



# Education as Mediation Between Child and World: The Role of Wonder

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## Abstract

Education as a deliberate activity and purposive process necessarily involves mediation, in the sense that the educator mediates between the child and the world. This can take different forms: the educator may function as a guide who initiates children into particular practices and domains and their modes of thinking and perceiving; or act as a filter, selecting what of the world the child encounters and how; or meet the child as representative of the adult world. I look at these types of mediation (or aspects of the mediating role of the educator) at the hand of the work of John Dewey, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Richard Peters. The purpose of this paper is to explore the bearing that the mediating role of the educator—as interpreted by these authors—has on the role wonder may play in the educational process. I suggest that initiation highlights the familiarizing function of wonder, and is most readily associated with inquisitive wonder; representation draws attention to the defamiliarizing role of (in particular contemplative) wonder, as well as to its world-affirming role; and selection (the educator as ‘filter’) foregrounds the distinction between momentary and dispositional wonder.

**Keywords** Wonder · Inquisitive wonder · Contemplative wonder · World · Mediation · Hannah Arendt · Martin Buber · John Dewey · Richard Peters · Alfred North Whitehead

## Introduction

Education as a deliberate activity and purposive process necessarily involves *mediation*: the educator mediates between the child and the world. This mediation can take various forms; the educator may act as a *filter*, selecting which aspects of the world the child encounters and the ways in which it encounters them, or as a *guide*, initiating the child into particular domains of experience, or as the *representative* of the world, speaking on its behalf in order to pass it over into new hands—and undoubtedly other forms of mediation are possible. Since the three I mentioned here are not (necessarily) mutually exclusive they may also be seen as different aspects of the mediating role that both in practice and

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in theory may receive different degrees of emphasis. Depending on how exactly they are conceptualized or fleshed out in practice, there may or may not exist tension between them.

A recent paper by Mario Di Paolantonio on Arendt's thinking about wonder (Di Paolantonio 2019) highlights the importance of reflecting on the relation between wonder and the world. From an Arendtian perspective the main question is: does wonder (make us) withdraw from, or rather attend to the world? While I recognize the former as a real possibility, my purpose in this paper is to explore the bearing that the mediating role of the educator has on the role *wonder* may play in the educational process. In other words, my interest here is in the ways in which the various forms of mediation by educators between child and world involve or can enlist the help of a wonder that attends to the world. The educator's own wonder at or about the world is likely to influence how she perceives and performs her mediating role; and since the child's own wonder qualifies its relation with the world it matters what attitude towards the world the educator fosters—specifically, to what extent the educator nourishes children's sense of wonder, and what *kind* of wonder the educator promotes.

By 'educator' I mean either a teacher (in primary school or secondary school, someone who teaches *children*) or a parent or any other adult in so far as (s)he is engaged in 'educating' a child. To educate a child, as I understand it, is to be engaged in a deliberate activity the principle or intrinsic aim of which is to increase (widen and deepen) the child's understanding of the world and his or her own place in it. In the process, the world—both the natural and the human world—is gradually opened up to the child, who thereby gains in freedom to operate and move about in the world. 'Understanding' is not a purely cognitive matter, but includes feeling and a 'sensed relation with others and with the world' (Di Paolantonio 2019, p. 214). It entails both logical and technical understanding and the understanding involved in 'to understand all, is to forgive all' (Whitehead 1962, p. 3).

The term 'wonder' requires a somewhat more elaborate elucidation, which I will provide below. I will proceed as follows: in the first section, "[Wonder](#)", I will briefly explore the experience and concept of wonder. In "[The Educator as Mediator Between the Child and the World](#)" I look into the three forms or aspects of mediation listed above; my sources here will be John Dewey, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Richard Peters. The section "[Implications of the Educator's Mediation for the Role of Wonder in Education](#)" discusses the implications of various interpretations of the educator's mediating role for the role that wonder may have in education. I end with a brief conclusion (section "[Conclusion](#)").

## Wonder

'Wonder' is not a unitary thing. There is no such thing as 'the' experience or 'the' concept of wonder. Rather, the term 'wonder' covers a plurality of experiences that are related and overlap but are also importantly distinct from each other, and no single conceptualization of wonder captures them all (Vasalou 2015; Schinkel 2018). A fairly encompassing description of wonder is that 'it' is a *mode of consciousness* in which we experience that which we perceive or are contemplating as strange, beyond our comprehension, yet worthy of our attention for its own sake (Schinkel 2017, p. 552, note 15; Schinkel 2018, p. 34). But as said, this covers a great variety of experiences. In Hove's terms, wonder has various *modalities* (1996, p. 457).

A child may be captivated, entranced, speechless as it witnesses the miracle of an egg hatching and a chick emerging ever so slowly, feeble and forceful at the same time.<sup>1</sup> We might call this ‘contemplative wonder’. Another child—or the same child, some time later—may be equally impressed, but full of questions: how is a chick able to do this? How does it know when to come out? This might be called ‘inquisitive wonder’.<sup>2</sup> The child’s questions here are not the same as questions arising from curiosity; that is, their wording may be the same, but their origin and their tone is not. It is not one’s desire to know that takes center stage—it is not about you wanting to know—but the object; there is a respectful distance in wonder that is lacking in curiosity.<sup>3</sup> There are also differences in depth and engagement. Curiosity tends to be more superficial and fleeting, moving quickly from one object to the next, never stopping to wonder; and it concerns ‘local’ ignorance, within one’s given frameworks of understanding, rather than foregrounding the general extent and limits of one’s understanding (Opdal 2001; Rubenstein 2012; Schinkel 2017, 2018).

Contemplative wonder is a silent response to mystery, to the mystery of existence—either the concrete existence of this thing or creature (this featherless chick, this crooked tree, this imposing mountain, this ‘self’), or (through this) existence in general, ‘that there is something rather than nothing’ (Hepburn 1980, p. 10). If it contains questions—and it generally does—they are of a ‘silent’ kind, a ‘why’ and ‘how’ that admit of no answer that would satisfy them, because contemplative wonder hints at a fundamental, irresolvable not-knowing. Inquisitive wonder entails a drive to investigate the what, how, and why of what aroused one’s wonder. It often fuels the child’s and the scientist’s search for knowledge and understanding. The questions raised here admit of an answer, at least in principle. But in its respectful distance to the object inquisitive wonder seems to contain a touch of, a being touched by, the mysterious as well—which may be why, unlike with curiosity, the ‘resolution’ of inquisitive wonder, too, is never complete. That is to say, a residue of wonder—of contemplative wonder that was ‘mixed in’ with inquisitive wonder (but I realize that to put it like this runs the risk of reifying these terms too much)—remains.

Wonder, whether inquisitive or contemplative, has a *deconstructive* and a *constructive* side. On the one hand wonder shows up the limits of our existing frameworks of understanding; for what we experience in wonder does not fit our existing categories and interpretative schemes. So wonder challenges, bursts out of, and breaks down how, up to that moment, we understood the world. Yet what we experience presents itself as ‘out there’, as real and important, and it calls us to respond. This aspect of wonder, and in what we do to meet its call, makes up wonder’s constructive side. Wonder draws our attention to the world, it asks us to (really) look or listen; and in many cases it lures us towards better, deeper, more comprehensive, more nuanced, understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Apologies to the person who shared this example with me a few years ago; unfortunately, I cannot remember who it was.

<sup>2</sup> The distinction between inquisitive wonder and contemplative wonder is made by various authors in different ways. It is sometimes phrased in terms of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ wonder (Parsons 1969, p. 88), sometimes as ‘wonder(ing) about/how/why’ versus ‘wonder at’, or just ‘wondering’ and ‘wonder’ (Hove 1996; Goodwin 2001; Sinclair and Watson 2001; Zazkis and Zazkis 2014, p. 67; cf. Hadzigeorgiou 2014, p. 45); Schinkel (2017) distinguishes ‘active wonder’ from ‘deep wonder’ (or ‘contemplative wonder’).

<sup>3</sup> Of course the word ‘curiosity’ does not pick out a clearly defined object in the world, either. So when I distinguish between curiosity and wonder this is a translation to the conceptual level of differences between experiences typically associated with the terms ‘wonder’ and ‘curiosity’. It is because there are important differences between these experiences—between kinds of experiences that can helpfully be grouped together—that it is important to distinguish between wonder and curiosity (i.e. to hold on to both terms), as well as to differentiate between different kinds or modalities of wonder.

Wonder can thus take different forms, it has multiple aspects that may be more or less dominant in the experience, and it may vary considerably in affective tone—from pleasure or delight on one end to fear on the other (Vasalou 2015, pp. 36–37). Wonder can be inviting, but also emotionally and existentially unsettling. In wonder we relate to the world differently than in other modes of consciousness, but how, exactly, and whether this relation also develops into deeper engagement (rather than, for instance, withdrawal) also depends on the form that wonder takes. Its indubitable potential educational importance is therefore also not singular, and not unconditional. “In harmony with courage,” Laura Piersol writes, “wonder becomes an essential step in learning”. Courage is necessary ‘to abandon preconceptions and then to embrace strange, new ideas’ (Piersol 2014: 5). Piersol recognizes that wonder can lead to questioning and to the exploration of new and newly imagined possibilities, as well as involve appreciation of the beauty and mystery—the extraordinariness—of the world. And both are connected through the notion of mystery: the world is always more and other than we thought. If we can stimulate students’ sense of wonder at and about the world it could be an antidote to the boredom that is common in schools, and motivate students to (really) learn, from an intrinsic motivation to do so. Wonder keeps the world interesting, stirs the imagination, and makes learning more meaningful (Trotman 2014, p. 29; cf. Hove 1996, p. 58), but as Trotman also notes, ‘the capacity to generate and sustain wonder will always be in the hands of the skilful educator’ (ibid., p. 34).<sup>4</sup> The point I wish to draw attention to in this article is that it is not just the educator’s skill that matters here, but that the potential role of wonder in education depends on how we interpret the role of the educator as mediator between child and world.

## The Educator as Mediator Between the Child and the World

John Dewey begins *Democracy and Education* with the observation that living things distinguish themselves from inanimate ones by the fact that they ‘maintain themselves by renewal’ (1997, p. 1) and goes on to explain that ‘[w]hat nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life’ (ibid., p. 9). Education, seen as the means by which a society maintains itself, is necessary because people die, and new people are born, and because those who are born are ‘not only unaware of, but quite indifferent to, the aims and habits of the social group’ (ibid., p. 3). This ‘vital’ quality of education stressed by Dewey left a clear impression on the educational thought of Martin Buber and (either directly or through Buber, or both) Hannah Arendt.

In his 1925 lecture “Über das Erzieherische” (literally: ‘on the educational’, ‘on that which educates’) Buber begins by elaborating on the observation that ‘the child is a reality’: that at each moment, all over the globe, ‘specific and yet specifiable’ (‘determined and yet determinable’) people are born is a myriad of realities, but also one reality.<sup>5</sup> “In every

<sup>4</sup> Trotman cites Kieran Egan’s observation that wonder ‘constantly serves to keep the world and experience interesting’, from Egan (2008, p. 68).

<sup>5</sup> The German is ‘schon bestimmt und doch noch bestimmbar’; it is impossible to catch the exact sense of ‘bestimmt’—as a common word for a ‘specific’ something or other, and as expressing something’s being determined in its character or form or outcome (involving also the sense of having a *purpose* or a *destination*)—in English. Maurice Friedman’s translation in *Between man and man* (Buber 2002: 98) reads: ‘who are characterized already and yet have still to be characterized’.

hour the human race begins.” (Buber 2002, p. 98). This, for Buber, is a source of hope, of light, in a darkened world.

A similar sense of crisis, deepened by the ‘event’ of totalitarianism and another World War, informs Hannah Arendt’s 1954 essay “The crisis in education”. But for her, too, there lies hope in the fact that everywhere, every day, new human beings are born. “[T]he essence of education,” Arendt (2006, p. 171) writes, “is natality, the fact that human beings are *born* into the world.” Natality, Natasha Levinson (2001, p. 13) explains, is Arendt’s term for ‘the human capacity for renewal’. This capacity begins with, and is made possible by, the birth of new human beings. But this is mere *potentiality* for renewal; it does not guarantee renewal, but requires actualization. Children are new human beings, but also *becoming* human beings (Arendt 2006, p. 182). As such, they are also always a threat to the continuity of the world, at the same time that they hold out hope for it. For this reason the educator has an important and very difficult task: to ‘mediate between the old and the new’ (Arendt 2006, p. 190), to preserve newness while also preserving the old—to protect and nourish the capacity for renewal *with a view to* the preservation, through renewal, of the world.

Education, then, implies mediation. But as said, this mediation can take different forms. The educator can be the person who *filters* the world with a view to optimizing its effectiveness or fruitfulness in shaping the child. We find this expressed by Dewey and Buber, who both note that the whole world educates, but that only the educator does so with a deliberate intention. The educator *thinks about* what of the world he will let the child experience. Dewey writes: “[t]he central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (1965, pp. 27–28). And in Buber’s terms education means ‘*Auslese der wirkenden Welt durch den Menschen*’ (‘selection by man of the effective world’) (1962, p. 23; 2002, p. 106). Clearly, such formulations emphasize the *moulding* or *shaping* function of education, its effect on character and dispositions, more than the transmission of knowledge; the criterion of selection is the formative influence things will have on the child.

But this does not exclude a role as *representative* of the world, a role explicated by Arendt, for whom the teacher has to be a figure of authority whose function it is ‘to teach children what the world is like’ (Arendt 2006, p. 192) According to Arendt (2006, p. 186) “the educators (...) stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is”. Although as a representative of the world the educator must teach children what the present world is like—which at first sight might look more like an effort at transmission or reproduction of what exists without change—the purpose of representation is not to ensure the continued existence of an identical world. Rather, for Arendt at least, the world as it is must be re-presented (made present again) for the children, *in order that they may change it*, may ‘set it aright’. Unlike Dewey, both Buber and Arendt—no doubt to some extent due to their relative closeness to the cultural and geopolitical developments and events in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century—express a sense that the world is out of joint.<sup>6</sup> This lends a particular urgency to

<sup>6</sup> What Arendt calls ‘the crisis in education’ is in essence a crisis in authority that is linked to a crisis in tradition that has roots that go back centuries, but that was deepened and finalized by twentieth-century totalitarianism and the atrocities that came in its wake (2006, p. 26). Education requires authority and tradition (they belong to the nature of education), but modern education ‘must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition’ (ibid., p. 191). Like Buber (1962, pp. 46–48) Arendt believes that we must do without any concrete sense of the aim of education, without models to aspire to; but whereas Buber (1962, pp. 47–48) at least saw a deeper ‘direction’ or ideal aim remaining even when all the old aims of education (to become a Christian, a gentleman, a citizen) had become obsolete—namely to

their hope for renewal and the task of the educator; it is not *progress* that is at stake, but the preservation of a sense of the holy and the possibility of true human community (Buber) and of hope for a truly human form of living-together, where we are free because we take responsibility for the world and for ourselves (Arendt, as well as Buber). Nevertheless, for Dewey, too, the educator's role as a representative (or 'delegate') of the world (Dewey 1997, p. 8) is not a matter of simply passing on what exists—this is simply impossible, for *ideas* or *thoughts* cannot be passed on from one mind to the next. When they are expressed by the educator, they become, to the child, 'another given fact, not an idea' (ibid., p. 159)—as a thought or idea it must be realized anew, which means that, for that reason alone, all thinking is original.

Yet an important difference in *intent* remains between Arendt on the one hand and Buber and Dewey on the other. Arendt explicitly wants the educator to 'teach children what the world is like' (Arendt 2006, p. 192); the educator's task is that of 'pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world' (ibid., p. 186). There is no mention of selectiveness here, of choosing the way in which the child encounters the world. That she does not mention this—even though she would surely have realized that teaching inevitably involves selection—reveals a concern with the possibility of indoctrination, and with the 'old' impressing itself on, and crushing (all hope for), the 'new'. It also reveals a difference in what these authors mean by 'the world'. For Dewey and Buber the notion of 'the world' refers in essence to the whole of reality with which as human beings we can come into contact in some way or another. Both in their own way rejected a dualism between subject and object, mind and world. Dewey emphasized our natural or biological embeddedness in the world; he interpreted the theory of evolution as showing that 'the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs' and that knowledge is therefore 'a mode of participation' (Dewey 1997, p. 338). Buber put forward the relational view that '[t]o man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude' (see "[Implications of the Educator's Mediation for the Role of Wonder in Education](#)" in section); but the notion of the world refers to everything we may experience or relate to. For Arendt, however, 'the world' has a more particular meaning. 'The world', in Arendt's thinking (see Arendt 1958), is in the first place what human beings, through work, have made of the earth. It is the human world of things and institutions with a certain stability and durability. And beyond that the notion refers to the 'public', a common sphere in which difference can appear, i.e. where a plurality of points of view meets on the basis of a common concern to maintain and renew the world. "[I]t is what happens *in-between* people that constitutes the world." (Kattago 2014, p. 59) 'The world', for Arendt, is therefore an inherently political notion, which further explains her use of the term 'representation'.

Both *representing* the world and *filtering* the world involve *initiation*, or the *guiding* role of the educator, in some way or another. Initiation, in Richard Peters' view, is essentially a matter of getting on the inside of certain forms of thought and awareness (1970, pp.

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Footnote 6 (continued)

become as the image of God—in Arendt we are not offered an escape from disorientation, are left without a sense of direction. All that we have to hold on to is something also stressed by Buber, namely the educator's real—felt and lived—responsibility and love for both the child (each particular child) and the world. That is not to say that Arendt's philosophy is without hope, however; there is hope in natality, and Arendt famously spoke of love, both for our children and for the world, and this is itself a source of hope, and has inspired various philosophers of education to develop world-affirming conceptions of education and of teaching (Masschelein and Simons 2013; Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski 2018; Vlieghe and Zamojski 2019; I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to Vlieghe and Zamojski's recent work).

52–53), of being led into ‘activities or modes of thought and conduct that are worth while’ (ibid., p. 55). The teacher introduces the child to such activities and modes of awareness and conduct; and as the child grows education becomes more and more a matter of ‘participating in the shared experience of exploring a common world’ (ibid., p. 53). Initiation, for Peters, is primarily a matter of learning a language—or, better, languages: the language of one’s country in the form that has in one’s social group, as well as the specialized languages of particular (scientific) disciplines or cultural domains. “In learning a language the individual is initiated into a public inheritance which his parents and teachers are inviting him to share.” (Ibid., p. 53). Again, Arendt would probably have been wary of notions of initiation, and of any form of teaching that might seem to involve moulding the new in the shape of the old. But ‘teaching children what the world is like’ is not conceivable without initiation into modes of thought and inquiry that, each from its own perspective, show children what the world is like.

Although of the three forms of mediation initiation most obviously requires the educator to teach by example—Peters speaks of the teacher’s role as that of *primus inter pares*, agreeing with Aristotle and Oakshott that ‘such subtleties’ as skill and judgement ‘in an educational situation are caught rather than taught’ (ibid., pp. 59–60)—in fact all three require it.<sup>7</sup> The educator as ‘filter’ as understood by Dewey and Buber is not herself without substance; rather, *among* the experiences the educator ‘selects’ for the pupil are inevitably experiences involving the educator as exemplar. Arendt’s conception of the educator’s role as representative of the world makes no explicit space for modeling or teaching by example. But insofar as initiation into specific modes of thought and inquiry need to take place, modeling will also occur. Moreover, if the educator’s primary concern is with natality, with children’s potential to renew the world, then she must foster capacities for thinking and judgement, and it is plausible (to come back to Peters) that, for most children at least, this requires the example of someone exercising those capacities.<sup>8</sup> This latter point may require thinking ‘with Arendt against Arendt’ (for she writes that ‘thinking’, i.e. thinking independently and conscientiously, is something that ‘cannot be inherited and handed down from the past’ but must be discovered anew by each new generation and each new human being), but it seems plausible that what she says about education implies the need for and possibility of some kind of ‘education for judgement’, however indirect (Arendt 2006, p. 13; cf. Smith 2001).<sup>9</sup>

In short, the three types of mediation distinguished here can to a considerable extent be seen as merely emphasizing different aspects of the educator’s role; but in some cases these differences of emphasis do matter, and in part this is because they stem from different concerns, from different worldviews even. In the next section I explore what these differences might mean for the role of wonder in education.

<sup>7</sup> Peters (1970, p. 58) also mentions another way in which the educator is to be an exemplar, namely in the domain of love and trust, which are preconditions for education; this fits in well with what Buber and Arendt write about the relationship between educator and child.

<sup>8</sup> I say ‘for most children’ because perhaps for some a *negative* example may be enough to develop its opposite—the example of someone ‘obviously’ lacking in judgement may, perhaps, suggest its opposite as the thing to strive for.

<sup>9</sup> Where Smith speaks of thinking ‘with Arendt against Arendt’ she refers to Seyla Benhabib (1992). *Situating the self*. New York: Routledge, p. 123.



## Implications of the Educator's Mediation for the Role of Wonder in Education

No doubt the most memorable subject teachers for many of us are those who loved their subject and were animated by a sense of wonder—about history, biology, geology, culture, language, the physical deep structure of the world, or the miracle of music. *They* were probably the teachers who were most successful at initiating us into the modes of thinking, perception, and inquiry specific to their subject area. *Initiation*, as Peters explained, implies *invitation*: children are invited to enter a new world—the world of history, for instance, or biology or music—that offers them a new perspective on ‘the’ world. But why would they cross the threshold? What is in it for them? Whitehead (1962), almost certainly influenced by Dewey, emphasized the importance of *romance*.<sup>10</sup> Learning is a process that goes through different stages (for Whitehead, the stages of romance, precision, and generalization); but the fatal mistake—routinely made—is to skip the stage of romance and move straight to the stage of precision, of disciplined learning, acquainting oneself with what others have found out about the subject at hand, et cetera. This bid for efficiency is doomed to fail, for “[t]here can be no mental development without interest. Interest is the *sine qua non* for attention and apprehension.” (Ibid., p. 48). This means that children need to be excited by ‘unexplored connexions with possibilities half-disclosed by glimpses and half-concealed by the wealth of material’ (ibid., p. 28). Hence the romantic stage ‘is dominated by wonder, and cursed by the dullard who destroys wonder’ (ibid., pp. 50–51). The educator’s wonder can here be the spark that lights the child’s wonder, or it can fan the flame that is already there.<sup>11</sup> Wonder can be contagious. If the teacher’s wonder is directed at some object, this suggests to the child that there is something wonderful about it—and that means it is worth getting to know.

Initiation, then, draws attention to an aspect of wonder that has obvious educational importance: wonder sparks our interest in (something in) the world—it *is* a form of interest, a mode of the sense of importance or value (ibid., pp. 62–63). That means that wonder, *inquisitive* wonder, *helps children become familiar with the world*, because it involves an intrinsic motivation to engage with it. Familiarity is often seen as antithetical to wonder, and vice versa, but there can be no doubt that especially young children’s wonder (that innate capacity the loss or dulling of which is so often lamented by adults) functions to make children familiar with the world around them. Wonder is part of human beings’ innate directedness towards the world—in Buber’s terms it shows a longing for relation. Quinn (2002, p. 32) suggests that children’s ‘first sensible knowledge is of being *as* mystery’, for

<sup>10</sup> Whitehead’s philosophy in general was influenced by the work of Dewey and other American philosophers such as William James and C.S. Peirce. He wrote the essays collected in *The aims of education* between 1912 and 1928; the essays in which he develops the idea of the stages of learning (or ‘mental growth’) are from 1922 and 1923. It is interesting—and perhaps betrays a difference in personality—that Whitehead afforded a central place to wonder, a term which Dewey in *Democracy and education* uses only once (but in connection with romance; see Dewey 1997, p. 212): “The earth as the home of man is humanizing and unified; the earth viewed as a miscellany of facts is scattering and imaginatively inert. Geography is a topic that originally appeals to imagination—even to the romantic imagination. It shares in the wonder and glory that attach to adventure, travel, and exploration.” Dewey seems to have preferred the term ‘curiosity’, which given his scientific bent is perhaps not surprising; for the historical development of the appreciation of wonder and curiosity see Daston and Park (1998); cf. also Vasalou (2015, pp. 39–43). The relevance of Whitehead’s work with respect to wonder in education is also recognized by Hadzigeorgiou (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Thus educators need to cultivate ‘an attentiveness to the experience and implications of wonder in our own lives’ (Hove 1996, p. 457).



they still need to get ‘a grip on’ reality. Self and world still need to become separate things. Once they are, any new thing, however ‘common’, may evoke wonder in a child. To merely say that increasing experience and familiarity with those things dulls the sense of wonder would be to ignore the necessary role of wonder in producing that familiarity.<sup>12</sup>

Insofar as representation (as Arendt understood it) involves initiation it will also involve wonder in the role explained above; wonder will help children make sense of the world and find their way in it. But for Arendt *re-representation*, ‘teaching children what the world is like’ was in large part about allowing children to develop a perspective on it, to determine their own view on and position in and towards the world. Children, if I interpret Arendt correctly, were to become ‘familiar’ with the world, but not *too* familiar, not familiar in a sense at odds with critical distance, with what Arendt called ‘thinking’. What Arendt saw in mass society was ‘socialized men’, people “who have decided never to leave what to Plato was ‘the cave’ of everyday human affairs, and never to venture on their own into a world and a life which, perhaps, the ubiquitous functionalization of modern society has deprived of one of its most elementary characteristics—the instilling of wonder at that which is as it is” (Arendt 2006, pp. 39–40). Wonder, here, is (in my terms) *contemplative* wonder rather than inquisitive wonder.<sup>13</sup> Rather than helping us become familiar with the world it *defamiliarizes* the world, and that is one reason why contemplative wonder is (educationally) important. (This is not to say that inquisitive wonder does not also defamiliarize the world; in fact, it is distinct from curiosity in that it does this, but its thrust is always towards re-familiarization—on a more adequate level of understanding.) As Pedersen (2015, e.g. p. 139) notes, wonder makes the world ‘newly present’, a phrase which encapsulates the intimate connection between Arendt’s conception of representation as the function of the educator and wonder’s power to make us see the world anew, not as we were used to seeing it, but with fresh eyes.<sup>14</sup>

There is another note in the chord of ‘the instilling of wonder at that which is as it is’ that is also worth mentioning here; apart from the opposition between those who never question anything and those who are disposed to ‘think’ and ask for the meaning of things and social arrangements, there also seems to be an element of admiring wonder there, something that we might connect with the ‘love of the world’ that figures so prominently

<sup>12</sup> There is an analogue of this in Buber’s sketch of the development of I–Thou and I–It relations in children. This is not surprising, since the I–thou relationship as described by Buber—entailing being fully present with someone or something, allowing it to be, rather than considering it in terms of how you can use him/her/it or what (s)he or it can mean for you—bears considerable similarities to wonder as a mode of consciousness. According to Buber, the child first goes out to a Thou, has ‘the instinct to make everything into *Thou*, and only through increasing, constantly changing, contact does the separated I emerge. Only now can It appear and can the I–It relation begin to become dominant; once this has occurred it takes effort to recover the I–Thou relation, and (like wonder) this is always bound to give way again to our everyday attitude towards things and people. See Buber (2004, pp. 26–30).

<sup>13</sup> In Arendt’s terms this would have been ‘admiring wonder’ (Arendt 1978, p. 143; Di Paolantonio 2019, p. 221).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Arendt was suspicious of a wonder that was purely contemplative; the danger was that one would dwell in it and withdraw from the world (see Rubenstein 2011, pp. 20–24; cf. Arendt 1988; see also Di Paolantonio 2019). Yet in *The life of the mind* it seems that Arendt associates curiosity with the quest for knowledge, and wonder (among other things, perhaps) with (non-instrumental) *thinking* and the quest for meaning; a quest, interestingly, which in a sense aims at ‘*disalienating*’ the world into which, after all, each of us is born as a newcomer and a stranger’ (Arendt 1978, p. 100)—so wonder’s relation with (de) familiarization is more complex still!

in “The crisis in education”.<sup>15</sup> Representation, for Arendt, is based in love for the children and love for the world; and it is on the latter basis that educators assume responsibility for the world ‘even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is’. So representation, it seems, cannot be an affectively neutral affair that merely enables children to develop their own perspective on the world. It will also convey a sense that the world is *worth* maintaining and renewing, and presumably it *must* do so if education is also to enable the next generation to become educators themselves. Wonder, building on the function of its inquisitive form but distinct from it, could play a world-affirming role here.<sup>16</sup> Although Arendt explicitly rejects the admiring, affirmative wonder she finds in Plato and other sources, because it ‘leaves no place for the factual existence of disharmony, of ugliness, and finally of evil’ (Arendt 1978: 150; see Schinkel 2019) she does not reject admiring wonder entirely. She writes that the Greek answer to the question ‘what makes us think’, namely that ‘the origin of philosophy is Wonder’, has ‘lost nothing of its plausibility’ (Arendt 1978: 141). And she speaks of ‘the speechless wonder of gratitude from which the questions of philosophy spring’ (Arendt 1994: 445), a gratitude ‘for everything that is as it is’ (Bernstein 1996: 188, cited in Kattago 2014: 65) (which she saw as closely related to ‘the speechless horror at what men may do and what the world may become’; Arendt 1994: 445).<sup>17</sup> But admiring wonder, if it is not to lead to ‘otherworldliness’, must at the same time be Socratic, *aporetic* wonder—a wonder that defamiliarizes the world, that shows us that what we thought we knew, we do not in fact know: “What begins as wonder ends in perplexity and thence leads back to wonder (...)” (Arendt 1978: 166).

Wonder’s defamiliarization of the world could in principle serve a primarily ‘progressive’ function, namely the development of *more adequate*, more encompassing, more integrative, more consistent perspectives—whether on the natural or on the social world. This seems to be how Opdal (2001) conceived of it, and this is most likely how it would slot in most easily in Dewey’s thinking—but not in Arendt’s. For arguably, there is a sense in which this would not be radical enough, for this view remains tied to a ‘rational’ conception of progress that itself escapes the wondering gaze. If wonder makes us see the world anew, we may not always be able to build or expand or improve on what others before us have done. As the experience of wonder does in individuals (cf. Hove 1996), so may wonder on the social level introduce a discontinuity that resists interpretation in progressive terms. Wonder may provoke (a demand for) a social paradigm shift, or inspire a reorientation towards ‘forgotten’ principles, a desire to ‘try again’; both involve a reshuffling rather than cumulative progress.

What Dewey would have been *most* interested in—so I imagine—is *inquisitive* wonder that has become *dispositional*. As I suggested in the previous section the educator who

<sup>15</sup> The famous last sentences of the essay run: “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.” (Arendt 2006: 193).

<sup>16</sup> This point, as a reviewer helpfully pointed out to me, is made in Levinson (2010). It links up with the affirmative Arendtian pedagogy developed by the authors mentioned in note 6. I thank the reviewer for asking me to explicate this more positive strand in Arendt’s educational thinking. Connections between wonder and love are also suggested in Hove (1996) and Schinkel (2017, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> See for the connection between wonder and gratitude in Arendt also Gill (2003).

functions as a *filter* in the sense that (s)he selects those experiences and encounters with the world that will be most effective and fruitful in the child's development is centrally concerned with *moulding* or *shaping* the child's character. This is true for both Dewey and Buber. But in Dewey's case what was most important, educationally, was the development of a critical, 'scientific' disposition. Dewey spoke of the 'method of thought' and insisted that 'thinking is the method of an educative experience' (1997, p. 163); but 'thinking' is here (in Dewey's pragmatic framework) exactly what for Arendt it is not, namely a utilitarian, problem-solving activity.<sup>18</sup> The "systematic utilization of scientific method as the pattern and ideal of intelligent exploration and exploitation of the potentialities inherent in experience" was for Dewey (1965, p. 86) the only viable alternative for the education system in the modern world; but this was as much a prescription for what education should aim at (for the character it should produce), since "scientific method is the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences of the world in which we live" (ibid., p. 88). If education is to fulfil its progressive role, then, inquisitive wonder cannot be a momentary experience that occurs at random, but it needs to be dispositional.

Buber's hope and primary concern, as far as the 'aim' of education was concerned, was that children would become 'one', that in their person and their life they would become unified—in other words, that (despite the conditions of modern mass society and its totalitarian movements) they would become individuals capable of free and responsible action in the world (see Buber 1962: "Über Charaktererziehung"). Only then would they be able to say 'Thou' to the world and to others, not to 'experience' or 'use' them, but to enter into relation with them, to be fully present with them.<sup>19</sup> Though perhaps from the outset more ethically charged the I–Thou relationship is a form of relating to the world that is very similar to contemplative wonder. So again, the view of the educator as someone who 'selects' the world with a view to how it affects the child's development brings with it an emphasis on wonder as a *dispositional* quality—for although, as Buber wrote, every Thou must always become an It again (that is to say: the I–Thou relationship cannot be maintained indefinitely), it *is* possible and desirable for the I–Thou relation to become an ever-present latent possibility, so that it becomes easier to say Thou again. In that situation, every It is also perceived differently—it is touched by the awareness that it could become a Thou for you. The same is true for (contemplative) wonder that has become dispositional: even though one cannot continuously perceive the world in or relate to it through that mode of consciousness, its 'availability' as a latent possibility changes one's 'ordinary' perception

<sup>18</sup> There is some room to nuance this statement, for there is definitely an interest in something for its own sake involved in what Dewey calls 'thinking', and it is also an activity that is concerned with meaning or significance. Furthermore, in light of Arendt's famous warning that thinking is dangerous (but thoughtlessness even more dangerous), Dewey's discussion of the 'risk' involved in thinking is interesting (1997, pp. 148ff.); but his conception of this seems to have been more limited, to do mainly with the possibilities of straying (temporarily) in the wrong direction.

<sup>19</sup> In reply to a reviewer's question let me stress that an *I–Thou* relation is not only possible between (human) persons, in Buber's thought. Not only does *I and Thou* begin with the statement that '[t]o man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude' (my emphasis), Buber also makes explicit that there are three spheres in which 'the world of relation arises': 'our life with nature', 'our life with men', and 'our life with spiritual beings'. Moreover, it is clear throughout the book that the two attitudes are attitudes towards the world as a whole, towards everything that presents itself to us, which we may perceive merely as things consisting of qualities and as events consisting of moments, or we may meet them as *single* beings, or (in the case of things) as 'simply being', and as happenings that cannot be analyzed into moments (Buber 2004: 11, 13, 30–31).

of the world like a soft tone in the background that accompanies the sounds and sights of everyday life.

Buber's conception of the role of the educator—his interpretation of what it means to be the one who 'selects the effective world' and the responsibility involved in this—also implies an important role for contemplative wonder on the part of the educator herself. The teacher–student relationship is to be an I–Thou relationship, a special kind of dialogical relationship, one of 'inclusion', in which the educator perceives the relation also from the other side (the side of the child) (Buber 1962, pp. 36ff.). Personal likes and dislikes, preferences and inclinations ('Eros') entail a will to enjoy, in a consumptive sense, that education excludes; the teacher should be there for the child not for her or his (i.e. the teacher's) sake, but for *its* (the child's) sake. For this it would seem necessary to be able to view each child with wonder—without prejudice, without a preconceived idea of what the child ought to become. Buber's repeated reference to the teacher who enters a new classroom for the first time—seeing all those different faces, pleasant and perhaps (to him or her) unpleasant, at any rate all strange yet all human—is no doubt intended to suggest just this (cf. Buber 1962, pp. 31, 79).

## Conclusion

To summarize, I have suggested that education necessarily involves mediation, in the sense that the educator mediates between the child and the world. This can take different forms: the educator may function as a guide who initiates children into particular practices and domains and their modes of thinking and perceiving; or act as a filter, selecting what of the world the child encounters and how; or meet the child as representative of the adult world. I have looked at these types of mediation (or aspects of the mediating role of the educator) at the hand of the work of John Dewey, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Richard Peters, and have connected their interpretations of the mediating role of the educator with different ways in which wonder can and should play a role in education. *Initiation* highlights the *familiarizing* function of wonder, and is most readily associated with inquisitive wonder; *representation* draws attention to the *defamiliarizing* role of (in particular contemplative) wonder, as well as to a world-affirming role; and *selection* (the educator as 'filter') foregrounds the distinction between momentary and *dispositional* wonder. Clearly, all of this requires further elaboration. Many (potential) connections between the authors discussed had to remain unexplored, and much more could be said about the role of wonder in education as they conceived of it. What I have said about the development of wonder in children has been brief and speculative; this is also a topic that merits further attention. But what I have hoped to show here is that there is more than one way in which wonder can play a role in education—its potential role goes beyond its much noted motivational power—and that this is so in part because there is more than one way in which wonder modulates our connection with the world. A stronger awareness of this may help educators bring into play the educational potential of wonder—or to respect its presence on occasions where, from a particular perspective on education as 'learning', say, wonder might seem to disrupt the learning process. Biesta famously criticized the contemporary replacement of education talk with learning talk, among other reasons because learning tends to be understood as an individual, linearly progressive or cumulative process that may be facilitated by a teacher—a provider who meets the needs of the learner (needs that the learner already knows). Education, however, is not a linear and cumulative process, but a *transformative*

process of ‘responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us’, in which one finds out what it is that one needs (Biesta 2005: 62). It seems to me that wonder—and in particular deep or contemplative wonder—has an important role to play in education conceived in this way.

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