



# Education & Enlightenment

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*by*

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## ABSTRACT:

In this thesis, we analyse what happens to enlightenment and education as society becomes more competitive. To do this, we use Lacan's (2006) theory of psychology in which he classifies the human psyche into three different ontological realms - *the Real*, *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*. We use this theory to show how the ability to think and solve more complex problems is possible by increasing a person's vocabulary and knowledge of concepts - and how this type of thinking, the type of thinking that can be learned through education, is *Symbolic* (Žižek, 2008, 2012). We also use this terminology to expand on the theory of motivation, that is traditionally divided into *internal* and *external* motivation (Fuglsang, 2015; Katznelson, 2007). By applying Žižek (2008, 2012) and Lacan (2006) to motivation we also find two types of motivation, *desire* which is *Real* motivation and *ego*, which is *Imaginary* motivation. We find that ego has become the main motivational factor in education, and that ego is negatively correlated with enlightenment as well as the motivational factor in the personality trait known as *conscientiousness* (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The unfortunate consequence of this is that enlightenment becomes a negative trait when adopting a purely competition-minded perspective. To support our hypothesis of this development we use Plato (the Republic), Drucker (1946) and Pedersen (2011). Lastly, we use Agamben (2007) to argue that education to some extent can be viewed as having become *consecrated* and through working with a couple extreme perspectives on education (Grey, 2009, 2013) we attempt to profanate education and get a more realistic interpretation of how education is. By developing a deeper understanding about education and enlightenment in contemporary society, we hope to obtain the insight necessary to propose valuable improvements.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Do you know what scholarship means, what a school means – the original meaning of a scholar? Leisure. (...). Today, pffff! – nothing is more busy than a school. They make you work work work work work cause they got to get you through on schedule, they have expedited courses and you go to school so as to get a union card, a PhD or something so that you can earn a living – so it's a whole contradiction of scholarship; scholarship is to study everything that's unimportant, not necessary for survival, all the charming irrelevances of life.*

Alan Watts, 1966

This is a thesis about education. But not in the sense of '*what is education*' – that is describing education from an *ontic* perspective, in terms of its physical, real or factual existence. Rather this thesis investigates education from an *ontological* perspective, the question of '*how is education*'. This difference between framing the question *ontologically* rather than *ontically* is inspired by Heideggers (1962) distinction between beings (*Seiende*) and being (*Sein*). In Heideggers terminology, beings (*Seiende*) is a being or a things actual physical presence in reality, whereas being (*sein*) is the phenomenological aspect of the same being or thing – that which emerges from the perspective of human consciousness. The all too common neglect or forgetfulness of this ontological aspect of things is what Heidegger terms *Seinsvergessenheit*.

We believe the ontological approach to the question '*how is education*' is essential, to the extent that answering this question would be senseless without also considering questions such as '*how is thought*' and '*how is enlightenment*'.

After all, if you examine an educational setting purely ontically it will not be very interesting - a group of individuals are gathered together, maybe someone is producing a pattern of sound with his mouth, otherwise also known as speaking. What is truly interesting about education must without a doubt be what goes on inside the students heads, how this affects their relations to each other and society.

*Ontological research itself, when properly understood, gives to the question of Being an ontological priority which goes beyond mere resumption of a venerable tradition and advancement with a problem that has hitherto been opaque* (Heidegger, 1962; 31).

We believe ‘education’ to be exactly such an *opaque* problem or concept. That education is important seems often to be taken for granted without inquiring deeply into *how* and *why* it is important. Is education a way to acquire a prestigious job – a rite of passage or phase of liminality that an individual must undergo to move from one position in society to another? For example, as Chris Grey, Professor of Organization Studies at the University of London has suggested:

*The most extreme way of understanding management education would be to see it as an entirely cynical charade. Thus, so long as no one knew, management students could spend their courses, say, sitting in a dark room and it would not matter since the value of management education is purely symbolic and credentialist – just a matter of putting letters after people’s names* (Grey; 2009, 142).

Or is there a “higher”, “deeper” or “underlying” purpose of education – and what do words like “higher”, “deeper” and “underlying” even mean, other than an attempt to imbue a concept, like education, with mysterious properties?

Is there value to the pursuit of gaining knowledge simply for the sake of knowledge, or as a process of enlightenment – for self development, to further humanity as a species or perhaps even as a fundamental part in the constitution of democracy?

*The scientific way of thinking is at once imaginative and disciplined. This is central to its success. Science invites us to let the facts in, even when they don’t conform to our preconceptions. It counsels us to carry alternative hypotheses in our heads and see which best fits the facts. It urges on us a no-holds-barred openness to new ideas, however heretical, and the most rigorous skeptical scrutiny of everything – new ideas and established wisdom. This kind of thinking is also an essential tool for a democracy in an age of change* (Sagan, 1996; 30).

Democracy is based on the principle that the masses will collectively arrive at a better solution to problems than what an individual ruler, with subjective preferences and potential prejudices toward minority groups, could – at least that is a heavily

simplified reasoning, but will serve for the purposes of this introduction. Democracy of this form relies on a certain level of ‘enlightenment’ in the general population – but how does this ‘enlightenment’ emerge? And how (if at all) does it relate to education? *Most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking – not even yet, although the state of the world is becoming constantly more thought-provoking* (Heidegger, 1976; 4).

Part of our hypothesis is that education is becoming increasingly entangled in the capitalistic ideology. So that the purpose of education is becoming more about being a productive worker in a world of corporations, rather than an enlightened citizen, participating in a democratic state. In other words, our concern with this development is that the ‘enlightenment’ aspect of education might become neglected as a result. What we therefore wish to investigate in this thesis is what role education plays in contemporary society – and if this role is changing, then what are the implications of the changes in this role. To investigate this, we will inquire into the philosophical aspect of education, how it relates to ‘enlightenment’ and the processes of ‘thought’ itself. And compare this to the contemporary, and increasingly competitive, society. *Philosophers are the thinkers par excellence. They are called thinkers precisely because thinking properly takes place in philosophy* (Heidegger, 1976; 4-5).

To Carl Sagan, science is a *way of thinking* (Sagan, 1996; 30). Important to note is that science is not thought in itself – or as Heidegger (1976; 8) wrote: *Science does not think*. Rather science, like “logic”, is a set of rules setting boundaries for what is “proper thinking” – what is ‘rational’ and ‘reasonable’, ‘intellectual’ or ‘academic’. If the rules and laws of science are followed, then the resulting thought is considered scientific.

*Why does the traditional doctrine of thinking bear the curious title “logic”?* (Heidegger, 1976; 113).

However, if *science does not think* (Heidegger 1976; 8), then what does? In this thesis we will use Lacan and Žižek to develop an understanding of what thinking *really* is, and how it relates to education and enlightenment.

*In the traditional, pre-enlightened universe, the authority of the Law is never experienced as nonsensical and unfounded; on the contrary, the Law is always illuminated by the charismatic power of fascination. Only to the already enlightened view does the universe of social customs and rule appear as a nonsensical ‘machine’ that must be accepted as such (Žižek, 2008; 88).*

We believe education to be important - and furthermore, that it is of paramount importance that education beyond anything else, serves in the evolution of our species by developing our enlightenment and ability to think freely. We are afraid that this purpose is being exchanged with an ideal that, rather than serve humanity, serves the corporations - and that is what we will try to uncover in this thesis.

## 1.1 MOTIVATION

*The point is that “the spectacle is so fascinating.” For the world is a spell (in Latin, fascinum), an enchantment (being thrilled by a chant), an amazement (being lost in a maze), an arabesque of such stunning rhythm and a plot so intriguing that we are drawn by its web into a state of involvement where we forget that it is a game (Watts, 1973; 95).*

One of the toughest philosophical concepts is the concept of ‘beginning’. It is one of those concepts that are inherently paradoxical, perhaps because the human mind has not evolved to be able to comprehend it. One example is the case of the beginning of a human life, or a transition from a state of non-existence to a state of existence. Another example is the beginning of the universe. Each example leads to the inevitable question: “what was there before?” – Because a sane human mind is adept at pattern recognition and craves causality. In theory then, to the logic of the human mind, a causality chain must go on indefinitely, because a true beginning would be an effect without a cause.

One way around this paradox is with the concept of ‘emergence’ – For example; ice, water and steam are all emergent properties of water molecules interacting with each other. So a drop of water does not ‘begin’, but rather ‘emerges’ from the presence of a



sufficient amount of water molecules – similarly, yet arguably more speculative, consciousness might ‘emerge’ from the interaction of neurons, and a new universe might ‘emerge’ from the extreme conditions of black holes.

Maybe philosophy itself also does not ‘begin’, but ‘emerges’ when a language becomes complex enough to support multiple concepts.

*Even the first concept, the one with which a philosophy “begins,” has several components, because it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning, and if it does determine one, it must combine it with a point of view or a ground [une raison] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; 15).*

This thesis physically began with an introduction – yet it emerged from a motivation, interest and curiosity that began before the first word was written.

Our motivation to write this thesis started out as an interest in the purpose (*objet petit autre*) of education. At first our understanding of this purpose was very basic; “you study so as to get a job”, “to acquire useful skills” and because it’s “interesting” – and yet that does not seem particularly illuminating.

*The spectacle is so fascinating that we have perhaps forgotten that there was a time when we wanted to be told what an electron is. The question was never answered... something unknown is doing we don’t know what—that is what our theory amounts to. It does not sound a particularly illuminating theory (Watts, 1973; 94-95).*

Perhaps the issue has to do with the problem of ‘beginning’ itself, as human beings are not omniscient beings, we have to be able to function and work with concepts that are only partly defined – as such we might arrive at the conclusion that something makes sense, even when it is not properly defined, as it was initially the case with many of the concepts of quantum mechanics, including the electron.

In this sense, the reasons and meaning of education often feels taken for granted – as if the modern world is a jigsaw of concepts that must fit together, and when solving this jigsaw education is made to fit the picture – rather than have its own clearly defined piece – hence the apparent vagueness.

This is a big part of our concern, that as the power has shifted from states to corporations, so has the understanding of education.

*The literature on higher education policy points to changes in the dominant discourse over the years. In particular, the ascendance of a discourse marked by concepts of new public management, using language inspired by neoclassical economic theory which characterizes education as a marketplace where students are customers, has led scholars to critically question the foundations of modern higher education policy. (...) The authors find that the discourse has moved from a pluralistic one embracing not only the economic benefits of education, but also emphasizing on democracy, citizenship, and equality, towards a predominantly economic one, focused squarely on notions of globalization and competitiveness in a knowledge society (Johansen et al, 2015; 1).*

This is where we see a parallel to economics, in particular to the work of Bjerg (2014) and Lazzarato (2013). Bjerg describes how money is, which is paramount in understanding the power structures of contemporary society – lately, most political discussions on education seem to be about increasing effectiveness and saving money, as if there is somehow a shortage of this entirely abstract phenomenon – but how is it not a political decision? We decide to create a society in which we prioritize a few super rich individuals at the expense of our educational system, among many other things.

*Education spending, left entirely to students, frees up resources which the state quickly transfers to corporations and the wealthiest households, notably through lower taxes. The true welfare recipients are no longer the poor, the unemployed, the sick, unmarried women, and so on, but corporations and the rich (Lazzarato, 2013; 67).*

Through the work of Lazzarato and Bjerg, how contemporary society is governed seems utterly absurd. This absurdity seems to us to be at the heart of many, if not most, of the biggest problems of western society, and a big part of our motivation to write this thesis is related to how these economical issues relate to how we think about education. Especially as we believe education can function as the key to break this cycle of inequality - a cycle that we believe can only be sustained because the majority are completely unaware of its existence and how it works.

However, our interest in this subject is by no means a purely economical one, we also have a deep philosophical interest in understanding education, which we wish to explore further in this thesis, among others through the work of Žižek (2008) and Lacan (2006). Of course we believe these two perspectives to be connected - to avoid repeating a spiral of incremental inequality we must answer the question 'how is education', so we can understand how education is and how it should become in order to create a better society that serves our species rather than a few privileged individuals.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

*What happens to enlightenment and education as society becomes more competitive?*

### 1.2.1 CLARIFICATIONS

With 'enlightenment' we refer mainly to the Kantian (1784) as well as Žižek's (2012) understanding of this concept. With 'education', we refer to education at university level in western societies. With 'society', we really mean 'modern western societies'. With 'competitive' we are mostly referring to economical competition - although sometimes we use competition as an educational phenomenon, in example competition between students as to who can get the best grades. When the two words competitive society are put together they also refers to Ove K. Pedersens theory of "the competitive state" (2011) with is the prevailed culture in Denmark's since 1990.

### 1.2.2 RESTRICTION

Education is a broad term and in recent years it has become much broader. With the concept of continually learning, educational institutions like universities loses its monopoly of education. Both Ove K. Pedersen and Peter Drucker argues that as we will have to expand our understanding of the term education to include all forms of learning and not just degrees. Especially the internet changes the accessibility to information, and concepts like 'education hacking' has started to appear where the universities are completely cut out of the equation.

In this thesis we will focus on education in universities, since a broader definition of the term education would lead to a much longer and less exact thesis. By narrowing down our focus area we can make a more comprehensive examination of education in universities.

### 1.2.3 VALIDITY

A large part of the empiri that we base our analysis on it empirical research made by others. The reason for this is that we simply believe all the information we could possibly need is already out there, just a matter of knowing where to look, and collecting our own data in this regard, would do nothing more than the act of pouring a bucket of water into a vast ocean of information.

*In this same century, we have moved from a world in which access to information was still severely limited to one in which we are all drowning in infoglut. And yet we act as though we could save people by pouring another bucketful into the sea of information. I am convinced that when information doubles, knowledge halves and wisdom quarters. The quest for some Theory of Everything that will explain it all, distracts us from developing our own skills and applying our deep wisdom (Theobald, 1998; 2).*

By basing our analysis and discussion on empiri gather by other scientist we argue that other our thesis will be based on a much broader range of evidence than it would if we had gathered all the evidence by ourself. Furthermore it allows us to compare different discourse analysis made by different people based on different empiri to see if there is a consistent between their analysis. We do use a report published by the Danish Ministry of research and education, but the goal of this is not validate or criticize the analysis, but rather to have concrete text which can help us substantiate and illustrate the how the theoretical terms can add value to the discourse analysis.

### 1.2.4 IMPORTANT RECURRING CONCEPTS

A short list of the most important and common concept that are used throughout this thesis. The concepts are more thoroughly defined where they appear in their respective theoretical sections, so this section is meant more as a guide to the reader than anything else.

***the Real:*** The first of Lacan's (2006) ontological orders of the human psyche. It involves pre-lingual thinking - a type of thinking that is not based on language.

***the Symbolic:*** The second of Lacan's ontological orders of the human psyche. It is a type of thinking based on language and logic (*parlêtre*).

***the Imaginary:*** The third of Lacan's ontological orders of the human psyche. It involves the sense of self, *ego*, and thinking that distinguishes between the self and the *other*.

***Enlightenment:*** The ability of an individual to reason autonomously - without the guidance of another.

***Consecration:*** Something that has been imbued with holy properties. The opposite of *profanation* (Agamben, 2007).

***Profanation:*** The return of a sacred object to its natural state. The opposite of *consecration* (Agamben, 2007). *Desecration* is *profanation* in which the object is destroyed in the process.

***the Idea of the Good:*** An eternal idea of how the individual should live which the individual can approach through education (Plato, *the Republic*).

***the Knowledge worker:*** A worker who creates value through his knowledge (Drucker, 2007).

***the Knowledge society:*** A society where knowledge is the key to production (Drucker, 2007).

***the Competition state:*** A description of the Danish culture and discourse after the year 1990. In this state, competition defines the individuals and the institutions (Pedersen, 2011)

## **2.0 THEORY OF SCIENCE**

*It seems to me what is called for is an exquisite balance between two conflicting needs: the most skeptical scrutiny of all hypotheses that are served up to us and at the same time a great openness to new ideas. Obviously those two modes of thought are in some tension. But if you are able to exercise only one of these modes, whichever one it is, you're in deep trouble.*

*If you are only skeptical, then no new ideas make it through to you. You never learn anything new. You become a crotchety old person convinced that nonsense is ruling the world. (There is, of course, much data to support you.) But every now and then, maybe once in a hundred cases, a new idea turns out to be on the mark, valid and wonderful. If you are too much in the habit of being skeptical about everything, you are going to miss or resent it, and either way you will be standing in the way of understanding and progress.*

*On the other hand, if you are open to the point of gullibility and have not an ounce of skeptical sense in you, then you cannot distinguish the useful as from the worthless ones. If all ideas have equal validity then you are lost, because then, it seems to me, no ideas have any validity at all. (Sagan, 1987; 6)*

In theory of science, one of the most important ideas is how to distinguish between what is to be considered as ‘science’ and what is to be considered as ‘not science’. As formulated by Carl Sagan above, this means that there essentially are two risks. One is to accept too much as ‘science’, thus inevitably considering multiple cases of ‘false knowledge’ as ‘true’. The other is to accept too little as ‘science’, and therefore end up rejecting perfectly ‘true’ knowledge. This is why having ‘criteria of quality’ in science is of utmost importance. For this thesis we will use Gergen’s (1997) five criteria of quality (See section 2.3 for more detail).

## 2.1 PERSPECTIVE AND OBJECTIVITY

One problem associated with gaining knowledge, that we shall briefly mention, is the problem of perspective and objectivity. Often, the ‘scientist’ assumes a role as if he is himself of a completely different reality than his field of study.

*By this I mean the thing that is also frequently called the ‘hypothesis of the real world’ around us. I maintain that it amounts to a certain simplification which we adopt in order to master the infinitely intricate problem of nature. Without being aware of it and without being rigorously systematic about it, we exclude the Subject of Cognizance from the domain of nature that we endeavour to understand. We step with our own person back into the part of an onlooker who does not belong to the world, which by this very procedure becomes an objective world (Schrödinger, 1958; 118).*

This is always the case to some extent, as Erwin Schrödinger argues, but can be more or less of an issue. In this thesis, we - the writers - are students ourselves and therefore part of the very educational system that we are researching. This has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages because we have personal experience from our own lives that we can draw on to, hopefully, gain a deeper insight. Disadvantages because this personal experience will undoubtedly affect our judgement in ways we can’t realistically foresee. We hope that by being aware of this we can overcome those disadvantages.

## 2.2 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE THESIS

In this chapter we shall examine the assumptions underlying the theoretical framework for this thesis. What people think about ‘reality’ and how they express it through language is simultaneously affecting our perception of reality as well as reality itself (Hermansen et al, 2004).

In this sense, we understand ‘education’ as historically and culturally contingent, and our understanding of ‘knowledge’ (belief) about ‘education’ as a ‘discourse’. This discourse can vary across a multitude of factors, such as culture, which individual expresses the discourse and even in what social context it is being expressed.

For example we consider the assessment by Jørgensen & Phillips (2010; 46), that kindergartens and playgrounds are created on the basis of an understanding of ‘children’ as a separate group in society to be a good example of how a discourse can have a real effect on the structure of society – in other words, how we *think* about the world has *real consequences* in the physical reality. However, we believe that it goes deeper than this, that kindergartens and playgrounds are not *solely* created on the basis of an understanding of ‘children’ as a separate group in society – to comprehend the phenomenon of ‘kindergartens’ and ‘playgrounds’ it is also necessary to consider the role of kindergartens in relation to society. In this sense ‘kindergartens’ and ‘playgrounds’ are not created solely on the basis of understanding ‘children’ as a separate group in society, but also serve a particular function in society. Or rather a societal *need* that arises as both males and females enter the labor market. Similar to this line of thought, ‘kindergartens’ and ‘playgrounds’ are also a form of *division of labor* which has been a common phenomenon in capitalistic societies undergoing a phase of ‘industrialization’.

It is for these reasons, that we believe a purely discursive perspective can be too narrow and fail to see the ‘bigger picture’. We believe that Žižek’s (2008) three ontological orders (as understood by Jacques Lacan) – *the real*, *the symbolic* and *the imaginary* – are well situated for supplementing the perspective provided by discourse analysis. In a sense like Einstein’s theories of relativity built upon Newtonian physics rather than discarding them – adding on an extra dimension – Žižek’s theories can be viewed as doing the same with discourse analysis. Rather than discard the theory, an extra dimension is added. Bear in mind of course, that Lacan’s ontological orders function independently from the multiple theories of discursive analysis. Rather than a theory of social reality, Lacan’s (2006) theory is a theory of the human psyche. Žižek (2008) frequently mentions theories of discourse analysis by Laclau and Mouffe throughout his work, but discourse analysis is essentially an integrated part of how Lacan’s *Symbolic* interacts with *the Imaginary*.

Consider again the example of ‘children’ and ‘kindergartens’ from Jørgensen and Phillips (2010; 46). The discursive approach is to consider the word ‘children’ as a



*symbol* – Ceci n'est pas une pipe – the word 'child' is not itself a 'child' but a symbolic representation of a child, that obtains its meaning from how it relates to other 'signifiers' such as for example being different from 'adults'. Once again the word 'adult' is not itself an 'adult' but a *symbolic* representation, which also is only meaningful in how it relates to a whole network of other symbols, a network of 'signifiers' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010; Andersen, 1999).

The danger is to be stuck in this ontological order of *the symbolic*, and so miss the equally important ontological orders of *the real* and *the imaginary* (Žižek, 2008).

A good example of how *the imaginary* can have real influence on reality (note that 'reality' is not the same as the ontological order of '*the real*') is formulated as follows by Žižek:

*Our hypothetical starting point is that there is an abundance of toilet paper on the market. But, suddenly and unexpectedly, a rumour starts to circulate that there is a shortage of toilet paper – because of this rumour, people frantically begin to buy it, and of course the result is that there is a real shortage of toilet paper (Žižek, 2008; 210-211).*

In other words, what people think (that there is a shortage of toilet paper) have consequences in the real world (people frantically begin to buy it leading to an actual shortage of toilet paper). Of course Žižek doesn't stop his thought experiment there, but elaborates that, even if people know for a fact that it is just a rumour, the result can still be an actual shortage of toilet paper:

*Each participant reasons as follows: 'I'm not naïve and stupid, I know very well that there is more than enough toilet paper in the shops; but there are probably some naïve and stupid people who believe these rumours, who take them seriously and will act accordingly – they will start frantically buying toilet paper and so in the end there will be a real shortage of it; so even if I know very well that there is enough, it would be a good idea to go and buy a lot!' The crucial point is that this other presumed to believe naively does not have to exist effectively: to produce his effects in reality, it is enough that he is presumed by others to exist (Žižek, 2008; 211).*

As Bjerg (2014) has shown, this is the same effect that can result in the phenomenon of “bank runs”:

*Only when the bank starts issuing credit that is not backed by cash on deposit is it truly a bank. In this sense, banks are ontologically insolvent. This means that bank runs do not necessarily happen when banks become insolvent. It is rather the other way around. Bank runs produce the very effects by which they seem to be motivated. In Heideggerian terminology, bank runs merely convert an ontological insolvency to an ontic insolvency (Bjerg, 2014; 146).*

Again, the appearance of kindergartens in society, is simultaneously a solution to women entering the labor market, and the consequence of a widespread ontological understanding of “children” being different from “adults” in more aspects than just their relatively smaller body size.

Perhaps even more so than kindergartens, universities and other educational institutions are of exceptional interest ontologically. After all, looking just at the ontic perspective does not seem very interesting – in that sense, a university is a building in which people mostly sit still, while reading books, taking part in lectures and so on (all of which don’t even make sense if the ontological is not taken into consideration) – through this process some kind of restructuring and mutation is induced within the students brains, which essentially is a purely deterministic perspective.

Arguably the ontological perspective is much more interesting – what kind of thinking and societal structure is education emerging from – This is why the ontological perspective is the focus of this thesis. In other words, how does education change how the students *think*, what kind of thinking in society influences how education is structured and so on. For this reason, gaining a deeper understanding of *thought* itself is an integral part of this thesis, for which we shall use mainly Lacan’s (2006) and Žižek’s (2008) theory of the human psyche - simplified through the three dimensions of *the Real*, *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*. This is a choice on our part, as there are many other theorists we could have chosen to use instead, ultimately resulting in different understanding of the field of study and possibly even different conclusions.

## 2.3 CRITERIA OF QUALITY

Ultimately, what theory of science boils down to, is really a distinction between “good” and “bad” knowledge – between what is to be considered as “science” and what is not to be considered as “science”. Too much scrutiny results in weak conclusions as very little is accepted as “true” – on the other hand, too much naivety risks resulting in conclusions based on wild assumptions.

As natural science deals with problems on a purely ontic level – i.e. a black hole does what a black hole does regardless of what any human being thinks about it – criteria of quality in natural science are pretty simple – *what is the ability of a scientific theory to predict the future* and *what is the ability of a scientific theory to be used practically* (Gergen, 1997; 60-65).

However, when it comes to the ontological, which arguably plays a huge role in social constructivist science, human interaction is introduced into the equation to further complicate things – thought processes (which researchers never have direct access to – i.e. you can’t hear other people’s thoughts) influence how people act and interact whether on an individual or societal scale.

Because of this added complexity, it would be almost impossible to conclude anything meaningful without a close interaction between theory and the empirical, and as a result, a lot of responsibility rests on the researcher’s ability to understand and interpret reality. This is in alignment with the criteria of qualitative research expressed by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009). According to them, there is an ongoing movement in qualitative research away from validity and reliability and toward argumentation as well as the researcher’s capacity for *intellectual flexibility, receptiveness and creativity* (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; 305).

This melting together of the theoretical and the empirical can be like taking off the empirical ‘straitjacket’, but runs the risk of leading to *‘freedom projects’ that consist of nothing more than armchair constructions* (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; 303). In social constructivism it seems impossible to interpret any research without already having an established theoretical framework of what ‘reality’ is. Change this framework or ‘paradigm’ and the interpretation and sense making will also change

resulting in possibly completely different conclusions. This is not to say that no ‘reality’ exists outside of a theoretical context. Thought processes influence how humans act in the ‘real world’ and thus can have very real influence on the ‘real world’.

*While it is evident that reality exists and is what it is, independently of our knowledge of it, it is also evident that the kind of knowledge that is produced depends on what problems we have and what questions we ask in relation to the world around us* (Danermark et al., 2002; 26).

This complexity can make it very difficult to evaluate the significance of social constructivist science. In the case of natural science it is often very clear why it is useful as the theories that are produced tend to be directed toward prediction and understanding of the physical realm – which is often useful for shaping and manipulating this physical reality – i.e. the creation of various mechanical devices and genetic engineering. This is the strength of the natural sciences and social constructivism can not always compete solely on these criteria. This does not however undermine the value of social constructivism, but to understand the value of social constructivist theories it is sometimes necessary to add more criteria of quality than the traditional criteria of prediction and practical use. Gergen (1997; 60-65) thus describes three criteria of quality of social constructivist science in addition to the two more generally accepted criteria from natural science:

1. The ability of a scientific theory to predict the future.
2. The ability to use the scientific theory practically.
3. The contribution of the scientific theory to existing institutions or life forms.
4. The ability of the scientific theory to constitute critical challenges.
5. The potential of the scientific theory to change the culture.

These distinctions are crucial to this thesis as the scientific purpose here does not have much to do with neither predicting the future, nor practical use. Instead the goal of this thesis is to constitute a critical challenge to taken for granted ‘knowledge’ and

discourse – hopefully with a potential to change the culture of contemporary society for the better, and thus contribute to existing institutions – in this case universities – and life forms – in this case humans. In other words, the first two points of Gergen’s criterias of quality are not so important to our thesis and the focus is rather on point three, four and five – especially point four, to challenge the common sense understanding of education by examining it theoretically and ontologically.

It is important to note that even ‘scientific’ theories can be part of culturally embedded discourses that have a very real impact on how people think and act:

*It is interesting to note that the theories which are held to be important, for instance in organizational theory, are hardly popular because of their strong support in any empirical material, since the defects in this respect may be considerable, but still without affecting the popularity of the theory. Rather, these theories are popular because they appeal to the imagination or because they are elegant or are perceived as breaking new ground (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; 307).*

We wish to challenge taken for granted assumptions of education not because we do not believe education to be important – on the contrary, we believe it *is* important, and we wish to gain a deeper understanding of just why that is the case, which could potentially lead to an even better educational system with increased focus on what’s important – or what we, as a species, democratically agree upon what is important, so that the decision as to how we invest in the future through education becomes increasingly a conscious rather than unconscious decision.

## 2.4 HOW WE INTERPRET LACAN AND ŽIŽEK

How we read Žižek (2008) is perhaps a bit different from how he is usually interpreted. Žižek has a background in psychology as well as philosophy and from his psychology background he draws significantly on Lacan’s psychological theories. Žižek through his mastery of philosophy adds a layer of relativism to his interpretation of Lacan, especially in regard to the three ontological dimensions *the real*, *the symbolic* and *the imaginary*. What we decided to do for this thesis, is to go back and

read the original theory by Lacan (2006) – the effect of this is a reading of the theory (of both Lacan and Žižek) that is slightly more psychological and slightly less philosophical than how Žižek is usually interpreted.

This type of reading makes sense, as we to a great extent use these theories to understand the psychological effects of education on the students – to be more specific, we regard *the real*, *the symbolic* and *the imaginary* as three types of thought processes inherent in human psychology. This particular reading was inspired by an early hypothesis we had, that one of the purposes of education is exactly to influence the way the student *thinks* so that the very way of *thought* improves – with this interpretation we hope to gain insight into the human mind, how it works, and how this is influences through education.

*Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task* (Heidegger, 1962; 31).

### **3.0 THEORY:**

In this theory section we will start with the less tangible and more philosophical part of the theory we are using, and then move on to the more tangible and more economical aspects of the theory.

#### **3.1 THE REAL, THE SYMBOLIC AND THE IMAGINARY**

*We have the Real as the starting point, the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolization* (Žižek, 2008; 191).

With any philosophical attempt at creating a suitable model of how we (as human beings) interpret and understand the world – the physical reality as well as the abstract internal reality of the human mind – one fundamental problem is where to begin:

*There are no simple concepts. Every concept has components and is defined by them. It therefore has a combination [chiffre\*]. It is a multiplicity, although not every multiplicity is conceptual. There is no concept with only one component. Even the first concept, the one with which a philosophy “begins,” has several components, because it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning, and if it does determine one, it must combine it with a point of view or a ground [une raison] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; 15).*

This dilemma of where to begin is particularly relevant in defining the ontological orders of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan; *the Real*, *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*. For instance, this thesis is valuable because of its *symbolic* properties – it is full of symbols, in this case letters, composing words, composing sentences – but to a being that is not a being of language (*parlêtre*), that does not have a concept of *the Symbolic*, the very basis for any thought beyond ‘intuition’ – this ‘thesis’ would be an entirely different ‘thing’. It would still be ‘something’, on the ontological plane of *the Real*, but it would be devoid of meaning – impalpable and meaningless.

*The Real* is arguably the most difficult of the three ontological orders to comprehend for the human mind. In fact, defining the real is by definition impossible, as ‘definition’ is a *symbolic* tool, and *the Real is the rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles* (Žižek, 2008; 190). Simultaneously, however, *the Real* is also the most ‘basic’ of the three ontological orders, so common sense would suggest to take *the Real* as the point of departure – However, as we can only describe *the Real* through *the symbolic*, perhaps it would be better to start there.

Important to understand about *the Real* is that it is *ontological* – as are *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*. It is not *ontic*, that is physical, real or factual existence. It is not ‘reality’.

*Finally, if we try to define the Real in its relation to the function of writing (écrit, not the post-structuralist écriture), we must, of course, in a first approach state that the Real cannot be inscribed, that it escapes inscription (the Real of the sexual relation, for example); but at the same time, the Real is the writing itself as opposed to the*

*signifier* – the Lacanian *écrit* has the status of an object, not of a signifier (Žižek, 2008; 193).

Perhaps it is easier to comprehend *the Real* by understanding the limitations inherent in *the Symbolic*. *The Symbolic* is in a way *simplification*, the first step in any understanding is not to get overwhelmed by the seemingly infinite complexity of *the Real*. For this reason, *the Symbolic* tends to deal in opposites – ‘light’ as the opposite of ‘darkness’, ‘life’ as the opposite of ‘death’ and so on. However, most of these are not ‘true opposites’, rather they merely appear as opposites because of an oversimplification bias pertaining to the structure of language. Further inspection into the nature between *light* and *darkness* reveals that they are indeed not completely opposite, rather light is the *presence* of something (photons), and darkness is the *absence* of that something.

*The Symbolic* also biases towards *absolute* conclusions. As an example of this, consider the debate on the concept of *free will*. Because of the very structure of language, of reasoning through the use of *symbolic* representation, that very reasoning is limited by language itself. For this reason, on the argument of whether or not *free will* is possible, it would seem that the amount of possible solutions to the inquiry is binary – either free will is *completely* and *absolutely* possible, or free will is *completely* and *absolutely* impossible. However, that is an artifact of the *Symbolic* simplification inherent in any human language. The *Real* ‘truth’ about free will could just as well be that it is simultaneously possible and impossible – yet from the ontological perspective of *the Symbolic* that would be ‘paradoxical’. In other words, language is a powerful tool, but it also comes with an overconfidence-bias that simply naming something, creating a *symbol* for it, generates *understanding* – yet the seemingly paradoxical are reminders from *the Real* that this is not the case. An omniscient level of understanding and knowledge through *the Symbolic* is therefore impossible without embracing contradiction - both because *the Symbolic* is really simplification and also because reality can be weird. Just because logically something does not make sense, does not necessarily mean it is wrong - because *logic* emerges from the rules that govern our language and is therefore also *symbolic*.



*'Absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity* (Žižek, 2008; xxix).

Worth noting, these philosophical concepts of *the Symbolic*, language and intellectual thought are not merely philosophical speculation. According to neuroendocrinologist Robert Sapolsky (1994), professor of biology, neuroscience and neurosurgery at Stanford University, language is the very basis of human intellectual comprehension and studies across cultures with different languages have shown that even simple concepts that are inexpressible in some languages are also incomprehensible for the speakers of that language. Interestingly enough, scientific theories are usually accompanied by an expansion in vocabulary through the addition of various concepts and definitions that are central to the theory, thus enabling the scientist to consider possibilities that were otherwise unthinkable.

If part of 'higher education' is expanding the students vocabulary through the addition of new concepts that would imply that education is influencing the very ability of the student to think and reason. By learning the 'academic language', the student acquires the ability to reason academically. Logic (logos) and the ability to reason are inseparable from language, from the ontological realm of *the Symbolic*. Reason, logic and language are all inseparable from each other and are all *Symbolic*.

*Man is – Hegel dixit – 'an animal sick unto death', an animal extorted by an insatiable parasite (reason, logos, language)* (Žižek, 2008; xxvii).

As Sagan (1983, 1987, 1996) describes it, evolving brains provided a way to store and manage information outside of DNA - and just as big an evolutionary leap as the invention of neural networks is exactly the human language, more complex than the communication of any other known species, our language allows us to store information outside of our bodies and our minds and for that knowledge to transcend time even beyond a human lifespan. Not only this, but language is what provides the basis for humans to think complex thoughts that are otherwise unthinkable. As Sapolsky (1994) explains it, when comparing humans to chimpanzees, it is not only that we humans have a brain that is an incredibly four times heavier than that of a chimpanzee, but also our think utilizing an incredibly complex language. These are the

differences between a species whose greatest technological accomplishment is using a stick to fish for ants - and a species capable of forming vast societies with incredibly advanced technology.

For these reasons, *the Symbolic* is perhaps the most interesting of the three ontological orders from an academic point of view, however all three ontological orders relate to a different type of thinking:

*The Symbolic* is really logic, reason, argumentation – all the types of thinking that involves the use of language or other *symbolic* representation of reality.

*The Real* is a type of thinking that's independent of language. *Intuition* would be a good example – when presented with a problem, the subject could say “I can't explain it, but I have a feeling or intuition that this is the solution” – or for instance, the act of drinking a glass of water, it can be easily explained *symbolically* “you grab the glass with your hand, raise it to your mouth and tilt it, letting the water pour into your mouth and swallow”, but we don't generally need the *symbolic* understanding to drink a glass of water – we just do it, it's a different type of thinking that doesn't need language. As such, *the Real* is similar to Heidegger's concept of readiness-to-hand: *The ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself the sort of thing that circumspection takes proximally as a circumspective theme* (Heidegger, 1962; 99).

*The Imaginary* is thinking that has to do with relations to other people – or other beings. This is for example where Lacan (2006) places the ‘ego’ – without the existence of an *Other* to compare oneself to, the ego cannot exist. *The Imaginary* is also any type of *theory of mind*, the understanding that other people have a different understanding and interpretation of *reality* than one-self.

Of course the complexity of this theory intensifies in how these three concepts overlap. Even though *the Imaginary* in its basic form does not need *the Symbolic*, most complex *imaginary* thought does involve the use of language – so the example from earlier with the imaginary shortage of toilet paper is only possible because of this overlap between *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*. According to Lacan (2006), these three aspects of the human psyche all influence each other in complex ways.

*The paradox of the Lacanian Real, then, is that it is an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of ‘really existing’, taking place in reality), has a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects (Žižek, 2008; 183).*

As an example, one could mention eastern philosophy, where a common critique is the tendency of human beings to lose track of *the real* and live primarily from the abstract perspectives of *the symbolic* and *the imaginary*. A common saying in eastern philosophy is for example “if you look at your friend, and all you see is ‘your friend’, then you are not really seeing your friend”. At first glance, this sentence is insensible, but by applying Lacan’s concepts of *the Real*, *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary* it makes sense: “if you look at your friend (*the Real*), and all you see is ‘your friend’ (your *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* interpretation of your friend), then you are not really seeing your friend (you miss *the Real* aspect of your friend)”.

Very similar to this is the joke often cited by Žižek:

*Spaulding: Say, I used to know a fellow looked exactly like you, by the name of ... ah ... Emanuel Ravelli. Are you his brother?*

*Ravelli: I’m Emanuel Ravelli.*

*Spaulding: You’re Emanuel Ravelli?*

*Ravelli: I’m Emanuel Ravelli.*

*Spaulding: Well, no wonder you look like him ... But I still insist, there is a resemblance (Žižek, 2014; 97)*

What’s special about this joke is that it illustrates an ontological confusion between *the Symbolic/Imaginary* and *the Real*. The name Emanuel Ravelli is a *signifier*, the *symbolic* and *Imaginary* representation of the person calling himself Emanuel Ravelli. The joke is that Spaulding does not draw a connection between *the Real* sensory experience of Emanuel Ravelli and *the Symbolic* and *Imaginary* representation of the name Emanuel Ravelli.

### 3.1.2 HOW IS THOUGHT? ŽIŽEK AND LACAN CONTINUED

We expect that considering these three dimensions of human thought from the theoretical perspectives of Žižek and Lacan will become particularly relevant in examining the question ‘how is education?’. We shall therefore inquire a bit further into this application of *the Real*, *the Symbolic* and *the Imaginary*.

*This means that these concepts, which are powerfully interrelated, do not correspond to anything that is immediately given to our intuition. Now this is precisely what is substituted for them point for point through an approximation which can only be gross, and which is such that one can compare that approximation to what the idea of force or waves means to someone who has no knowledge of physics* (Lacan, 2006; 386).

The above extraction from Lacan's (2006) book ‘*Écrits*’ provides an excellent example of the difference between *the Real* and *the Symbolic* – especially in how they relate to thought itself. The idea of *force* and *waves* are *symbolic* concepts from the field of *physics*, yet a person with no knowledge of physics can still have an *intuitive* understanding of these concepts from being subjected to the physical experience of forces and waves.

Here we clearly see how studying physics is really about gaining a *Symbolical* understanding of physics - this is essentially achieved by expanding one's vocabulary with concepts that enable the student to think about physics in a completely different and much more precise way than is otherwise possible. Much of this precision is gained through knowledge of mathematics, which is also a language and therefore also *Symbolical*.

What is so great about applying this theory to education is that it shows precisely how education can actually increase the capacity of students to think and approach problems with a much deeper and intellectual understanding. An understanding that was otherwise impossible without knowledge of the concepts necessary for expressing it. In other words, the jargon and verbosity associated with various educations is not just to be annoyingly equivocate and ostentatious - nor a mere superfluous attempt at appearing clever and thus commanding authority over people with a less developed

vocabulary - on the contrary, being proficient with a vast array of concepts allows for the solution of problems of increasingly intellectual complexity.

That being said, an extensive vocabulary *can* be used ostentatiously to come off as more intelligent and ‘win’ arguments, thus imposing authority over others - especially those unwilling to admit their incapability to comprehend the extensive vocabulary because doing so would violate their ego, in other words, go against their *Imaginary* self-image as ‘intelligent’ compared to *an other* (Lacan, 2006).

The intuitive understanding of *the Real*, as for example, the first hand experience of forces and waves in nature without the intellectual or *Symbolic* knowledge of these concepts in physics, is very similar to the Heideggerian concept of *readiness-to-hand*: *If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character* (Heidegger, 1962; 98).

Importantly, the ability to think *intuitively* does not require any *symbolic* understanding – nor does *theory of mind* at its most basic level. This becomes a bit clearer in the studies of animal behavior. Robert Sapolsky (1994) explains how chimpanzees are creatures that can be shown to possess both the ability of *intuition* as well as the capability for *theory of mind* – without the complex thought processes that humans are capable of, given our complex languages. In other words, chimpanzees are, unlike humans, *not* beings of language (*parlêtre*), yet they still have the ability to learn basic tool use through their *intuitive* grasp of *the Real* or their *readiness-to-hand*. Simultaneously, chimpanzees are also beings of *the Imaginary*, as they possess the ability for *theory of mind* – for example, when looking into a mirror, studies suggest that chimpanzees understand that what they are seeing in the mirror is a reflection of themselves. Additionally, studies of chimpanzees show that they are aware that other beings have experiences of reality that are separate from their own experience – for example, when presented with a banana in the presence of a higher ranking male, the

chimpanzee will only take the banana if the higher ranking male is looking the other way (Sapolsky, 1994).

### 3.2.1 EDUCATION AS LEARNING HOW TO THINK

A discourse that is often expressed about education is that it has something to do with learning – after you have an education you are expected to have obtained certain skills and knowledge. Through the concepts of *the real*, *the symbolic* and *the imaginary* we have discovered a theory as to what these “skills and knowledge” could be more precisely. One thing all academic education has in common is that it provides the students with a range of *symbolic* tools to describe the field of study – whether it be jargon in psychology or mathematical formulas in physics – what these all have in common is that they enable the student to think differently, with a new perspective, thoughts that were otherwise unthinkable.

Another development that makes sense with this theory, is the reported dramatic increases in IQ-scores over the past 100 years. This is considered a very short time-span in terms of any genetic changes, so there had to be a different explanation – that is, IQ-scores seems to be strongly correlated with the ability for abstract and hypothetical thought, which seems more important in contemporary complex societies than ever before.

As we have shown, hypothetical and abstract thinking is *Symbolical* according to Lacan’s (2006) psychological theory. So the rise in IQ can be explained by the increased demand on the ability of people to think and reason *symbolically*. In other words, this type of thinking is more important in contemporary complex society than ever before, and it *is* something that can be learned, and education plays a significant role in this aspect.

### 3.3.1 WHAT IS PARADOX?

Reading Lacan (2006) and Žižek (2008) leads to a more profound understanding of the concept of paradox. As we have described, *the Symbolic* is a way of thinking that works through language or other symbolic representations of reality – but it is not a flawless system. By using language as an integral part of our thought processes, humans run into a range of logical biases. For example, the bias toward interpreting reality in sets of binaries – light/darkness, good/evil and so on – as well as a bias toward absolute conclusions – for example the conclusion that free will either completely exist, or completely doesn't exist, rather than a *paradoxical* solution in which free will both does and doesn't exist simultaneously, which of course *logically* makes no sense, hence the *paradox*, but might nonetheless be the 'true' solution. In other words, the 'truth' could turn out to be that free will *paradoxically* both exists and does not exist at the same time – this would be paradoxical to us, because thinking in the *Symbolical* relies on language and thus inherits the flaws and limitations of language. Therefore, because we are limited to a symbolic understanding of reality, accepting the existence of paradoxes in theories is sometimes a necessity. Because *logic* is a principle of *language* and therefore *the Symbolic*, but not necessarily a requirement in the ontological reality of *the Real*.

### 3.3.2 WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another* (Kant, 1784; 1).

To Kant, enlightenment has something to do with daring to think for oneself, as an individual, independent of external authority. This is very similar to Žižek's interpretation of this concept:

*The leading motif of the Enlightenment is, of course, some variation of the injunction 'Reason autonomously!': 'Use your own head, free yourself of all prejudices, do not accept anything without questioning its rational foundations, always preserve a critical distance...' (Žižek, 2008; 87).*

Interestingly enough, the concept of enlightenment presumes the existence of free will – because without free will, a human being can never be truly autonomous. Rather than, the human being would be reduced to nothing more than a sequence of events on a causal chain with the illusion of consciousness. So free will is a dichotomy – Schrödinger (1958; 54) formulates this dichotomy as such:

- (i) *My body functions as a pure mechanism according to the laws of nature.*
- (ii) *Yet I know, by incontrovertible direct experience, that I am directing its motions, of which I foresee the effects, that may be fateful and all important, in which case I feel and take full responsibility for them.* (Schrödinger, 1958; 54).

The “laws” (*logic*) that govern language makes free will seem impossible, a paradox. What enlightenment is according to Žižek, is exactly the realization that all laws in their essence are nonsensical, regardless of their origin and nature.

*In the traditional, pre-enlightened universe, the authority of the Law is never experienced as nonsensical and unfounded; on the contrary, the Law is always illuminated by the charismatic power of fascination. Only to the already enlightened view does the universe of social customs and rule appear as a nonsensical ‘machine’ that must be accepted as such* (Žižek, 2008; 88).

Of course blind rejection of authority is just as unenlightened as blind acceptance of authority – enlightenment is the ability to evaluate authority based on personal insight and willpower and then decide what to do with it, in that sense, enlightenment is freedom of choice, or ultimately freedom of will.

A natural question involving enlightenment is why enlightenment is not the natural or default human condition – why is it a skill or ability that needs to be acquired or learned. To Kant (1784), this is because humans start out as children that needs to follow the authority of their parents to ensure their survival. To Nietzsche (2003) the picture is significantly grimmer – to him, humans act as domesticated herd animals



because, throughout history, not to accept authority was dangerous, even life-threatening.

*The total degeneration of humanity down to what today's socialist fools and nitwits see as their "man of the future" – as their ideal! – this degeneration and diminution of humanity into the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, into man in a "free society"), this brutalizing process of turning humanity into stunted little animals with equal rights and equal claims is no doubt possible! (Nietzsche, 2003; 92).*

Where Žižek (2008) differentiates himself from Kant (1784) and Nietzsche (2003), is with the notion that enlightenment is ultimately a paradox. As mentioned earlier, enlightenment first and foremost presupposes the concept of free will, which currently is a paradoxical concept. Because, firstly, we cannot replicate it (although research in artificial intelligence might someday change this), secondly, because we cannot explain it – other than it being some kind of emergent phenomenon – and thirdly, because we can't prove it beyond personal experience.

What is also paradoxical according to Žižek, is the transition from not-enlightened to enlightened. Just like the *vicious circle of belief*, non-enlightenment is a vicious, unbreakable circle – how to become enlightened is in itself paradoxical because it is not something that can be understood logically (*reason, logos, language*). That does not mean it is 'truly' impossible – it may only seem so because of the biases inherent in the *Symbolic*.

*The necessary structural illusion which drives people to believe that truth can be found in laws describes precisely the mechanism of transference: transference is this supposition of a Truth, of a meaning behind the stupid, traumatic, inconsistent fact of the law. In other words, 'transference' names the vicious circle of belief: the reasons why we should believe are persuasive only to those who already believe (Žižek, 2008; 37).*

So starting on the path to 'enlightenment' can be paradoxical, but once it is initiated and the first steps towards questioning authority are taken, it can be difficult to stop before the end of the road. Ultimately everything will be put into question, the authority of logic, even the nature of being. According to Žižek (2012), the journey of

enlightenment ends with *awakening*, which is also the end result of *Buddhist Enlightenment*:

*The self is a disruptive, false, and, as such, unnecessary metaphor for the process of awareness and knowing: when we awaken to knowing, we realize that all that goes on in us is a flow of “thoughts without a thinker.” The impossibility of figuring out who or what we really are is inherent, since there is nothing that we “really are,” just a void at the core of our being. Consequently, in the process of Buddhist Enlightenment, we do not quit this terrestrial world for another truer reality—we just accept its non-substantial, fleeting, illusory character; we embrace the process of “going to pieces without falling apart.” (Žižek, 2012; 101).*

This idea of “*thoughts without a thinker*” is the same conclusion that Schrödinger (1958) arrives at through his deliberation on determinism, free will and enlightenment. According to Schrödinger, consciousness is not unique, even though it appears so through the illusion of the Ego – which in Lacan’s (2006) theory of psychology is purely on the realm of *the Imaginary*. To Schrödinger, the Ego, or what we identify with as the “I”, is not *the thinker* itself, or a collection of memories, but *existence* or *consciousness* itself:

*What is this ‘I’? If you analyse it closely you will, I think, find that it is just a little bit more than a collection of single data (experiences and memories), namely the canvas upon which they are collected (...) And even if a skilled hypnotist succeeded in blotting out entirely all your earlier reminiscences, you would not find that he had killed you. In no case is there a loss of personal existence to deplore. Nor will there ever be (Schrödinger, 1958; 56).*

So Schrödinger and Žižek both arrive at the same conclusion to enlightenment, that there is no *thinker*, and we can’t explain *existence*, at least not yet. In Lacan (2006), the illusion of this *thinker*, or “*I*”, is all part of *the Imaginary*, which is what enables the formation of the *ego*. In other words, enlightenment ultimately leads to diminishing of ego, as the realization that *there is no thinker* renders the illusion leading to its formation impossible.

This might seem irrelevant at first in a thesis about education, but it is relevant, since it has a major influence on the motivation needed to complete an education. The ego is a very important concept in theories about motivation, and enlightenment therefore has a big influence on what people are motivated by. We will go more in detail about this in section 3.4.3.

### 3.4.1 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

One of Jacob Fuglsangs (2015) major points of criticism is that the motivational factor has changed from internal motivation to external motivation in education.

Motivation can be divided into two different concepts; internal and external motivation.

Noemi Katznelson uses defines the two terms internal motivation and external motivation this way. Internal motivation refers to personal influences, such as passions, what a person needs to feel fulfilled etc, while external motivation refers to outside influences such as being expected to "contribute" to society by getting a job, doing what is expected of you and so on (Katznelson & Pless, 2007).

This means that internal motivation can be understood as the internal desire to gain knowledge. It relies on interest in the subject or enjoyment in the process rather than external factors like rewards and pressures. Students who are motivated by internal factors are likely to work harder to improve their skills, because this type of motivation lasts longer and is self-sustaining.

*Young people know education is important. That only makes it even more tragic for those, who can't, because they didn't learn what was necessary during school. And some of what is necessary is a motivation, that extends further than the outer motivation* (Fuglsang, 2015; 204 – translated from danish).

However this form of motivation is also much harder to foster, mainly because different students find a variety of different things motivating. To foster internal motivation you will often need to know what aspect of the field interests and motivates the individual student and therefore it requires lengthy preparation.

External motivation can be understood as performing a certain activity to achieve a desired outcome. The most common examples of external motivation are grades and money, it can also be to avoid an unwanted situation like failing an exam or getting fired. External motivation is usually used to attain outcomes that a person would not get from intrinsic motivation. However one danger with external motivation is that it can reduce the amount of internal motivation – For example, a student might study so as to get a job and pay back his student loan, and in focusing on that forget his original interest in his field of study, that drove him toward the education in the first place.

*What better preparation for the logic of capital and its rules of profitability, productivity, and guilt than to go into debt? Isn't education through debt, engraving in bodies and minds the logic of creditors, the ideal initiation to the rites of capital?* (Lazzarato, 2013; 65-66).

When education becomes a question about gaining the necessary grades to pass and later get a job – to make a living and potentially pay off a student debt – and become accepted into society, then there is a substantial risk that the internal motivation will diminish. In other words, acquiring knowledge, skills and enlightenment becomes less relevant while acquiring the right credentials to gain a job becomes more relevant because it enables the students to become a part of the social structure.

This has two major effects

1. Only skills and credentials that can be used to become a part of the work force is considered valuable and thus the education's role ceases to be about enlightenment and instead is about enabling students to participate in the workforce.
2. Students' goals become to get the credentials and not the skills, since they don't have an authentic interest in the subject, but need a certificate to participate in society. The problem is that if the only form of motivation that people have to participate in social structures are to live up to the perceived expectations from friends and family, rather than an internal passion to acquire the skills and knowledge taught at the university, then the contents of the education become irrelevant to the students and only the credentials are considered important as it certifies the student to become a part of the social structure.

According to Jacob Fuglsang almost everybody today are convinced that education is a good idea, since the young generation realize that they need an education to get a job (Fuglsang, 2015, 204). This means that people have the external motivation they need, but many students do not find the education purposeful and therefore lack internal motivation.

### 3.4.2 EDUCATION AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

This case of students not finding the education purposeful is not too different from Chris Grey's worst case scenario interpretation of education:

*The most extreme way of understanding management education would be to see it as an entirely cynical charade. Thus, so long as no one knew, management students could spend their courses, say, sitting in a dark room and it would not matter since the value of management education is purely symbolic and credentialist – just a matter of putting letters after people's names (Grey; 2009, 142).*

In this extreme case, education would simply be modern society's version of a 'rite of passage'. A rite of passage is defined as a *transition ritual designed to transfer an individual from one social position to another* (Johnsen & Sørensen, 2014; 1). The theory of rites of passage was originally formulated by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 and is traditionally used on small-scale societies, but Turner (1974) began using the concept on large-scale societies and even made references to the intellectually liminal situation of students in western societies.

Therefore it makes sense to use the theory of rites of passage on education - an extreme version of this perspective is the one presented by Chris Grey, who writes: *Watson refers to a 'contract of cynicism' in management education wherein students accept, and faculty delivers, knowledge which both know to be virtually useless. For the student the pay-off is the qualification; for faculty a controllable and unchallenged encounter (Grey, 2009; 142).*

We don't believe that this extreme perspective should be understood literally, but there might still be some degree of truth to it, and it shows very clearly a scenario of what

education could become in a society which has disregarded the enlightenment aspect completely.

Education is to a large extent functioning as a rite of passage in contemporary society as the definition of a rite of passage is a ritual that transfers an individual from one societal position to another, as mentioned earlier. And studying in order to subsequently get a job does seem to be the hegemonic discourse as we shall see later when we examine the Danish report "High Goals - Excellent teaching in higher education" (High Goals, 2016). The same was shown to be the case by Johansen et al (2015).

If we accept the premise that education is a rite of passage where 'a job' is the end goal, but not the absurd example of education as *nothing but credentials* (Grey, 2009), then the natural extension to this premise is that education, beyond being a *rite of passage*, is also a *preparation* in the sense that the student *does acquire some knowledge and skills*. In this case, knowledge and skills are only useful in the fulfillment of a job. The natural question is then what those relevant knowledge and skills could be? According to Schmidt and Hunter (1998), the two best predicting factors that can be used in conjunction to estimate the capabilities of a future employee, are *general mental ability* – a system for measuring intelligence – and *Conscientiousness tests* – 'conscientiousness' meaning *governed by conscience*. People with high conscientiousness are more likely to finish their tasks on time, care about doing a 'good job' and submit themselves to authority – they care more about leaving a good impression on their boss and co-workers than their less conscientious colleagues.

*The major personality trait that has been studied in causal models of job performance is conscientiousness. This research has found that, controlling for mental ability, employees who are higher in conscientiousness develop higher levels of job knowledge, probably because highly conscientious individuals exert greater efforts and spend more time "on task." This job knowledge, in turn, causes higher levels of job performance. From a theoretical point of view, this research suggests that the central determining variables in job performance may be GMA, job experience (i.e.,*

*opportunity to learn), and the personality trait of conscientiousness. This is consistent with our conclusion that a combination of a GMA test and an integrity test (which measures mostly conscientiousness) has the highest high validity (.65) for predicting job performance (Schmidt and Hunter, 1998; 272).*

This is highly interesting considering the concept of *enlightenment* according to both Žižek (2008) and Kant (1784) is about being critical towards authority – In other words, there is a negative correlation between *enlightenment* and *conscientiousness*. *Conscientiousness* being the second most important factor in predicting job performance after mental ability means that there would be a significant expectancy that enlightenment should correlate negatively with job performance. In a society where job performance is the most important feature anyone can achieve, enlightenment would seem nothing short of a futile distraction.

An interesting aspect of conscientiousness is that studies have shown that it is very easy to fake – job applicants tend to be aware (consciously or intuitively) that this is a trait managers are looking for.

*Laboratory studies, such as those instructing participants to 'fake good', show that it is very easy to identify the desirable or correct responses to a personality inventory (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010; 153).*

And:

*Regardless of where one stands in relation to the use of personality inventories, it is clear that conscientiousness is the most important personality predictor of job performance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010; 139).*

Coincidentally(?), conscientiousness is also the most important personality trait to possess in order to get through higher education – So in the light of this research, one way to view education would be as one big conscientiousness test. A test that is impossible to fake, as a higher education generally takes five years (when counting a bachelor plus a master's program) – subsequently, no one is able to fake conscientiousness for five years without actually possessing the trait. In other words, what better guarantee exists for a mentally able and highly conscientious employee, than an individual who has successfully grinded his or her way through five years of

sucking up to professors – the university version of authority – and demonstration of willingness to complete a vast variety of tedious tasks.

As a side note, this also provides an explanation to why the most intelligent individuals in society are not always the most successful in terms of education – because intelligence happens to be significantly negatively correlated with conscientiousness:

*Conscientiousness was significantly negatively correlated with abstract reasoning (fluid intelligence), but not with verbal reasoning (crystallized intelligence)* (Moutafi et al, 2003; 1).

Another effect of conscientiousness being the most important personality trait in students undergoing education, is that there is a gender bias in conscientiousness scores – that is, females on average score significantly higher than males on this trait. The expectancy then is that more females than males will be able to accomplish the *rite of passage* of education – and this is exactly the case, females are much more likely than males to get a college degree or higher.

As conscientiousness has to do with wanting to give other people a good impression of oneself – for example by getting good grades or impressing superiors – it seems plausible that conscientiousness is linked to motivation, and it is. According to Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2010) and Moutafi et al. (2003), conscientiousness is positively correlated with how driven people are by *external motivation* – which is almost implied in the definition of conscientiousness. Additionally conscientiousness must be negatively correlated with enlightenment as enlightenment involves questioning authority and law (Kant, 1784; Žižek, 2008) and conscientiousness by definition is exactly the opposite of that.

So conscientious people are driven by *external motivation*, which Fuglsang (2015) has shown to be the primary motivational factors in education, as it is structured today. In Lacan (2006), *external motivation* is inherent in *the Imaginary* and indistinguishable from ego.



### 3.4.3 THE EGO AND THE IMAGINARY AS MOTIVATION IN EDUCATION

We already introduced the concepts of *internal* and *external motivation* (Fuglsang, 2015), which are common concepts in psychology (see section 3.4.1). Lacan (2006) essentially operates with the same concepts, albeit under slightly different names: *Internal motivation* is located in *the Real*, and is in a sense simplistic. For example, the desire to end pain or gain pleasure, the curiosity to explore or discover and the excitement in understanding how things work or attaining new knowledge. In short, all of these can be reduced to different forms of *desire*. In other words; *internal motivation = desire*.

*External motivation* is located in *the Imaginary* and is synonymous with *ego*. This means that *external motivation* or *ego* cannot exist without *an other* to compare itself to, which is why it is *Imaginary*. Examples of this could be the pursuit of status, competition or trying to be better than *others* and creating a narrative or self-image of how *the Imaginary other* perceives oneself. In other words; *external motivation = ego*. *The phenomenon in question here shows one of the purest forms in which the ego can manifest its function in the dynamic of analysis. This is why it makes us realize that the ego, as it operates in analytic experience, has nothing to do with the supposed unity of the subject's reality that so-called general psychology abstracts as instituted in its "synthetic functions." The ego we are talking about is absolutely impossible to distinguish from the imaginary captures that constitute it from head to toe—in both its genesis and its status, in both its function and its actuality—by an other and for an other* (Lacan, 2006; 312).

When applying this theory to university level education, it seems – aside from the desire for gaining knowledge – to be almost exclusively motivated by ego. One could argue that a person could have a *real desire* to get good grades, but that is simply not correct as grades are meaningless without *an other* – grades only make sense in *the Imaginary*. This is true even with people competing with themselves – in this case, a person's past self takes the role of both *the other* and *the self*. Explained like this, self-competition almost seems as insane as a case of dissociative identity disorder (also known as multiple personality disorder).

The concepts of an *other*, a *self*, an *I* and an *ego* are thus all concepts of *the Imaginary* and therefore any motivation that involves any of these concepts are made possible through *the Imaginary*.

Interestingly enough, attaining knowledge can be motivated by both ego and desire. The desire part is difficult to explain as it comes from Lacan's (2006) *the Real* and therefore it has to do with feelings or basic drives, such as for example curiosity. The ego is probably easier to understand for most people – that is wanting other people to think about you in a certain way, or even wanting to think about *oneself* in a certain way. The *other* does not have to be a specific *other*, it can even be an entirely abstract *other* (for example “very few people are able to get the grade 10 or higher, therefore that is a ‘good’ grade - or - *other* people don't generally get such a good grade”), and the other can even be the person's own self as mentioned above.

In other words, the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of thinking of oneself as being ‘clever’ is also motivated by ego. The *I* might even be the most common *other* in ego-based motivation – in this case it takes the form of a *narrative*, such as “I am a philosopher, and philosophy is very important” or “I am very good at what I do, and my accomplishments are very meaningful”. The ego then pushes the individual to seek to fulfill the narrative, which makes it a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is also why narratives are often used as a motivational tool in management, as people are willing to work much harder and longer when they identify with and find their work meaningful – by identifying with ego, people become more conscientious, and less enlightened as they do not see the ego as the *nonsensical machine* or *illusion* that it really is, protecting us from the truth, that we are really a *void* or *thoughts without a thinker* (Žižek, 2012; 101) – to shield ourselves from this truth we create a mask, an imaginary character that we think we are, and this ‘character’ is precisely the ego:

*The lesson concerns the “inherent theatricality involved in self-knowledge and action. No action or motivation of [the agent] is directly his own, but must be assessed in the light of others’ reactions to it; he understands himself by constantly looking at his actions in the light of the mask that he wears in them.” In other words, the lesson concerns “the mediation of desire and feeling by the imagination or fiction inherent in*

*the relation between actor and spectator,” namely the “inherently socially mediated character of desire formation itself.” What Lacan calls “the big Other” is this agency of social rules and appearances which confers on everything we do a minimal aspect of theatricality: no matter how passionately we act, our desire is always a desire of the Other, mediated by the Other (the symbolic texture which provides the scripts for possible desires); we are not directly ourselves, we play the role of ourselves, we imitate a fiction of what we are (Žižek, 2012; 424).*

The purpose of this *mask* or *role of ourselves* is not only to fool others, but also ourselves, because all of these are aspects of *the Imaginary* and can only exist as such – in *the Symbolic* as well as *the Real* an *I* or *Self* does not exist – simply because they cannot exist without the concept of *an other* – only consciousness exists, and consciousness is the *thoughts without a thinker* (Žižek, 2012; 424).

In education, most of the motivation is directed toward the student's ego. Most people study to add a title to their personal narrative, so they can fill a certain role in society, so other people will look up to them and think they are intelligent. The system of grades is adding to this effect by further incentivizing competition – a competition that is usually directed against an abstract idea of an *other*, rather than anyone specific, although it can also be specific. This runs the risk that the attention gets pointed toward the prestige and respect that comes with good grades, rather than attaining the skills and knowledge that grades supposedly reflect.

The danger is that education becomes the ‘*contract of cynicism*’ Chris Grey (2009; 142) is suggesting. If education is mainly about adding shallow accomplishments to the mask of the ego, then that is exactly a ‘*contract of cynicism*’ with no actual benefits outside an *Imaginary* reality.

In other words, *external motivation*, the type of motivation that is driven by the ego and the *Imaginary*, is what dominates motivation in education – but in this case, is this a ‘problem’ that is rooted in education itself, or is it rather a symptom of society having become ever increasingly competitive? Competition of course also being an entirely *Imaginary* phenomenon as it requires an *other* to compete with, and so competition only makes sense from the perspective of the ego.

We believe contemporary society is the cause of these developments in education, and over the next sections we will introduce a range of theories to better understand the situation.

### 3.5.1 THE RISE OF CAPITALISM

Capitalism (from latin capis; head/person) is an economical and social system, in which the ownership to the means of production (the ‘capital’) is private, and where labor, goods and capital are exchanged in a ‘market’. In its ‘purest’ form, the market is ‘free’, which means that supply and demand regulate production and prices, and that the actors on the market can exchange goods and services without interference from the state.

Already during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a form of *trade capitalism* emerged in England with free exchange of goods, capital and labor, that gradually replaced the feudal society. With the industrialization of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the automatization of work processes, capitalism developed further and the *industrial capitalism* spread throughout the western world.

As capitalism spread, the accusations against capitalism steadily increased, some of the common criticisms were that it was an unfair and repressive system, that in itself creates opposition and conflict not only between capitalists and workers, but also between the company owners themselves (Fink, 1995; 117).

Central to the 19<sup>th</sup> century critique of capitalistic were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Historically they saw capitalism as a progress, because it helped develop the industry and created the possibility of almost limitless satisfaction of needs (Fink, 1995; 111). However, they simultaneously pointed out that capitalism as a system contains so many internally destructive tendencies, for example in the form of huge concentrations of capital, procedurally growing class contradictions and recurring crisis so grotesque that it inevitably has to collapse.

Simultaneously with the increasing critique of capitalism, labor movements emerged and developed in Europe, where the resistance against capitalism resulted in

democratization of the political systems and alleviation of the consequences of capitalism through social, health and educational reforms.

In the years after the first world war, the intervention of the state was strengthened in the capitalistic economy, under the influence of the British economist John M. Keynes theories. This tendency was strengthened after the Second World War with the foundation of the *welfare capitalism*.

Supporters of the free market economy achieved enormous progress around 1980, amplified by the collapse of the Soviet Union which had represented an alternative to capitalism. And since the 1990's capitalism as well as the market economy has been the dominating ideology of society in the western world, which culminated in Francis Fukuyama's book 'The end of history' (Francis Fukuyama, 1992).

According to Fink (1995) there will in every society with capitalistic conditions of production, be a tendency that ever more areas are incorporated under a capitalistic dominion or assume other forms that are favorable for the production that aims for ever increasing profit:

*The entire society becomes subject to a requirement – a categorical imperative – about more and ever more, without any conscious planning of what this 'more' is useful for. Economical growth becomes a goal in itself* (Fink, 1995; 116).

### **3.5.2 CAPITALISM – IDEOLOGY OR RELIGION?**

The problems in society can affect education negatively, resulting in a negative cycle in which education becomes part of the problem. Therefore, understanding the problems of education cannot be completely separated from the problems in society. Now some might argue that capitalism is not an ideology, but rather an economic system – but it is an economic system that has been idealized and which is difficult to argue with or suggest alternatives to, without being accused of heresy - in other words being a communist. Not only does capital treat *the earth, matter, and the living beings that proliferate on the earth as exploitable "objects"* (Lazzarato, 2013; 59) – but no

other possibilities exist, there is no serious alternative being debated in contemporary western society. It is not a question of capitalism or something else, but rather a question of what type of flavor of capitalism.

*Capitalism (and its power) is above all defined as absolute control over what is possible and what is impossible. The first watchword of neoliberalism has been “there is no alternative,” in other words, there are no other possible than those proclaimed by the market and finance. In the midst of the sovereign debt crisis comes the same refrain: the indebted man must pay because no other possibilities exist. What is expropriated by credit/debt is not only wealth, knowledge, and the “future,” but more fundamentally the possible (Lazzarato, 2013; 23).*

According to Lazzarato, a great part of the reason this broken system is at all sustainable is because university students are really made up of two groups. The first group are the *children of creditors* (Lazzarato, 2013; 66) who have no interest in changing the system, as they are essentially the winners of the game of capitalism – the second group are the students that are hoping to create a better future for themselves, and who knows that critiquing the system is counterproductive to their goal of getting good credentials in order to get a good job and pay off their debt. So why run the risk of ruining your entire future by criticizing the system – this is why the problems of education might really be economical problems. As long as students are relying on education for their economical success, they simply do not have the freedom to truly disagree with the system – they can pretend to disagree, and are usually even expected to have a critical stance toward what they accept as ‘knowledge’, ‘scientific’ or ‘truth’, but they can not truly disagree. *For the student the pay-off is the qualification; for faculty a controllable and unchallenged encounter* (Grey, 2009; 142).

These tendencies shows clear parallels to religion as capitalism has successfully created a vicious and unbreakable circle of belief. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Giorgio Agamben describes ‘capitalism’ as *a religious phenomenon, which develops parasitically from Christianity* (Agamben, 2007; 80). Similar to Benjamin (1921) Agamben establishes three characteristics of this ‘capitalistic religion’, first, it is a

*cultic* religion, which means that everything only has meaning in reference to the fulfillment of a cult, not in relation to a dogma or an idea (Agamben, 2007; 80).

Second, it is a *permanent* cult, where it is impossible to distinguish workdays from holidays as work *is* the celebration of the cult. Third, unlike Christianity, the capitalist cult is not directed toward redemption or atonement for the guilt, but toward guilt itself:

*Precisely because it strives with all its might not toward redemption but toward guilt, not toward hope but toward despair, capitalism as religion does not aim at the transformation of the world but at its destruction* (Agamben, 2007; 80).

In the original critique by Benjamin (1921), he used the German word ‘Schuld’ which can not only mean ‘guilt’ but also ‘debt’. This gets a whole new meaning in contemporary society where the majority of money in circulation are bank created credit money – which essentially is debt (Bjerg, 2014).

In Christianity as well as capitalism then, people are born with guilt – except of course that in capitalism, those who are born wealthy are effectively born without guilt. In Christianity the guilt is absolved by being “good people”, essentially well behaved – in capitalism the guilt is absolved by acquiring money - however there are no real moral boundaries to how these money can be acquired, the destruction of the world through global warming for instance is mostly accepted as long as it is profitable. In the capitalist religion then, according to Agamben (2007), ‘money’ *is* a holy symbol, a sacred object that must be obtained in order to achieve redemption and get rid of the guilt – yet it is essentially a debt which can never be repaid because of how the current economical system is based on *credit* (Bjerg, 2014).

*Methodologically it would be productive to first examine what associations money has adopted with myth in the course of history – until it could draw from Christianity enough mythical elements in order to constitute its own myth* (Benjamin, 1921; 3).

Agamben (2007) introduces two concepts; ‘consecration’ and ‘profanation’ that are essentially each other’s opposites. Consecration is thus *the removal of things from the sphere of human law* or making something holy or sacred. Profanation on the other hand means *to return them to the free use of men* (Agamben, 2007; 73).

In Lacan's (2006) and Žižek's (2008) terminology, this is all *symbolic*. Take as an example a wooden cross, in its consecrated form the holy symbol of Christianity, in its profaned form an ordinary piece of wood. In *the Real* there are no difference between the two, only in *the Symbolic* is there a difference.

In the 'capitalist religion' the most obvious example is – once again – that of money; in its consecrated form the embodiment of pure value (or debt), in its profaned form worthless pieces of paper or digital numbers on a computer screen.

*As long as people believe that the money issued by the state is somehow backed by 'real value', this money will indeed circulate as if it were actually backed by 'real value', thus producing the effect that it is indeed backed by 'real value' (Bjerg, 2014; 112).*

In this sense, money has been consecrated, imbued with *real value* through the power of belief. Agamben (2007) argues, that consecration does have its place – in the case of children playing with toys, they are essentially consecrating the toys, the plastic gun becomes a real gun, the doll is alive and imbued with personality and so on. Even cats are consecrating objects in play, pretending the yarn is a mouse. But after the play is over, the object is always reduced to its original state through profanation. Only in religion is anything kept in its consecrated state indefinitely – which is why capitalism must be a religion, as money is a consecrated object kept in a state of consecration indefinitely. The profanation of money would be to strip it of its *Imaginary* worth. However money is probably a good thing, and the solution, as Bjerg (2014) argues is more likely to move from an economy based on *credit money* to an economy based on *sovereign money*.

*The problem is not that the state imposes the consequences of its indebtedness onto the people. The problem is that the state has allowed private agents to profit by flooding the economy with credit money of their own making in the first place (Bjerg, 2014; 262).*

The reason all of this is important in a thesis about education is because society and education are non-separable from each other. The problems in society can affect education negatively, resulting in a negative cycle in which education becomes part of



the problem. But education can also be part of the solution, if education creates an environment and a platform for people to consider how society works and where they have the freedom necessary to critique it – this requires that education's role as enabling a student to expand his knowledge and seek enlightenment is not forfeited for a capitalistic ideal of competition (more on this later).

## 3.6 PLATO

### 3.6.1 PLATO – FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Alfred North Whitehead said that *The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato*. (Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 39; Free Press, 1979) and it is clear that Plato has had an enormous influence on the Western history of ideas. Since Plato dedicate a large part of his book 'the Republic' to describing his ideal educational system and these thoughts has shaped many of the assumptions we have regarding education. We believe that it is important for our thesis to outline some of Plato's thoughts on education, since they have helped create the foundation of the Western understanding of education, but this section should not be seen as an analysis of Plato. There exists a wide variety of interpretations of Plato's book 'the Republic' as well as different interpretations of how philosophical sound these different interpretations are (Skirbekk & Gilje, 2005; 66-67). We have chosen to stick with a simple and more traditional interpretation of Plato's idealism, since we believe that this interpretation has had the greatest influence on the Western perspective on education and therefore is most relevant for our thesis.

### 3.6.2 THE IDEALISM OF PLATO

We will now give a brief outline of Plato's idealism as well as a brief description of his perspective on what knowledge is and how it is obtained. This will help the reader understand the assumptions Plato works with when he describes what he considers the ideal educational system.

Plato argues that ideas exist, which are not accessible to our senses, but are intelligible and therefore only are accessible through the mind.

*These things themselves that they mold and draw, of which there are shadows and images in water, they now use as images, seeking to see those things themselves, that one can see in no other way than with thought (Plato, the Republic, 510e).*

This stands in contrast to sensuous objects which we *can* access through our senses. This means we have a dichotomy between ideas and the sensuous. In other words, the world can be divided into two different worlds, the intelligible and the sensuous (Plato, the Republic; 509d).

The sensuous objects are changeable and imperfect, which means that knowledge of this kind is not perfect knowledge. In contrast we have the ideas which exist in the intelligible world and are independent of humans and hence do not change over time. We can only achieve perfect knowledge - Epistemen - of ideas, because they are immutable and perfect. This means that knowledge about ideas are a more perfect kind of knowledge.

The sensuous world can be understood as reflections in the water or in a polished surface of the intelligible world (Plato, the Republic, 509e). These reflections we see in our world can help us get insight into the world of ideas. Through reflection on sensory experience and assumptions that we formulate, we can approach this perfect knowledge. It is possible to recognize the idea of a circle through the various incomplete circles we find in nature. This means that the conceptual clarification of everyday language is not just an analysis of our language, but a way to get closer to the world of ideas (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 74).

According to Plato, life is a period in the soul's existence in which the soul is incarnated in a body (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 75). The soul enters the sensory world at birth and moves back to the intelligible world at death. When the soul was in the intelligible world it had direct access to the ideas, but at birth the souls forget all it used to know. During the life the soul can see shadows of the ideas which remind it of the true ideas and by doing so it might recognize them. Life is thus a process of recognition. Therefore humans have a longing to achieve greater insight into truth,

beauty, what is good, Plato calls this term Eros. The different ideas cast shadows in the sensory world, which makes it possible for humans to access a preliminary and incomplete insight into the different ideas and this include the most important idea, *the idea of the good* (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005, 71).

As we seek to obtain greater insight into the idea through our mind by contemplating, we get better at recognizing the shadows when we meet them in the sensory world and likewise when we attempt to develop our understanding of the sensory world through experience we move closer to insight in the ideas. Hence we get closer to the truth by moving back and forth between the two different worlds. Thus, we need both theory and practice, since we need a combination of the two to get closer to true knowledge.

### 3.6.3 THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF PLATO

In Plato's republic Socrates mentions 4 different states within the soul that he places on a ladder, where the ones at the top are closer to the truth and the ones at the bottom are furthest from the truth.

*You have made a most adequate exposition, I said. And, along with me, take these four affections arising in the soul in relation to the four segments: intellection in relation to the highest one, and thought in relation to the second; to the third assign trust, and to the last imagination. Arrange them in a proportion, and believe that as the segments to which they correspond participate in truth, so they participate in clarity.* (Plato, the Republic, 511d-e).

After this section he begins to explain the Allegory of the Cave. Socrates argues that this allegory explains the relations between human nature, education and lack of education

(Plato, the Republic, 514a). Through education we can advance in the cognition hierarchy and move from illusions to insight.

The most important idea we can get insight into is the idea of the good, also known as the form of the good. It is important to note that Plato does not make a sharp distinction between the idea of the good, the beautiful or the righteous (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 86). Since the idea of the good is eternal and exist regardless of individual

humans it becomes possible to have objective ethics. Since Plato argues that the good is a form of knowledge, we can learn to recognize it through education. When people learn to recognize the idea of the good they will begin to act good, so by educating people it is possible to make them into good citizens which in turn will make them happy. In the first book in the Republic, Socrates shows how a wide variation of different actions can be righteous, this is made clear when Socrates explains to Polemarchos, how servants act righteous, by obeying their masters commands, but sometimes their masters make mistakes and give a command that would harm themselves, in which case it is righteous to disobey the command (Plato; the Republic; 339c - 340b). Here it is shown that different ideas and phenomena can be righteous, because righteousness is constituted by different phenomena, a person will need insight into the relationship between these phenomena to understand the idea of righteousness. Therefore the person will need to know everything in order to have complete insight into the idea of righteousness, such an insight is hardly possible for a man to achieve (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 72). Since the idea of the good is so difficult to get insight into, only a minority of the citizens have the abilities and intelligence required to get insight into this idea. This means that Plato believes that people are created differently and education should determine who is most capable of getting insight into the idea of the Good.

*Each of us is naturally not quite like anyone else, but rather differs in his nature; different men are apt for the accomplishment of different jobs.* (Plato, the Republic, 370a-b).

Even for those most capable it will require many years of rigorous studies to learn. This minority that is capable of getting insight into the good, must first become educated and then lead the Polis (city state).

*Then our job as founders, I said, is to compel the best natures to go to the study which we were saying before is the greatest, to see the good and to go up that ascent* (Plato, the Republic, 519c-d)

This quote shows that the goal of education is to make a polis that is good for all the citizen and this requires an educational system which is able to both find and train the

best minds in the state to recognize the idea of the good so that they can lead the Polis. We see in the Allegory of the Cave (Plato, the Republic, 514 - 517) that if a person gets full insight into the ideas he must return to society and help to lead and educate the citizens in the Polis. It is important to note that the people who are capable of seeing the idea of the good would rather spend all their time getting a more clear idea of the good, but regardless of that it will be their duty to lead the Polis, which can be seen in this quote.

*It's not the concern of law that any one class in the city fare exceptionally well, but it contrives to bring this about in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, making them share with one another the benefit that each is able to bring to the commonwealth. And it produces such men in the city not in order to let them turn whichever way each wants, but in order that it may use them in binding the city together (...) But you we have begotten for your selves and for the rest of the city like leaders and kings in hives; you have been better and more perfectly educated and are more able to participate in both lives. So you must go down, each in his turn, into the common dwelling of the others and get habituated along with them to seeing the dark things. And, in getting habituated to it, you will see ten thousand times better than the men there, and you'll know what each of the phantoms is, and of what it is a phantom, because you have seen the truth about fair, just, and good things. (Plato, the Republic, 519e-520c).* It is important to understand that the individual is not educated for the individual, but for the state, since they have taken a higher education they are more fit to lead and will therefore have to enter the cave again to help the people who are still stuck there. Therefore Gunnar Skirbekk and Nild Gilje argues that *It is therefore not true, that Plato seeks truth for the sake of truth, as it is often said.* (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 71, translation from Danish). But because it is best for everybody if the most capable people get educated and are leading the Polis. Handing over all the power to the experts might seem extreme and anti democratic, but Plato works with the premise that the experts have gained insight into the way to live and organize a community. What we today define as an expert only knows how we should act if we wish a certain outcome, while Plato's experts have insight into the divine and

perpetual idea called the Good which contains goals we should have for society as well as our lives. It is perhaps a bit suspicious, that Plato argues that the philosophers should lead the Polis, since he is a philosopher himself, but if we do not speculate about his motivations, but take him at his words he says that it is in fact against the philosophers own interest to lead, but those *who have seen the idea of the good, does not have much desire to interfere in human affairs, they would rather remain in this higher world* (Plato, the Republic, 519d).

It is not clear from the start who are capable of obtaining insight into the good before education has started. For this reason Plato argues that a healthy Polis requires an educational system where everyone has access to general education, and everyone has the same chances, and later are given the role they are most qualified to fulfill.

Education must be public and all children should have equal opportunity regardless of social class and gender. The students enter this system when they are ten years old, and all receive the same education until they are twenty years old, at this point there is a test and the best continue their studies while the rest will produce the commodities that the polis needs. The ones who continue their studies will have another test when they are 30 years old, the best begin to study philosophy for five years, while the rest get jobs in the army or as administrators. After the best group have completed their five years of training they have to return to society and learn to navigate in practical life. After 40 years of educational studies and practical training they will become the leaders of the state (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2005; 77). This means that the educational system divides its citizens into three social classes. Each citizen gets the job which best matches their abilities, which is both advantageous for the polis and at the same time helps the individual to achieve happiness.

### **3.6.4 THE LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT**

For Plato the enlightenment is literally to see the light that is the immutable and perfect version of the idea of the good. All humans have a longing desire to achieve greater insight into truth, beauty, what is good (Eors) that they had access to when they lived in the intelligible world. Kant also believed that knowledge about what is true

exist and is accessible, but they have very different ideas about how it should be achieved. For Plato education is the bridge to enlightenment and is therefore immensely important, since it is the way people can achieve enlightenment and contribute to the city state and achieve happiness.

For Kant enlightenment is the ability to use one's own understanding without direction from another. This definition changes the role of the educational institution from a place that should teach you what truth is to a place where you should learn to use your understanding without direction.

### 3.7 PETER FERDINAND DRUCKER

It is interesting to compare Drucker and Plato, particularly their two books; the Republic and the Concept of the Corporation. While Plato focuses on how the population should find a better life in Polis or the city state through education, Drucker examines how the modern human spends a lot of time working in the corporation and argues that a better educational system can be the way to make the individual more productive while giving them a better life, thus we will argue that the contrast between Drucker and Plato shows how education can be understood in the context of the state or in the context of the corporation.

#### 3.7.1 THE CONCEPT OF THE CORPORATION

In Drucker's book the concept of the corporation he sets out to describe why it was possible to improve its productivity so drastically under the second world war and he argues this was because they got better to organizing workers in corporations. Modern production is based on *organization not of machines but of human beings*. (Drucker, 1946, 21).

When America changed its economy to a war economy during the second world war many people had to enter the factories who were not used to work there. Drucker argues that these new people were not satisfied with just being told how they should work, but wanted a more elaborate explanation of how the entirety of the production worked. This lead to several reconsiderations of how the production facility was

constituted and how the employees should work together this made it possible to mass-produce products like airplanes which prior was considered too complex to mass produce.

Drucker argued that after the war it was clear that management and organization of employees was the most important aspect of mass production and not raw material and production tools. This led to the realization that in order to optimize the efficiency of the work force there was a need for more supervisors especially in middle managers positions. Drucker goes even further and says that every achievement of the war production rested on the training in relevant skills for the workforce namely these supervisors. For this reason Drucker argues that the rate of industrial expansion largely depends upon the country's ability to recruit and train a sufficient number of potential leaders for mass production industries (Drucker, 1946, 31). These supervisors can be trained through leadership experience from small businesses and work in political parties and communities, but since the modern industry needs so many supervisors the number that can be trained this way is not sufficient. Therefore it is needed to create new methods to give leadership experience to future supervisors (Drucker, 1946, 32). Drucker argues in his book, *The Concept of the Corporation*, that this should mainly be the corporate responsibility and the corporation needs to look for more opportunities to train its employees, but in later writing he places a larger emphasis on educational institutions.

Drucker's argument for a broader education that includes more blue collar workers goes like this, faced with an ever-growing need for executives and a fierce competition, the corporation cannot afford not to use the intelligence, initiative and imagination of ninety percent of its workers (Drucker, 1946, 206). As a result companies can benefit greatly if they offer their employees the opportunity to gain the skills they need so that they will get the equal opportunity to get a management position as newly educated from an engineer school or college. This does not only have the benefits of getting more people with leadership skills, but a worker who is satisfied, secure and emotionally engaged with the production will be more effective (Drucker, 1946, 207). When Drucker talks about the benefits of educating the



workforce he has a tendency to use extra production as the core argument to convince the reader that his ideas are beneficial, but he often concludes with a comment about how these changes could make the workers life better as well, which shows that it is not only about increasing production for Drucker, but also about improving the life quality of the workers. This means that the corporation should not only be understood as a production facility, but it must also be understood as a social institution where workers live much of their life (Drucker, 1946, 208).

An example of this could be when Drucker writes about the problem with only the prospect of getting a paycheck to motivate the assembly line workers. Drucker argues that when employees only have their paycheck as motivation they will lose their self-respect and when they do not understand what they are producing their job will alienate them as well.

Considering what we know about desire- and ego-based motivation from Žižek (2008, 2012) and Lacan (2006), this provides an interesting perspective. In theory, perhaps, it is possible to motivate workers through a *Real* desire, for instance, the job could be ‘fun’ or genuinely ‘interesting’ - but that is probably a steep requirement for a lot of jobs. Much more realistically then, is to motivate the worker through the *Imaginary* ego - but as we have seen, that actually requires that the worker is *not* enlightened, as enlightenment ultimately leads to viewing the ego as ‘nonsensical’. Therefore, if the goal of education is purely to produce an efficient workforce, enlightenment should not be desirable as it makes it harder to motivate those employees and they will be relatively less conscientious.

However, Drucker sees education as a possible solution to both these problems, since it can give the worker a better understanding of what they are producing as well as making it possible for them to get promoted which can give them a prospect of a brighter future and therefore motivate the worker.

However education for supervisors needs to be more advanced since these supervisors need a very different and more complex set of skills and abilities than the craftsmen need prior to the industrializations. The main difference is that it requires a much

higher degree of abstraction and far more knowledge. The craftsman needs to know his tools, but the supervisor needs to know his principles (Drucker, 1946, 30). These changes lead to a new form of worker which Drucker defines as the knowledge worker.

### 3.7.3 DEFINING THE KNOWLEDGE WORKER

To understand how Drucker defines the knowledge worker we need to look at its predecessor, the manual worker. The manual worker has existed for millennia and has been described in songs and poems since Hesiod wrote about them 800 BC (Drucker, 1999, 1). But none of the people who wrote about them decided to take a look and describe accurately what they actually were doing while they worked, not until Frederick Winslow Taylor looked at them in the early 20th century. He found that many of the traditional procedures do not add anything of value to the production (Drucker, 1999, 2). This means that a lot of the time spent in the working environment basically is pointless. Taylor also argued that manual work was not the result of skills as many poets have claimed, but rather the result of knowledge. The difference here is that skills are something that can be mastered and perfected by the individual, where knowledge is knowing how these simple and repetitive motions should be organized and executed. By focusing on the optimization of work through knowledge and doing away with all the redundant work traditions Taylor succeeded in vastly increasing the output of the workers (Drucker, 1999, 3). In other words knowledge and management of knowledge is the key for corporations to being more productive than their competitors. One of Karl Marx's most significant insights was that the workers neither owns nor can own the tools of productions and therefore becomes alienated from their own work. It is impossible for an employee at an industrial factory to take the assembly line or a steam engine with him from one job to the next, but since knowledge is not impersonal like money, but instead resident in a person, the power relation changes in the knowledge society. If we look at doctors and teachers as examples we see that their primary asset for production is knowledge. Drucker calls this group *the knowledge works*. Their defining characteristic is that they possess the

necessary knowledge to carry out their work and therefore own the means of production (Drucker, 2007, 236). Since the knowledge workers again own the tools of productions and the relationship between knowledge workers and employers becomes a relationship built on interdependence. Many organizations now have a HR department dedicated to ensure that the organization is attractive for the best knowledge workers to start and continue working for their corporation. In other words it is far more expensive to replace the knowledge workers than the manual workers. Drucker says that this means that the employee and the organization needs each other in equal measure and therefore have a symbiotic relationship (Drucker, 1999, 10) and 2 years later he says that it has changed even more and that the organization needs the knowledge worker far more than the knowledge worker needs them (Drucker, 2007, 236). But regardless of how much they need each other, one thing is clear, knowledge has become the focal point of society which leads us to Drucker's next concept; 'the knowledge society'.

### 3.7.4 THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The knowledge society might be the most competitive society we have ever known, when knowledge becomes accessible for everyone, there is no longer any excuse for poor performance. In earlier societies it was impossible to rise out of the social status you were born into so you were destined to continue the work your father had with everything that follows from social and economic status that followed with the job (Drucker, 2007, 233). The possibility to improve on your social status means that the knowledge society becomes a far more competitive society. *It is a society where many more people than ever before can be successful. But it is therefore, by definition, also a society in which many more people than ever before can fail.* (Drucker; 2007, 238). The way to achieve a higher status is to gain capital which now is knowledge, this means that education becomes extremely important in the knowledge society. *The knowledge worker gets access to work, job and social position through formal education. The first implication of this is that education will become the center of knowledge society, and schooling its key institution.* (Drucker, 2007, 233).

Drucker argues that education is a key aspect of the knowledge society. The vast majority of new jobs created, require many different qualifications that "blue-collar" workers neither possess nor are well equipped to acquire. These jobs requires a different approach and mindset, which allows the educated person to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge, but more importantly, it requires a habit of continual learning (Drucker, 2007, 231). This is not a skillset which can be taught quickly, and for that reason the employees in the industrial sector cannot be moved into knowledge or service work the way that farmers were moved into the industrial workforce (Drucker, 2007, 231). The knowledge society needs a unifying force that can focus different ideas, thoughts and perspectives into a common and shared commitment and this unifying force is education. This means that society and its citizens are more dependent on the educational system than ever before and the distribution and acquisition of formal knowledge in several ways are remarkably similar to the distribution and acquisition of property as well as income in the two or three centuries called the age of capitalism (Drucker, 2007, 233). When knowledge becomes a key resource, the educated person now matters more than ever before, and the issues of what it means to be an educated person becomes increasingly more important.

### 3.7.5 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

For this reason the general education becomes important, but Drucker argues that this should not only be a general education with the role of preserving great traditions, the wisdom, knowledge and values which are collected in the heritage of the culture. This general education must preserve the knowledge and culture of the world, but that cannot be all it does. The general education also needs to enable the educated person to use his or her knowledge in the present, so that the educated person can participate in molding the future, in short, he needs to be capable of making his knowledge relevant for the world. This is exactly the challenge which liberal arts degrees, humanists and general educations are facing now. It can be worded as follows: *How do I make my knowledge relevant to the world?* (Drucker, 2007, 220).

When the question is articulated as *How do I make my knowledge relevant to the world?* It becomes impossible to look at the organization. The reason why the question gets rephrased this way is that the knowledge worker spends the majority of his or her time in an organization, and needs the organization to make this knowledge relevant. *Most if not all educated persons will practice their knowledge as members of an organization.* (Drucker, 2007, 221).

Therefore we need to answer another question to know how knowledge becomes relevant to the world and that is. *How do I use my knowledge to work in the organization I want to and how do I make my knowledge relevant in this organization?* This in turn gives the general education a new responsibility, it needs to ensure that students can apply their education in an organization and make it easy for them to articulate how their knowledge is helpful to an organization.

In the organization the educated person will have to live in two different cultures at the same time. An intellectual, culture where the focus is on ideas as well as words and a management culture, where the focus is on work and people. When the educated person sees the organization from an intellectual perspective, the organization becomes a means to an end to practice their knowledge, but when the educated person sees the knowledge from a management perspective the knowledge becomes a means to an end to improve the organization's performance, so that the mean and the end swap places depending on the perspective. These two perspectives are opposites, but they relate to each other as pole opposites rather than contradictions. They can both be right at the same time and they need to support each other.

*If one overbalance the other, there is only nonperformance and all-around frustration. The intellectual's world, unless counterbalanced by the manager, becomes one in which everybody does his own thing but nobody achieves anything. The manager's world, unless counterbalanced by the intellectual, becomes the stultifying bureaucracy of the organizational man. But if the two balance each other there can be creativity and order, fulfillment and mission.* (Drucker, 2007, 221-222). Thus the essence of management becomes to make knowledge productive (Drucker, 2007, 237).

The general education for the most part only apply the intellectual perspective, this creates a mismatch between the educational systems and the organizations outside of academia. When the educated person enters the organization, their knowledge must also be understood from the management perspective where it is a means to an end. Drucker argues that liberal art and general education must start to look at knowledge from the management perspective as well. *The fact that the liberal art curriculum they enjoyed so much in their college years refuses to attempt this is the reason why today's students repudiate it a few years later. They feel let down, even betrayed. They have good reason to feel this way.* (Drucker, 2007, 222-223).

### 3.7.6 PLATO AND DRUCKER

Plato and Drucker has both been influential figures in the way we understand education and many of their ideas influences the assumptions made later on about education.

One of the assumptions that they both share is the idea that education can be beneficial for the individual and the state simultaneously. For Plato the idea of the good can help the citizen to live a good life and govern, or be governed the way which is optimal for the Polis, while for Drucker the skills can help corporations increase production, which is also beneficial for society since it is a way to avoid depression or total war, two major concerns just after two world wars and a depression, but it was also a way to give the individual blue collar worker the opportunity for a better life. This dualism in education where it should be beneficial to the individual and the state simultaneously have survived until today.

However, where they differ the most, is in their understanding of work. For Plato work prevents the individual from philosophizing and getting closer to the idea of the good. For Drucker, total employment is needed to avoid a depression. This depression can be avoided by producing for war, but if war production becomes the only way to avoid a long term depression, then *industrial society would be reduced to the choice between suicide through total war or suicide through total depression.* (Drucker, 1946, 269).

This means that for Plato the individual is beneficial to society by realising the idea of the good and help other realise the idea of the good, while for Drucker the individual is beneficial to society, by work and producing so war and depression can be avoided, but in both cases the individual and the state's interests matches up. Part of why the interest of the individual matches up with the interest of the state is that it is in the individual's interest to live in a good state.

Another aspect where Plato and Drucker differ is in their view on enlightenment. For the citizen needs to be enlightened in order to approach the idea of the good, enlightenment is here the key to a happy citizen and a well managed city state. Everything, from the way individuals should live their life, to the way the Polis is organized, is about getting people enlightened and move closer to the idea of the good. This stands in contrast to Drucker.

For Drucker, the goal is to reduce unemployment and increase productivity by making the citizens work in corporations, while making the work more meaningful and rewarding. To Drucker knowledge is a resource which is acquired through education and the purpose of this resource is to make it productive through the corporation - or in his later writings; organisations. To Drucker general educations need to find a way to make their knowledge relevant to the world through organisations in order to be valuable. Enlightenment is not valuable to Drucker if it does not help the worker make knowledge productive. According to Schmidt and Hunter (1998), in their compilation of 85 years of research findings concerning what influences productivity, the results are clear - mental ability (the can do) and conscientiousness (the will do) of workers are among the most sought after traits. Enlightenment is not - and furthermore is even considered to be negatively correlated with conscientiousness (Moutafi et al., 2003).

### 3.8 EDUCATION TODAY

In his book, ‘the concept of the corporation’, Drucker describes the benefits he believed society, the corporations and the workers would gain by making knowledge more accessible to the working class. Drucker's thoughts about education was based on a limited amount of empirical data, because his idea at this stage was about constructing a better educational system, which only existed in very few places. A similar thing can be said about Plato, where the educational system was theoretical as well. However we will look at Johansen et al. (2015) Ove K. Pedersen's (2011) and Jacob Fuglsang's (2015) view on education. It differentiates because it describes how education have changed in the last several decades. Since it doesn't describe an ideal educational system it seems a bit more critical, but it also adds a value perspective to the discussion. We will first describe how this change in discourse about the educational system is described by Johansen et al. discourse analysis and look at the consequences as they are described by Ove K. Pedersen and Jacob Fuglsang. Ove K. Pedersen's distinction between education's role in the welfare state and the competitive state shares many of the same differences which can be found between Plato's and Drucker's view on education, but Ove K. Pedersen can discuss the consequences of this change since he is describing them rather than discussing them on a theoretical level.

#### 3.8.1 A NEW FOCUS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

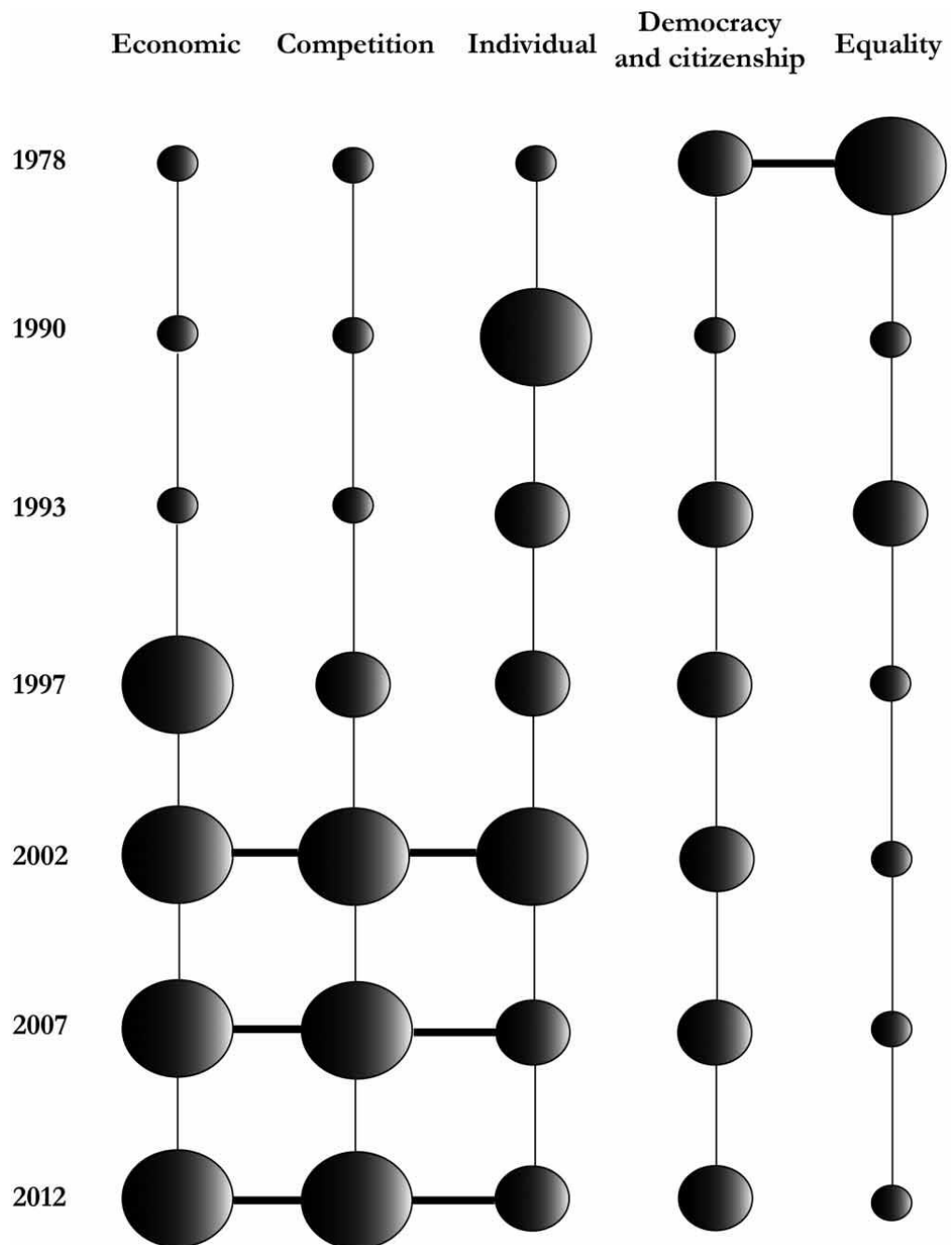
The two perspectives on education that Drucker and Plato introduced are still relevant today. Johansen et al. argues in the article Political discourse on higher that there have been a change in discourse about which role higher education should play in society. This has led to a shift in the social role of universities from a discourse where education should focus on democracy, citizenship and equality, towards a discourse which is mainly focused on the economic benefits of education as an engine for the production of knowledge, and for national competitiveness in a globalized world where education becomes an investment in human capital.



*The discourse has moved from a pluralistic one embracing not only the economic benefits of education, but also emphasizing on democracy, citizenship, and equality, towards a predominantly economic one, focused squarely on notions of globalization and competitiveness in a knowledge society. (Johansen et al., 2015, 1).*

The authors made this discourse analysis by analysing seven different policies from 1978, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2007 and 2012 in order to show the gradual change in discourse. The discourses were then divided into three different sizes of circles depending on how prominent the discourse was. The authors acknowledged that this analysis was subjective, since the size of the circles were an approximation, but argues that since 5 different researches were involved in the analysis, it added a degree of triangulation, which increases the analysis validity (Johansen et al., 2015, 7). The five thematic discourses they analysed were the economic rationales, individualization, global competition, democracy and citizenship, and equality.

This is illustrated in figure 1. (Johansen et al., 2015, 7).



*Figure 1.*

The figure shows that the discourse about the economic and competitive benefits with education has moved from a minor to a major focus in policy plans. This means that the discourse of Danish educational politics is fundamentally different now compared to the late 1970s. Whereas the first policy plans, especially focused on equality and

forming the democratic and enlightened citizen, the later plans main focus were on the economic benefits of education to the wider economy (Johansen et al., 2015, 12).

Johansen et al. gives two examples of this new discourse.

*In the global economy, production and utilization of different knowledge is the key to increased growth, increased employment and greater welfare. The government's strategy of growth 'Growth with Commitment' emphasizes an educational system in top class, a central argument to ensure growth and welfare. The competitiveness of Denmark will mostly depend on whether the educational system can live up to the demands of increased professional competence and standards, as well as professional development – in comparison with international, and not least EU, standards. The public sector and the business community largely depend on employees who are able to apply and facilitate information, and transform new information to innovation. Just as the underlying basis for an effective public sector are well-educated employees on all levels. (Regeringen 2002, 9) (Johansen et al., 2015, 9).*

and

*The prerequisite to ensure prosperity in the future is that we Danes are among the best educated in the world. Because knowledge and education is the path to growth.*

(Anders Fogh, 2013) (Johansen et al., 2015, 11).

However, the authors argue that since they analysed political documents, then the tendency they demonstrated towards a higher focus on economic benefits with education is not only expressed in discourse, but also in concrete political decisions. One of the examples they give of a law which is based on this discourse is the change in how universities are funded. They have moved from a central budget model to the "taximeter" system. Prior to this new system universities was annual granted a sum of money, but from 1994 the new taximeter system meant that each university would receive money a per-student allocation, which was partly made to encourage

universities increase student intake (Johansen et al., 2015, 9), but also to enable universities to spend the money more freely according to the local needs.

The authors describe this new law with the following metaphor. Higher education can be understood as a production facilities, where knowledge and graduates becomes the product (Johansen et al., 2015, 3).

To sum up the authors argue that the rationale behind the economic strand is that education is valuable because it has a positive effect on the Danish economy. Students are seen as a resource (human capital) that enables future economic growth which means that the role of the educational institutions becomes to produce this human capital (Johansen et al., 2015, 7).

### **3.8.2 DEFINITION OF VALUE AND CULTURE**

In this section we will describe Ove K. Pedersen's concepts of the national state and the competitive state. Ove K. Pedersen sees the same change in discourse which Johansen et al. sees, but his concept of the competitive states makes it easier to describe the consequences of this change in discourse, Ove K. Pedersen argues that there have been two major changes which have altered the Danish state and therefore the educational system too. The first one is the transformation from the national state to the welfare state and the second one is the transformation from the welfare state to the competition state. But before we describe the change from the national state to the competition state we will need to understand how Ove K. Pedersen understands change in society in general. To describe this, Ove K. Pedersen uses two different concepts, value and culture. He defines values as the assumptions behind the arguments in the everyday political debate and he defines cultures as the plurality of values that defines the institutions. Values changes over time and this means that cultures changes over time as well since new culture emerges when a wide variety of values change (Pedersen, 2011, 169). Ove K. Pedersen argues that he can show that a culture has changed by pointing to changes in values (assumptions behind arguments). He also argues that the school always has been an institution which goal was to

normalize a specific culture that is making a particular set of values natural to everybody (Pedersen, 2011, 171).

Therefore we can learn a lot about which assumptions exist in a society by looking at the school system. As a result he looks at a wide variation of different school reforms, and how different groups, mainly politicians have discussed the Danish educations since 1850 and until today in order to highlight the different assumptions. These changes in values and cultures have happened before, when we went from a nation state to a welfare state, and he argues that the assumptions behind the role of education has changed again. Ove K. Pedersen argues that the first example of a this change from the welfare state to the competitive state this change in culture happened in the early 1990 (Pedersen, 2011, 169 & 171). In 1991 IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements). A study that showed that Danish students didn't read or write as fast as other countries students. This together with other studies initiated a debate about the purpose of the primary school. After 25 years debate the law was changed. The 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006 a new law was passed called Formålsparagrafen (the purpose paragraph) for the primary school and The 8<sup>th</sup> May 2007 a similar law was passed for high school. Ove K. Pedersen argues that both these laws are based on the value that work is what ties the individuals to society. Hence the educational institutions main task becomes to enable students to work by giving them the necessary skills to participate in the work force (Pedersen, 2011, 170). In short education became an issue of work and employment (Pedersen, 2011, 186-187).

#### **3.8.4 THE COMPETITION STATE**

Ove K. Pedersen argues that we have moved from a culture where the goal of education was to enable the students to participate in our democracy, to a system where the goal is to enable us to participate in the workforce or said in other words we have moved from a welfare state to a competitive state. During the welfare state the goal of education was to make individuals take on a shared responsibility for the community, which included an obligation to influence what the nation's political goals are and how it's resources should be distributed, through democratic participation

(Pedersen, 2011, 183 - 184). More than any other institution should school change society, by enabling that all could be formed through free access to knowledge and information could exceed the inequality that was in society (Pedersen, 2011, 185). Thus the schools responsibility in the welfare state was to enable everybody to be enlightened through free access to knowledge and information, so they could participate in the democracy and overcome innate inequalities in society (Pedersen, 2011, 185). In the competitive state however the purpose of education became to make students contribute to the workforce and nations production. This means that the education system becomes subordinated to the social economically ideal and everything from the public school to universities to business schools becomes tool for economic competitiveness (Pedersen, 2011, 188). This change in culture meant that the school primary task no longer is to enable its students to participate in the democracy, which was its role the first 160 years of its existed. The schools secondary task becomes to promote democracy, while the primary task becomes to make the state more competitive (Pedersen, 2011, 172). Ove K. Pedersen highlight the importance of the educational system in the competition state for the nation when he says that the school's primary goal has become to develop the students into "soldiers" in the battle for the between nations to have a more competitive society (Pedersen, 2011, 172 - 173). The word soldiers and battle between nation is very interesting. Many western nation have not battled internally with weapons since the second world war, but there are still a continuously economically battle between states to gain economically superiority. So according to Ove K. Pedersen the battle between nations becomes a battle of who can be more productive than the other countries and this makes the level of education into one of the most important factors of competitiveness. What is new is that the fight for values and thus the primary school now becomes subordinated to the socio-economic performance and thus higher education becomes a tool for the state's competitiveness the same way that the labor market did in the 1950s. Therefore, the purpose of the school now educate to the participate in the labor force (Pedersen, 2011, 187). But the educational system of the competition state has another important role to

play beside increasing the nation's competitive advantage. education also enable the individual to participate in a community through work.

### **3.8.5 EDUCATION MAKES US A PART OF THE COMMUNITY**

Ove K. Pedersen argues that the most important point is the a change between these two cultures are the different views on humans between the welfare state and the competition state (Pedersen, 2011, 173). In the welfare state the individual was seen as irreplaceable and was valuable just because it exit, but in the competitive state the individual get to define itself through its work, skillset and enlightenment. This means that educations becomes essential for the human in the competition state since it is what enables the individual to define themselves. Both moreover it also means that education and skills have become a precondition for participation in social relations namely work (Pedersen, 2011, 195). As a result all children must develop the skills that enables them to live a good life and not be left behind (Pedersen, 2011, 193). But it is not just skills that has become important, also personality and motivation need to be formed so that the individual can fit into the labor force and therefore they become elements that should be molded by the educational system.

In the competitive state the concept of community and individuality is based on the idea that the ability and desire to work is what people together into a community and it is now the school's mission to provide students with the professional competencies so they can become a part of this community through work (Pedersen, 2011, 170).

Ove K. Pedersen disagrees with (Hustand 2008: 43) when he says that the schools has become an institution for learning, instead he argues that they are a place where you learn what is required of you to achieve work and through work participate in one or several communities. This is done by equipping the students with a personality that motivates them to work (Pedersen, 2011, 200).

Since both the state needs the students educated to make sure that the country is competitive and the individual needs to be educated to become a part of a community, the state and the citizen shares interested t, not only in ensuring that the citizens are educated, but also to ensure that the education is relevant for the labor market.

### 3.8.6 EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE

Jacob Fuglsang reaffirms Ove K. Pedersen's idea that the culture around education has changed, when he looks at how education should be for everyone. However Jacob Fuglsang is more critical to this change. Like Ove K. Pedersen he looks at changes in assumptions behind arguments, but he does not use Ove K. Pedersen's concept value and culture. Jacob Fuglsang looks at the 95 percent objective. This objective was established in the 90s, the same time where Ove K. Pedersen argued the change in culture happened. This objective aims to ensure that as many students as possible gets an education. It should be noted that even though the argument has changed from "*Education to everybody*", to education to 95%, since it has been recognition we wouldn't have a 100% of all people who gets an education, the point in the 95 percent objective is still the same as education to everybody, namely that as many as possible should get an education because education is good for everybody period. Jacob Fuglsang argues that this goal has been drafted with the best intentions, since it is crucial for the students to get an education, since the job possibilities for people without an education keeps getting worse. When the policies recognized that the need for unskilled labor would be heavily reduced in the future, they decided to reduce the number of untrained workers (Fuglsang, 2015, 200). This shows a large change in our understanding of education from the 70s where it wasn't seen a problem that only a third of the work force was educated (Fuglsang, 2015, 200).

To Jacob Fuglsang the problem with the 95percent objective is that it is quantitative and not a qualitative way to measure success of the educational system. This measurement only counts the students who get through the system and not the quality of what they learn. Since it is much easier to count the number of students that gets through the system, then it is to measure the quality of what the students learn. This is problematic since the educational institutions are incentivized to enroll students who does not have the foundational knowledge which are prerequisite to follow the education. It strongly affect the atmosphere on an education when a group of the taught subject is not understood by a segment of the students who does not possess the required skills to understand it.



It is noteworthy how Jacob Fuglsang and Ove K. Pedersen sees the same development in our culture, but Jacob Fuglsang is much more critical to this development.

#### **4.0 ANALYSIS:**

Ove K. Pedersen, Fuglsang and Johansen et al. all point out that discourse around education have changed, and it has become increasingly focused on economic and competitive aspects. Since the same tendency is described by several different theorists, and they all argue that this discourse began to get more traction in the early 90s. Was dominating during the late 90s and still is the relevant discourse today. Therefore we will argue, that there have been sufficient triangulation to argue for the validity of a change in the political discourse surrounding education. Furthermore Johansen et al. argued that, since the discourse analysis was based on political documents, it was not limited to how the value of education was articulated. But it also affected the real laws that changed how education is conducted in today's society.

*We focus on government papers as these are both the outcomes of a political process, and influence political discourse, and therefore are not 'merely rhetoric', but shape 'real policy' (Saarinen and Ursin 2012, as cited by Johansen et al., 2015, 6).*

In our analysis we will not spend much time arguing for the validity of their discourse analysis, rather we will take a look of the newest published report by the Danish Ministry of Research and Education. This report repeatedly emphasizes, that the Danish educational system needs to be more relevant to the corporations, and it therefore fits very well with the discourse that Ove K. Pedersen (2011), Fuglsang (2015) and Johansen et al. (2015) has identified. It addresses how higher education in Denmark should be organised in the future to better benefit the individuals, as well as corporations, and it is extremely relevant since it is used by politicians as the point of departure, when new laws regarding higher education is discussed. We will use quotes from this report to illustrate the points we make with our theory about the Danish educational system.

## 4.1 HIGH GOALS – REPORT ANALYSIS

In this section we will look at a report made by the Danish minister of research and education. Like Johansen et al. (2015) we will argue that analyzing the political discourse not only shows how the discourse has changed, but also how real political decisions are informed and shaped by this discourse.

This report was called “High Goals - Excellent teaching in higher education”. This report was made earlier in 2014 and it analyses the Danish university education in order to make certain recommendations on how we should move forward with our educational system. The report is based on the premise that Denmark is in the middle of a significant societal development, where a much larger number of highly educated people will need to find a job in the labor market (High Goals, 2016, Regu). This development means that higher education will need to cover a much more significant part of the labor market than it has done before, namely by educating its students to work in smaller and medium sized companies as well as in larger companies.

In order to face this development, the committee argues that higher education will have to adapt by improving quality and relevance (High Goals, 2016, Regu). The relevance of the education is among other keynotes defined by the proportions of students who become employed after they have finished their studies. This definition of relevance means that the education must be relevant for the labor market and supports the tendency described by Ove K. Pedersen (2011) and Johansen et al. (2015).

This is presented as a socio-economical problem since the committee that drafted the report argues, that The Danish government spends about 30 billion. kroner annually at higher education. An OECD survey shows that Denmark is the country which has the largest public spending on higher education in terms of share of BNP after Norway. However, as graduates of higher education get closer to more than half of the Danish work force, education becomes so important for the Danish productivity, growth and welfare, that this expense becomes a required investment for the state to function. The political system and society in general has a legitimate interest in how the massive investment in higher education is managed. Society therefore needs to ensure that the

money, that has been invested into education, ensures that the education actually helps the student enter the workforce. This is achieved by ensuring that the education is relevant for the labor market.

This development is a worldwide development which has accelerated in the last ten to twenty years. Furthermore, this development means that education changes its role in society. Its main goal, according to the Danish ministry of research and education, is to create the work force rather than develop new knowledge, which is clearly illustrated in this quote from the High Goals report.

*It is obviously important for a country to contribute to this knowledge production. But it is even more crucial to have the capacity to make the new knowledge available so it can be applied for the benefit of society through well-educated citizens. Against this background, higher education has become an important prerequisite for doing well in international competition. (High Goals, 2016, 34, Translated from Danish).*

From this quote we can see that the Danish minister of Education states, that the most important role of Danish universities is to improve Denmark's production, so we can be more competitive in the international market. The Committee argues that the best way to do this is to make sure that the students, and therefore the labor market, has access to the knowledge produced in the academic world, and that this should take priority over new research since it is more beneficial to society. The logic behind this argument is that it is beneficial to society in an economical sense to make sure that the new knowledge that is gained through education is also applied in practice. This shows very clearly how we are in a competition state, as Ove K. Pedersen theorizes, where the most important goal of education is to make the citizens into soldiers in the international market (Pedersen, 2011, 172).

This is especially interesting when you also remember that an increasing number of citizens depend on education to enter the job market and gain access to a community. Which means that the minister for research and education argues, that education is beneficial for both the individual as well as society. This reflects both the aspects of Ove K. Pedersens theory of the competition state, where the logic is relevant for both

society and the individual. Which means that multiple actors are pushing society in the direction of ensuring that the education is relevant for the corporations.

#### **4.1.1 RELEVANCE**

However, the education is by many students not perceived as relevant for the labor market. Many students experience a disconnect between the world of work and the world of education, since they can only apply a tiny portion of the knowledge they have acquired during their time at university. According to the report (High Goals, 2016, Regu), the committee sees this as a failure of the universities since they are not fulfilling their most important goal – that is providing the labor market with skilled workers – and therefore universities must change in order to accommodate that.

In order to uncover a more accurate version of the graduates' perspective on the education's structure and content, the committee conducted a qualitative study of 13 graduates employed in small or medium sized enterprises. This study focused on the comparison between the skills they needed in their jobs and what they had learned in the university (High Goals, 2016, 12 – 13 + Appendix 5).

The committee's studies indicate that both students and graduates, in different areas and types of education, demand general skills that can be applied in practice. The majority of the participants in the committee's graduate survey of people with higher education employed in small and medium enterprises experienced that they entered a completely different world when they entered the labor market, because there was a disconnect between higher education and the labor market. This highlights a problem with the Danish educational system. The goal of the educational system is to equip its students with the skills they need for a future job, but a large proportion of the students do not feel that the skills they have learned are useful in their future job. According to the committee the university will have to build bridges and close the gap between these different worlds; between employment and education (High Goals, 2016, 6). Several of the interviewed argued that university education - with the exception of the business education - is very far from the real candidate meetings in the small and medium enterprises. But those that were interviewed also pointed out that, although

the specific job functions requires a very different skillset than what the academic program focuses on, they still found the problem solving and analytical skills they had obtained during their education useful (High Goals, 2016, 36).

To be more specific, the committee's study showed that more than 40% of university students experience that their education contributes much or some to their acquisition of job or work-related knowledge and skills, and this number is only a bit over 50% for business academies and professional university colleges. The committee found this to be exceptionally noteworthy since these educations are defined by their close links to practice (High Goals, 2016, 35). Meanwhile one in four university students experienced that their education contributed very little to their acquisition of job or work-related knowledge and skills (High Goals, 2016, 34).

High professional quality of education is an indispensable precondition for the students' qualifications to enter the labor market after they leave higher education.

Yet, the talented do not always graduate with the professional quality necessary to get him or her a job (Høje mål, 2016, 25).

As an MSc. employed in a small Danish company puts it:

*You get a basic knowledge that you can be useful, but not a specific knowledge.*

*Everything works completely different in the company. I might use maybe definite 5 per cent of what I have learned at school, the rest is baggage which means that I can act consciously in the job, which enables me to perform a number of tasks that I otherwise would not have been able to* (High Goals, 2016, 37; translated from Danish).

Chris Grey (2009, 2013), professor at London University, argues that education could be replaced with sitting in a dark room for 5 years, and even though he is aware that this statement is too extreme, he argues that there is still a degree of truth in this statement. In regards to business schools he writes that *the apparent purpose of business schools, to make their students better at management, is flawed. There is no evidence that they do - that is to say there is no evidence that a manager who has studied at a business school is by any measure, no matter how broad or narrow you choose it to be, better at managing than one who has not.* (Grey, 2013, 141).

This matches with the finding of the High Goal report where the students only experienced little connection between the skills they learned and the challenges they faced when they were hired by a corporation - as was illustrated in the above quote about only being able to apply 5 percent of the learned skills.

However, as we have shown, Lacan (2006) theory of psychology can be used to illuminate the type of 'learning' that takes place in higher education.

Lacan would describe the process of learning to think abstract and hypothetical thoughts, as increasing the capability for conception of the *Symbolic*. The student increases their master over the *Symbolic* through the expansion of his or her vocabulary - which is the very thing that enables the student to consider (in this case) management much more precisely than they would otherwise have been able to.

Therefore education provides the students with a range of *symbolic* tools which are valuable for the student to function in the modern competitive society. Since modern corporations need employees who are capable of thinking symbolically, to deal with the challenges they are faced with. Drucker (1946) wrote that supervisors needs a more complex set of skills and abilities than the craftsmen needed prior to the industrializations. Mainly because the supervisor needs a much higher degree of abstraction, since the craftsman only needed to know his tools while the supervisor needs to know his principles (Drucker, 1946, 30). When the interviewed student argues that he can still use the abstract way of thinking he learned during his time at the business school then it can be understood as a demonstration that he has improved his ability to think symbolically. Drucker argued that this skill was the most important skill for a supervisor to have and the very reason we need education.

As we have shown, education - to the extent that education is about learning and improving the ability to think - is primarily about increasing the student's ability to think with language (*parletré*), which utilizes Lacan's (2006) concept of *the Symbolic*. However, the *Symbolic* is not the only type of thought that human beings possess - there is also *the Imaginary* and *the Real*. *the Real* is perhaps the most difficult to comprehend of the three, and bears clear resemblance to Heidegger's concept of

*readiness to hand*. The idea here is that it is not all skills that can be learned or mastered from a purely *Symbolic* understanding, some types of skills and knowledge are better and easily handled through *the Real*. A large part of the routines and challenges workers will face are understood and dealt with intuitively, without using the *Symbolic* understanding, since *the Real* resist definition as definition is itself a *Symbolic* tool. Thus there are some limitations to how relevant the education can be, since it is impossible for education to give more than a *Symbolic* understanding to the students and some problems are better solved through *Real* experience and intuition.

The Committee argues that a significant reason why few of the students feel few of their skills can be applied when they enter a corporation, is that a still growing number of highly educated students will have to find a job in small and medium sized enterprises. These smaller companies have different skill-requirements than larger companies have, and they simultaneously have different skill-requirements from each other. Therefore it can be difficult to predict what skills are needed in a small or medium size company. The committee argues that educations must change to give the students these skills (High Goals, 2016, 35 – 36). This shows how the educational system is required to change in order to better give the students the qualifications they need to work and make the education more relevant to the contemporary society. However since the interviews showed that general problem solving skills often could be used, while it was harder to apply more specific skills, the Danish ministry of research and education recommends that education should not be designed to meet the current or short-term needs of any specific types of enterprises. Rather the students should acquire general skills that will greatly be demanded and necessary in a lifelong perspective, to commit them to the future labor market, so education's role becomes to enable its students to continuously transform their professional skills in order to meet the needs of the labor market (High Goals, 2016, 26). This shows that even though Drucker and the Danish Ministry of research and education do not use Lacan's concept of the *Symbolic* they still agree that thinking *Symbolically* is important for the ability to think abstract, however adding Lacan's (2006) concept of *the Symbolic* can make it

more clear in what way higher education is relevant for businesses and his concept of *the Real* can show what education is unable to learn the students.

#### **4.1.2 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THEORY**

The Danish ministry for research and education does not only want to make education more relevant for the labor market, they also want to improve the quality of the education the students receive and they argue about the best way to do this through deeper engagement in the study.

There are several different theories as to what is most important in order to learn, and the committee subscribes to the Student Engagement theory, where students engagement is seen as the most important factor in students learning. The committee acknowledge that there are other theories about what is most important for learning, and there is not an academic consensus yet, but they argue that since this theory is supported by a large body of theoretical framework and empirical evidence, while it has been tested in many different countries, they have chosen it as their framework for the analysis (High Goals, 2016, 44). Student engagement theory defines engagement as a combination of the time, effort and resources the student committee ha to the education, but also the time, commitment and resources the teacher and institutions dedicate to create a good educational environment (High Goals, 2016, 44).

The reason for this is that studies have found that there often is a strong correlation between student engagement and how much time students and teachers dedicate to their study (High Goals, 2016, 46). One of the most important assumptions in student engagement theory is that the engagement (time, effort and resources) spent by students, teachers and the educational institution is a good way to measure the quality of the education. Therefore the theory suggest that student engagement needs to increase. The committee accepts this assumption and therefore examines how they can increase the engagement from all the actors. The committee's analysis also found that students in many programs do not spend the full time or capacity on their education, therefore they do not learn as much as they could have, which is a significant problem



(High Goals, 2016, 124). The committee therefore wants to find a way to get students to spend more time on their education.

Since the concept of engagement is broadly defined, many different aspects can contribute to increased engagement. It can for example be the case, that the students feel they have been challenged in solving complex tasks, which can motivate the student (High Goals, 2014, 45).

The committee argues that Danish universities should work towards a system where all teachers and leaders in higher education are concerned with how teaching and the organization of their particular training can be developed to promote maximum student intensity as well as structure the course so the subjects are as relevant to the businesses and give as high a chance for future employment for their graduates as possible. The goal should be to encourage students to spend their full time on the study and arrange the course in close collaborations with businesses to ensure relevance (High Goals, 2014, 124), but also to find ways to encourage teachers at universities to prioritize the educational aspects of their job higher in comparison to research.

The Committee's analysis has shown that the management of the institutions strategic focus on educational quality can only marginally be translated into a real priority and recognition of good teaching when it, for example, applies to salaries and promotions. The committees studies shows that in the university sector, there is a clear commitment from the teachers that research a higher priority than education. Only 14% of teachers at Danish Universities believe that teaching and education is given priority over research, whereas 51% believe that research is given a higher priority than education. Furthermore only 10% of the teachers find that good teaching is rewarded in terms of a higher salary or promotion (High Goals, 2016, 84). Another indicator that education is valued lower than research is the common practice in some Danish universities and disciplines where teachers who have gained external research grants do not have to spend time teaching anymore, which send a clear signal about

what the leaders value highest and send the wrong incentive (High Goals, 2016, 85 - 86). At the moment very few teachers are experiencing clear salary and career incentives to provide high quality education and the Danish ministry of research and education finds that the leaders of the universities need to translate the strategic priority of higher quality of education into real incentives for the teachers (High Goals, 2016, 85). Furthermore the committee analysis has shown that the recruitment process of new staff members at universities usually places an emphasis on research skills rather than teaching skills. The committee argues that this emphasis accurately reflects the employment structure of universities. A higher focus should be placed on practical work experience connected to teaching rather than only focusing on articles that have been published (High Goals, 2016, 138).

The committee argues that Danish universities have a significant challenge in recognizing and rewarding teaching skills and performance on a par with research capabilities and results. This is extremely important since the time and resources the teachers spent on preparation for the education plays a significant role in the students engagement according to student engagement theory, for this reason it is extremely important for the quality of the education to have teachers who engage in the teaching and not just researchers at the universities.

This managerial challenge is to translate the strategic priority of the education quality over researchers into real incentives for teachers. To complete this managerial challenge at the Danish universities the committee argues that the person who has the professional responsibility of the individual programs, also need to have the managerial powers to prioritize and reward good teaching, which is not the case at the moment (High Goals, 2016, 128). The quality and relevance of higher education cannot be improved upon just by injunctions or other forms of detailed rule management of the programs from outside of the universities. Partly because the task is different from program to program, partly because the commitment of teachers and their immediate managers is crucial to the outcome (High Goals, 2016, 125).

Therefore the management of the Danish Universities must have the managerial authority to reward good education.

Jacob Fuglsang (2015) also discusses the immense importance of high quality teaching, but he approaches the problem from a completely different starting point. Fuglsang also argues that the teacher's authority suffered in the 1960s under the youth rebellion, teaching stopped being a call and became a profession instead, which changed the authority and respect that was connected to the position through most of the 19th and 20th century (Fuglsang, 2015, 129). This highlights how both perspectives identify the same problems, find different causes and therefore also proposes different solutions. In other words, since the committee utilizes an economical perspective, they end up suggesting an economical solution to the problem. Fuglsang argues that as society has become more competitive, we have moved from internal motivation at the universities to external motivation, which is supported by the suggestion of more external motivation for teachers at universities. However this 'problem' should not just be understood as a 'problem' with education itself, but rather as a symptom of the society having become more competitive in general.

#### **4.1.3 MORE STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITIES**

Fuglsang (2015) argued that the discourse surrounding education has changed from one in which education is one of several different legitimate opportunities in life, to a discourse where it is the default option. Therefore the state's goal becomes to get as many citizens to be educated as possible. Fuglsang is critical to this approach, since he believes the atmosphere on educational institutions becomes worse when people who have no interest in the taught subject enter the educational room. This is because it is required if they want to get a job. Drucker described the same phenomena although with a very different approach. For Drucker this tendency of expansion of education is highly beneficial for the works and society at large, since society should strive to increase the employment and give the workers relevant knowledge to make them more productive. Drucker argues that this expansion of education has changed the majorities

of workers from *the manual worker* to *the knowledge worker*, which have ensured that they are in possession of the means of production which have given them tremendous possibilities to improve their life, and simultaneously given them a more meaningful and less routine based job.

This development of getting a higher number of people through education is clearly reflected in the High Goals report. This means that in addition to the challenge of giving more relevant education, the Danish universities are also faced with the challenge of having to educate a much larger amount of students. The highly educated will over the next few years constitute the majority of the Danish workforce. This means that graduates will be included in a variety of different job functions, where they will be affected by developments in the labor market and the changing demand for knowledge and skills. This sets new demands for the educational system if all graduates must be able to apply, adapt and develop their knowledge (High Goals, 2014, 6). This is very clearly illustrated in the report where it describes a new tendency of a decrease in the number of jobs where routine based skills and manual labor are the main tasks. This has happened because these jobs increasingly are being replaced by computers and machines or now are performed more cost effectively abroad. In the same period, the use of non-routine tasks such as complex and varied tasks and communications become more widespread in both the public and private sector (High Goals, 2016, 25-26). This has increased the amount of people who seek to get a higher education, which means that higher education is no longer just a means to enable a small group to handle a special task at the highest level of education, but rather to educate a large part of the population to carry out their job. As the proportion of the population which at some point in their lives are enrolled in higher education increases, the overall importance of higher education increases as well both for the individual and society as a whole (High Goals, 2016, 3). This can be seen in this quote.

*The fulfillment of the political objective that 60 per cent of young people should complete higher education can therefore be described as a great success for the Danish society. The full effect will only gradually unfold over the next 20-30 years in*

*the form of more people in the labor market with a higher education and a great potential for increased productivity* (High Goals, 2014, 4).

However there has also been critique of this approach to get as many students through the educational system as possible. Fuglsang (2015) argued that the '95 percent objective' where as many students as possible should get through the system. Fuglsang argues that this objective is inherently problematic since it was a quantitative approach to education, rather than a qualitative approach. He further added that this method was adopted because it was easier to count the number of students who got through the system, than measure what they had learned. However getting the wrong students into the course was problematic since it could ruin the atmosphere on the course. Johansen et al. makes a similar critique when they imply that the taximeter system makes the graduates into nothing more than products of a knowledge producing facility, and the amount of people who gets a degree becomes more important than the quality of what they learn. Fuglsang makes a similar analogy when he ask; *Is the school a workshop or a place of learning?* (Jacob, 2000, 136 translate from Danish).

So one of the main arguments for education is that it increases the productivity of the Danish society, however the Danish ministry for research and education is aware that it potentially can be dangerous to structure higher education in a way in which the wrong incentives are developed.

They argue that it is important not to create a grant related automation that can provide the institutions with an inappropriate incentive to increase the intake of students or create new training provision, if from an economic perspective (High Goals, 2016, 9).

This is much closer to Drucker's perspective of education.

It is not only a question about getting as many people through the educational system as possible since the committee argues that a high quality of education is an indispensable precondition for the students qualifications to enter the labor market after they leave higher education. Yet, the talented graduate does not always possess enough professional quality to get him or her a job. Here we can see that both the increase in the amount of people who gets an education, as well as the movement

towards skills which are relevant to corporations, share the goal of getting the citizen to be more productive in the labor market. The department for research and education wants to get more people through, but only if the education they get is relevant for the labor market.

Since the committee only wants student through the system who are useful to the labor market, then they have accepted the critique of the taximeter system, since it can create the wrong incentives for educational institutions. The Committee believes that the current funding model for the educational system, where universities get more money for each student they get through (the taximeter system), creates inadvisable incentives. The committee argues that the current public funding system gives universities an incentive to enhance the research quality, but not to the quality and relevance of the education (High Goals, 2016, 135). Furthermore it makes universities reluctant to increase the professional requirements needed to pass courses and models, since it will result in fewer resources for the university (High Goals, 2016, 134).

However the government must ensure that each university receives basic research funding which ensures that the research grant is not handed out automatically based on student intake, since that creates incentives to create degrees and accept students, even when it does not make sense from a socio-economic perspective or the individual student's chance of employment (High Goals, 2016, 136). For this reason the committee argues that the money acquired per student should only be equal to the marginal expenditure connected to having an extra student. However the basic grant should be increased, and at the same time this should remove the economical incentive to lower the academic requirements for passing exams (High Goals, 2016, 134).

The interesting thing is that even though Jacob Fuglsang (2015), Johansen et al. (2015) and the department for research and education all agree that the taximeter system is problematic, because it encourages quantity over quality, they still differ in their definition of quality. Since the committee emphasizes the importance of how education can benefit society, then their definition of quality ends up being closely connected to the definition of relevance that is relevant for the student when he or she enters the labor force. So the criticism that Jacob Fuglsang and Johansen et al. present,

which is that the economical rationale in the educational system creates the counterproductive taximeter system, is also the rationale that might lead to the abolishing of the taximeter system. We can conclude two things from this. First of all, that these two perspectives sometimes can agree on a problem and a solution. However they do not always have to oppose each other, but can cooperate if the circumstances are right. But we can also see that even as we move away from the taximeter system, the department for research and education are still comprehending education within a socio-economic discourse.

#### **4.1.4 COMBINING RELEVANCE AND QUALITY**

The committee argues that quality and relevance should not be understood as an either-or balancing. On the contrary, they are better understood as elements that reinforces each other. If courses are made more relevant for the labor market, it can often motivate students to be more engaged, work harder and thus gain a deeper technical understanding of the field they are studying (High Goals, 2016, 41). The problem of valuing business relevance and educational quality is usually presented as either or balance where the perspective of increased relevance reduces the qualities, but quality and relevance to the labor market shares many of the same challenges. We can see that many of the challenges which the High Goal report present for the Danish educational system applies to both relevance and quality.

There are other relevant examples of where the two discourses can collaborate. Another example of this is when the admission process is reconsidered. The committee argues that the admission system for higher education needs to be reformed in order to reduce the dropout rate and make the studies more relevant for the corporations. Instead of the current system, admission to universities should not be decided by the student's average grade. Instead, the admission process should be decided by individual grades that are relevant for the respective courses. Furthermore, any requirement for admission based on grades should not be able to exceed the grade 7. If there are more applicants than it makes sense to accept on a course, the university need

to use alternatives methods to determine who should be accepted. For example through the use of motivated applications, interviews and admission exams. The same should apply to degree programs with a continued high dropout rate after the introduction of training-specific entry requirements. These selection methods should be used on courses with high dropout rates even when such a course could accept all the students. These changes should be phased in over a number of years starting with the courses with the highest requirement to grade average and the highest dropout rate (High Goals, 2016, 144).

The problems with using grades to determine if a student gets accepted on the education they want to get admission into, has been described as a problem by Jacob Fuglsang. He explains that it transforms the earlier education from a place of learning into a battlefield (Fuglsang, 2015, 107). This introduction of interviews and application to get accepted and more economical benefits for teachers who focus on education has been something people like Fuglsang has argued would be beneficial for a long time, since it could improve the quality of the education, but since the new economical discourse ties Denmark's economical success to the relevance and quality of the education, then it becomes economically beneficial to invest in the educational system. We can see this connection in the report where it says that the political system and society in general has a legitimate interest in how the massive investment in higher education is managed (High Goals, 2016, Page 125).

At this point it is important not to make a conclusion too early, even though the economical perspective has shown that it can solve some of the concerns raised by its critics. This thesis however, consist of language and is therefore an artifact of *the Symbolic* simplification inherent in any human language. Although it would be a logical paradox from a *Symbolic* perspective if this theory was beneficial and harmful at the same time. Even though this might seem contradictory we must remember that an omniscient level of understanding and knowledge through the Symbolic is impossible without embracing contradiction.



## 4.2 THE PROFANATION OF EDUCATION

In section 3.5.2 of the theory, we mentioned Giorgio Agamben's (2007) use of the concepts *consecration*, *profanation* and *deseccration*. Agamben uses the concept of *consecration* to describe how money is essentially a holy symbol in capitalism - the reality of money is of course, that it is only 'book keeping', a system for distributing resources within a society. And yet, many people, including even some economists, will say things like "that's not true, everyone knows money is money, and it is very important", which is exactly why it is essentially a consecrated concept to Agamben. Agamben writes in a way that many neoliberals will no doubt find provoking, as he compares capitalism to religion - but he has a definite reason for this, which is that provocation is one way to get to *profanation*, which is to remove the holy properties from an object or an idea, without the destruction of that object or idea.

In other words, when Agamben makes the parallel between capitalism and religion, and between money and God, it is not necessarily because he thinks of this as the most precise analogy for these concepts. Rather it is essentially to cause the profanation of these concepts through provocation.

So provocation can lead to the profanation of a concept that has been consecrated.

Like money and capitalism, education too can be regarded as a consecrated concept - in many ways it is a 'black box', the purpose of which is not completely clear. When Chris Grey (2009; 142) suggests that education is really a '*contract of cynicism*'

wherein *students accept, and faculty delivers, knowledge which both know to be virtually useless* - this is not necessarily because he thinks this is the most precise analogy - after all, he is himself working as a professor at the University of London.

Rather, like Agamben, he is trying to cause a *profanation* of the concept of education - to force people to think more precisely about what the true purpose of education should be. In other words, nobody obviously wants education to be an entirely 'cynical contract', even if it is essentially a *rite of passage* (Turner, 1974), the passage itself, or rather *state of liminality*, must serve a purpose beyond the mere acquisition of credentials.

This is a big part of why we decided to use Lacan (2006) and Žižek (2008, 2012).

Because their concepts of *the Real*, *the Imaginary* and *the Symbolic*, as a psychological theory can provide insight into how education can actually change the way students think, by equipping them with a broader range of concepts - because language provides the very basis for thinking in *the Symbolic*. Learning new concepts allows the student to think about and solve problems that were otherwise both unthinkable and unsolvable.

This theory not only shows that there *is* learning taking place in education, but it also specifies what constitutes this learning. This aids in the profaning of education by illuminating the concept and making it less opaque. With Žižek (2008, 2012) and Lacan (2006) it also becomes clearer, how education can lead to enlightenment by equipping the students with the tools they need to think independently. Even the limitations of intellectual thought is specified with the concept of logic, because language isn't perfect, and only constitutes a third of the thinking that goes on in Lacan's (2006) theory of the human psyche.

Logic too can become consecrated - as logic effectively is what is generally accepted as 'correct thinking', and yet it is not a perfect system as we have specified.

*Why does the traditional doctrine of thinking bear the curious title "logic"?*  
(Heidegger, 1976, 113).

The occurrence of paradoxes is what causes the profanation of logic. And the profanation of education can be achieved by challenging the common sense understanding of education, like Grey (2009, 2013), as well as by better understanding the premises of thinking and enlightenment.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION:**

### **5.1 MOTIVATION AND THE EGO**

We showed with Lacan (2006) that the ego can be a powerful tool to motivate people and found that ego and *the Imaginary* is the primary motivation in education. This is the case because most of the motivation in education is directed toward an *other*, either in the form of competition (who can get the best grades), or in the form of studying to

earn credentials and a respectful position in society. What is especially satisfying to the ego is gaining authority and confidence - authority when other people suddenly respect what they are saying, and confidence, when they convince themselves of their own brilliance. However there are two problems with this. The first problem is that it runs the risk of becoming shallow, often having a title and the ability to use a few fancy words is enough to command authority with a vast majority of people - as such it easily ends up a charade rather than a display of actual intellectual ability. The ego becomes a mask, and a whole narrative is constructed around this *Imaginary* persona. This leads to the second problem that's related to motivation through ego - which is that the ego creates an illusion of meaningfulness where there is none, thus preventing the individual from becoming enlightened (Žižek, 2012).

Interestingly ego motivation is strikingly similar to the personality trait known as *conscientiousness*. Conscientiousness is the single best personality trait for predicting performance in studies as well as job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

Conscientiousness share a lot of the same traits with ego as motivation, that the two can be regarded as synonymous. This leads to the realisation that in a society, where paramount importance is placed solely on competition in the market, enlightenment is a counterproductive virtue, as it disperses the illusion of ego by revealing its *Imaginary* and *non-sensical* aspects (Žižek, 2008, 2012). Thereby an important source of motivation is lost - essentially the ability to coerce people into doing boring work by maintaining an illusion of meaningfulness and a higher purpose, while objectifying people and stripping them of their freedom and free will.

Disregarding enlightenment can therefore not be defended from an ethical point of view - and doing so regardless paints bleak and cynical pictures of the role of education that we for instance see in Chris Gray (2009, 2013) when he compares education to a *cynical contract* with no meaning other than transferring people from one position in society to another, like a rite of passage (Turner, 1974).

Bleak and cynical perspectives - even when they seem extreme - serves an important role in that they prevent concepts from becoming *consecrated* (Agamben, 2007), and help to *profanate* concepts that have been *consecrated*.

These perspectives are especially important as there arguably is a movement toward an increased focus on competition and corporations - we showed that with the difference between how Plato saw education and how Drucker saw education. Simply put, Plato saw education as being primarily about helping its citizens achieving enlightenment, since this was the what is best for Polis and the individual, while Drucker saw education as primarily serving the function of giving the individual the skills they needed to make their knowledge productive, since Drucker regard this as what was best for the individual and the state.

This development is likewise reported by Johansen et al. (2015) as well as by Ove K. Pedersen (2011), who writes that education *no longer has as primary assignment to enlighten the individual to become a citizen or participant in a democracy, but rather to develop the individual into a soldier in the competition of the nations* (Pedersen, 2011; 172, Translated from Danish).

The analogy is harsh, but fitting, as soldiers are trained to follow orders without questioning the authority of their superiors. In other words, asking critical questions becomes a counterproductive activity in the competition state, which is overall more productive if the population remains unenlightened and malleable - according to research on factors for predicting job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010, Moutafi et al., 2004). As mentioned earlier, slight exaggeration is not necessarily a bad thing, as it can create a shift in the common sense understanding, which can become *consecrated* and shrouded with fascination. Especially concepts that resists clear definitions runs the risk of becoming *consecrated* concepts (Agamben, 2007) - and as 'education' is a very complex concept, it is important to strive toward better understanding of it to ensure it remains profane. One way to gain a deeper understanding of education is, for example, as we have tried to do in this thesis, to describe the type of thinking that can be improved through education. With Lacan's (2006) theory of psychology, we think it is clear that the type of thinking acquired through education can be understood with Lacan's concept of *the Symbolic*, which is based on symbolic understanding of reality (reel), that is basically language and logic. By gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be skilled

academically, provides the necessary foundation to improve education to further amplify this aspect and invent new methods of teaching to make the acquisition of this knowledge and skill more effective.

We believe education to be extremely important and an investment in the future - and therefore we think that it should be considered of paramount importance to find ways to make education as good as it can be. What has enabled the human species to excel technologically beyond any other species on this planet is exactly our developed comprehension of *the Symbolic* - to which the key to further improvement, we believe, is to be found in education.

To ensure future progress, education must be a priority, and cannot be compromised by the increased focus on competition (Pedersen, 2011) and the shift of purpose from state (Plato, the Republic) to corporation (Drucker, 1946) - all of which we have tried to cover in this thesis.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION:**

Based on discourse analysis conducted by Pedersen (2011) and Johansen et al., (2015) we can conclude that we have entered a “competitive state” and this has changed how the role of education is being perceived, from Plato’s (the Republic) definition where education benefits the individual and society by helping them to realise the “idea of the good” to Drucker’s (1946) definition where education benefits the individual and society, by creating a new form of “knowledge worker” who controls the means of production, since it has become knowledge. This transition has meant that education's role has become to make the citizen an effective worker.

Education gives the students a vocabulary of concepts which can be understood as a *Symbolic* form of knowledge. This enables the students to think with this *symbolic* representation which enables them to solve problems that they otherwise would be unable to solve. This problem solving skill can enable the student to become a more productive worker, but this symbolic understanding of the world also makes it more likely for the student to attain enlightenment as a more developed understanding and

ability to use concepts inevitably leads to the realization of law and authority as a *nonsensical 'machine'* (Žižek, 2008; 88).

Traditionally motivation is understood as “internal” and external” motivation, by analysing Lacan and Žižek we also define *desire* which is *Real* motivation and *ego*, which is *Imaginary* as two other forms of motivation. In the competitive state, motivation is tied to external factors such as money and prestige which depends on the individual's ‘ego’ to be an effective form of motivation. This ego can be understood as the *Imaginary* idea that an *other* is judging your accomplishments, however according to Žižek’s (2012) interpretation of *enlightenment*, enlightenment reveals the illusory nature of *the Imaginary* and therefore the ego is negatively correlated with enlightenment. For this reason the educational system faces a conflict between Enlightenment and becoming a productive worker.

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