

Schulreform Through “Experiential Therapy”

Kurt Hahn – An Efficacious Educator

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1. Biography

„He was the most helpful, most generous man I ever have known, rich in ideas and rich in the energy and cunning required to put them into effect. Things were not easy for him: as a Jew in an initially discreetly, then ever more anti-brutally Semitic society; as a man who was ailing by nature and also acquainted with psychic depressions, but who loved health and wished to lead others to health; as a *Christian gentleman* among pagans. Not even the bitterest experiences were able break his good will.“

It was these commemorative words that the historian Golo Mann (1976, 84) dedicated to his teacher and friend Kurt Hahn, who died on December 14th, 1974. Kurt Hahn was a German politician and progressive educator of Jewish origin who later became a Christian and citizen of England. Today, he is considered the „father“ of modern „experiential education“ and an important representative of international peace and social education. It is said that hardly anyone could remain indifferent to Hahn. His political speeches and reports often stirred emotions and his educational concepts and schemes did not seldom meet with opposition. Hahn needed neither rank nor title to make himself heard. His charm and his cordiality were widely praised. Due to the compelling power of his personality, he had many friends all over the world – statesmen, industrialists, officers, scholars – who generously supported his ideas and projects.

Early Life

Kurt Hahn, born on 5th June 1886, came from the industrial upper classes of Berlin. His father, Oscar Hahn, was a sophisticated merchant. He was partner and chief executive officer of the „Hahnschen Werke,“ a joint-stock company which – built up in the 1860s by his grandfather Albert – ran big steel and pipe mills in Duisburg and Düsseldorf but also in Upper Silesia, Austria, and Russia. Famous rabbis and teachers were the ancestors of his mother Charlotte, née Landau. She was a beautiful woman full of wit, who played the piano perfectly and ran a salon where on a jour fixe renowned scientists, politicians, and artists such as Paul Ehrlich, Raoul Richter, Hans Delbrück, Albert Südekum, Sabine and Reinhold Lepsius met to cheerful conversation. She brought up her four sons, Walter, Kurt, Franz, and Rudolf with much love and understanding.

School, however, was a nightmare, in particular for Kurt Hahn who thought of the Königliche Wilhelms-Gymnasium as a „torment box“ and „burial ground.“ And although he highly appreciated some of his teachers, he preferred roaming the meadows and forests with the children next door and meeting his friends Arthur Rubinstein, Leonard Nelson, and Hugo Perls to read philosophical works and perform classical dramas. The fact that school had not to be torture, but could also be fun, was what Hahn learned when, at the age of sixteen, he was hiking with his uncle, the medical professor Martin Hahn, through the Dolomites and when three English friends, Alec Marcan, John Arnold-Brown, and Ben Simpson, were enthusiastically telling him about their school, the progressive boarding school „Abbotsholme.“ On parting, they gave him „Emlohstobba“ as a present, Hermann Lietz’ hymn of praise of their New School in Derbyshire founded by Cecil Reddie. Hahn said at a later date that this book had the effect of a „call of destiny.“ It made grow in him the never abandoned plan to become an educator and school reformer. Shortly before he graduated from gymnasium, in the

summer of 1904, Hahn got a sunstroke which forced him during his whole life – in spite of several pressure relief surgeries – to avoid light and heat and to protect himself against imminent headache by wearing broad brimmed hats and big sun glasses.

Remembering his own apprenticeship in England, his father sent him to Oxford where Hahn matriculated at Christ Church College and dedicated himself with persistence and eagerness to classical philology and philosophy. From 1906 to 1910, he studied at the universities of Heidelberg, Berlin, Freiburg, and Göttingen. Besides his main subjects he attended lectures and seminars in psychology, pedagogy, art history, and national economy held by Edmund Husserl, Georg E. Müller, Gerhart von Schultze-Gaevernitz, and Wilhelm Windelband. The old Friedrich Leo and the young Leonard Nelson impressed him as teachers and scientists, the great Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, however, was admired by him as a strict master and political thinker. The first book Hahn published came out in 1910. It was a novel, named „Mrs. Else’s Promise,“ in which he – criticized by his family and praised by Hermann Hesse – described in a literary way the experiences he made at school and during his childhood. The same year he returned to Oxford studying with Gilbert Murray and John A. Stewart Plato and Kant, and beginning work on a book entitled „Thoughts on Education“ – only partly printed later on – to prepare himself in the succession of Cecil Reddie and Hermann Lietz for the foundation of his own school. At the same time, he actively participated in the life at the college. He did lots of sports, chiefly athletics and hockey, and took part with great enthusiasm in important debates on current issues of domestic and foreign politics organized by the Students Union with members of parliament, secretaries of state, and former prime ministers such as Asquith, Grey, and Roseberry. Through his close relationship to graduates of the old Public Schools of Eton and Harrow and through his practical dealings with statutes and regulations of the Parliament of Westminster, Hahn developed a life-long admiration for English education and English democracy.

Hahn spent the summers on the north-east coast of Scotland in Morayshire – a county which he learned to appreciate and love because of its cool climate and its ordinary people. It was there where he met his English friends (J. L. Calder, Alistair Cumming, Evan Barron) and entertained visitors from Germany, among them Karl Reinhardt, the school reformer and high official in the Prussian ministry of education who promised to become the first director of studies at his new school.

High Politics

His comfortable life got a dramatic turn when, after the assassination of the heir to the throne of Austria, the machinery of mobilizations and declarations of war started and the German troops marched into neutral Belgium. Hahn fled Scotland in July 1914 and returned to Berlin on adventurous paths via Norway and Denmark. Because of various head surgeries not fit for service he entered the „Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst“, the agency for information and propaganda attached to the German Foreign Office and directed by Paul Rohrbach, where he acted as foreign language assistant and expert for England analyzing the press and through it the public feeling in the camp of the enemy. The „Zentralstelle,“ where many intellectuals well-known at a later day (Friedrich Gundolf, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Otto Grautoff, Werner Weißbach) worked, was – with its almost inexhaustible resources – the ideal starting point for Hahn to establish personal contacts, acquire linguistic skills, and gain political influence. When, in winter 1917, he disagreed with his superiors about the decision of the German

government to intensify the submarine warfare and destroy unarmed merchant vessels in the Atlantic, he changed from the „Zentralstelle” into the „Militrische Stelle” of the Foreign Office, where he became a close associate of Colonel Hans von Haeften who, on his part, was a close political adviser of General Ludendorff and the German High Command.

The political relationships Hahn had through his family and his work, were far-reaching and stretched into different directions. He gave lectures in the moderate „Deutsche Gesellschaft 1914” (German Society 1914) and in the pacifist „Bund Neues Vaterland” (Alliance New Fatherland). He traveled to international socialist peace conferences in The Hague (1916/1917) and Stockholm (1917) and to meetings with representatives of the allied governments in Copenhagen and Berne (1918). He contributed articles for the liberal magazine „Deutsche Politik” (German Politics) edited by Theodor Heuss and essays for the conservative „Preuische Jahrbucher” (Prussian Annals) published by Hans Delbruck. Beyond that he wrote reports and speeches for the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and the Colonial Minister Solf, but mainly for Prince Max of Baden whose political mentor and close friend he became in the course of time.

In fact, it was Hahn who had the idea to make Prince Max, the heir to the throne of the Grand Duchy of Baden, Chancellor of the German Reich. With amazing skill and with the help of influential friends (Conrad Haumann, Eduard David, Friedrich Naumann) Hahn eventually succeeded, however, too late to terminate the war in a manner tolerable for the honor of all the powers involved. The “peace of agreement” which Hahn wanted to achieve and which he had continuously aspired to since 1916, required a „political offensive“ linking common sense to psychology and morality. Humane warfare, said Hahn, the „pragmatic idealist”, was not only ethically required but was also a means to win the public attention of the British and American people. In a similar way he argued when he spoke up for the restoration of the sovereignty of Belgium, came out against the unrestricted submarine warfare, and recommended to make peace in the East, a peace which was intended to safeguard the rights of the nations freed from the tyranny of the Russian Tsar. What Hahn was missing in German politics and what he asked for persistently, was the „method of healing statesmanship“: „Negotiations will be preceded by a public discussion that will, so to speak, already disclose the basis for an understanding and make it so clear to the peoples that public opinion in the warring countries will press for an attempt overcome the remaining differences by diplomatic negotiations“ (Hahn 1916-1918, 60). Hahn’s notion of the primacy of open, democratic politics was a promising approach to terminate the war, however, it didn’t have the slightest chance to be realized under the military dictatorship of the German High Command and the secret diplomacy of the Foreign Office. In October 1918, when Prince Max of Baden became Chancellor and Hahn his private secretary, the prerequisites to negotiate an acceptable “peace of agreement” with the allies from a strong position did not exist any more because of Ludendorff’s sudden request for armistice and because of the revolutionary collapse of the German monarchy. Even the good relations Hahn had with American diplomats (William Bullitt, Alexander Kirk, Lithgow Osborne) were of no help.

The more the peace negotiations drew nearer, the more urgent it seemed to Hahn to call the world opinion to resistance against the devastating terms to be expected for Germany. On his suggestion, Prince Max of Baden, Max Weber, Robert Bosch, and other prominent representatives of a “peace of agreement” founded in February 1919 the „Heidelberger Vereinigung” (Heidelberg Union), an association to achieve a „peace

of right and justice“ based on the Fourteen Points of Wilson. As secretary and adviser of the German delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, Hahn was able to express in public his viewpoint on dignity and fairness as he understood it; for the great speech the German Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Brockdorff-Rantzau, delivered when receiving the peace conditions was in decisive parts his work. „We are required to admit being the only nation responsible for the war; such a confession from my mouth would be a lie“ – one can read there, and following a description of the „hunger blockade“ maintained by the Allies against Germany even after the armistice: „That is what you should think of when you are talking about crime and punishment“ (Hahn 1919b, 99ff.). These phrases have gone down into the history books; yet, they could not change the outcome of the treaty.

Forced Emigration

When the peace conference was over, Hahn retreated to Salem – the former Cistercian monastery and now the residence of the Baden family at Lake Constance. There he began working on two projects: firstly, he realized his youthful dream of a country boarding school. Supported by his old friends Karl Reinhardt, Marina Ewald, and Wilhelm Schmiedle he succeeded in short time. After ten years of its existence, more than 400 boys and girls attended his „school state“ which consisted of four entities – Salem, Hermannsberg, Hohenfels, and Spetzgart. Secondly, Hahn devoted himself to political writing. He wrote the book „Die moralische Offensive. Deutschlands Kampf um sein Recht“ (The Moral Offensive. Germany's Battle for Her Rights, 1921) and the „Erinnerungen und Dokumente“ (Memoirs, 1928) of Prince Max of Baden, both in the name of the latter, where he justified the politics of the Prince during his chancellorship, fought against the „war guilt lie“ of the Paris Peace Treaty, and supported the establishment of the „Institut für auswärtige Politik“ (Institute for Foreign Affairs, founded in 1923 in Hamburg) the aim of which was to restore the reputation of Germany in the world.

Hahn kept distance to the Weimar Republic. He was disturbed by its lack of dignity and patriotism. Increasingly he was concerned about the electoral successes of the National socialists. „Dictatorship of the proletariat as that of fascism,“ he wrote in the „Memoirs“ of Prince Max, „is totally alien to the nature of the German people. [...] The aversion to the kind of parliamentarism we established by imitation of misunderstood institutions of the West, may lead to the effect that political thoughtlessness sees the only way out in fascist experiments“ (Baden 1928, 171). Yet Hahn's attitude towards National socialism was sometimes not free from German-national illusions. He tried to prevent Hitler from coming to power; that is why Hahn got in touch with Reichs-President Hindenburg and Chancellors Brüning and Papen and organized – together with the philosopher Leopold Ziegler – the „Salem Conference“. On the other hand Hitler and his party might be useful: „You had to invent the Nazis if they didn't already exist“ (Hahn 1931-1933, 166). In the summer of 1932, Hahn considered their function to unite the divided political center of the German parliament, to strengthen the power of the Reichs-President, and to accelerate the revision of the Paris Treaty. But when Hitler glorified political assassination as in the Potempa case, Kurt Hahn – a humanist and a liberal throughout his life – came publicly out against the policy of violence. How to be expected, shortly after the National socialists seized power, in March 1933, Hahn was arrested, soon be released through the intervention of British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, then banished from the state of Baden. He moved to Berlin and spoke with old friends among them the former Chancellor General von Schleicher, the

President of the German Supreme Court Walther Simons, and the Chief of the German High Command Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equort. Hahn came to the conclusion that he no longer had a platform for political opposition particularly as an individual of Jewish origin. Nevertheless, he tried with the assistance of high-ranking army officers and party officials to convince the Nazis government to maintain his school in Salem. In June 1933, he left Germany for England and founded a new school, called British Salem Schools, in Gordonstoun, Morayshire, the Scottish county he had treasured since his student days. With the support of the alpinist Geoffrey Winthrop Young, the historian George Trevelyan, the publicist R. M. Barrington-Ward, and other personalities of public life Gordonstoun – as Salem before it – experienced a rapid growth so that it was possible within twelve years to open two branches, one in Wester Elchies and another in Aberlour.

In England, where Hahn became naturalized in 1938 and converted to Christianity in 1945, he soon made acquaintances with professors, journalists, bishops, and members of parliament. Through them he once again tried to gain political influence with the intention to make the British public aware of the existence of the concentration camps in Nazi-Germany and of the dangers involved in the foreign policy of the Allies which was at first geared to political appeasement and then to unconditional surrender. As a German refugee, however, Hahn did not have much political weight. Nonetheless, together with the archbishop of York, William Temple, and the members of parliament Henry Brooke, Arthur Salter, and Lord Clydesdale, Hahn was able to launch petitions and press campaigns which condemned the cruel treatment of Jews and asked the British government to support the opposition within Germany against Hitler through serious negotiations and acceptable peace conditions. Hahn's letters and statements concerning the solution of the Sudetic crisis, the improvement of British military training, and the termination of genocide in Germany went up to the Foreign Office and the War Office, even up to the secretariat of Prime Minister Winston Churchill where they were thoroughly read and discussed. It was Hahn, too, who was one of the first to meet Rudolf Heß after his landing in Scotland and to write reports for the Duke of Hamilton and the Foreign Office by giving his opinion on the purpose of the strange peace mission of Hitler's deputy.

After the Second World War, when Hahn became a protagonists of the international school reform, he limited his political activities and reduced it to letters to the editor of the London "Times" and to occasional conversations with old friends and acquaintances, for example, with the President of the Federal Republic, Theodor Heuss, the bishop of Chichester, George K. Bell, the American Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Christian A. Herter – on issues such as the atom bomb, German reunification, the Anglo-German relationship, the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

2. Educational Convictions

Being a Jew and a Christian, a German and an Englishman, an educator and a politician, Kurt Hahn was an exception – a traveler and mediator between the worlds. The priorities he had and set for himself, however, were clear and obvious. For instance, education was for him not a question of politics, but quite the contrary: politics was a question of education. „The aim of the government is the political coming of age of the German people,“ he wrote in 1918 in a speech for Prince Max. „Not the arbitrary action of the existing powers, but the lack of political will-power in the German people was

responsible for the fact that Germany has been an authoritarian state for so long“ (Baden 1928, 456f.). This statement characterizes Hahn’s position. Even as a politician, he thought in educational terms, and in his educational theory he was always concerned with „civic education“: he wanted others to keep the world intact or – where this has been neglected – to make it intact.

Nevertheless to suppose that Hahn had a modern – for instance, Deweyan – understanding of democracy, would be at least inaccurate. What Hahn had in mind was orientated to the conservative liberalism of the 19th century. Particularly in Victorian England, parliament seemed competent to create a strong „government of the best“; and government and parliament were obviously dominated by men and women who – as, for example, Emily Hobhouse and Henry Campbell-Bannermann – were able of recognizing any infringement against law, justice, and human dignity and capable of putting it right through joined „confederate action.“ According to Hahn, politics had little to do with political parties, pressure groups, or the competition of interests; basically it was a matter of moral and character. „The world,“ Napoleon said and Hahn consented heartily, „does not perish from the evilness of the evil, but from the weakness of the good.“ The crisis of democracy as Hahn characterized it, came from selfish politicians who disregarded the common weal and from apolitical individuals who obeyed without reflection and acted without mercy. For Hahn, an unceasing optimist, moral and power seemed to be reconcilable through education.

Undoubtedly, at the center of Hahn’s educational philosophy was the “education for democracy.” The ideal he had in mind was the “vigorous and active individual” with humanitarian convictions who felt responsible for the welfare and progress of society. That is the reason why Hahn didn’t choose the intimate family – like Geheeb at the Odenwaldschule – but the „confederate group” as social unit in his boarding school; and that is why he didn’t take the self-realizing individual as model – like Neill in Summerhill – but the “vigilant citizen” who combines in himself the power of thinking with the will to act. „With us,” so Hahn in his „Seven Laws of Salem,“ „nobody is allowed to be a passenger, everyone belongs to the ship’s crew” (Hahn 1930, 52). Together with their teachers the boys and girls of Salem were responsible for all important tasks of school life as „guardians“ and „helpers“ and took part in all important decisions of school management in the „color-wearing assembly“ without, however, having comprehensive participatory rights – as was the case with Curry in Dartington. The final report Hahn’s students received, the „Salem Baccalaureate,“ included – besides the usual marks for academic accomplishment – statements about the development of their character. While skepticism, arrogance, and lack of commitment were strongly condemned, the virtues of justice, solidarity, and the courage to stand up for one’s beliefs were held in high esteem.

As hardly any other school reformer, Hahn believed in the „power of education.“ But his confidence in education was almost as strong as his fear of the decline of culture and civilization. „The state is inflamed,“ „the pasture is sour,“ so he grieved with Plato. Sick and in need of being cured, however, were not only politics and democracy; even family, youth, and society as a whole lived through a profound crisis. The modern family, Hahn explained, suffered from the „fatherless“ education which extended irresistibly because of the increasing division of labor and the growing demands of professional life. Up to the age of 11, the mother was able to look after her children alone. During the period of puberty, however, especially the boys were in need of the „careful guidance of a man.“ Thus a paradoxical situation occurred: „If the father is capable, which means if he *has the*

right to educate his children, his professional life neither leaves him the necessary time nor the energy required. If he is incapable, he *should* not be allowed to educate his children. It is not in the interest of his sons if he fills his ample time and leisure with educational activities“ (Hahn 1928, 126ff.). But that was not all. Hahn identified a second insufficiency in family education. Like the fathers, it was often the mothers, too, who – in his opinion – were not able to fulfill their duties. They protected their children from trouble and effort and spoiled them with exaggerated indulgence and love. With reference to Plato and William James Hahn claimed that adolescents had to be separated from their parents and instead of being educated in the traditional half-day schools, they should attend all-day schools or – even better – live far away in country boarding schools.

The crisis of the family, like the crisis of society, deeply worried Hahn. He talked about „social diseases“ which continually expanded in the Western world and threatened progress and growth. Hahn distinguished six different factors of social decline and deterioration:

– *Decline of fitness and physical health*: in particular due to the modern methods of motion, e. g. car, train, and elevator;

– *Decline of initiative and the spirit of adventure*: easily to be recognized as „spectatoritis,“ an “illness” brought about by the new media, e. g. radio, film, and television;

– *Decline of imagination and recollection*: especially fostered by the restlessness of modern people and their increasing fear of silence, loneliness, and seclusion;

– *Decline of carefulness and thoroughness*: primarily caused by the dwindling importance of the crafts and by the increasing inclination to look for quick results and easy solutions;

– *Decline of self-discipline and renunciation*: chiefly furthered by material affluence and the easy access to alcohol, cigarettes, and pills;

– *Decline of compassion and mercy*: in particular encouraged by the diminished community life and the expanding subjectivism, individualism, and egoism (Hahn 1962, 301ff.).

Taken singly, the decline of society and civilization was bad enough. Yet, for Hahn it was fatal that the cultural decay concerned less the small children, but all the more the adolescents having a decisively negative grip on their development and growth. The small children, Hahn said, possessed natural forces which protected and preserved them from the pernicious authority of social powers: they had a desire for physical activity, a need for human sympathy, a thirst for exploration, a longing for adventure and imaginative games. During puberty, however, these „treasures of childhood“ were lost and would be displaced by the „weaknesses of puberty.“ Boys and girls were now exceedingly exposed to the „sexual instinct“ which filled them with „suppressed vitality,“ „permanent restlessness,“ „irritable displeasure“ and which too often transformed them into „skeptics,“ „cynics,“ „listless persons,“ or even „lawbreakers.“ For Hahn, this was the crucial and predominant problem of education: „How is it possible to maintain the force of the children through puberty and beyond it, intact and pure? How is it possible to avoid that the sexual instinct which breaks through all of a sudden does not seize the mental energy of the boy and weaken everything the child wanted to attempt and which has formed his world up to now?“ (Hahn 1928, 128)

In contrast to other progressive educators – such as Montessori, Dewey, and Piaget – Hahn did not worry so much about the growth of the children of kindergarten and elementary school age. They seemed to him to be largely protected and safe – virtually living in a kind of cocoon. He was rather worried about the development of the teenagers, since he was convinced that highly praised and widespread concepts such as psychoanalysis and depth psychology with their methods of introspection, association, and reflection of the early childhood experience could not solve the problem of puberty. What Hahn put into discussion was a simple but effective „therapy“ the aim of which was to distract the pubescent teenagers from their disturbing afflictions, to turn them inside out, and to bring them in close contact with challenging activities. At the heart of Hahn’s approach was not – as with the followers of Freud – pleasure and enjoyment or – as with the followers of Herbart – teaching and instruction, but activity, experience, and adventure. Because of „experiential pursuits“ brought about deliberately, the young should learn to get to know their strengths and to discover their „grande passion.“ „We think,“ Hahn explained, „that every child is capable of a ‚grande passion‘, of a creative passion and our most noble duty would be to discover and satisfy it.“ (Hahn 1930, 151). Once this „salutary passion“ has been found, it will become the „guardian angle“ of the period of puberty while the undiscovered teenager without protection between eleven and fifteen will only rarely be able of keeping his or her vitality unaffected. Since, according to Hahn, insights and attitudes can be acquired at best in a social context, life in school and community had to play an important part. Thus, he developed a concept tried to satisfy the desire of the adolescent for adventure, responsibility, and proving their worth, without, however, submitting to an „authoritarian“ or „laissez-faire“ education. „Give the children the possibility to discover themselves ... Assign them tasks which are important enough to lead to the breakdown of the school state if carried out carelessly... Let them experience triumph and defeat ... Provide periods of silence ... Train the imagination“ – all this was laid down in the „Seven Laws of Salem“ (Hahn 1930, 151ff) and they were based on an educational program which should counteract the malfunction of society and lead the young to moral strength and courteous convictions.

Experiential therapy

Even as a student, Hahn had outlined his basic ideas of school and educational reform. But his concept did at first not go beyond the ordinary. Like his German and English predecessors, he wanted to educate the „complete person,“ to satisfy the „sound interests“ of children, and to „break windows into the walls of the school to let in the real world“ (Hahn 1933b, 203). Like Fichte, he regarded school as means of social renewal after a national catastrophe; like Thomas Arnold he looked upon sports as „trouble breaker“ during the difficult years of puberty; and like Kerschensteiner he considered the „study group“ as an efficient instrument of civic education in a liberal and democratic society. That is why Hahn had built sports fields and boat harbors in Salem and Gordonstoun from the beginning, had introduced project groups and trade guilds, had put up stables and laid out gardens, had set up workshops, laboratories, and libraries so that boys and girls were able to learn how to make tables and forge gates, how to look after fowl and grow vegetables, how to observe animals and do experiments, but also got to love literature, sports, and the arts.

In the course of time, Hahn expanded his repertory and at the end of the 1930s, he had created an educational system which went beyond the usual methods and aims of school

reform. The „experiential therapy“ (Erlebnistherapie), as he called his program of social and practical activities later on, largely consisted of four elements having a different emphasis each:

– *fitness* covered the physical component: in a „training pause“ between school lessons, the students practiced running, throwing, and jumping, the former students were invited to pass the German sports certificate and to abstain from drugs such as alcohol, coffee and cigarettes;

– *expedition* accentuated the affective component: during journeys, walks, and other exhausting activities, the students should be exposed to experiences and adventures which they might curse at the moment, but which they would not like to miss later on;

– *project work* emphasized the cognitive component: on Saturdays, the students had the whole day at their disposal for planning and realizing projects on their own – a translation of Ilias, an analysis of the rivulet Aach near Salem, the construction of a model airplane (by the way, Hahn did not revert to Kilpatrick’s „project method” as a model but to Helen Parkhurst’s „Dalton plan“);

– *service* stressed the social component: the commitment for others – as with the fire brigade, the sea and mountain rescue service, the social and environmental service – the students should assume responsibility and experience the sublime feeling: You are needed (Hahn 1962, 302ff).

How different the emphasis may be, it is evident that the specific functions and aims of all four elements overlap and intensify each other. The aim of – let’s say – the „expedition“ is primarily to exercise the „will-power,“ but at the same time to increase „physical fitness“ (training) and „intellectual strength” (project work). It is obvious, too, that the four elements are brought and kept together by the notion of activity, passion, and adventure.

There is the main difference between Hahn and other educationalists such as Herbart and Dewey. While Herbart and Dewey emphasized with „instruction“ and „experience“ the cognitive aspect, Hahn put the emotional aspect at the center of his educational philosophy using the term „Erlebnis” which is not easily translated. At bottom it means that feelings and emotions and not ideas and thoughts serve as the basis for learning and as a prerequisite to make experiences, to gain insights, and to change attitudes. Without „tiefgreifende Erlebnisse” (striking experiences), Hahn said, people were languishing without having neither a goal nor a compass; they were lacking motivation, orientation, and moral principles. Put in a different way: the more existential and profound the „Erlebnisse” were which people made, suffered, and got through, the more they were able to call to mind salutary recollections, to suppress mean passions, and to correct foul deeds. For this reason, Hahn considered the „social service“ as the most important and most efficient element of his „Erlebnistherapie” (experiential therapy). The fact of helping and saving, he explained, released feelings and emotions which are so basic that they even helped to change opinions, habits, and prejudices. For Hahn the incarnation of the unselfish helper and saver was the good Samaritan. His story was read to the students of Salem and Gordonstoun at the beginning of every school year. His example was evoked by Hahn when he spoke about world peace, international understanding, and – using William James’ words – about the „moral equivalent for war”. „The moral equivalent,“ he claimed taking the life saving services as reference, „has been discovered.

The passion of saving unleashes dynamics of the human soul which are much more powerful than the dynamics of war“ (Hahn 1962, 303).

International Educational Republic

The invention of the „experiential therapy“ and of the social services is doubtlessly Hahn’s particular contribution to educational theory. But this is not all. Since their foundation, Hahn considered Salem and Gordonstoun to be innovative „educational workshops“ which should have a bearing beyond the narrow domain of the country boarding schools. In order to prove the practicability of his educational ideas Hahn developed several strategies. First of all, he adopted the English version of the „community school“ and made Gordonstoun the „center of social service“ for the near by village Hopeman by organizing sports for young fishers, restoring the St. Peter’s Church, opening a sea rescue service station at the Firth of Moray, and founding a technical college for sailors and officers of the merchant marine. Later on, when his educational theory got stronger and his political commitment weaker, Hahn established a series of schools and programs worldwide which had the “experiential therapy” as a common basis. In five decades, he created an „international educational republic“ which now stretches over five continents. Hahn is the founder and co initiator of:

– *Boarding schools*: since 1920, united in the Round Square Conference; at present about twenty secondary schools worldwide, the most well-known of which are Salem (BRD), Gordonstoun (U.K.), Anavryta (Greece), Athenian School (U.S.), International School Ibadan (Nigeria).

– *Outward Bound Schools*: since 1941, short term schools, mainly situated at the coast or in the mountains, with an experiential program of three to four weeks for pupils, students, and young workers; at present more than forty schools, most of them in English-speaking counties.

– *International Award for Young People*: since 1956, a certificate for physical fitness, intellectual and social performance, to be obtained in bronze, silver or gold as with the German sports certificate; the oldest and most well-known is the Duke of Edinburgh Award; every year, about 100.000 boys and girls (also handicapped persons) between the age of 14 and 25 take part in more than 100 countries.

– *United World Colleges*: since 1962, two-year high schools – with an international student body and the “International Baccalaureate” as diploma – in Wales, Canada, USA, Italy, Norway, Venezuela, Swasiland, India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Costa-Rica, Bosnien-Herzegowina.

The educational republic Hahn created was furthered by the support of influential friends (the owner of the Blue Funnel Line Lawrence Holt, US-High Commissioner for Germany General John McCloy, Nato-Air Vice Marshall Sir Lawrence Darvell) but also by the favorable conditions of the times: for instance, the Outward Bound Schools benefited from the „fitness movement“ of the 1930s, the Duke of Edinburgh Award from the „youth crisis“ of the 1950s, the United World Colleges from the „Cuba crisis“ of the 1960s. However much he had accomplished, at the end of his life Hahn was not satisfied with his work. As a continuation and „democratization“ of the country boarding school concept, he would have liked to found „day boarding schools“ at the outskirts of big cities and „student hostels“ at the campuses of great universities. But

what grieved him most was the fact that he was not able to convince the German ministers of education – despite decade-long campaigns – to establish public all-day schools in social conflict areas – after all, he argued, it is the undeniable duty of the public school system to absorb and compensate the deficiencies of the modern family and society as far as possible. To lessen Hahn's disappointment with his life work, it can be said that today in Germany there is an animated discussion concerning the introduction of all-day schools and everywhere are now public schools which have included in their program „services“ for caring of young immigrants, old people, the environment.

For Kurt Hahn, who had more than any other progressive educator an intimate knowledge of politics, the formation of elites was the key problem, even in a democratic state. The „education for responsibility“ he aimed at in his schools meant to train the future „leaders of the nation“ in such a way as to make them persons of strong character committed to serve the common good and withstanding the corruption of power, money, and the spirit of the times. But despite his affinity to aristocracy and despite the large number of children with social privileges attending his schools (among them Prince Philip, Prince Charles, Queen Sophie of Spain, King Konstantin of Greece), Hahn was not only an educator for princes and the upper classes. From the beginning his – democratic – intention was directed to the education of everyone, even if his plans were only realized since the 1930s and some of them were not implemented at all. He tried to reach all adolescents – irrespective of their origin, education, nationality, and gender; for Hahn was aware of the fact that in the 20th century class privileges were obsolete, ethnic differences out of date, responsible leadership required in all walks of life. And since he knew that the level of the elites is largely determined by the level of their social basis, the formation of elites meant for him a general and high education of all young people. Hahn very much liked to quote a phrase coined by the Swedish sociologist Gustaf Steffen: „Aristocracy is the salt democracy cannot do without“ (Hahn 1957, 283). By aristocracy, Hahn did not just imply the persons privileged because of origin, wealth, or social standing, but idealiter an „aristocracy of service“ across all social classes and nations which at any time knows how to take initiative and to assume social responsibility. Hahn's schools should be open to adolescents from all countries and all walks of life. Untiringly he asked for donations and scholarships so that neither a boy nor a girl would be excluded from attending his schools and programs for financial reasons.

3. Critical Assessment

Kurt Hahn, one of the great underrated among progressive educators, did not always enjoy a high reputation with contemporaries and historians in spite of his impressive achievements. He was a practitioner not a theoretician, is often said. His writings were limited to a few articles and books and his ideas hardly differed from those of his generation (Hentig 1966, Flitner 1975, Skidelsky 1975).

Hahn did not contradict this assessment – quite the contrary: as far back as 1920 he pointed out that the objectives, contents, and methods of his educational theory were neither new nor original. He had „stolen it all,“ he said proudly: from Hermann Lietz, Plato, Kant, Baden-Powell, Thomas Arnold, William James and others. He had only tried to find what is best for his students. With words he placed into the mouth of Prince Max – as he often did – , Hahn explained his position: „Education is like

medicine. One has to reap the wisdom of thousands of years. If you have to go to a surgeon and this surgeon wants to operate on you for appendicitis in a original manner, I would strongly recommend to consult another surgeon“ (Hahn 1962, 292). Indeed, Hahn’s educational work is small and to identify the sources of his ideas is easy, since he himself mentioned most of them conscientiously.

Nevertheless, one should neither overestimate his comments nor underestimate his originality. Hahn adopted, but he did not copy. The way in which he analyzed and systematizes the conceptions of other educators and the way in which he integrated them into his own educational philosophy was constructive and creative, sometimes even brilliant. For is there another way to characterize his idea of putting life saving services such as rescue at the disposal of education? Or his idea to combine divergent elements such as the German fitness training, the American project learning, the British scout tradition, and the Christian charity work into a coherent concept? Or his idea to realize his educational theory in diverse institutions by differentiating them as to extent, duration, and age group so efficiently that by now millions of young people between the ages of 14 to 25 all over the world have been keen on experiencing his method of gaining self-confidence and social competence?

The fact that Hahn’s educational and – political – attitudes often gave rise to criticism could not fail to materialize with a man who – in spite of his modesty – was self-confident, who – in spite of his liberal views – gave the impression of being conservative, and who – in spite of his politeness – was not afraid of presenting provocative theses, pointed formulations, and biting remarks. In the course of years, Hahn has been criticized and attacked for various reasons: by Joachim Petzold (1964), because during the first world war he did not stand up for a „peace of agreement“ – as is generally believed –, but for an „ethically trimmed, and as large as possible, victory of German imperialism“; by Hartmut von Hentig (1966), because he disavowed democracy and political participation and sacrificed virtue to education; by Robert Skidelsky (1969), because he depicted Hitler as a politician with „a warm, even soft heart“ and because – by demanding high moral standards – he induced his students “to escape from reality,“ to practice „self-deception“, and give in to social „conformity“; by Heinrich Kupffer (1980), because he established a „fascist“ school and a „dictatorial“ regime which suppressed any kind of freedom, individuality, and autonomy; by Golo Mann (1986), because – due to the repression of his own homosexuality – he did not think much of „tact“ and „discretion“ and did not understand anything of „sexuality“ and „sexual education.“ Even Hahn’s use of words was critically examined; for instance, it was pointed out that he used expressions like „poor student material,“ „dangerous sexual instinct,“ „cultural decline,“ and „social epidemics“ which had to be „improved,“ to be „cured,“ or to be „treated,“ without recognizing that he employed offensive and barbarous language thus paving the way for the fascist regime and its contempt for human life (Hentig 1966, Kupffer 1980).

Some of these critical comments are not unfounded. In fact, there are remarks of Hahn – as, say, „ethical imperialism,“ „honorable National socialists,“ „dull democrats,“ and „stupid teachers“ – which may irritate, but which lose their explosive nature and importance when being read in their context. Often they emanate from Hahn’s conviction that even matters which seem to be evil can take a turn for the better. Hahn undoubtedly overestimated the character-forming value of sports and underestimated the social pressure to conformity and subordination his students were exposed to. He partially misunderstood the significance of reason for moral education, and the

importance of instruction for intellectual education. Sexuality and puberty were all too often considered by him as a threat from which boys and girls needed to be preserved and protected. Nevertheless, it is obvious that morality has to be trained and that unforgettable experiences can help to make right decisions in difficult situations. Hahn's „experiential therapy“ offers activities which belong to the basic needs too often neglected in traditional schools, and it presents opportunities of social learning which are compelling, impressive, and powerful. Carrying out project work, adventurous trips, and rescue services, the adolescents can prove their intelligence and imagination and get to know through challenging, sometimes dangerous situations, that they are needed and that the limits of their capacity to learn and act are set much further than others think and they themselves believe. Some forms of violence, theft, and drug consumption adolescents are liable to experiment with might be pointless and unnecessary. In essence, the educational philosophy of Hahn is a philosophy of „wholesome adventure“ and „active humanity.“ With his schools and programs which brighten the world now more than ever, he made an indispensable contribution to peace and civic education, but also to the modern educational theory of adolescence, character building, and social reconstruction. As a creative educator and brilliant organizer, Kurt Hahn counts among the great progressive school reformers of the 20th century.

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