Learning for utopia: from banal to critical Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

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Abstract

While long part of vocational and professional training, forms of practice-based education like Work-integrated learning (WIL) are now spreading to academic disciplines like Political Science. The pedagogical entailed in WIL is that student learning requires the theoretical knowledge and practice of both the classroom and the workplace, and therefore pledges better employability for graduates. At the same time, this promise entails a potential threat to disciplines that may call into question the assumptions of market and state relations. The question thus emerges: is it possible to do critical WIL, and what would it look like? This paper makes a normative case that a critical WIL is both desirable and possible by turning to Hanna Arendt and Richard Turner to differentiate 'banal' from 'critical' education. It further argues that any 'critical' educational programme must be based on three principles. First, students must learn about how social systems work and how to be successful in them, but they must also learn to critically reflect on the systems themselves, and to do so in normative terms linked to ending

domination. Second, are students required to develop both the dispositions and attributes required for working life, and those required for acting to end domination. Finally, there must be sufficient institutional independence of the programme from its partner institutions to protect the critical WIL agenda. These claims are illustrated through reference to a real-world attempt to institutionalise WIL in a Political Studies Masters programme in Sweden.

Keywords: *Work-integrated learning, Hanna Arendt, Richard Turner, banal education, critical education, utopia*

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Introduction

In recent years, forms of practice-based learning like Work-integrated learning (WIL) have found their way into traditional academic disciplines like Political Science. While long part of vocational education and training programmes, practice-based learning linked to the workplace has been contrasted with theoretical knowledge taught in the academic classroom. At the same time as arguably producing new knowledge at an institutional level, WIL is meant to better prepare students for the workplace, making them more employable whether in the public or private sector. In short, WIL is meant to bridge the

divide between the university and working life in various forms, better aligning the practices of post-secondary education with the logics of state and market. For all its stated benefits, the advent of WIL raises concerns for traditional academic disciplines, especially for the idea of the university as an institution independent of state and market, and primarily committed to the pursuit of 'true' knowledge. This view is evident in criticisms of WIL as variously subjecting academic programme to the imperatives of neo-liberalisation or bureaucratic regulation through emphasizing employability as the primary outcome of WIL programmes (Crisp et al 2019, Ferns & Lilly 2015, Jackson 2015, Rowe & Zegwaard 2017). The colonisation of the pursuit of truth, academic freedom, and independent research by the dictates of political power and economic profit is a threat perceived by among others, both traditional elitist and left defenders of the University.

This paper makes an argument connected with the phenomenological and existentialist idealist tradition that emphasises reflective consciousness, subjective freedom, and responsibility, including thinkers such as Hanna Arendt and Richard Turner, on the one hand, and the left Marxist-Freudian tradition of critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School on the other: that the production of knowledge needs to be linked to overcoming systems of domination, and moreover to realising foundational human 'needs and powers' (Horkheimer 1992: 246) and individual and political freedoms (Arendt 2019, Turner 2015). At the heart of this approach to education is the idea that learning is not just about empowering an individual to be successful in the instrumental logics of wider society, but also to reflect critically on those logics in terms of rational and normative accounts and actions regarding human needs, interests and wants.

This paper interrogates the idea that the rise of forms of practice-based learning like WIL threaten the critical theory project: that students who learn through WIL will not be taught how to reflect on the larger questions that confront society, nor the key interests vested in the status quo, nor the possibilities of alternative, more inclusive, just, and sustainable ways of living (Thång 2004). While acknowledging that this is a real risk, and that the advent of WIL must come at the cost of some traditional programme content, the article contends that something like a critical WIL is possible and desirable. What follows is a normative case for WIL as a form of critical education. Moreover, while a critical WIL could take many forms, any programme or module that wants to claim this identity needs to speak convincingly to the kinds of knowledge, knowers, and institutional independence that a critical WIL requires.

The case is demonstrated through the case-study of a master's programme in WIL with a focus on Political Science (WIPS) at University West in Sweden. While this programme was not designed as a form of critical WIL, through the design of the curriculum, including a compulsory two-semester internship module, we seek to demonstrate the promise and challenges of the idea of a critical WIL programme.

What is work-integrated learning (WIL)?

WIL is traditionally framed theoretically and in practice as co-operation between higher education and working life (Billett 2016, Bowen 2020, Dorland *et al* 2020). WIL bears a family relation to forms of practice-based education like clinical placements, work-based learning, co-operative education, service learning, 'sandwich' learning, and internships. Since WIL is defined as a broad field with a variety of meanings, there is room for researchers, teachers, university administrators and others, as well as for students and representatives of working life, to interpret and reinterpret what WIL can mean in practice

(Harmse & Goede 2012, Konstantinou & Miller 2020, McRae 2015, Nehls 2010, Sunnemark et al 2023, Thång 2004).

At the same time, within this broad conception, WIL can also be more narrowly specified as demonstrated by Piper et al (2023). As a pedagogical approach, WIL imagines developing modules and programmes where student work-place oriented learning takes place through the university classroom and meaningful activities of the workplace. In addition to being conceptualized as a cross-institutional and (usually) cross-spatial site where higher education and working life can meet, WIL is even considered to imply a different kind of knowledge that arises out of the intersection of theory and practice, university and third partners. A variety of perspectives, methods and traditions are considered to work cumulatively – adding something to one another and thus enabling more advanced 'constellations of knowledge' (Sunnemark et al 2023).

Further to 'bridging' institutions, spaces and knowledges, WIL can also aim to produce a new kind of student who learn a set of skills and characteristics that enable practical application of theoretical knowledge as well as theoretical and critical reflection on practical professional activity. Such skills and attributes are often articulated as being on a meta-cognitive level – that is, as something that enables a thinking about one's own thinking and a learning about one's own learning – or alternatively, with Barnett (2004), at an ontological level, including self-reflexivity, entrepreneurship, and the ability to absorb technological innovations and change. WIL as a pedagogy thus aims to give students the opportunity to control their own development and learning processes in relation to working life's, hitherto unknown, future requirements, and conditions.

WIL as pedagogy and a new approach to knowledge and knowers opens up room for research on the effective teaching and learning of WIL, especially as regards to how learners could develop practical or moral knowledge (*phronesis*) through different approaches and the relative contributions of university and workplace activities to this. Furthermore, WIL as an educational subject or field results from the sum of these activities, pedagogic, knowledge based, knower based, or research driven. Lastly, WIL can be institutionalised in the teaching, research, and administration of new master's and PhD programs in the university. In sum, beyond the broad conceptualisation of the collaboration or bridge between higher education institutions and working life, WIL has multiple, in-depth, and specific expressions that serve as testimony to the potential richness, complexity, and impact of this approach to higher education.

While there is clearly much about WIL that appears attractive, there is also a downside to transforming higher education into a system that trains graduates for the world of work or merely employable rather than educates democratic citizens or change agents in a world confronting serious social and global challenges or forming individuality in line with the *Bildung* tradition. At the heart of this distinction is not only a contrast in the content of the knowledge covered in preparation for the workplace rather than the world, but also in focus on technocratic skills at the expense of normative judgements and theoretical reflections. A further important contrast centres on developing a disposition on the greater efficiency of the current system versus a disposition to imagine, and to work towards, a different system. All three of these dimensions, critical reflection on core assumptions, normativity, and agency, are at play in the contrast between, on the one hand, what we term a banal education focused on the knowledge, skills and values instrumental for the world of work versus, on the other, a critical education focused on the knowledge, skills and values that

empower graduates to become reflective and critical thinkers in regard to the ‘good’ society, and change agents for a ‘better’ world to those ends.

In our case-study, we are concerned with how Political Science as an academic discipline interprets WIL. A key challenge for academic disciplines posed by WIL is that there is not one obvious vocational outlet for graduates who, in the case of Political Science, typically work in local government, public institutions, the media, academia, civil society organisations, international organisations, business and so on. This makes it harder to identify societal partners and one appropriate set of workplace skills and activities that students should learn through WIL.

One response to this challenge is a recently introduced master’s programme in WIL with a focus on Political Science (WIPS) at University West in Sweden that focuses on developing research skills, with students conducting a research-based internship across the diversity of host organisations identified above. The programme is developed over two years, where the first year has a strong emphasis on teaching research methodology, the area of WIL, and aspects of political Science, and the second year involves an internship where the main task is practical/applicable research for a host organisation, and then academic reflection on some aspect of the internship in a Masters’ thesis. In this way, the key pedagogical principles of WIL such as learning in the classroom and learning at the internship/workplace (through ‘real-world’ research tasks) as well as partnership between student, university and society are all expressed. Notably, while the university has identified high-level commitments to producing students committed to democracy and sustainability, these principles are very broadly integrated into the design of the master’s programme. It is thus not intended to be a ‘critical WIL’ programme as defined below. Despite this, as we demonstrate below, the experience of some staff and students has raised the

promise and perils of a more critical theory framing of the programme into the future.

The perils of 'banal' education

In what follows, we make the case for a critical education over a banal education both negatively and positively by turning first to Arendt and then to Turner. We make the case negatively by pointing to the dangers of banal education as it may enable or enhancing tyranny and/or oppression.

Perhaps the most known example of this line of critique is Arendt's description of Adolf Eichmann's technocratic defence of administering the holocaust as a form of 'banal evil' (Arendt & Kroh 1964). One of the senior organisers of the holocaust in during World War II, Eichmann survived the war and fled to Argentina where he lived under a false identity until arrested by Mossad agents in 1960 and put on trial in Jerusalem. At Eichmann's trial, a key theme in his defence was the claim that he was not responsible for making decisions and was just following orders. He claimed that people like him were forced to serve as mere instruments in the hands of the leaders. Observing parts of the trial first hand, Arendt interpreted Eichmann's claims to be little more than an efficient cog in a machine as a form of thoughtlessness that amounted to what she termed 'banal evil'. She states (1964: 135):

> Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he [Eichmann] had no motives at all…He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing... In principle he knew quite well what it was all about, and in his final statement to the court he spoke of the 'revaluation of values prescribed by the [Nazi] government.' He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness - something by no means identical with stupidity - that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period…It surely cannot be so common that a man facing death, and,

> moreover, standing beneath the gallows, should be able to think of nothing but what he has heard at funerals all his life, and that these ‘lofty words’ should completely becloud the reality - of his own death. That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem.

While Arendt makes the claim that the evil of the holocaust is far from banal by separating the doer from the deed, she is drawing attention to how an individual can become a vital cog in this evil machine of death just by self-interestedly trying to ‘get ahead’ in the bureaucracy by being an efficient worker, following the rules and executing orders. Without the capacity to reflect on the end results of rules/system, the duty bound or honest worker nevertheless can-do great evil. Our case does not depend on the specific role of education in forming Eichmann’s consciousness and actions that rendered him, in Arendt’s eyes, a carrier of ‘banality of evil’. What we are suggesting, however, is that education can be part of, or do nothing to counter, the formation of a non-thinking consciousness (the ‘natural attitude’ in phenomenology), and in so doing, be thought of as ‘banal education’. Our view is that education can be a double edge sword, or a pharmakon, as both a poison and remedy, as ‘a means of producing something’ (LSJ Greek–English Lexicon 2022). Thus, education could help produce a reflective and thinking consciousness different from Eichmann’s particular form of thoughtlessness.

What then is it in a critical WIL education that would result in a thinking consciousness that stands as an antidote to the ‘banality of evil’? Let us begin with Arendt’s point about Eichmann’s inability to reflect on his actions as tied to morality (1964: 135). In this aspect, Arendt’s theorization of evil bears a resemblance to the Socratic-Platonic conception of evil as caused by ignorance rather than ill will. Such similitude, however, only tells half the story (Bragg

2017). For Arendt, the advent of 'banal evil' is also contextually linked with Weber's iron cage of modern bureaucratization and the instrumentalization of everyday life, in particular the political response of totalitarianism, whether Fascist or Stalinist. Totalitarian ideology upheld a singular narrative and strong leader or/and party that purportedly embodied the people's will (Ibid 2017). The lack of both vertical and horizontal dialogue in totalitarian regimes was manifested in both the public, or political sphere, and within the individual, at work or at home. Phenomenologically it could be inferred that Eichmann's thoughtless was due to that his consciousness lacked an inner dialogue to reflect on his action/work activity during the Third Reich. Existentially it could be inferred that he handed over his moral agency to the leader/party.

This outsourcing of moral agency and autonomy to Hitler's will goes hand in hand with Eichmann's distorted 'thoughtfulness'. At a point during the trial Eichmann evoked Kant's moral philosophy as justification for his actions. He testified that not only had he obeyed the laws of the (Fuhrer's) land, but up to a point done his 'duty' in accordance with 'Kant's moral precept' (1964: 136). Arendt notes that Eichmann recounted the principle of the categorical imperative quite correctly. He did not, however, account for the practical reasoning involved at arriving at the principle behind the will. Rather than letting Eichmann off the hook, Arendt (1964: 137) suggested that his identification with the leader had not led Eichmann to abandon, but rather to pervert, Kant's moral formula:

> What he failed to point out in court was that in this 'period of crimes legalized by the state,' as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land […] Kant, to be sure, had never intended to say anything of the sort; on the contrary, to him every man was a legislator

> the moment he started to act: by using his 'practical reason' man found the principles that could and should be the principles of law.

Kant's categorical imperative is arrived at by means of using one's reason as an autonomous moral legislator to decide what maxim could be applied as a universal (objective) law for all subjective wills. Eichmann on the other hand, Arendt argued, had arrived at the categorical imperative through the affinity with the totalitarian law giver. Arendt sees in Eichmann an identification with Hitler's will and his execution of the final solution as a version of a diligent, dispassionate, dutybound civil servant, and not a fanatical Nazi ideologist. Eichmann has replaced reflection with identification, and with that he is no longer a moral agent that reasons around ends.

Whereas critics of Arendt's account have pointed out that Eichmann was indeed a passionate ideological Nazi (Ezra 2007), Arendt's theorization of the banality of evil might have validity for many other 'little men'. Neither did Arendt, as others, as for example Jacques Lacan (1989, 1992), put Kant's formalistic ethics on trial for producing an empty rationalism associated with the pathological sense of duty manifest by the many 'little men' in the industrial machinery of mass death. Yet, Arendt kept exploring Kant's practical reason, and while she died before completing her book on judgment (1999), she insisted on thinking as the defense against the banality of evil.

While the exact meaning of thinking in Arendt is somewhat vague (Butler 2011), it did not necessarily presuppose a transcendental subject/ego as in Kant – and perhaps Arendt even 'detranscendentalized' Kant as Ronald Beiner (1999) has argued. For our purposes here, it suffices to surmise from the above account that thinking to Arendt is phenomenologically constituted as a consciousness engaged in a reasoned reflection over the meaning and ends of

one's actions, over what they are and what that could and should be. This includes judgments on actual and potential collective actions that are expressed in speech (logos) and formed in and by a community with 'spectators' (Arendt 1999, 2005). Arendt's phenomenological description of practical thinking and judging arguably then bears as much resemblance to Aristotelian *phronesis* (that we will turn to later), as to Kant's practical reason (which is determined by the unconditional principle for the good will, not the actions and its consequences) and judgment. The semblance to an Aristotelian ontology in regard to things human is also significant for our purpose as we are concerned in this article with the student as *knower* and *doer* (in Lacan's terms, 'the subject of the enunciation'), and not only the moral judgment a stipulated by Kant's categorical imperative, as 'the symbolic identity the subject assumes within and via his [moral] statement ('the subject of enunciated (statement)'' (Zizek 1998).

To sum up, the case of Eichmann is a powerful illustration of the dangers of an education in and for thoughtlessness: a training in technocratic competence in an enterprise that eschews and critical and ethical reflection on the ends of the enterprise that, following Arendt, we may call 'banal education'. It is possible to extend the argument of the limitations of banal education for human wellbeing from the contexts of the holocaust, tyranny and domination to contexts that are not as oppressive. Similar arguments about the dangers of banal education and institutionalized thoughtlessness apply to neo-liberal societies today (Brown 2005, 2019) as neo-liberalism reduces democratic action and dialogue to a constructed logic of the market, economic efficiency ('instrumental rationality' in the Frankfurt school tradition) for which graduates are trained to work in various occupations, at the cost of sustainable planetary life.

In respect to the case of the WIPS masters at University West, we note above that the programme is not systematically committed to any ‘critical theory’ goals such as non-domination despite background commitments to democracy and sustainability. In addition, there is little doubt that the promise of greater employability is a key reason why many students are attracted to the programme, and indeed one of the obstacles we have experienced in getting some students through the degree is that some have ended up working full-time for their host organisations before completing their studies. At the same time however, it would be unfair to fully characterise the WIPS programme as a form of banal education. Partly, this is because of the values and dispositions do run through the programme in informal ways in the views of most the staff and students, background assumptions around the pedagogic and practical choices of the programme. And partly because as noted above, WIL at its core is structured around a reflection on theory and practice and their relation, a theory-practise dualism that also runs deep in the political science tradition. Written into the design of the degree is a constant and iterative process of reflection on both learning through both the experience of teaching and work-based activities.

This emphasis on ongoing critical reflection and discussion on questions of managing divergent knowledges, relationships and identities helps most students develop capabilities close to the kind of thoughtfulness that Arendt refers to – views that have come through clearly in student reflective assignments and group discussions. WIL as reflective pedagogy lends itself to reflective lenses that could be critical. Such lenses are introduced and explored for example in the course, WIL in Theory and Practice, which includes seminars such as ‘Working and the ethics of action and praxis: state/public employee’, ‘The origin of the theory-practice divide in political science: episteme, techne and phronesis’, ‘Critical reflections on social institutions’, ‘political theory (‘value’) vs political science/positivism (‘fact’)’, ‘Intersectional analysis, work-

life and social reproduction', and elective courses in areas such as sexuality and gender and international political economy.

The promise of 'critical education'

To make our positive case for critical education want to draw on the work of Rick Turner and on his only major published work before he was assassinated by the apartheid state in 1978, *The Eye of the Needle* (2015). In many ways Turner's writings reiterate and extend the critique of the evils enabled by banal education and his educational practice to transcend it. He was writing at the height of apartheid, an authoritarian racist and colonial system of white supremacy. Apartheid not only relied on the economic exploitation of black South Africans, but also the political oppression of all opponents of the system, including white opponents like Turner. In such a context, a diligent and hard government worker who strove to do the best job possible without thinking of the ends of government would invariably enact racial evil. In addition to reinforcing Arendt's line of criticism, Turner's argument offers resources for a case for critical education in all societies when he writes of the constraints of 'common sense' and the necessity of 'utopian thinking' for achieving any kind of moral transformation in society.

Turner began his own education in the tradition of British liberalism and empiricism that did little but 'verify the given' (Morphet 1980). Having been politicized by the radical politics at the university and the unions at time, on the one hand, and introduced to Sartre's notion of radical freedom and the responsibility and possibility of transforming given conditions and values on the other, Turner travelled to study in Paris, where he wrote his dissertation on Sartre's existentialism under Jean Wahl. Phenomenologically, Sartre situated freedom in the place between the thing that present itself (its intentionality) in or to consciousness and the transcendental consciousness that reflects or bring

judgment about the thing presented (the phenomenon), not least by considering the things that are not, but could be present (Sartre 2018). Sartre's early idealist existentialist view of the individuals place in the world could be framed through the recurring agent-structure debate in the social sciences, in that he sided with the agent (individual), who is 'condemned to freedom' ontologically and as such, unconstrained by human nature on the one hand, and having to choose in relation to the structural conditions on the other. Turner accounted for the condition of human existence in relation to structures in a re-worked version of his dissertation:

> Man has no 'nature', because the structure of consciousness, a continual project into the future, is such that it can never be bound to anything, and can always doubt any value. It is this structure of consciousness to which we are referring when we say man is free. He transcends the given towards a goal, a value which he constitutes himself implicitly or explicitly. This transcending is what characterises being human. Man constitutes values in terms of his frame of reference through a process of synthesising all his experience. This process is unconscious, unthematized, but it can be thematised and so become a conscious attempt to construct an objective understanding of the world by means of the various techniques of thought. In so far as he can also change his values in this way, he is responsible for them but to the extent he is not aware of this responsibility. He can, through the techniques and so make a genuine choice for himself. But, since these techniques of reflection and thought come to him from his society, he is to a great extent conditioned by this society, even though the society and the other aspect of his situation – body, psyche, world, past – only exist from him to the extent that he interiorises and lives them. (Morphet 1980: xv-xvi)

When he returned to South Africa in 1966, Turner started to teach and write with the idea of transcending the given along the lines of understanding and making 'genuine choices' in the world. In *The Eye of the Needle,* Turner (2015:

5) argues that ‘common sense’ thinking is thinking that obscures reality, often by naturalizing or normalizing the specific, contingent, and self-interested norms of the dominant group as given, normal and good. To illustrate this claim, he gives the example of white South African assumptions of racial superiority over black South Africans, or patriarchal assumptions about the role of the women as carer of children and the home. In many ways this is a version of Mill’s (1998: 9) argument about the ‘tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling’ that exists alongside legal forms of oppression. Against the constraints and misperceptions often inherent in ‘common sense’, Turner argues for the necessity of utopian thinking to access the truth about society.

Turner means two things by ‘utopian thinking’. The first is to recognise what is impossible because it is given by nature, versus what is socially constructed and thus changeable. For Turner, all social relations are socially constructed although many people may assume otherwise in contexts where social norms mistakenly ‘naturalise’ relations as given by god or nature. Second, Turner holds that need to evaluate our society ‘in the light of other possible societies (2015: 3-5). Key here, says Turner is to grasp ‘the present as history’, through thinking about it in comparison with other societies in the past, present, but also the future, and what we could make society (2015: 7). This requires us to think theoretically about society – that is to identify what is essential, what is the current forms, what values do we want, and how should we institutionalise these. Most important, Turner concludes, we all need to develop a ‘theoretical attitude’, that is the disposition to critically reflect on common sense assumptions, and to engage in utopian thinking. By utopian thinking Turner means three things: (i) seeing the present as history and the future as open to construction, (ii) theorising about what exists in the present, and imagining, based on our values, what could exist in the future, and (iii) becoming change

agents in the world to bring about this normative vision of the future through current action.

In many ways Turner's arguments about critical thinking amount to a version of critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt school: the notion that power relations in institutions and ideas dominate us and that ideology critique is central to the process of practical liberation (Geuss 1981). Crucially for Turner, the process of ideology critique is best coupled with both personal reflection and collective action to bring social change, identified through a process of deep personal and collective reflection. This is a journey that is hard for the individual to take alone, and impossible to enact apolitically. Hence, in his practice as an intellectual-activist Turner modelled the role of the teacher as a kind of facilitator alongside the student on the collective journey to political enlightenment and personal liberation. In many ways it is a form of teaching closest to the model of religious learning.

Notably, central to learning process, and especially developing the 'theoretical attitude', is a process of dialogue rather than lecturing – what Greaves (1986: 33) terms 'redemptive discourse', a process of Socratic dialogue that aims to draw out what is already within. Turner was famously brilliant in one-on-one and small groups conversations (Hemson 1996, De Kadt 2017) – but the point is not so much about his style than about the idea that learning happens dialogically rather than didactically. It was dialogical reflection that Arendt argued was necessary for the formation of reflective consciousness and judgment. Dialogical conversations also defined in her theorization of a political realm of freedom (of speech as/and action) among equals, as opposed to a totalitarian levelling. Political freedom is marked by a plurality of agreements and disagreements between individuals, as well as the democratic possibility to act in concert (Arendt 2019: 93-200).

The dialogue that Turner advocates is one that disrupts ‘common sense’ values and ideologies of domination using practical reason. It is fact and reason that must ground arguments to understand the world, and the point of understanding the world is to change it to a better alternative based on shared human values of freedom and love (Piper 2010). For Turner, the meaning of praxis that emerges from the critical reflection on practice requires personal and collective choice to act and behave differently in the present. In this way he affirms the value of prefigurative practice both individually and organizationally (Hudson 2017), as to change the future through acting in new ways in the present. Indeed, organisation was seen as central to the production of consciousness of free individuals (Nash 1982).

The enduring relevance of Turner’s approach to the misleading and constraining effects of dominant social norms is clear today in a context of a climate crisis where it seems easier to imagine the end of the earth as a place hospitable for human life than it does to imagine the end of unsustainable forms of capitalism (Fisher 2009). Even if one disagrees with this specific claim, however, the general relevance of Turner’s insights into the importance of critically reflecting on social norms, doing so normatively, and imagining a better alternative informed by our values, endures. This, it seems to us, is a crucial ‘life skill’, ‘graduate attribute, ‘human capacity’, ‘developmental capability’ or central aspect of ‘personal empowerment’ for any system of education that is not banal.

In summary then, we term any such system of education which affirms the importance not just of understanding the world beyond positivistic reification of common-sense ideology, but also of changing it for the better by ending domination, as a form of critical education, not least in reference to the critical theory tradition in which Turner is broadly located (Bohman 2011). At the heart of the specific theory of critical education outlined above is the production of

graduates with knowledge and skills not only about how the system works, but also an ability and a disposition to think critically about the ends of the system, how it might be improved considering our values, and the practices required for this better future. To put it in Turner's terms, a critical education is one where graduates not only know how things work but have the 'theoretical attitude' to criticise the limitations of the current ways that things work, the 'utopian thinking' to imagine a better future consistent with reason and our values, and the personal conviction to become change agents for it.

To return to the case of the Master's Programme in WIL and Political Science at a Swedish University, while moral reflection on the goals of education or research internships and becoming an agent to end domination are not consciously built into the design of the programme, other than in some seminars offered by some members of staff, the experience of some students in the programme have demonstrated the potential for this kind of approach. An example of this is a former student of the program who during a pilot stage of the program reflected on her earlier experience working at a state institution. Including a situation in which she had been asked to communicate a relocation plan to a large group of refugees, that would negatively affect their life and studies. Rather than transmitting this information, she both challenged and designed a different plan/solution for the better welfare and education of these refugees that was later implemented. Asked about the causes and reasoning behind her action, she answered that she had learned to "think critically" during her studies in our Political Science undergraduate program and that the relocation plans were contrary to her "being a human" and her universalist human right commitment. The critical ability allowed to challenge the decision on ethical grounds and thus stepped out of a technicist mindset in this instance. Her reflection reminded us of Arendt's theorization in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and its importance, not least in Sweden where there is a strong positive

identification with the state, and progressive work is primarily seen to take place in and through the state.

These points confirm the potential for a critical WIL degree to do more than build reflexivity on the practice of learning and doing for the workplace, and to add reflection on the normative ends of polices and even systems too. Furthermore, as illustrated by the above case, the challenge of real-world work can serve as a provocation to action, and if supported by various learning process deliberately intended to foster agency, can support students in the process of becoming change agents too.

Criteria for a Critical WIL

As noted above, practice-based forms of education can take many forms. In principle it seems that the same must hold for any account of WIL. Thus, in what follows we do not outline the definitive version of critical WIL, but rather some key principles that any critical version of WIL must address to reflect the approach informed by Arendt & Turner. These three principles concern: (i) the nature of the knowledge taught and affirmed in a WIL approach, (ii) the kind of knower generated through a WIL approach, and (iii) the institutional arrangement to underwrite a WIL education.

Critical knowledge, action, and judgment

The framing of WIL is one that contrasts the knowledge and practice that students learn in the University classroom with that of the workplace. A way to describe this relationship in knowledge terms is as a contrast between Aristotelian *episteme* (theoretical knowledge) and *techne* (practical knowledge), and that student learning through the exposure to both could potentially produce practical wisdom (*phronesis*) around action (*praxis*) to attain equitable ends (Piper et al 2023). Phronesis is neither the same as *techn*e or *episteme* nor

simply the sum of both. Rather, *phronesis* refers to the process of deliberation for acting well to achieve a longed-for equitable end regarding ultimate particulars, by the integration of moral virtues with theoretical and practical virtues as accumulated through experience (S. Kourkoulakos & Gray P., 2022, personal communication, 21 January). But as if to make things harder for educators, Aristotle noted that while phronesis could be learned, it could not be taught (unlike *episteme* and *techne*), and this where critical WIL can play an important role, as it includes learning through doing/working (Piper et al 2023).

Aristotle (2011: 119-131) explains that action (*praxis*) or practical wisdom, like practice (*techne*), relates to the part of the human soul that concerns that which could be otherwise, of things 'coming-into-being'. This presupposes, like Kant's moral philosophy, an actor with the freedom to choose, reason, and act (Ibid:120). For Aristotle, however, the moral deliberation and actions concerns end ultimate particulars, not universal maxims only, and takes into consideration circumstantial conditions. Phronesis mixes the universal, such as theory or legislation/laws, with the particular, as it appears in everyday life and politics, ruling, legislative work or in the courts (Ibid: 124-126). In Arendt's ontological classification (2019: 7-21) over human activities, politics is the realm of 'action'. Unlike *phronesis*, however, for Arendt, politics is also about natality, new beginnings, and not only determined by longed-for ends (2005, 2019). Politics is the realm of freedom (2019: 31-33).

Phronesis is different from the practice of making things, as it concerns *action* regarding human opinions and over ends that could be otherwise. The notions of practical knowledge as related to practice or *techne* concerns the principles/means of making (*poesis*) a thing rather than the ends of a system or organisation. Thus, the kind of reflection on practice in doing woodwork have nothing to say about the ends to which furniture is used. The reflection is over

techniques and regards the output/product (the *end*) and the individual's role as the cause and executer of this process. In Arendt's ontological taxonomy over human activity, this kind of practical activity is designated to the realm of 'work' (2019: 7-21).

Similar to the making of a thing, the critical reflection on teaching practice informed by theoretical principles might have nothing to say about the larger purpose of higher education. From a critical education perspective, however, the ends of education are just as significant as the means of learning. Hence, for Turner, while how one learns is clearly important, and he was precisely interested in the breaking down of traditional institutional and spatial divides around where and how people learn, just as important a question is why we have education at all, and how it advances human wellbeing. This latter point is the question raised about knowledge in a critical education approach and is aligned with the realm of *phronesis* that concern moral praxis (action), or what Arendt identifies as the realm of 'action' (2019: 7-21). However, whereas *phronesis* concerns good actions as ends in themselves, but these actions must be considered in light of ends that could be otherwise. For reasoning and reflection over the value of the end, and the good society itself or even the ultimate good, *sophia* (the combination of *episteme* and *nous/*intellect) is also required (S. Kourkoulakos 2022, personal communication, 1 March; Aristotle 2011: 129-134), or what Arendt refers to in part as contemplation.

What this means is that any practice, module, programme, research that claims the label of critical WIL must foreground reflection not just on the means to the ends of education, but the ends themselves, and to do so normatively. Thus, questions of how to teach well must be asked alongside questions of what the objectives are teaching ought to be? Furthermore, this orientation is an essentially normative one and thus aligned with Turner and critical theory. The

ends of a module, programme or system are not inherently given, but are social choices that are inherently value-laden – as is any forms of human practice or organisation beyond some basic biologically given activities that nevertheless must take a particular and contingent forms of social organisation to realise.

Consequently, Turner and critical theory's concern with normativity are of a specific sort that aims at wellbeing for all humans. That is, it is an ethics of inclusion and shared human experience, rather one of supremacy of one group over another. This is a fraught and difficult terrain, and perhaps it is impossible to say in advance enough to resolve debates on what constitutes education that secures human wellbeing or inclusion for all (Ellsworth 1989). Nevertheless, the conditions for justice (such as values of equality, freedom, solidarity, and human dignity) are central to the critical theory tradition (Horkheimer 1992) and thus inform our understanding of critical education. An education system that is normatively committed to exclusion of a certain race, such as apartheid for example, has normative ends but particular and unjust rather than universal and just ones. Hence, this would not be a form of critical education.

Critical education in the tradition of critical theory also requires a socio-economic and political understanding of how to identify the structures and the agents for emancipation. As Bohman (2011) has detailed:

> Critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation.

With this in mind, we suggest that critical WIL could be based on the premise of a non-traditional understanding of where knowledge resides, who carries it and how it flows. In this it is also akin to the tradition of critical pedagogy and its aim to create ‘critical consciousness’ (Freire 1996: 356-358). But when critical pedagogy focuses on creating knowledge in dialogue with and from, specifically, the experiences of the oppressed, critical WIL can cast a wider net. This does not mean that it cannot or should not include the subjects of critical pedagogy or the knowledge stemming from them, on the contrary, but that it also relates to larger social structures and systems. The form of this exists within the very kernel of WIL in a general sense: knowledge – not least practical knowledge – exists in a myriad of contexts in society, working life being one of them. To succeed with this, implicit or explicit ideas on hierarchies of knowledge must be re-considered and reciprocal flows of knowledge between for example universities and working life or universities and civil society.

This alone, however, does not make critical WIL. It is also about what this structure is filled with and that it opens to not only normative knowledge, but also transformative knowledge. Here lessons can be learned from the theories of critical pedagogy: critical WIL should focus on creating knowledge flows and co-creating knowledge together with actors of social transformation with emancipatory aims. This thought represents a great challenge through the pronounced presence of the employability discourse in WIL. It is easy to see that WIL can be criticised for being about adjusting to the demands of working-life and society in large, whatever they may be, to construct employable students. This would be the direct opposite of the ambitions of critical pedagogy. Critical WIL must therefore learn from this and find and use knowledge and knowledge bearers that challenge society and working life, rather than simply adjust and adapt to it, but also from within institutions. This

is easier said than done of course – how do you co-operate and co-create knowledge with for example governmental agencies or municipalities on that premise? – but it still needs to be done.

In respect of our case-study of the Master's Programme in WIL and Political Science at a Swedish University, such principles would imply that the modules students take, as well as research tasks they must execute in the internship, must be connected to objectives aimed to achieving some form of ending domination whether it be reducing racism, challenging capitalism or striving for environmental sustainability. It should also include developing the capacity for critical reflection not just on the tools of good research but on the goals to which the research is applied, and thus the normative ends of the programme of the host organisation. Currently, the Master's Programme in WIL and Political Science is not systematically designed to required students reflect critically on larger normative goals, other than some seminars offered by some members of staff. These are objectives that could be better integrated into the core modules of the degree, and in the selection of the programmes of hosts where students will conduct their internships.

Critical knowers

One of the strongest arguments for WIL and many forms of practice-based learning is the development of a qualitatively different kind of graduate or knower from the traditional academic graduate. There are typically two forms of this expressed in the literature. The first concerns the set of skills and attributes required in the workplace by the express and implicit rules around daily organisational practices from dress and time-management, to conduct in meetings, the language of business, protocols, and etiquette in staff relations, to how to deal with conflict and so on (Billet, 2010). For many academic graduates, these are practices often learned first and only in the workplace. The

second form concerns what Barnett (2004) describes as those ontological capacities to cope with change and uncertainty, and often include meta-level soft skills such as self-reflexivity, creativity, resilience. The other form that we have identified here are the ability to reflect on the challenges of working life in relation to ethical perspectives (Higgs 2012, Orrell & Higgs 2012, Thång 2004).

In addition to these, critical WIL would require a third kind of normative skill or attribute, namely the disposition to become a change agent to improve the world by some version of ending domination. As Turner observes, there are potentially many ways to do this. One might be at a personal level, by pursuing pre-figurative forms of practice to instantiate new and better ways of being in the world. A simple example from Turner's own life was his marriage and cohabitation with a Muslim woman of colour at a time in South Africa when this was expressly forbidden under the racist laws of apartheid. Other way of being a change agent that Turner identities is through organisation to lobby for change in various ways. This could include using democratic channels to change laws and policies of government but would also potentially includes any kind of advocacy from impacting discourse on social media to forms of direct action, or material support for various causes or people, and so on.

The key point, as Turner points out, is that a goal of critical education is to create change agents for a better world, whatever the means employed. Clearly this is a commitment not far from many Universities already claim to aspire to when they speak of creating graduates who can be democratic citizens, or champions of change for a sustainable future. However, seldom is explicit thought given to how to produce such graduates, outside perhaps of certain civic engagement programmes in some institutions. For a critical WIL programme, in contrast, such criteria would have to be centrally engaged, developed, and instituted.

An age-old question is at play here: is higher education primarily about what students become or who students become? This is not the place to distinguish between all the complexities of this question, but one could argue that WIL includes both sides: the focus on employability alludes to the what, while the focus on reflection and lifelong learning alludes to the who. This is akin to what in the above is described as skills and attributes required in the workplace and ontological skills, respectively, but can also be understood in a narrower sense. The what is the future occupation that the education prepares for, while the who is the development of the inner personal qualities that the education sets in motion. Neither of these are by nature critical though, hence our argument for a third set of skills emanating in becoming a change agent to improve the world. A criterion for a critical knower is therefore that the students in their future career are not willing or even capable to distinguish between their line of work and a constant reflecting and ontological learning. A critical knower must do critical work. That is the only way for the third set of skills to become and be trustworthy.

In respect of our case-study of the Master's Programme in WIL and Political Science, one implication of this principle is not just to develop capacities for critical reflection in a way that shifts a sense of identity. This is a process that is already evident to some extent in the debates that are foregrounded in the degree such as the question of 'work-readiness' versus 'life-readiness', and in the ongoing emphasis placed on the importance of reflection not just on teaching or work activities, but also across them, and the 'ontological' skills and dispositions required to shift ways of learning and working. This emphasis on ongoing critical reflection and discussion on questions of managing divergent knowledges, relationships and identities needs to be linked both to the normative and agency-building commitments identified above. In many ways,

this would amount to a further elaboration or refinement of existing practices in the degree to include explicit teaching and learning of these additional components of critical WIL: a commitment to normative progress and taking action to bring these about.

Critical institution

A key feature of WIL is that it serves to bridge the University and the world of work. Indeed, this cross-institutional character of WIL has led some scholars such as Björck (2020: iv) to argue for 'the possibility of establishing physical and/or virtual counter sites to the usual WIL design'. If a key outcome of WIL is to create agents for social change, this raises the possibility of engaging with organisations in the political domain, for example, if students do internships with climate crisis or refugee rights organisations. The key point is that the demands on a critical WIL programme are additional to, and more than, the core missions of the University and the workplace, and may well involve engaging with allies in lobbying for social change. It is not hard to imagine how relations with advocacy organisations might impose new expectations on the university driving the critical WIL programme.

A further implication of straddling these three domains and the logics of higher education, the workplace, and the political realm, is the importance of securing an institutional location independent enough from each to maintain the required balance, but also close enough to be sustainable. While traditionally WIL programmes have emerged in higher institutions, the case for relative autonomy from the University applies as much as from the workplace and the political realm too, if not more so given current trends in academia. Perhaps given the tradition of universities, it may be enough to separate out university 'ownership' of the programme from more localised 'control' of it, but this principle also opens the idea of formal location of WIL initiatives outside of the university,

even when in partnership with it. The key and enduring point is that institutional autonomy over the WIL project is required to prevent the aligning of a critical WIL programme too close to just one logic of the university, the workplace, or the political advocate, but rather to maintain a judicious balance between all three.

To this end, and if concrete autonomous critical WIL institutions is not conceivable or desirable, the balance can also be created by using WIL and especially critical WIL as something that drives universities and workplaces on, pushing them to be social actors and pushing them to take social responsibility. An example of this is to the creation of new institutional spaces formally within the university that can constitutes a node for social development through co-operation with other social actors including locally based government and civil society entities (Goldstein & Glazer 2012). WIL, with its focus on cooperation and co-creation of knowledge, can work as a framework to channel experiences and activities of different stakeholders towards co-governance within this new institutional space (Rampersad 2015, Henderson & Trede 2017). This new institutional space can thus belong not only to ‘the university’ but to all participants. The advantage is that the structure is stable, since while for example companies may come and go, the university will stay put. But it is important to understand that to constitute an anchor institution demands strong focus on the university as an open space. And it is crucial that social activity and social responsibility is at the heart of the university’s identity. Otherwise, there will be no place for critical WIL and the possibility to be an anchor institution will be lost.

Finally, the situation with our case-study of the Master’s Programme in WIL and Political Science at a Swedish University, is that the degree is located in the university national mandate which requires all programmes to become WIL

accredited. Notably, while this need not prevent the University, or in this case the master's programme, being framed as an anchor institution with strong local links and responsibilities this is not currently the formal framing of the university or the programme. It remains feasible that the programme could embrace an approach that, for example, might enable new forms of co-governance of the programme between staff, students and host organisations within a framework committed, at minimum, to democracy and sustainability.

Conclusion

As the world changes increasingly quickly, we need graduates who are capable not just of getting and keeping a job, but also who can address the urgent global problems of violent conflict, inequality and poverty, and the climate crisis – problems that at root are linked to economic, political, and ideological forms of domination. The advent of new practice-based programmes such as work-integrated learning (WIL) in post-secondary institutions provides an opportunity to do just this – especially when they emerge in the context of traditional academic disciplines like Political Science that can conjoin a tradition of critical reflection with learning through workplace activities. This opens the possibility of what we broadly term 'critical work-integrated learning'.

In making this argument we make a distinction between 'banal education' and 'critical education' informed by both Arendt arguments about banal evil and Turner's case for utopian thinking. Through her analysis of Eichmann's justification of his death camp activities at his trial, Arendt draws attention to a particular kind of thoughtlessness associated with framing work as just a technocratic activity. This moral thoughtlessness can lead to tremendous evil, such as diligent participation in mass executions, which Arendt terms 'banal evil', and that serves as a profound and enduring lesson that education should reflect in the ends of systems, which may be oppressive, as much as the most

efficient means of realising these ends. Hence, critical education requires critical reflection, for example, not just on how learning best happens but also the ends of learning too in line with Aristotle's theorization.

With Turner we can develop this starting point of critical education through his claim that what is required to overcome the thoughtlessness that Arendt speaks of, which Turner terms a form of 'common sense thinking', is 'utopian thinking'. By this Turner means firstly, ensuring that students learn a theoretical attitude, that is to critically reflect on the taken for granted assumptions of things, such as the ends of education. Furthermore, this is theoretical in that it must distinguish between what is essential and given and what is contingent and constructed, and then reflect on the contingent and constructed in normative terms to imagine a future that better realises our positive human values. Finally, this theorising has implications not just for systems but for us as individuals too, and Turner argues for individual pre-figurative practice in our daily lives for the better future we desire. These three components of utopian thinking, the theoretical attitude, normative theorising and becoming change agents offer a substantive vision for critical education – so named because of its resonances with the critical theory tradition.

We conclude the paper by arguing that this normative account of critical education has clear implications for how we should develop a critical WIL. Thus, while many different forms of critical WIL might exist, we hold that any defensible version must instantiate some account of critical knowledge, knower, and independent institution. In respect of critical knowledge, this means that learning in a critical WIL programme must include critical reflection on both the means and ends of the programme and work, and that this reflection must have an explicitly normative and anti-domination dimension too. In respect of knower, any critical WIL programme must inculcate not just 'ontological'

disposition such as resilience, but also the commitment to becoming a change agent for a better world. Lastly, as a condition of effective and sustainable governance, any critical WIL programme needs an institutional home of sufficient independence from university, workplace, and political interference to maintain a balance between the potentially competing demands of each component. The effective integration of these components into a WIL programme should enable as Turner would put it, learning for utopia.

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