***N.B. is a working draft of a paper, please don't circulate more widely without checking with me first.

'A Troubled Cure for a Troubled Mind': Mental Health and the idea of Therapeutic Education

Emma Williams
University of Warwick

Time has told me
You're a rare, rare find
A troubled cure
For a troubled mind …
(Nick Drake, 'Time Has Told Me')

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the global 'mental health crisis', amongst young people, attention continues to be placed on the role that schools can play in helping young people with their struggles. This increased attention on mental health in education and in society might appear like a new phenomenon—especially as discussion of mental health has been heightened in connection with recent global crises (such as the coronavirus pandemic as well as crises in poverty and the climate). Yet the idea that education has a relationship with what is today called 'mental health problems' is far from new in itself.

In this paper, I seek to re-open the question of the relationship between mental health and education, by attending to the question of how coherently the relationship is being understood today. I focus, in particular, on a view that has attained much traction over the past 20 years—and constitutes a 'no-nonsense' *rejection* of the idea that education should become embroiled in discussions of mental health and with, more broadly, a therapeutic agenda. Is mental health and therapy the business of schools at all? The critical argument

against therapeutic education, as we shall see, set within the context of a broader critique of therapy and the therapy industry, and contains its own assumptions about the proximity of therapy to education.

II. THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION AND ITS CRITICS

From therapy culture to therapeutic education

The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education was first published in 2008, and was viewed at the time as a controversial text. A Second Edition of the book was published in 2019, less than 12 months before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. In their new preface, Ecclestone and Hayes draw attention to the growing references in wider culture and education to the impending crisis in youth mental health. (They could not have predicted the way mental health would have become an even more central focus in the years and months that followed, compounded by national lockdowns and closures of schools). Their work continues to be seen as one of the strongest critiques of what they call the 'concept creep' across therapeutic and educational contexts—and Ecclestone and Hayes would surely see the current 'mental health' agenda in schools as one further instance of this growing phenomenon. Thus, while many in education are thoroughly invested in the idea that schools should be concerned with wellbeing and mental health, Ecclestone and Hayes seek to provide an articulation of why the infiltration of therapy into education is deeply problematic (p. 161). For Ecclestone and Hayes, this involves questioning 'both the nature and extent of the problem that therapeutic education is supposed to address' (2019: 149), and in ways that come to show therapeutic education as thoroughly 'authoritarian, normative and dangerous' (p. 160).

Let us begin with some clarification of what Ecclestone and Hayes have in mind when they refer to 'therapeutic education'? The scene is set early in the book, via a broader look at the influence of therapy and therapeutic agendas on contemporary lives. Ecclestone and Hayes suggest that therapeutic concerns have become embedded in contemporary culture, pointing to examples such as:

> One section of a bookshop in a small town near Oxford is depicted as 'Tragic life stories': it carries 69 titles. Next to it, the sub-titles of the autobiographies of minor and major celebrities suggest they could easily cross into the other section: tales of 'love and fame' are illuminated through "battles with addition", "low self-esteem",

> "childhood abuse", and "personal demons". Autobiographies of minor celebrities … have turned insecurity, emotional 'pain' and vulnerability and "battles for emotional survival" into a flourishing literary genre of what some call "cry-ographies" (p. 2)

As further evidence of the widening of therapy and therapeutic concerns into everyday life, Eccelstone and Hayes cite the proliferation of categories of 'psychological syndromes and disorders' that has come to emerge in contemporary psychiatry and medicine (p. 7). They also refer to the way particular certain mantras have become part of our common ways of understanding and thinking about ourselves and our behaviour—notions such as 'we all suffer from low self-esteem'; 'we must accept ourselves and value what we have'; 'it is possible to realise our potential and find our "real self"' (pp. 8-9). These are 'therapeutic orthodoxies', 'drawn from an eclectic mix of cognitive behaviour therapy, neuroscience, Freudian or Jungian analysis, transactional analysis or Rogerian counselling.' They work to bring about a shift in the contemporary age from a language of deficit or 'sickness' in speaking about mental health and wellbeing, towards more optimistic vocabulary in which discussing mental health problems is seen as 'a progressive development that enables more of us to admit to problems' (p. 18).

Ecclestone and Hayes' central concern, however, is with the way that therapeutic concerns have come to infiltrate education. A significant moment, they suggest, occurred in the early 00s, when notions of emotional literacy and intelligence came to enter the classroom (p. 21). At least since 2007, they write, idea that educators should 'actively promote happiness and wellbeing' has mostly become an orthodoxy in schools (p. 46). The subsequent chapters of their book will unfold the way this has come to be realised across different levels in school and higher education in the UK.

Therapeutic intrusions

The chapter on 'The Therapeutic Secondary School' is particularly illuminating on what Eccelstone and Hayes have against therapeutic education. Indeed, Eccelstone and Hayes begin this chapter by suggesting that what has been happening because of the therapeutic turn in the secondary school context (in England) represents 'a much deeper change in ideas about the purpose and content of education' (p. 64). Here we come to see the first level on which therapeutic education has 'changed the subject'—that is, altered the structure of the curricula and the educational purpose of traditional intellectual disciplines in education.

Ecclestone and Hayes note how the therapeutic agenda found a readymade audience amongst those who had been disenchanted by the 'exam factory' system of contemporary schooling as well as by the push towards cultivating skills for the labour market (p. 62). The therapeutic agenda appeared to herald a different orientation for education, one which focused on the young people themselves and developing what has been called 'personal capital'—or what Eccelstone and Hayes call 'soft skills' i.e. skills that are seen to be related to feelings and to personal and emotional behaviour (in contrast to the kinds of skills of the labour market). We see this particularly in the development of 'personalised' learning programmes—in which young people are encouraged to gain knowledge of *themselves* (how they learn, how far they are 'ready to learn) over above gaining particular subject knowledge. Eccelstone and Hayes use as an example an activity in which a young person is encouraged to keep a diary about school in which they record their hopes, fears, and expectations first thing in the morning and then look back and compare whether any of these were realised during the day.[1]

The next point that Ecclestone and Hayes highlight is what has happened to traditional subjects because of the therapeutic turn. In fact, the authors argue that *progress* of the therapeutic agenda somewhat depends upon (been itself bolstered by) casting tradition subjects and curricula as 'boring' and 'irrelevant' to contemporary teenagers. The rejection of traditional subject knowledge or what they term 'intellectual' pursuits' is thus seen to work hand in glove with the rise of the therapeutic agenda; as they write: '[the shift from] the intellectual to the emotional, from the mind to the body, typifies what we have called the therapeutic turn' (p. 60). And again: 'many proponents of learning to learn appear to regard the emotional outlook, attributes and skills associated with them as more important than subject content' (p. 51). Yet hollowing out of traditional subjects exemplifies for Ecclestone and Hayes that, far from being an 'antidote' to instrumental approaches to education, the therapeutic agenda in fact *continues* this agenda—albeit towards different kinds of outcome ('soft' skills). As Eccelstone and Hayes put it, because of the therapeutic turn traditional subjects come to be 'marshalled for emotional outcomes amidst a plethora of other instrumental outcomes' (p. 47). They highlight the way that interventions once seen for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and 'cognitive progression within subject domains' become morphed to fit therapeutic agendas—pointing to the example of how

[1] They several features of secondary schools in their discussion—for them the infusion of therapeutic education can be seen throughout notions of personalised learning, specialist interventions, the introduction of peer mentoring schemes, the introduction of new subjects or updates to existing subjects.

formative assessment comes to be redefined not as something used to improve understanding but as something used for 'fostering a positive attitude as part of wellbeing' (p. 63). In an interesting twist, Ecclestone and Hayes then point to the way that any arguments *against* this therapizing of educational practices itself comes to be critiqued using therapeutic terms:

> Learning to love particular subjects, or aspiring to excel in them, have become invisible as educational goals. Indeed, in therapeutic language, such ideas signify 'dysfunctional' teachers who care more about their subjects than students who use this to maintain 'inappropriate' power relations. (p. 62)

The love of knowledge, they suggest here, comes to be cast as a kind of fetish of a dysfunctional mind. Hence another hallmark of therapeutic education as Ecclestone and Hayes critique it is the closure of other possibilities and difficulties faced in arguing against it.

Vulnerable beings

Here we move on to the second major problem that concerns Ecclestone and Hayes in their book: the way that therapeutic education succeeds in altering 'the human subject' (p. 164). In their chapter on secondary schools, Ecclestone and Hayes cite the words of Guy Claxton, educationalist and cognitive scientist who developed the influential account of 'learning power. In Claxton's estimation, young people as obsessed with 'raving', taking drugs, celebrities, they are all at risk of getting pregnant; at the heart of these problems are feelings of insecurity, and of finding themselves shorn of skills that are relevant and needed in their contemporary lives. Claxton's words work to exemplify for Ecclestone and Hayes the move towards portraying young people as anxious, fearful of the future, and floundering that works hand in glove with the turn to therapeutic culture. Notably, it is not so much that Eccelstone and Hayes do not think young people are feeling this way—it is more that they think they are feeling this way because therapeutic culture has *created* them as such. The point can be extended to understandings of the phenomenon of the youth mental health crisis. As Eccelstone and Hayes put it in their updated preface, they see the contemporary mental health crisis as 'a manufactured problem that has become very real.'

We approach here something key to understanding the 'danger' invoked in Ecclestone and Hayes' title. It is a matter highlighted in the preface to the second edition of the book. As

Ecclestone and Hayes put it there: 'key to our concerns [in writing the book] was the wider cultural privileging of ideas that human subjects are inherently vulnerable and in need of constant psychological support and emotional management' (2019: ix). For Ecclestone and Hayes, it seems, therapeutic culture *necessarily* colludes with this conception of the subject. As they put it: 'however well-meaning, therapeutic techniques *cannot be separated* from a culture that promotes the diminished self' (p. 160 [emphasis added]). Or, as Ecclestone and Hayes also put it, in ways that draw attention to the severity of the problem, 'we argue that therapeutic education is social engineering of the feeble, passive subject on an unprecedented scale (2019: 163). For Ecclestone and Hayes, then, therapy succeeds in creating a 'diminished' account of the human being—diminished insofar as the self is vulnerable and passive. Part of the diminishing here involves how, via casting us as vulnerable, we become open to more and more external forces and control over our lives. Ecclestone and Hayes note the way young people are encouraged towards a kind of 'hyper vigilance' in relation to their emotions and psychological states—which leads more and more young people to start feeling troubled and insecure about the ways they are feeling—and which, in turn, leads more and more people to seek support from the therapeutic industry. As such the industry comes to flourish and its ways of understanding the human self comes to predominate. Hence narrative that human beings are vulnerable—and the more recent move to characterise this vulnerability in terms of psychological disorders—allows therapy to survive, and indeed makes it become a necessary aspect of our lives. We are caught in a cycle where a certain kind of cure is perpetually required.

Eccelstone and Hayes' argument has similarities with the wider analysis of society and therapy Frank Furedi develops in *Therapy Culture.*[2] Furedi, notably, sees hallmarks of a fictionalised vulnerability in discussions, for example, of the rise of sexual violence, discussions of trauma and 'cycles of abuse', as well as ideas of addiction. Like Ecclestone and Hayes, in Furedi's account therapy culture promulgates a picture of 'vulnerable, traumatised and emotionally damaged individuals.' Moreover, he argues, this picture works hand in glove with a sense of self as powerless, helpless and passive. The idea of the vulnerable self in Furedi's analysis is thus seen to involve a wider sense of the external world as 'an object over which people have very little control' (2004: 127). Therapy culture,

[2] First published in 2004. Furedi authored the preface for the first edition of *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*.

as Furedi sees it, is the sign of a society 'obsessed with the diseased character of the self.' It is a sign of 'society's pessimism regarding human potential' (2004: 118).

In Ecclestone and Hayes' discussion, the pessimistic character of society is largely reflected in terms of what has been happening in education (2019: x). In their discussion on secondary education, Ecclestone and Hayes note how, rather than rising young people out of their problems, therapeutic education (with its emphasis on vulnerability), works to produce adolescents who are narcissistic, inward facing and introspective. As they write, in reference to the therapeutic interventions in secondary schools:

> Dressed up as developing emotional skills and wellbeing, the training of appropriate attributes, dispositions and values encourages young people to see themselves, their feelings and opportunities to participate as the most important topics they can learn about (2019: 63).

The idea of the vulnerable self breeds, in turn, 'a curriculum which assumes that topics and processes can only be engaging if they relate to the self' (p. 63). The 'core value of schooling', Ecclestone and Hayes argue, is hereby turned away from knowledge into a search 'for true sources of satisfaction'; education becomes subsumed to the overarching question: 'are children happy'? (p. 64). However well-meaning some of these interventions might be, for Ecclestone and Hayes they come from a misconceived notion of human beings and, as we might say following Furedi, one that has been born of a pessimistic society.

III. INITIAL QUESTIONS

It is worth interrupting our analysis of Ecclestone and Hayes discussion at this point, to begin to raise certain questions. Certainly, we may feel a certain sympathy with the argument that Ecclestone and Hayes develop about what has happened to education today, and especially given the way the invasion of therapeutic concepts to understand ourselves happens so regularly and across many areas of our lives in ways that have largely come to be unquestioned and normalised. (Something to which academia is not immune—indeed Ecclestone and Hayes refer to the way that those who have taken a critical approach to their ideas tend to psychologise them, and say they are dealing with their own psychological 'issues' against therapy!). At the same time a nagging question may be emerging: what might be the *alternative* to the pessimistic, therapeutic society that Ecclestone and Hayes are portraying here?

This kind of objection is, in fact, one that Ecclestone and Hayes consider.[3] In the final chapter of *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education,* and in the context of Ecclestone and Hayes' consideration of those who would say their critique suffers from a lack of positive alternative, Ecclestone and Hayes offer some broader diagnoses of the malaises that lie behind the taking root of therapeutic education. As they put it, in response to their critics:

> We believe that debates about our arguments need to focus not on the crisis *in* education but on the fact that we face a crisis *of* education, a crisis which comes from the disintegration of the idea of education and of loss of belief in human potential … The battle of ideas we want to create is about the account that state education increasingly offers of what it means to be human (p. 161)

We might wonder whether Ecclestone and Hayes here object to the pessimistic, therapeutic society by scaling up the pessimistic thinking further—the crisis is not just *in* education (pessimism about young people's mental health) but *of* education (pessimism about the nature of society itself). When turning to consider what we might do on the other side of such thinking, Ecclestone and Hayes in fact reject what they term the 'contemporary left' which seeks a 'resurgence of some vague "politics of hope"' (p. 161). They also reject 'emancipatory rhetoric' of educators such as Paulo Freire. Instead, they seek a turn to what they call 'radical humanism', to be defined thus:

> In its widest sense, radical humanism stands for humanistic values associated with the enlightenment: reason, science and progress. Radical humanism is essentially a rational philosophy that focuses on the ability of humans to transform the world by making scientific and social progress through reason. (2017: 162)

In terms of what change this will bring to education, Ecclestone and Hayes become wary of turning to conceptions 'liberal' education (which, they argue, has also become diminished). Instead, they connect the idea to what could be a revitalisation of '"subjects" … based on the intellectual disciplines' as the heart of education (p. 162). In this account, the idea of the vulnerable subject would be replaced by a 'a rational, robust and autonomous human subject' (2017: x). Ecclestone and Hayes cite John Stuart Mill and Socrates as precursors to

[3] Furedi's alternative is somewhat different because it invokes as sense of stoicism, but there are connections between his idea of the 'stiff upper lip' and the enlightened humanism that Ecclestone and Hayes suggest.

such a conception of the human subject—and of the purposes of education. As Ecclestone and Hayes write in the lines that close their book, 'what makes humanity is the intellectual and an education based on *cogito ergo sum* not *sentio ergo sum.*' (p. 164).

What are we to make of these claims? It is worth noting, as a starting point, that the invocation of John Stuart Mill is perhaps a little ironic. Indeed, Mill writes in his *Autobiography* about his experience of education at the hands of his father, which might be the pinnacle of the kind of education Ecclestone and Hayes are advocating for (schooling as gaining the knowledge of the disciplines, aimed at cultivating an independence of understanding).[4] Yet at the same time as Mill's education led to remarkable intellectual success—he was reportedly reading Greek by 3 and Latin by 8—as he recounts in his *Autobiography* it did not leave him immune from psychological problems. The overt evidence for this comes from what Mill calls 'a crisis in my mental history' which occurs in his 20s. He somewhat attributes this to the kind of education he received, which appeared to enact something of a domineering hold on his thinking in ways that led him to struggle 'to attain his own conception of how he should live his life' (p. vxii). His crisis is described as being a moment in which he found himself deficient in feeling, and without the capacity for pleasure. At the same time, as Mark Philp puts it in his introduction to the Oxford World Classics version of the *Autobiography*, the work as a whole is 'a compelling and troubling text' which might suggest a more complex picture (p. xv). Mill sees his recovery as coming by way of reading the romantic poets (Philp suggests it also came by way of the experience of the death of his father (p. xviii)), yet these are hardly optimistic sources and if anything would take us deeper into the recesses of what Ecclestone and Hayes might object to as 'vulnerability'.

The suggestion that Socrates is a figure who might side with the alternative conception of education (and the human being) that Ecclestone and Hayes are presenting is also worthy of further reflection. In particular, this is because, within the classical period, the connection between therapy and education would not have been questioned but would have rather been part of the background of understanding of the nature of both fields (in fact it is more of a contemporary phenomenon to think in terms of separate 'fields'). Put otherwise, in the classical period, education and therapy were intimately intertwined—as Pierre Hadot has

[4] The introduction by to Mill's *Autobiography* by Mark Philp helpfully emphasises its focus on upbringing and education (see pp. xii-xiii particularly).

brought to light in his analysis of Ancient Schools. As Hadot writes in relation to Socrates, in particular:

> … Socratic dialogue turns out to be a kind of communal spiritual exercise. In it, the interlocutors are invited to participate in such inner spiritual exercises as examination of conscience and attention to oneself; in other words, they are urged to comply with the famous dictum, 'Know thyself.' Although it is difficult to be sure of the original meaning of this formula, this much is clear: it invites us to establish a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes the foundation of every spiritual exercise. To know oneself means, among other things, to know oneself *qua* non-sage: that is, not as a *sophos*, but as a *philo-sophos*, someone *on the way toward* wisdom. (1995: 90)

Hadot's discussion of philosophy in Ancient Greece brings to the fore the ways that, for Socrates, the practice of philosophy was intrinsically related to the health of the soul—and how this also involved a certain challenge to the learner and a kind of uprooting of certainties that were previously held without reflection. That there is something disturbing in this form of education is seen from the way the dictum of *knowing oneself* we find in Socrates was not a call for the kind of narcissistic introspective search (as Ecclestone and Hayes equate with therapeutic education). Rather it was a troubling of the self and its knowledge—and a sense of knowledge of something, as seen in the above quote, that is always somehow beyond and outside of us, and a sense of the human being as one that is *on the way,* structurally, not just contingently.

We start to open some interesting lines of thought here that might take the discussion of education and therapy in a somewhat different direction. Yet it might be said that the points raised here are unfair as objections. Ecclestone and Hayes are not seeking to produce a fully-fledged philosophical account of the alternatives at the end of their book. So is this unfair? Yet the point is not just that Ecclestone and Hayes make a few erroneous references. For I think what is brought into view here vis-à-vis their alternative reveals how certain ways of thinking about therapy and its proximity to education that have been passed over in Ecclestone and Hayes' account. Let us consider further.

IV. ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Let us at this point take a turn that might seem a little abrupt, yet it will serve to take us into the kinds of thinking that was opened above. The British psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips is an example of a figure from 'therapy culture'—but how far as what we find in Phillips akin to what Ecclestone and Hayes critique in their book?

Let us take off from Phillips' short essay: 'Should schools make you happy?' Here Phillips considers the view that 'we are pleasure-seeking creatures, who want to minimise the pain and frustrations of our lives' (2010: 86). Yet the picture, as he notes, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is all-too-easy—and 'happiness is not as simple a thing as we would like it to be' (p. 86). The simple fact that children have competing pleasures shows this (a child can both wants and not want to have their dinner: they are hungry and so will get pleasure from eating, but they are also engaged in playing their game and not wanting to interrupt it). On a more complex level, as Phillips invokes, psychoanalysis shows us how we are creatures whose ways of life are embedded in fictions and fantasies—capable of a multitude of ways of censor ourselves and hide from ourselves our real pleasures, and of taking pleasure in ways that are morally problematic such as in the pain of others.

For Phillips, the simplistic drive to happiness that is there in modern culture and modern society speaks of a wider pathology—a warped and disturbing inability to adequately respond to the conditions of life in the modern world. Phillips' way of making this point is somewhat subtle. 'What would it mean' he asks, 'as an adult, to be happy after watching the news?' Or, as Phillips continues, 'as a child, to be happy after learning in school about the history of the slave trade?' (p. 89). The drive for happiness in education and elsewhere is interpreted by Phillips as a 'cover story.' It is a way of closing ourselves off from certain matters. It is, put otherwise, a motivated avoidance. The avoidance is not that might not only, of course, be driven by our own psyche. It can be an avoidance that undergirds a society as a whole—and perhaps one that plays into the hands of certain industries. (Coca-cola sell us a picture of happiness, as Phillips suggests). Hence it is worth asking, as Phillips does, albeit somewhat cryptically, 'if education is going to make you happy, what is it going to have to make you in order for you to be happy?' (p. 99).[5]

[5] Phillips notes the risks of a culture that promotes *unhappiness* too—a similar problem emerges as the unquestioned pursuit of happiness. The point, I take it, is that the unquestioned pursuit of happiness creates the conditions for the promotion of unhappiness, as a counter to this.

I would suggest that Phillips' discussion here (and elsewhere) brings out certain problems for Ecclestone and Hayes' account. Phillips is drawing on therapeutic ideas and traditions—but not in ways that seem to involve a wholescale acceptance of the kind of therapeutic education that is objected to in Ecclestone and Hayes' book. Yet let us look a bit further. For in fact in Phillips, too, we start to get a *different* sense of the ways in which education might be related to the happiness agenda. As Phillips puts it, 'education should make you *interested* in happiness' [my emphasis]. Or elsewhere, 'it seems to me that one thing education can do is help children *find a language* that can do justice to the pleasures and problems that happiness involves' (p. 93). 'We may end up by saying something like: education should be showing children good ways of bearing their unhappiness, and good ways of taking their happiness when it comes' (p. 98).

Phillips' discussion draws upon some central tenets of psychoanalysis (and of certain traditions in philosophy, particularly those that take the 'linguistic turn'). In the background to Phillips' discussion is surely Freud's provocative remark that he would have succeeded in his psychoanalytic task if he 'transformed neurotic suffering into ordinary human unhappiness.' This, as Phillips puts it elsewhere, is a statement about the nature of the human. Freud's conception can be connected to the understanding of our lives in language and with words (indeed, the centralisation of language and what is said is a key aspect of the revolution of psychoanalysis). Our lives and our thoughts are 'made with words'—but we are not in control of words and language. There is something that is always troubled in our relationship with our words: they may feel as close as my own skin, but my words also tie me up in knots and they escape me and evade me too. The possibilities I have of making meaning (with words) are always at the same time haunted by the possibilities of meaning unravelling. Stanley Cavell has described the precarious position we find ourselves in in relation to our words: 'a thin net over the abyss'. Yet this sense of the fragility of our words and our lives with words which is part of what it is to be human.

Psychoanalytic therapy is largely a matter of attending to words and the struggles we are in with them. But Phillips also brings us to consider a picture of education as involving something similar: education, as Phillips puts it, as *finding languages* and *finding words* in relation to the things we are being taught about. The idea of 'finding words' does not, notably, here mean a matter of mastering or of gaining a complete understanding. Our education is, rather, much like psychoanalytic therapy, not a task that is ever completed of finished but is rather ongoing. It is not going to be a totally smooth and easy matter. Coming

to and into words involves a necessary struggle (it is the kind of struggle envisaged in the myths of Oedipus and the myth of Eden—both accounts of the genesis of the human). Part of the nature of the things we are learning about and coming towards is that they are never grasped completely or for all time.

Note that, pace Ecclestone and Hayes' argument, there is nothing in the relationship between therapy and education we are moving towards here that would reject or deny the learning of traditional subjects. Yet we might come to think about 'traditional subjects' in less static and completed terms as seems to come through in Ecclestone and Hayes' discussion. Certainly, it might be precisely *via* traditional subjects that the kind of learning Phillips is alluding to can take place (Phillips singles out the history lesson). More obvious, perhaps, are the connections between an education in literature and what Phillips is talking about—as Phillips puts it elsewhere:

> If psychoanalysis is like a poetry lesson, a poetry lesson … might be … like psychoanalysis. But a lesson in getting something right in words, as right as one can make it; and a lesson in the importance of faltering; and a lesson in the value of unstateable, unknowable aims. (p. 16)

The point is to see the opportunities that there are *within* traditional subjects for this kind of learning. It is not to infuse into them therapeutic principles, but in fact to resuscitate in such subjects dimensions that have long been there—but tend to be blocked by a modernity that is inhospitable to and motivated to avoid what, as Cora Diamond puts it, 'unseats our reason' (2003: 22); a wider pathology of turning away from 'the difficulty of reality' of which the decline of subjects (such as history and literature, as well as other humanities) can be seen as a symptom. The global shift towards emphasising skills and competencies, we might note, deflects attention from the content of such subjects. Content, when it is emphasised, is conceived as mastery of the ability to meet criteria that achieves a grade. There is a nihilism in much of the way the disciplines are being conceived along these lines—and the kind of engagement that Phillips is seeking to bring into view, in history as in poetry, works on the other side of this nihilism.[6]

[6] It is worth referring back to the idea of fictions and fantasies a little more here. Phillips' earlier point, mentioned above, that fictions and fantasies can work to hide our conceptions of happiness is well made, but this should not hide the fact that, as well as this, our fictions are a part of our real world. Here, I mean to refer to fictions that are overtly fictional, such as works of film and literature, and more generally stories, without which

Do we move then here towards another way of thinking about education and its relationship with therapy? Yet it is worth considering a further point, namely, is this just pessimism in another guise? In other words, does the kind of view we start to open via Phillips and his sense of psychoanalysis, reinvoke a sense of the 'vulnerable' self that, as Ecclestone and Hayes suggested, makes us powerless and open to control by therapeutic culture and others? Certainly, there are aspects of writing about psychoanalysis that might do this. Yet I think Phillips resists this—what he offers us is more like an idea of disquietude (a disquieted life) that a vulnerable self. A key difference is this: a certain image of the vulnerable self, at least, still harbours the image of a *cure*—and hence an all too clear notion of things we need to remedy our ills. But the idea of the disquieted nature of the human we would not be seeking *cure* – indeed part of the education is coming to see that there is, in the words of Samuel Beckett, 'no cure for that' ('that' referring to being human).

We can bring these lines of thought back to the figures of Socrates and to Mill and what we saw in them: a struggle as intrinsic to education and we do not get 'let out' from it, but rather is ongoing across the course of a life (or the course of an autobiography). Education here is connected to our *becoming human* which means learning to see the unsettlement that essential characterises human life. In covering this over, therapeutic education hollows out therapy: it makes it into something quasi-medical and in ways the continue the scientism of disenchanted modernity. Education has been lost. and But Ecclestone and Hayes seem to enact their own a hollowing out, too—of education's therapeutic possibilities, or otherwise put, of the proximity of therapy to education.

V. THE EXPRESSION OF DANGER

Before drawing conclusions, it will be worth raising a further note about Ecclestone and Hayes' argument in *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*. A helpful way in is to consider a review that was published in *The Guardian* about Furedi's book. The review, which was titled 'Pull Yourself Together' took issue with what the author called Furedi's 'tough-guy assault on vulnerability' (Morrison 2003). The author points particularly to how insensitive Furedi's critique of vulnerability and victimhood as 'constructed' might appear

---

human life is scarcely conceivable (or would not be the thing that it is). It is to refer to the way that fictions and images are things we inherit and project that shape the way we actually behave. For example, it would be difficult to see what loyalty would be if it were not in some way couched on the part of the agent in images of loyalty and the kind of life that goes with it. The same holds across a range of our experience (wife, mother, sister, teacher, academic, researcher, fitness enthusiast, chef, vegan and so on). The point, of course, connects to what is being said about the inheritance of language more broadly.

to certain people—including those who have been the subject of domestic violence, child abuse, stalking and bullying. Does Ecclestone and Hayes' account give us a similar impression?

Of course, Ecclestone and Hayes may feel that the kind of charge being introduced above is all too familiar. They may point to the way that they have already responded in their book to similar criticisms, viz. those that cite statistics as proof of the prevalence of 'damage' and 'disaffection' amongst young people today. Ecclestone and Hayes' counter to this is to destabilise the statistics, pointing to the way that there are 'varying figures' (p. 148) as well as repeating their suggestion that much of the so-called increase in mental health problems is as a result of pathologisation to the extent that 'a non-problem becomes a problem and more and more people describe normal states as ones that cause difficulty and distress' (p. 148-149).

Certainty, Ecclestone and Hayes' challenge to statistics as unquestionably showing us the 'facts' is to be welcomed. Yet I also think that the points being introduced via the *Guardian* article are moving in a slightly different direction—and one that is not necessarily attended to in the 'replies to objections' that Ecclestone and Hayes include in the final chapter of their book. One way of putting this is as follows: what seems to me to be being objected to in the *Guardian* review seems more to turn on the *way* in which Furedi is making his argument (characterized in the review as a 'tough-guy assault). In other words, it is turning us to issues of the *style* in which arguments against therapeutic culture, and therapeutic education, tend to be developed. A phrase that might be helpful for us here is one that Gordon Bearn used in a seminar paper where he spoke of the voice of 'gruff realism.' What Bearn seemed to be pointing to was a certain tone of voice that is adopted in philosophy at times—a kind of common sense or non-nonsense tone and the self-consciously rigorous avoidance of sentimentalization. Of course, we might think that this kind of tone has something going for it, particularly in relation to some of the pretentiousness and sentimentality that surrounds aspects of therapeutic education (and which the examples in Ecclestone's and Hayes book serve well to illustrate). At the same time, however, we might wonder whether the kind of 'no-nonsense' tone we find in Ecclestone and Hayes has something lacking. It is—as is perhaps being intimated in the *Guardian* review of Furedi—

too blunt and abrupt to do justice to the issues under consideration.[7] It might even become a kind of rhetorical style in itself—one that is acquiesced in just as much as the sentimental style of some therapeutic education adopts. And all this compromises something of the rigour of the argument itself. It is a kind of tone that might also shape the alternative to therapeutic education invoked by Ecclestone and Hayes above. Notably, what we saw here was a move that pitted a rational, 'enlightenment' conception of the human against the vulnerable conception of the self the is at the heart of therapy culture. In doing so Ecclestone and Hayes' draw on something of a caricature of the Enlightenment figures—as committed wholly to reason, and as sceptical of anything to do with the emotions and feelings.

When Gordon Bearn alluded to the voice of 'gruff realism' it was to get us to see what is problematic and limiting within a certain tone. It turns us towards issues of language and expression and their centrality in human lives (something that tends to be overlooked as superfluous to the substance of an argument). In regards to certain issues, we might put it, the no-nonsense voice does not quite do the trick—in fact, it might work to cover over the complexities of the problem. Put otherwise, perhaps there may be something that goes un-addressed, something that is not quite responded to in Ecclestone and Hayes' account on account of the assumption of this tone.

So, is this a battle between education and therapy, a matter of being on this side or that? Certainly, this is not where this argument is leading. But it is to suggest that there is a question over *how* we are to object to therapeutic education—a question of how it is that we understand what is problematic about the modern ways of understanding the relationship between education and therapy. Ecclestone and Hayes' no-nonsense tone may mean that certain aspects of therapeutic education go un-addressed.

Adam Phillips would be just as critical of the instrumentalization of modernity and indeed of therapy culture. Yet we do not find in his work that the no-nonsense tone that comes through in Ecclestone and Hayes' critique. Neither, we might say, do we find the kind of sentimentalism that characterises much of the therapeutic turn. Of course, this is not to say there are not interesting issues of expression to be examined in relation to Phillips' thinking.[8] But there is a tension that is manifest—and this connects, I think, to Phillips' attempt to

[7] There are of course differences in the tone between Furedi and Ecclestone and Hayes. Furedi's 'tough guy' might be reminiscent of some of the kinds of tone we find in certain traditions in sociology, particularly that draw on a certain reading of Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power.

[8] It is a point that is explored in interesting ways by Stanley Cavell in his review of Phillips. See Cavell (1997).

reinvigorate the connection psychoanalysis, philosophy and literature, that is, to the way his writing operates on the borderline of the (itself troubled and contested) relationship between psychoanalysis and the humanities.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have traced the way Ecclestone and Hayes connect therapeutic education to broader issues regarding therapy culture, the instrumentalization of education, and the cultivation of a vulnerable notion of the human subject. For Ecclestone and Hayes, therapy is not only a *mechanism* of this instrumentalism and cult of vulnerability, notably, but is *inextricably* linked to it. They suggest such matters (instrumentalism, vulnerability) are to be resisted, and that a key part of this is keeping education out of the business of therapy. For Ecclestone and Hayes, education should be geared towards the development of an enlightenment-inspired notion of the subject: a rational agent able to contribution to the progression of knowledge. They take see philosophical figures such as John Stuart Mill and Socrates as pillars of this view.

I have sought to develop a criticism of Ecclestone and Hayes' solution to the problem of therapeutic education. Centrally, I have been questioning whether Ecclestone and Hayes have moved a little too quickly in their rejection of the relationship between therapy and education. This involved, initially, reconsidering Mill and Socrates—as two figures who, in fact, allow us to start to glimpse quite a different idea of the relationship between therapy and education. Exploring Mill's *Autobiography* and Pierre Hadot's reading of philosophy as a way of life, we come to see the proximity of certain forms of education *to* therapy—albeit a different kind of therapy to what we find in contemporary forms of therapeutic education. There is certainly more that could be said about both these thinkers.

Yet in this paper I have sought to develop these ideas further by turning to the work of Adam Phillips, as a contemporary figure in 'therapy culture'. The starting point for this was Phillips' essay on happiness in schools. It is worth noting here that the question of happiness in schools is one topic among many that Phillips has written about—and it is not like I am suggesting that this issue or issues of education are centrally examined by his work. Indeed, Phillips is more generally interested in the work of the therapist and their client and, as I have also discussed, in challenging some of the phony aspects of therapy culture that exist today. Yet part of what I have been exploring in this paper is the ways in which Phillips' ideas can be taken further in connection with philosophy and education. We might say that

what we come to glimpse through Phillips' discussion is an account of Plato's idea, repeated in later Wittgenstein too, that education involves a 'work on the self': not in the sense of introspection, but in the sense of a self-formation and growth that is always ongoing. On this view, as we saw, education is not well cast as a remedy for our ills. If it is truth tat 'you're on earth: there's no cure for that', then what we need to shift is precisely the idea that *a remedy is what we need*.

Ecclestone and Hayes' attempt to rescue education from the clutches of a therapeutic culture that is diminishing our understanding of ourselves and of education. Yet their argument seems inattentive to the proximity of therapy *to* education. The move to recognise this proximity (as I am seeking to do here), need not involve a move in the direction of introspection, self-indulgence and the cultivation of vulnerability (or of instrumentality). It need not move in the direction of making a case for or against therapy, either. What is at issue here is not, in fact, a confrontation or a seeking to resolve a confrontation: being on this side or that. Rather, the question is how to best to understand what is problematic about therapeutic education as we currently have it. In the context of the contemporary mental health crisis—and in the context of increasing evidence that 'therapeutic education' is failing to improve this—the question seems even more urgent. In this context, it is interesting to return to those traditions in philosophy and psychoanalysis that interact in their effort to do justice to human disquietude and the disquieted life—and see where they can be taken forward in relation to education today. To invoke the epigraph of this paper, in this time of 'trouble minds', can we find a way to seeing education as the 'troubled cure'?

REFERENCES

Cavell, S (2022 [1997]) 'Finding Words' in Cavell, S. *Here and There: Sites of Philosophy* Bauer, N. Crary, A. and Laugier, S. (eds). Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press. pp. 138-152

Ecclestone, K and Hayes, D (2019) *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* London: Routledge

Furedi, Frank (2003) *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* London: Routledge

Hadot, P (2005) *Philosophy as a Way of Life* Oxford: Blackwell

Mill, John Stuart (2018) *Autobiography* Oxford: Oxford World Classics

Morrison, B (2003) 'Pull Yourself Together!' review published in *The Guardian* available at www.theguardian.com/books/2003/dec/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview7 (last accessed 11/10/2023)

Philp, M (2018) 'Introduction' in Mill, John Stuart *Autobiography* Oxford: Oxford World Classics

Phillips, A (2011) 'Should School Make You Happy?' in Phillips, A *On Balance* London: Penguin

Phillips, A (2002) *Promises Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* London: Faber and Faber