

John Hughes May Be onto Something: Anti-Authoritarianism in Education, Film and Policy

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In this article, I use two popular anti-authoritarian films to explore often-overlooked options for the education reform debate and general issues related to educational public policy. Bringing in sources from many disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and economics, I argue for a second look at the issues revealed in the films and action on our part toward creating a more sustainable educational and economic reality. I contend that if we take into account our historical context, we come to a much different conclusion regarding these issues than we might have otherwise.

We are faced with the paradoxical fact that education has become one of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought. – Bertrand Russell

The centerpiece on the main set in John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club* (1985) is a female statue with no head and no arms ... Lady Liberty with all her faculties and means for human action removed. This statue stands in the middle of the library and seems to be a symbol for the current public education system and its ineffectiveness. This sentiment is also clearly present in a later Hughes film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). Here, Ferris works the system to buy an exciting day in Chicago for him and his friends, as opposed to sitting through another bland round of classes. Though made primarily as entertainment, I believe what Hughes employs are "cultural myths, or modern-day folktales" (Bulman, 2005: 162). He utilizes these to argue that the public "education" system, as well as the popular notion of authority, is corrupt at its core and that rebellion or anti-authoritarianism is a necessary first step to securing opportunities for intelligence and free thought.

THEORY

Hughes' films not only set a trend in the genre of high school film, but also raise pivotal questions about education policy. Author and mythologist, Michael Meade (2005) makes a critical distinction to understanding the position taken in Hughes' films. Meade differentiates between *positional authority* and *personal authority*; he explains that personal authority is a phenomenon that grows from within, something that many "primitive" or nonindustrial cultures see as self-evident. Personal authority is often described as personal power or wisdom, while the popular notion of authority, i.e., positional authority, is actually pseudo-authority or power that comes with a badge, title, or degree. One who had personal authority in these nonindustrial societies often came to be a great leader. If this quality waned, people waited until a new personal authority arose. It is doubtful that the U.S. can currently sustain such a redeeming conception of authority, dependent as it is upon positions and titles, and distant as the citizens have become from the seats of power.

Positional authority is something at the very framework of the current American institution of public education, essential to most bureaucracy, and counter-intuitive to the value of freedom¹ (Meade, 2005). When I say that Hughes's characters are justified in their anti-authoritarianism, this latter connotation of authority is what I refer to – positional authority. Coming to the table with this distinction, it is reasonable to think that Hughes is correct when he suggests that each of us must reject positional authority in favor of the more personal, more expressive, more moral, and freer concept of authority.² Therefore, we must pursue the teachers to which we are drawn. This pursuit of personal authority is an absolute must if we are to recover the treasure of intelligence that is buried beneath heavy bureaucracy.

According to anthropologist Mary Bucholtz (2002), historically youth cultures not only have a tendency to highly value personal authority, but in addition often define themselves in their rejection of the more formal institutions built around positional authority. Bucholtz (2002: 528) argues with the dominant trend in sociology and society at large to view adolescence as a phenomenon of the recent past: "...sociologists have incorrectly maintained that the cultural category of adolescence is symptomatic of modernity, an assumption that overlooks the existence of similar

categories in a wide variety of cultures, from nonindustrial to postindustrial.”

Further, Bucholtz (2002: 529) disagrees with the tendency of many to approach adolescence as a stage on the road to adulthood. She says that this misdirected tendency “[u]sefully highlights selfhood as a process rather than a state, but inevitably frames young people as not-yet-finished human beings.” While selfhood is a process, the norm of adult reality is not necessarily the logical conclusion of that process, but is only one option among many. In terms of their rational capacities, youth are often higher functioning than many adults, who have largely come to function as creatures of habit. Hughes makes this clear in both films, portraying adults as mindless drones following rules because “that is the way things are done.” These adults fail to ask vital questions which come naturally to the young, thereby allowing the system to rob them of meaning. So as both Hughes and Bucholtz demonstrate, youth culture is a relatively stable construct, from which we can approach authority, education, and schooling. This construct runs parallel with – or often as an alternative to – traditional adulthood.

As a culture in and of themselves, youth have a wide variety of colorful options in terms of how they come to define themselves. They may buy into the commonly accepted belief that what they are going through is a stage, in which case they will most likely come to accept the dominant adult culture’s norms (at least eventually). On the other hand, they may select one of the readymade options and marketed to them by corporate America, which thrives off co-opting authentic rebellion. Or as Hughes, Meade, and Bucholtz all suggest, the youth may forge their own path.³ Hughes shows us examples of creative personal authority, represented in the films by the lead roles of Bender and Ferris, coming forward to lead their friends and acquaintances out of the doldrums and alienation of conformity and adult life. One of the characters in *The Breakfast Club* even asks their group of newfound friends if they think that when you grow up your soul dies. All seem to reach the realization that life does not have to be this way, it just often is, though the characters cannot quite articulate why.

It is difficult to deduce from the films whether Hughes knows precisely why he has his main characters reject positional authority. Perhaps it is an intuitive move based on personal experience or perhaps it is a well-researched dramatization of the facts. In any case, his advocacy is well-justified. Ludwig von Mises (1946) explains some of the evils he saw in the rising tide of bureaucratization. He says that typically bureaucracy offers “no opportunity for the display of personal talents and gifts.” He continues:

Regimentation spells the doom of initiative. The young man has no illusions about his future...He will get a job with one of the innumerable bureaus, he will be but a cog in a huge machine, the working of which is more or less mechanical. The routine of a bureaucratic technique will cripple his mind and tie his hands. He will enjoy security. But this security will be rather of the kind the convict enjoys within the prison walls (94).

Now that this rising tide has become reality, we must face whole generations schooled, and thus crippled by, the above phenomenon. For our analysis, we must keep in mind that we ourselves are tainted. Sociologist Barry Anderson, in researching the relationship between student alienation and school bureaucratization, confirms the conclusion of Mises. His studies find that “[l]ess bureaucratic modes of school organization ... produce higher levels of achievement” (1973: 331) and “bureaucracy [negatively] affects feelings of power and control” (1973:316).⁴

While Mises and Anderson expose a large fissure in the public education system, John Taylor Gatto takes us further. In a controversial speech, the teacher and education historian enumerated and explained the “lessons behind the lessons,” or the “hidden curriculum,” of mandatory public schooling: “confusion, class position, indifference, emotional dependency, intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, the fact that one can’t hide” (Gatto, 2005: 2-10). He observes that the *context* is the real lesson, not the *content*. These unconscious lessons, when added to the impersonal nature of public education bureaucracy only serve to fuel alienation.

Bucholtz (2002:550) notes that suicide – often the end result of extreme alienation – most commonly coincides with a disruption of traditional social roles and socialization processes. I contend that this claim can be taken one step further, that both alienation and suicide can be linked to a disruption of intuitive or instinctual social roles and socialization processes which were designed by nature to engage the individual. Though these troubled adolescents might not completely understand their thoughts, feelings, and actions, they intuit that something is terribly wrong in their situation and seek to change or end it. This represents the negative end of the locus-of-control spectrum (Riordan, 2004: 99).⁵ Hughes demonstrates that those alienated youth who have an extremely high locus-of-control will seek to either reject or play the system, to use its very nature against itself. This rejection, in turn, opens the door to the realization of a full-fledged youth culture. John Hughes utilizes characters like Ferris and Bender to declare war on a system that advocates ends so contrary to the individual’s instinctual self-interest.

Hollywood usually has a tendency to handle subjects on an individual level more than a structural level.⁶ Often this is seen as a negative criticism. I argue that Hughes, though perpetuating this trend, does see as valid the cultural myth that individuals can rise above structural obstacles placed in their paths, if they are a strong personal authority

or have such a person to follow. Perhaps Hughes even provides, through his films, stand-in cultural capital to recommend to lower and middle class individuals examples of personal authority. Awareness is the first step toward overcoming institutional obstacles. What his characters do once they have risen above structural obstacles is, of course, never handled in the films and is another story for another day. Evidently the overwhelming majority of U.S. audiences are perfectly content with just the initial overcoming of the obstacle to a character expressing himself or thinking freely. This particular cultural myth - that one can overcome structural obstacles through the pursuit of personal authority, while also acting as a cathartic mechanism for the free society we are told we are,⁷ provides prerequisites to freedom of thought or expression: rejection of this oppressive education system and all of its positional authority figures. Through Hughes, we see one strong vote cast for personal authority, which is an outgrowth of questioning, rebellion and self-discovery.

While Hughes makes no explicit case for certain education reforms in either film, there are several inferences we can make about his recommendations for education public policy. To do so, it will be helpful to utilize the two polar opposite, oft-cited views toward policy reform, the philosophies of John Rawls (2001) and Robert Nozick (1974). In the minds of educators and policy makers, Rawls tends to represent redistribution of funds and government intervention; Nozick represents the opposite – private solutions. Cornelius Riordan notes that Rawls is essentially a stand-in for Karl Marx as Marx is highly stigmatized. Riordan says, “Many public school teachers, being frightened of Marx as a protégé, fail to recognize that the mandate and the current practice of public schools ... follows the philosophy of Rawls” (2004: 20).

The problem with the above-mentioned tendency for educators to substitute Rawls for Marx is that the socio-economic hardships that come about on the educational front are inherent byproducts stemming from the application of a redistributive philosophy,⁸ whether we label this philosophy Marx or Rawls. Critic N.S. Arnold (2004) summarizes Rawls:

Rawls’ claims about the moral arbitrariness of differences among individuals starts with the observation that people do not deserve their natural talents. He adds that even their habits, such as their willingness to work hard, are owing to factors beyond their control. From these and similar observations, he concludes (in effect but erroneously) that people do not deserve anything at all. This conclusion clears the decks for treating natural talents and abilities as assets owned by the community, which in turn sets the stage for redistributive institutions.

When we dwell on these assumptions of Rawls for any length of time, we realize how self-defeating they are. Following the presumptions of Rawls, clearly communities don’t deserve the skills of their citizens either. Changing the non-deserving party does not make either party more deserving, but only adds one more level of non-deservingness. Going one step further, what infallible institution or community would he have redistribute the products of a man’s labor? Surely we must realize there are none. Each institution is, in fact, made up of fallible individuals, who have no better knowledge for what it should be used than the man who earns the money. We each feel like we know best what to do with our own money. We slip into arrogance when we begin to tell others what to do with theirs. A community, just as easily as an individual, can fall prey to immoral thoughts or acts, especially when the community is founded on taking the works of another’s hands. The logical conclusion of this approach is one community taking from another, the cultural and military imperialism we so often witness today. The assumptions under which Rawls operates seems to justify *not* utopian redistributive institutions, *but* institutional violence. Since everything is equally undeserved and arbitrary, according to Rawls, why not just take at random what one needs? This is exactly what many individuals do in the name of the community.

It would be much better for everyone to just start with what they have and not force, but recommend by means of social pressure, that those with more “undeserved” positive qualities sympathize with those who have less, therefore encouraging humility and appreciation instead of envy and resentment over how much the invisible hand of the state gives him or her. It is difficult to imagine that Rawls himself would have written near as much as he did should he not have made a profit from these works, monetary or otherwise. I hold that he would have frowned upon the state redistributing these profits (though they are clearly unneeded since he already had a university salary) or letting the community decide where his talents could best be used. The same goes for Marx, whose lifestyle completely contradicted his writings on the subject of redistribution. His children were put through high-end private schools by an industrialist relative, as Marx barely made ends meet with his writings. Despite the reticence of public educators to see this oversight, I note these facts so as not to confuse the issue of redistribution and its consequences. While Marx and Rawls both have some very pointed and relevant critiques of capital, the answer lies not in redistributing it, for that amputates the source of capital and will eventually end itself.

Robert Nozick, on the other hand, is a modern-day continuation of the classical liberal position, representing the minimal or ultra-minimal influence of the state in the lives of individuals. Historian Burton Fulsom Jr. (2008: 254) explains how, like Nozick, “the Founders emphasized natural rights – the process of ensuring God-given rights to

life, liberty, and property to every American.” Nozick, like the Founders, is logically inconsistent. For Nozick begins by noting that the basis of every state is immoral as it imposes arbitrary dues to support itself and departs from free⁹ “private protective associations,” such as voluntary communities, private social safety-net organizations,¹⁰ militias, or businesses employed in the service of providing protection to individuals. The state sets itself up as the ultimate moral authority. Nozick notes that each state:

... *claims* a monopoly on deciding who may use force when; it says that only it may decide who may use force and under what conditions; it reserves to itself the sole *right* to pass on the legitimacy and permissibility of any use of force within its boundaries; furthermore it *claims* the *right* to punish all those who violate its *claimed* monopoly (1974: 23, italics mine).

Nozick ends by making concessions towards the minimal state, just as the founders did due to matters of “practicality.” Nozick’s original observations in support of mutual aid and personal authority are very well-placed, his latter a bit flawed.

Historian Stephan Davies (2009) discusses how the idea of the modern nation originated in Prussia, not as a natural progression of events, but as a means for a certain segment of the population to control the rest. This idea quickly spread as it was so much more efficient than military occupation though such occupation was, and is, sometimes still necessary for the political or economic elite to retain or extend control. Part of this progression was to create public schools that would serve to indoctrinate and assimilate the citizenry. American policy makers followed this Prussian lead, many traveling abroad to observe the “success” of the schools in turning out loyal citizens.

As far as John Hughes is concerned, most modern parents and teachers are unconsciously party to the very corrupt system which was created for the express purpose of social control. When looked at from the historical context of a corrupt system, all who buy into this system, especially those with positional authority, are the enemy to freedom. To ask anyone which he or she would prefer out of two evils is blatantly ridiculous. Each reform of “public education” would simply be a matter of what flavor of corruption one can tolerate. The actual reforms are so close in degree as to make any difference virtually negligible. Altering a corrupt system will give you an *altered* corrupt system. Hughes, through the youth in his films, would say, “If the system itself is corrupt, overcome the system.” Thus we see him represent a position outside the oft-cited reform spectrum, one that draws from the essences of Marx, Rawls and Nozick.

Nozick says in his preface to *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*:

[M]any persons will reject our conclusions instantly, knowing they do not *want* to believe anything so *apparently* callous toward the needs and sufferings of others. I know that reaction; it was mine when I first began to consider such views (1974: ix-x, italics mine).

Nozick goes on to say that with reluctance he began to become convinced of what he calls libertarian views – largely based upon economic law. Now he approaches the subject with no reluctance, knowing full well that the ultimate advantage for every individual is to be had through acting in coordination with, instead of against, these economic laws. In a search for solutions to the above mentioned problems, Ludwig von Mises (1944: 111) advises us similarly: “Whether one likes it or not, it is a fact that the main issues of present-day politics [including those of educational public policy] are purely economic and cannot be understood without a grasp of economic theory.”

It is to be admitted that adopting or even suggesting adoption of a *laissez-faire* stance toward “public education” *sounds* harsh. If we are not far-sighted, we are easily duped when it comes to this.¹¹ We will see only the immediate result and say that this is not desirable. What will people do without the current educational system? The answer, quite frankly, is that we do not know precisely, but if we look at history, what did people do before there was a public educational system? They inventively came up with options that worked for all involved. Not only did this freedom-oriented approach bode well for the people, but it was economically sound. It developed local economies and cultivated personal responsibility, two key voids we are experiencing today. So what am I suggesting?

Both *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, if looked at on the Marx and Rawls/Nozick spectrum, seem to come out as a draw between the two positions regarding educational reform. The films call for anti-authoritarianism and expressive individualism. What does this argument mean in terms of suggestions for educational policy? Both films do not overtly argue for redistributive reforms in education and neither argue for parental choice in education. We see Hughes’ school faculty and the majority of the parents portrayed and mocked as an absurdity. However, this conclusion to place Hughes’ films as a draw on the school reform issue is premature.

If we look past the scenes of both films and remember that we sit in a society that has been corrupted by a long history of redistributive policies, we may gain some valuable insight we might have lost had we not considered the historical context. What we have here in the person of Hughes is the argument for a position outside the spectrum,

which does not offend the notion of community or individualism. This position takes the essence of what each philosopher is attempting to achieve and creates an alternative outside the commonly cited spectrum: mutual aid. This is a position where individuals have choice with regard to the fruits of their work, which inevitably leads to the banding together into geographical or ideological communities. It eliminates the highly ineffective and slothlike bureaucracy in the middle. Anti-authoritarianism is a necessary precondition to realizing a world along these lines. Though it allows for rampant hedonism as well, Hughes seems to argue that individuals will intuit authentic personal authority. It tosses the black and white, left or right mentality to the wind and calls upon the grey. It takes us out of our camps and restores our humanity. Thus mutual aid is a viable position to take, blending as it does Marx's valuing of the community with Nozick's respect for individual autonomy.

As educational public policy scholar Neal McCluskey (2008:10) notes, although private non-profit and for-profit methods of education had secured close to a 90 percent literacy rate for America by the late 1800's, there were still some who argued, ironically, that the only way to secure freedom was to indoctrinate and homogenize the youth for purposes of control. Unfortunately, these political and economic monopolists had the means at their disposal to impose and propagate these measures. Concerning the existing research on unity formation or ethnic integration, common excuses for "public education," McCluskey states that "the tragedy of proclaiming state-run schooling crucial to unity is that it has the opposite effect" (2008: 12). As Hughes demonstrates, youth cultures sense these manipulations.

Larry Reed (2008: 2), in his economic analysis of the myths behind the Great Depression, explains how largely since the 1920s, Americans have been the victims of an economy tainted with redistribution, sold to us in the name of equality, for the express purpose of securing more revenue and power for the state bureaucracy.¹² Economic historian Sheldon Richman (2009) asserts that a state always passes off the theft of our money to us under the guise of humanitarian ends such as "free" education for all. Economist and historian Robert Higgs (2007: 7) deals almost exclusively with this phenomenon and insists, "even the shepherd protects his sheep, but he does so to serve his own interest, not theirs, and when the time comes, he will shear or slaughter them as his interest dictates." Leonard Read (1998: 45-46) discusses the ways in which redistributive economies and institutions throughout history have been shown to collapse in upon themselves unless opened up.

Based on Hughes' portrayal of positional authority, it looks as though he agrees. Parents are peripheral characters in his films and all other teachers or adults are depicted as ignorant drones except for the wise janitor in *The Breakfast Club*, who represents yet another personal authority figure. Americans, along with Mr. Burns, Ed Rooney, and the parents in the films have adopted/been subjected to the somewhat corrupt moralities of our forefathers¹³ that often seep into democratic societies obsessed with equality. Alexis de Tocqueville (2000: 618) notes this very sharply, "at such times men pounce upon equality as their booty, and they cling to it as to some precious treasure which they fear to lose. The passion for equality penetrates on every side into men's hearts, filling them entirely."

The ideal of equality secures these men and women unearned wealth, control, and/or excuses the imposition of their values on others by means of redistributive policies. Presumably, this obsession with equality in the U.S. began around the time when public education first came into being in America, originating from American study of Prussian policy. Equality became the selling point. Aiding this movement were the unclosed back doors that the Founders left in *their* constitution and the centralization of communication media. This trend has continued throughout today.

One particularly interesting study by sociologist A. Lewis Rhodes (1960: 98-99) connects specific religious preferences, such as protestant fundamentalism, with authoritarian or "pre-fascist" traits. Based on self-evaluative surveys, high school students in the sample group ranked their agreement or disagreement with typical authoritarian statements and were catalogued on a spectrum accordingly. The control variable was religious preference, which is a direct reflection of home background. Branching off this evidence, I would propose that it is highly plausible to think that around the time public education surfaced as a social institution, the climate was high with religious fundamentalism and the desire to impose one's beliefs or ideas (in the name of equality) on the rest of the populace. I would also propose that the system remains in place due to the still-high levels of these sentiments, the prevalence of apathy and disillusionment, fear of change, or the inability to conceive of life differently.

Tocqueville explains the tendency this obsession with equality has, in regard to freedom:

Tell them not that by this blind surrender of themselves to an exclusive passion they risk their dearest interests: they are deaf. Show them not freedom escaping from their grasp, whilst they are looking another way: they are blind – or rather, they can discern but one sole object to be desired in the universe [equality] (2000: 618).

It is of utmost importance that we not consider the discussion closed, that we ask the right questions. I contend that Mr. Riordan (2004) misphrases a critical question when he asks, regarding education, what should be the higher value: equality or achievement? A more accurate question, in terms of educational values, would be “freedom or not?” According to Tocqueville, a focus on equality as a leveling device seems to corrupt freedom, though freedom often secures an equal guarantee of rights. As Rawls notes, we are inherently unequal and community is important. As Nozick notes, redistribution causes immense economic problems and individual autonomy is important. Parents on the whole may be incompetent or lack clear-sightedness now, as Hughes portrays on film, since they have been educated and indoctrinated to be, but over time, though it may be a rough transition, the possibility is there for people to relearn self-responsibility and mutual aid.

This push seems harsh especially in light of the tremendous efforts of many brilliant minds to research, study and implement policy as to how tax dollars might best be spent. History, morality, and economic law show, contrarily, that taxation and redistribution *are* harsher. Even so, this educational research picks up bits of truth. One prominent government study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* or the *Coleman Report* (1966: 21), found that “...socio-economic factors bear a strong relation to achievement,” corresponding to the health of the economic environment.¹⁴ These are bits of truth the wise observer will seize and dissect. Do we, through educational policy, create a climate where individuals can pursue utilitarian¹⁵ and then expressive ends or is the environment highly artificially restricted?

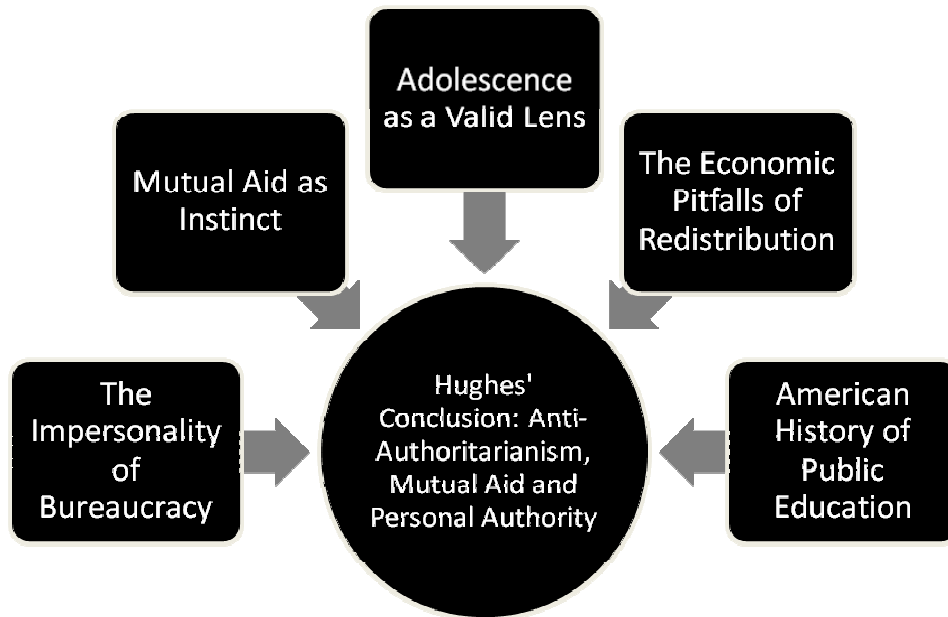
Studies, such as the *Coleman Report*, often confine themselves to one discipline, or even if they do not, they act as if they were see-it-alls. Leonard Read (1969: 87), in *The Coming Aristocracy*, describes the relevance of this realization: “our thinking is beclouded, frustrated, and often blocked entirely by the unconscious assumption that we are, or ought to be, see-it-alls. We get into our heads that the microscopic bit each of us sees is all there is to see.” The *Coleman Report* and similar studies act as if life is one-dimensional. Education is viewed largely as if in a void. Scientists utilize the laws that concern the field with which they are working. So too should sociologists utilize economic law when analyzing fundamental aspects of education like socio-economic status - instead of just studying the effect, study the cause as well.

Educational researcher Adam Gamoran (2000: 37-65), is perceptive when he notes, in regard to earlier educational studies like the *Coleman Report*, that the economic input-output model on which they are based “is an unopened black box.” This is very well put, as the earlier approach treated people as machines who go through a process, without really looking at the process. He suggests that through “opening up the black box” and looking inside the processes at work, we will gain more accurate insight into the social institution of education. As Hughes shows, this is true; Gamoran’s leap is an admirable one in the right direction. However, he does not go far enough. Even these conclusions are spoken in ignorance of economic laws, specifically those relating to human action,¹⁶ which lead to the effects often studied by education researchers and undermine the whole notion of public education. Gamoran misses the point because he is stuck in one discipline: the study of education. The very premise on which this institution was founded is the key corrupting factor: a redistributive model.

To give a brief discussion of a few of the economic laws which redistribution violates, I consult works by Ludwig von Mises, Henry Hazlitt and French economist Gustave de Molinari. Mises (1946: 143) begins by advising us that “the questions whether society or the individual is to be considered as the ultimate end, and whether the interests of the society should be subordinated to those of the individuals or the interests of the individuals to those of society are fruitless. Action is always action of individual men.” Molinari (1899: 18) then points out that individual man will only continue his action of labor exchange so long as the pleasure he gains in return will outweigh the pain of expending the energy in the first place. Molinari (1899: 19) uses this fact to explain the *law of least expenditure*: “man first satisfies his most pressing needs, those that appeal with the greatest urgency, or penalize deficient supply with the greatest amount of suffering. It is only after this that he endeavors to decrease expenditure by selecting the more remunerative [or profitable] spheres of activity.” Thus a society which progressively increases both overt and covert taxes and increasingly redistributes large portions of the wealth of individuals will eventually lose its most creative and prolific minds. It will come to a point where they no longer see it as beneficial to exchange their labor in such a restricted environment.

Hazlitt (1962) carries Frederic Bastiat’s famous economic analysis of seen and unseen consequences one step further, helping us to reach the point with which we are concerned. He alerts us to the fact that in any other decision making process, most people realize that an action can have both intended and unintended consequences, as well as both short-term and long-term ones. He points out that when it comes to making economic decisions, such as those relating to “public” policy, people have shown themselves as unable to accept delayed gratification and fail to see the long-term consequences of an action or policy. I argue that Hazlitt is correct in saying that perhaps the largest reason for this is that long-term economic consequences specifically, are unseen in the sense of being something obvious and concrete.

FIGURE 1. SUMMARY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING HUGHES' FILMS



Hazlitt (1962: 3-10) claims that regardless of how one justifies the redistributive policy, the policy itself is inherently corrupting, not only economically but morally as well. Redistributive policies take from the incomes of productive/constructive individuals and give to less productive or even destructive individuals, companies, or public works. Usually under the banner of some humanitarian cause, government jobs, which need not concern themselves with being efficient, are created. The violence that is inherent in government is put behind these redistributive policies. Individuals are also taxed to pay for the propaganda that the government then uses to convince them of the righteousness of its redistributive policy.

As we can see, for those who lack personal authority but crave power to force their view of life on others, government is good business to get into. Free advertising funds are available, a guaranteed salary, and a monopoly on force. It is a business, unlike any other, one which rewards not efficiency, but inefficiency. As police forces increase, crime rates go up, not down. As the post office continues its long history of losing millions of dollars daily, more taxes are sought. As schools fail, there is talk of reform and allocating more funds. Where private individuals or corporations would have to roll up their sidewalks and close their doors, public projects can tax people into the ground if these "humanitarian" services fall through. After all this shuffling of money from productive hands into non-productive, people will vote themselves right into a depression because they fail to make this critical economic distinction. All the productive individuals or companies will either have moved on to free ground, where their activities remain uninhibited, or end in bankruptcy. Public education will definitely not address these issues as it is created by exactly the above mentioned problematic policies. To expect a business that makes its money on thievery and ignorance to educate one about the very principles that undermine its existence is not exactly rational.

APPLICATION

As philosopher Bertrand Russell (1958:28) puts forth, real education should have two aims: "to give definite knowledge - reading and writing, languages and mathematics, and so on; secondly to create those mental habits which will enable people to acquire knowledge and form sound judgments for themselves." Neither of these is feasible in our current blanket education system. Learning proceeds from the desire of the learner. True learning is student-centered and individualized. This is not possible when unnaturally locked in various rooms for eight hours a day by state mandate, and being forced to submit to the arrogant attempts of policy makers to fashion others to their ideal.

Perfectionism in politics and public policy is shortsighted, economically ignorant, and inherently highly subjective. This brand of educational public policy lacks personal authority. Hughes' youth, in coordination with a dominant strand of youth culture, utilize personal authority to take a stand against corruption, thus forming a basis for intelligence and free thought. We must vote with our hands and feet instead of believing that names on a ballot are the only real options.

CONCLUSION

Operating from our economically and morally corrupt historical context, Hughes is not concerned with the educational reform question at all. His policy, rightly, is anti-authoritarian. This stance seems to coincide with, and lay the groundwork for a return to personal authority and mutual aid. It seems that Hughes feels there will always be people and systems attempting to control us. He and others see the youth culture as a relatively stable and viable alternative to traditional adulthood, one that asks the right questions. The first step to understanding public policy questions, especially those regarding education is to educate ourselves in basic economic law. The first step toward the opportunity to fashion free thoughts and form a basis for lasting intelligence is rejection of the public education system and positional authority in general. The alternative: accept morally and economically corrupt institutions, thus corrupting one's self. By sewing an immoral cause - redistribution in the name of equality, we bring down on our heads an immoral effect – the loss of freedoms and the promotion of an ever more oppressive state.

NOTES

¹ Here defined as free from the seizure of one's life and property (by logical extension – self-defense). i.e., Natural Rights.

² Occasionally, some with personal authority happen to be situated in positional authority.

³ It is important to note that this does not necessarily exclude all adults, only those that merely represent positional authority. The janitor in *The Breakfast Club* is a good example of an adult who the youth also see as a personal authority.

⁴ He makes clear that usually more bureaucracy equals the feeling that one is less in control of or has less power over any given situation; and vice versa. Most districts have large bureaucracies.

⁵ As Cornelius Riordan shows, even this phenomenon correlates highly with socio-economic status.

⁶ They do not traditionally employ C. Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination*. I am not sure if such a topic is even within the scope of film. Film in general may have an inherent bias away from social or structural.

⁷ A persistent theme in Bulman's work.

⁸ A public policy that collects a portion of the general wealth and redistributes it (according to any number or formulae) throughout the community.

⁹ Free not as in "free" public education, for which we are taxed and merely has the illusion of being free, but free in terms of not forced or coerced.

¹⁰ See Sheldon Richman's brilliant discussion of this topic.

¹¹ See Frederic Bastiat's discussion of seen and unseen economic consequences or Henry Hazlitt's expansion of this discussion, *Economics in One Lesson*.

¹² This includes both direct and indirect taxes, an example of indirect being the inflation of the money supply.

¹³ Under the guise of equality, we were made to believe that we could steal from our brothers so long as the government was the middleman. Actually, the government's very existence depends on this as Nozick shows.

¹⁴ Is the invisible hand of the market allowed to function or not? See Nozick, pp.19-21.

¹⁵ Utility means in this context simply: causal relevance for the removal of felt uneasiness (per Ludwig von Mises).

¹⁶ See Mises, p.106-153. The topic is beyond the scope of this essay.

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