base, that are wholly consumed by and embedded within context without hope of uniting with anything but themselves, much like the state Plato described his prisoners being in within the cave (1996, p.44). For Bernstein, it is the pedagogic device that plays the specific role of breaking this grip of materiality and uniting context bound meaning with other contexts and abstracting concepts. To enable this release there must be a prising open of the context in such a way that the direct relationship becomes indirect by introducing a higher level of abstraction that depends on the context but works differently to it, shifting meaning by degrees from the material and concrete to the immaterial and transcendent. This is what pedagogic *enhancement* is – experiencing boundaries in a way that breaks its chains through the *discipline* of hierarchy, for it is through hierarchy that one is able to step onto the other side of the boundary, able to walk up and down the ladder into new worlds of possibility and probability (1996, p.6). As this gap opens it creates the space for change, for it has released possibility from necessity and this is where we see the first crucial difference between Plato and Bernstein. Both understood the nature of this gap between the sacred and the profane, but Plato wished to regulate this gap with specific political, economic, social, educational and personal practices that ensured a specific distribution of power. Hence his tying of the personal model of the shift from the shadows to the light with the Republic and its philosopher kings. Bernstein, on the other hand, wished to think through the way *power and control relations distribute the sacred and the profane* (1996, pp.18, 45). It provided Bernstein with a certain kind of critical edge different to Plato. He is able not only to describe the nature of the divide between the sacred and the profane and how to bridge the two, but also the variations /possibilities opened up in this gap and the power and control relations that attempt to regulate its functioning. Plato's ladder attempted to set up a pure Euclidian space in which Philosopher kings ruled within a mythology of gold; Bernstein's ladder recognized a topology twisted in space

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[13]   There have been many thinkers in the Western Tradition who have attempted to develop their own pedagogic device to work this terrain. Dante is the master of the pedagogic device with his *Divine Comedy* not only encompassing the greatest depth with the greatest height, but also all the levels in between. Other great attempts can be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Descartes' *Meditations* and *Rules*, Augustine's *Confessions* and Plotinus' *Enneads*.

and time by the gravity of power and the reproduction of inequality.[14]

This does not mean that there was no movement in the Platonic hierarchy or a questioning of its functioning.[15] We did see two essential movements in the cave metaphor and the ladder of beauty: a movement upwards from the profane to the sacred and then a movement downwards from the light back into the shadows. The task of the sun gazer is to return into the cave and recontextualize what he has experienced for those still bound in a specific, limiting, context. It is a descent down the hierarchy and this is also how Bernstein describes the pedagogic device, beginning with how it *distributes* the sacred forms of knowledge, then how it *recontextualizes* it downwards into the shadows as thinkable knowledge, and finally how within the profane this recontextualization is received and *evaluated*, of how it impinges on the consciousness of the prisoner. It is the hierarchical shift downwards from creation to transmission to acquisition, from inspired production to reflective simplification to reproductive acquirement. It is a movement from abstract design to repetitive copy.[16] The prophet seer on the top of the mount is recon*text*ualized by the priest who makes what he saw understandable to the laity in the foothills still worshipping concrete images. One founding Type produces type/token trees below it that increasingly make explicit and specific

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[14]   This is a broad generalization. Plato does think through the implications of power and justice being intimately connected through the articulations of Thrasymachus (*Rep.* 338c), a position he gives full attention to in his *Gorgias.* See Burnett (1964) for an introduction to this vexed area. Furthermore, Plato was fully aware of power as an ordering device both in its corruptions and positivity, his *Republic* is precisely a description of how to free both individual and group from the deformations of power through the use of power. His is a vision of a new order, Bernstein is about the analysis of inequality not the creation of a new ranking, although current Bernsteinians are very quickly pushing towards this kind of vision. It is not going to take them long to build their own *Republic* (or Republics). But to do this they are going to have to negotiate and elaborate on how the regulative and instructional dimensions of education work as *activity systems*. This involves the current holy trinity of Bernstein, Halliday and Vygotsky being synthesized. See Daniels (2004), Webster, Matthiessen & Hasan (in press) and Bourne (2003) for very useful beginnings. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article for pushing me on this point and for the many other recommendations that have improved this paper.

[15]   Plato worked through the critical implications of his own hierarchy in the *Parmenides*.

[16]   We see a similar logic in Bernstein's distinction between internal and external languages of description, where the first works in the light and the second asks how these concepts can be made more material for the cave. Morias and Neves (2001), Ensor and Hoadley (2004) provide useful guidance in how to work from the light into the shadows.

what was contained in its abstract glory. But it is also the story of return from the many to the one, of what the reproductive acquirers make of this downward flow of light into the cave and here again the similarities between Bernstein and Plato becomes apparent. Bernstein continually points to how this device is not deterministic in both its flow downwards and clambering upwards, in both efflux and return. There is always space for this device to work differently, for in making the sacred accessible to those who it wishes to acquire it, paths are created that others can follow and exploit. The sacred vow unlocks to profane articulation (1996, p.52). But it also finds in its successful charting of a path between the sacred and the profane that others begin to challenge for its ownership, redefinition and use (1996, p.64-81). In Bernstein's explicit pointing to how power and control relationships can be understood in terms of classification and framing relationships he encompassed not only a similar height and depth of vision to Plato, but enabled a clearer placing of its majesty within the power and control relationships it was always already a part of.

Yet this placing of hierarchy within the fields of power and control should not make us ignore the nature of hierarchy in its own right and its intimate relationship to pedagogy. There is a deep educational logic to hierarchy that works its specific claim, and the easy mistake is to critique hierarchy wherever it is found as if hierarchy itself is responsible for inequality and not a device that can both address and cause inequality in education, depending on its use. With both Plato and Bernstein we saw a use of hierarchy to liberate not enchain and it is incumbent on us to point explicitly to how this is the case.

The first point already made is that any 'pedagogy' that works without any hierarchy results in complexification, not complexity. Each unit works on its own and is exhausted within itself as its own type. It does not relate to any other unit for to do so would assume some higher abstraction that related the two to each other. It is a wasteland pedagogy of immense variation and multiplicity without an ordering or emergent device to hold the diversity together. It is a horizontal plane where each feature holds separate and pure, a deflationist account where each unit holds in its own right and has nothing to do with the truth of the other. There is an illusion of growth in the diversity but these form a horizontal chain that bind the learner to whatever the specific context is without providing the tools to move beyond. Those who already have such an ordering tool can begin to build from the elements and climb the ladder; those who don't can only rearrange the types into different patterns on

the same cave wall.[17]

As soon as there is another level then hierarchy appears and the pedagogic relationship takes on one of three possibilities. Firstly, it can explore how a new level *emerges* from the elements below, of how the many become one and are increased by one, of how types become tokens for a new type. This is a pedagogy that works with hierarchy from the bottom up. Secondly, it can reveal how the higher level (type) *constrains* or provides boundary conditions on the elements (tokens) below, of how the one makes of the many below it a specific order necessary for itself to appear. Either pedagogy works from the fundamental to the significant or from the significant to the fundamental. The third pedagogic option is to work *horizontally* within this hierarchy, building up fundamental components so that possibilities can be created for significance or creative play. This allows for the possibility of pedagogy working with three levels: an upper level that constrains the middle level with its boundary conditions, and a lower level that enables the middle level to emerge from its components. At this level of working with a pedagogic hierarchy a unit would hold within itself both its own conditions of *possibility* from below and its higher levels of *probability*. It would not only have been built up from elements below but also have been formed by constraints above it that are pulling it towards itself as an attractor.

To summarize the nature of pedagogic hierarchy working from one to three levels we either have:

• segmented units with no previous tokens needed, and no regulating principle guiding it;
• either a type guiding what tokens are used (top down) or a building of various tokens into a type (bottom up), but not both;
• both tokens being worked upwards into types, and these types becoming tokens for another type above it in such a way that level 3 constrains level 2 *and* level one provides the possibilities for level 2.

An educational relationship that is working on at least three levels of hierarchy contains within itself the basic model of what pedagogic hierarchy is, for it not

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[17]   See Holland (1981) for experimental confirmation of this vision in terms of elaborated and restricted codes, where middle class learners are free to move through conceptual and contextual hierarchies, while working class learners are condemned to repeat the same everyday patterns again and again.

only works with founding conditions but also with future possibilities. If we take the second level as our unit of analysis (with both constraints from above and components from below) then we notice four basic energies working, all of which have pedagogic drive. Firstly, there is a tendency for the unit to *preserve* itself through strong classification at the level it is already on. Preservation can harden into a radical icy imperviousness to the other three forces or become a flexible independent unit open to these forces from within itself. Secondly, the unit can soften its classification and *adapt* itself to the level it is working on. Adaptation can result in the horizontal boundary dissolving completely in entropic heat or result in a creative receptiveness to the world around it. Thirdly, the unit could *break itself downwards* into its respective components. This can result in a radical dissolution where the higher unity is lost or it could provide clarity as to how the higher unit came about. Fourthly, it could *transcend* its own location by becoming a token to a type above it and shift up a level.[18] This can result in the upward path becoming dictatorial command or it can reveal the possible emergences that were contained within its own functioning.

These are the simplest components of a model of hierarchy and pedagogy placed together, and both Plato and Bernstein work its logic for the enhancement of educability. The next question I want to deal with is whether the higher levels are *bigger* or more *abstract* and the danger of equating the two kinds. Within Hierarchy theory[19] (as already discussed in footnote 3) there are two basic kinds of hierarchies: scalar/extensional and intensional. The first works with increasing levels of scale (from classroom to school to district to province to country); the second with increasing levels of complexity (from the concrete to the abstract) where there are greater levels of generalization,

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18   Piaget describes these forces very clearly in his levels of development: assimilation (the self preserves itself from the world); accommodation (the self opens itself out to structuration from the world); disequilibrium where the self finds the level it is working on under question, and a new state of equilibrium where the self shifts hierarchically upwards into a new level of development.

19   Koestler (1967); White, Wilson and Wilson., eds (1969); Pattee (1973); Allen and Starr (1982); Salthe (1985); O'Neill *et. al.* (1986); Ahl and Allen (1996); Wilber (1995). Set theory and computer programming, especially object-oriented programming with its concepts of inheritance, polymorphic resonance, yo yo effects etc. etc. provide rich resources to elaborate on this field. The latest fashionable French theorist to be thinking through the implications of set theory for the human sciences is the neo Platonist (sic) Badiou.

structuration and organization as one moves up the hierarchy. Plato works with both types in his two guiding images of pedagogic hierarchy. There is a shift from one body to many bodies (scalar/extensional) and then from bodies to mind (intensional/conceptual). Then there is the extension of minds working together in cultural institutions, before the intensification of knowledge produced into *form*al principles that finally lead to the great attractor of all – the Good. But the highest point of an intensional hierarchy is not the largest, indeed in Plato's case the Form has no extension at all for it is immaterial. It might have great extensional *implication* in that it contains within itself these fundamental constituents as its earlier levels, but its higher levels go beyond these more concrete units by having included what is necessary from them and then having introduced new and more abstract levels on its foundation.

We see a similar logic operating in Bernstein's pedagogic device. It is an intensional hierarchy in that its highest point is what is most sacred and abstract, and then it recontextualizes downwards and outwards into increasingly more concrete and specific formulations that reach right down into the trenches of the classroom. But it can also appear as an extensional hierarchy with the national department providing the highest/largest level of organization that increasingly breaks itself down into smaller units until we again reach the classroom. Both kinds of hierarchies are needed to think through its implications for pedagogy.[20] The danger is getting the two mixed up and maintaining that the biggest has to be the most abstract, or the abstract has to be the largest. Anyone who has worked with national departments will recognize the absurdity and danger of this link being absolute. Bernstein's strength was that he was not only able to think through the implications of both hierarchies separately and together within the educational field but was also able to provide a language of how these all held together. This enabled an analysis that can function on different levels but still work with each other. His language enables a translation device that works across both macro/micro and abstract/concrete, as well as their cross fertilizations.

The danger with a translation device is that it tends to work with exterior form and not interior intricacy and density. What is needed as well as an internal

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[20]   Ensor provides a particularly good example of how the pedagogic device works in her paper for the 3rd Bernstein Symposium – *Legitimating school knowledge: the pedagogic device and the remaking of the South African school-leaving certificate 1994–2004 –* especially its location within poverty and plenty.

conceptual language and external objectifying language of description is a language of *interiority* and *exteriority.* A language of interiority works from inside the unit of analyses' own framework and shows how from within its own conditions it maintains its boundaries. Classic exemplars for this kind of language can be found in phenomenology and auto-poiesis. These have *internal conceptual* languages but they are also *interior* languages in that the concepts arise immanently from within their own domain and are not externally derived. Bernstein attempted to provide an internal language of description that is conceptually worked out in its abstract glory, an external language that shows how to operationalize and research the concept, but he also attempted to work on an interior language for education in its own terms, refusing to treat it as a relay switch for power relationships beyond it, or abstract terms imported from other disciplines. It is this focussing on the interiority of education with internal and external languages of description that give Bernstein's writings such weight within educational research. It is one of Bernstein's major contributions to our thinking and research within the educational field and it rides on his initial breakthrough into how to work with the basic abstract forms of education: classification and frame.

'Classification' (what boundaries are drawn in space) and 'Frame' (how relationships interact in time) work in and between these respective hierarchical arenas and enable a furthering of what Plato described happening at the highest but one level of his ladder of beauty where the ladder becomes a sea that can be explored in all its depth and breadth, where all unwraps to measurement. From a painstaking working through many variations of classification and framing relationships Bernstein was finally able to come up with a simple formula that provided the translating device between the various levels of the pedagogic device as well as a foundational analysis of the forces of power and control operating within and between levels.

$$C\pm ie/F\pm ie$$

Classification and Framing work on a spectrum from strong to weak ($\pm$) in ways that are either interior to the unit of analysis or refer to how the unit of analysis relates externally to what is outside of it. It is with this simple analytical tool that Bernstein is able to travel as far as Plato did both into the depths and heights of the cave and ladder in its extensional and intensional variations, only now he has a universal translating device that picks up the manner these hierarchies work within a world seething with poverty and plenty. Dante had Virgil to guide him through the wastes of the inferno and

the climbing up the mount of purgatory; so too does Bernstein have at his side this fair equation. I exaggerate, but only just.

Stepping back for a moment we can see the bare bones of an adequate theory of pedagogic hierarchy showing itself – of working on preferably three levels with four tendencies that vary in classification and framing strengths and extensional and intensional types.[21] Such a theory needs elaboration both in terms of its internal and external language of description and in terms of languages of interiority and exteriority.

Yet this fair equation would seem to falter at a certain point, at precisely the place that Plato points out as the pinnacle of his pedagogic hierarchy. It is the point where dialectic throws the traveller into a world beyond principles, into a place where first assumptions are made and formed. It is precisely these founding forms that initially make classification and framing possible, that provide the initial impetus to its working. These original forms make classification and framing possible by providing the primary divisions the world operates within. To assume that power and control relationships make what they will of this world and carve it up to suit their ends is to miss how the world is already formed at its joints, a reality that will confront us with its own primary logic, a logic that makes classification and framing possible and speaks to it from the other side of space and time.

Bernstein did not go quietly into the night. In one of his last papers, *From pedagogies to knowledges* (Bernstein, 2001), he pointed to precisely that sacred terrain where assumptions and principles of knowledge are generated and again asked a question of it different to Plato. He wished to find out from this place of great height and abstraction not who its first mover was, but how there are "changes in knowledge forms and displacement of and replacement by new forms, creating a new field of knowledge positions, sponsors, designers and transmitters" (2001, p.368). It is from this great height that Bernstein peered down with intelligent love into the classroom in the hope of making the climb upwards recognizable and realizable. We have already seen Plato describe what should happen to someone privileged enough to reach this point. After contemplating the nature of The Good he should

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[21]   See my paper *Hierarchies and Education* presented at the Kenton Conference, 2004.

use it as a reference-point and spend the rest of their lives ordering the community, its members, and themselves' (*Rep.* 540 a–b).

What Bernstein used as his reference point was not the nature of the Good itself, but how the Good has been structured within poverty and plenty. The pedagogic love that is born from this union is the need to structure a path towards *justice* that works with broken ladders. But it is not only broken ladders that Bernstein worked with but the grammars of different ladders (Bernstein, 1999) and the various recontextualizing effects this has as the pedagogic device shatters downwards. Perhaps now we can see why Plato not only wrote of a ladder of beauty that worked with the verticality of love but also of a cave of shadows that worked with the differing verticality of intellect. Yet Plato did not only provide us with differing paths through that complex middle ground of the profanely sacred, he *performed* the journey for us through his writing. His writing is precisely the principles of hierarchical pedagogy enacted before us in such a way that it still takes us on the journey in all its phenomenological richness and complexity. It is this performance that warms the first half of this paper and makes of us all bloody footnotes.

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