

MANAGING CULTURAL PLURALISM IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING: INSIGHTS FROM GIANNI VATTIMO AND THOMAS KUHN

MATTHEW EDWARD HARRIS

Abstract. This article looks at implications of the ideas of postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo for how management deals with cultural conflict in an educational setting. Vattimo's ideas point towards the development of less prescriptive, more performative, means of resolving conflict in a setting where truth claims are of reduced importance. The performance will be a living out of *caritas*, a charitable attitude towards the cultures of others, moving in the direction of a gradual convergence of cultures through listening to and accepting the other. The paper then discusses ways in which Thomas Kuhn's idea of paradigm understood as exemplar can be used by management to inculcate the *caritas* as the *habitus* of those who live and work in their educational institution.

Culture and conflict

Culture is said to constitute commonly held beliefs, values, norms, symbols and traditions, captured under the umbrella of “Shared meanings” (Bush & Middlewood, 2005: 47) which “distinguish one group of people from another” (Dimmock & Walker, 2002: 71—drawing on the work by Hofstede, 1991). In an educational setting, taken in this context to be a school or college, “Culture is that set of values and beliefs, both explicit and implicit, which underpins the organisation and provides the basis for action and decision-making in the absence of direct instruction – it is “the way we do things around here”” (Foskett & Lumby, 2003: 9).

Foskett and Lumby’s understanding of the role of culture in an educational setting is problematic because “Schools are part of larger social systems and communities” (Blase & Anderson, 1995: 130). Concentrating on the staff of the school, rather than the pupils, each person in the educational setting will already have a culture of their own before beginning work at the school. This statement could be understood in a dry, factual sense approaching truism, that is, that we all have our particular upbringings which, to a greater or lesser extent, shapes our way of seeing the world. More strongly, one can follow the tradition of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kuhn, and Gadamer which shows that reality is “always-already interpreted” (Guarino, 2009: 9), and interpretations will vary between individuals depending upon their socio-cultural context. Our society in the West is culturally plural, yet a phrase such as “the way we do things around here” implies an understanding of culture in an educational setting which requires staff to conform to a particular way of doing

things, not taking into account the cultural plurality external to its own context. Alternatively, if “the way we do things around here” is simply a reflection of pluralism, it begs the question how, amid conflicting truth claims and practices, management can harness such diversity to provide “the basis for action and decision-making in the absence of direct instruction”. On either horn of this dilemma, the issue for management is how, in an educational setting, each person can retain their own cultural heritage while simultaneously working in an institution with a clear decision-making facility.

To analyse this dilemma further, I will be drawing upon the conceptual tools of the postmodernist thinker Gianni Vattimo because, as a philosopher and social commentator, throughout his career he has taken the ‘Babel’-like character of late-modern society seriously (Vattimo, 1998: 82; Vattimo, 1999: 52). Vattimo sees late-modernity, a way of characterising the age in which we currently live, as ‘chaotic’ in the sense that the “European ideal of humanity has been revealed as one idea among others” (Vattimo, 1992: 4) due to factors such as the increasing role of the media, communications technology, and the post-colonial situation. Such chaos Vattimo regards as a possibility for emancipation (Vattimo, 1992: 4) in the form of the dissolution of strong structures, a notion I will look at in due course. Despite the variety intrinsic in Vattimo’s work, and multiple causes and disciplines into which Vattimo’s ideas have been brought, Vattimo’s ideas could be used more in educational research. Michael Peters devotes a chapter to Vattimo in *Poststructuralism, Politics and Education* (1996), focusing on the politics of the information society. Nevertheless, there are ways to draw upon Vattimo’s ideas in relation to other educational topics as well, such as curriculum development and ideas concerning the relation between thought and action (both of

which are beyond the scope of this paper). The purpose of this article is to see what the result of taking Vattimo seriously when managing the Babel-like plurality of cultures would be within an educational setting. After summarising Vattimian hermeneutics, I will outline implications of Vattimian hermeneutics in relation to managing cultural pluralism for leading models of management (Formal and Collegial), before investigating solutions to accord with Vattimian principles firstly in the Subjective Model of management, and, secondly, based upon ideas from an author who was an inspiration to Vattimo: Thomas Kuhn. In short, the argument will be towards regarding management structuring a subjective *habitus* oriented towards harmony, rather than controlling cultural conflict through legislation and rules, as the way forward, on Vattimian terms.

Vattimian hermeneutics versus an appeal to truth

Gianni Vattimo (b. 1936) is one of the most important philosophers living and working in Europe today. Vattimo studied in Turin under Luigi Pareyson, and Heidelberg, with Hans-Georg Gadamer supervising. As a result, Vattimo's philosophy very much reflects the proto-postmodernist influences of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Kuhn. Taking his cue from Heidegger, Vattimo is most interested in the history of Being as coextensive with the history of metaphysics in the West. For Vattimo, metaphysics is always violent because it silences questioning, reducing discourse back to first principles leaving no room for disagreement (Vattimo, 1999: 43). Unlike some of his

contemporaries, Vattimo does not think that it is possible to overcome metaphysics in some sort of dialectical sense because in order to do so one would have to start again, to create another ground; one cannot get out and over metaphysics without falling back into it. Similarly, Vattimo does not think one can appeal to some sort of Levinasian ‘Other’, any kind of transcendent principle, for he thinks that this would again be to fall back into metaphysics (Vattimo, 2002, 36-37). Therefore, all Vattimo sees is a history of Being as linguistic traces of tradition shaping and limiting the horizon in which we live, work and encounter the world (Vattimo, 1988: 120). One cannot get outside of history and one’s personal linguistic inheritance. Vattimo was a translator of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, and Vattimo emphasised that “Being, that could be understood, is language”; whereas Gadamer insisted that the commas existing in the original German be discarded when translated into Italian, Vattimo wished to keep them to emphasise that there is no Being outside language (Vattimo, 2010: 57). Therefore ontology for Vattimo is immanent, historical and linguistic. This position of Vattimo’s could be regarded as hermeneutical nihilism or an ‘ontology of actuality’: all there is after the death of God (the term Vattimo uses to refer to the end of objectivity, the culmination of metaphysics) is the play of forces (interpretations) that are de-centred and endlessly communication through contemporary technology.

Vattimo aimed at a *Verwindung*, a ‘twisting’/convalescence-alteration (Vattimo, 1988: 172-173), of existing structures, whether they are religious, political, or cultural in some other respect, rather than their total destruction. Total destruction of such structures is impossible as one cannot start again completely for we inherit the linguistic traces passed down to us culturally. Vattimo reminds us of Nietzsche’s dictum that we cannot get rid of God until we have got rid of grammar

(Vattimo, 1993: 2). In this sense Vattimo was also influenced by Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* ('being there'); one exists only in relation to the contingencies into which one happened to be born. What *Verwindung* entails in practice is not principally altering cultural content, but one's attitude towards one's own culture and those of others. The means by which cultural *Verwindung* takes place in an individual is through their coming to realise that, in Nietzschean terms, that the world is a fable (Vattimo, 1992), confronting nihilism head-on. Vattimo was convinced that Nietzsche and Heidegger had shown beyond doubt that "there are no facts, but only interpretations" (Vattimo, 1997: 2). The end of faith in the highest of all values was encapsulated in Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God (Nietzsche, 2001: 119-120). Heidegger, the other principal influential figure for Vattimo, annihilated Being by transforming it into value (Vattimo, 1988). Vattimo's assumption that Nietzsche and Heidegger had inescapably changed the way we look at questions of truth and culture may be, and has been, questioned (Guarino, 2009). However, a discussion of the validity of Vattimo's philosophical assumptions is beyond the scope of this present work. Therefore, what follows acts as corollaries of Vattimo's view for cultural conflict in an educational setting irrespective of his views' veracity.

Vattimo did not want hermeneutics to be reduced to "a generic philosophy of culture" (Vattimo, 1997: 6), but rather be seen as a "theory of truth" (Vattimo, 1997: 8) in the sense of truth being 'friendship', the fusing of horizons in dialogue, of listening to one another. Nevertheless, Vattimo's insights concerning truth have implications for understanding culture, especially cultures in competition with one another. One way cultural conflict in educational settings may be resolved is by appealing to the facts. This would appear to be the way in which conflict resolution in

educational contexts is heading, given that Davies (1999) was arguing that educational policy-making should be moving in this direction. On this view, in the context of British education, cultures informed by ‘research’ have privileged access to the ‘facts’ and can therefore dominate over those who cannot, will not be, or are not, as ‘informed’. One such example is the paper “Early Years: Getting on Well” by the British school inspector group Ofsted. This paper mentions that “Research shows that there is a direct connection between high quality early years provision and better intellectual, social and behavioural development” (Ofsted, 2007: 3). State sector schools are evaluated by agencies such as Ofsted in relation to how far each educational setting is successful in promoting the outcomes they believe the research shows should be pursued. Vattimo’s hermeneutical nihilism invalidates this approach to cultural conflict resolution because there are no facts, only interpretations. For Vattimo, one person in a culture clash cannot insist on the veracity and, therefore, general normativity of their culture over the other person’s by virtue of it corresponding to reality, that there is some research—whether it be quantitative or qualitative—which establishes it as a ‘fact’, for it is just this fact/value dichotomy Vattimo, following Nietzsche and Heidegger, wants not to collapse, but to eradicate.

Given that one cannot appeal to truth claims or its value-correlative, objectivity, in order to arbitrate between cultural stances, what did Vattimo say about the attitude one should have towards cultures, both one’s own and those of others? Vattimo distinguished between *pensiero forte* (strong thought) and *pensiero debole* (weak thought). The former refers to holding one’s beliefs, values and traditions—and therefore, one’s culture—as objective and absolute, reducing others’ cultures to one’s own, causing exclusionary violence to the ‘other’. *Pensiero forte* is reminiscent of metaphysics, it

is the interpreter acting as if the death of God has not happened. By contrast, *pensiero debole* is a way of holding one's views in accordance with the virtue of *caritas*, that is, "Charity", or "Love" (Vattimo, 2007: 41): one recognises the situatedness and provisional character of one's own views and tolerates, and learns from, other cultures through one's disposition. With nihilism, "The call is thus not for a society with *no* values but for a society without *supreme and exclusive* values. On this model, cultures are complex conversations among varying conceptions of the world. Such dialogue can, and must not, shift into a dogmatic clash between conflicting truths" (Vattimo & Zabala, 2002: 454). *Caritas* comes from Vattimo engagement with Christianity. Realising that hermeneutics (the philosophy of interpretation) cannot be proved or grounded with recourse either to transcendence or a sort of historical a priori, Vattimo turns to history. Vattimo tries to ground hermeneutics historically with reference to the West's Christian heritage. Using St. Paul's term '*kenosis*', usually used in the context of the incarnation of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11, Vattimo sees a tendency for weakening in the history of thought originating in the Christian message. In different places in his works Vattimo argues for this weakening in a variety of ways. At times Vattimo refers to the beginning of the book of Hebrews in which St. Paul states that the Lord speaks to his people in different ways, being archetypical of hermeneutical plurality (Vattimo, 1997: 48). In other places, Vattimo emphasises that *kenosis* involves the absolute and transcendent emptying itself into history (Vattimo, 2003: 35). Other times, Vattimo links the 'friendship' of the Lord emphasised in the new covenant with his people through Christ (John 15:15) leading to a collective subjective turn from external reality to the inner life of faith (Vattimo, 1999: 78 for John 15:15; Vattimo, 2002: 107 for the subjective turn). Loosely, Vattimo links these ideas to a process of secularisation, which is the

transition of this message of weakening through history, placing emphasis on figures such as Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, and Dilthey along the way. Seeing a parallel between the history of Being as an ontology of decline in Heidegger and the reduction of violence through religious categories in the work of the anthropologist René Girard, Vattimo sees *caritas* as the stimulus for secularisation “which does not culminate in ‘fully realized nothingness’” (Vattimo, 1999: 63). *Caritas* is the recognition of provisionality, of situatedness as nihilistic vocation for the weakening of Being. With the subjective turn inward, Vattimo thinks *caritas* can guide an indefinite weakening of strong structures through a weakened ‘categorical imperative’, that is, if one turns inwards to look into oneself in terms of realising the provisionality and situatedness of one’s own inherited tradition, one should listen to others ‘like you’ in terms of tradition (Vattimo, 2007: 42). Mutual listening will lead to a ‘fusion of horizons’ in which neither interlocutor remains unchanged through the genuine exchange.

Vattimo’s call for *caritas* is not a simple call for tolerance. While it is the case that Vattimo was interested in fostering tolerance (Guarino, 2009: 17-18), he was perceptive enough to realise that tolerance is more difficult where strong thought prevails. Not every cultural position, perhaps, is worthy of tolerance, especially where such a position leads to violence. Furthermore, not every cultural position promotes tolerance. Strong thought can prevent an attitude of tolerance and be intolerable. Examples given by Vattimo include the zeal of Crusaders or the “certainty” felt by the Nazi leadership (Vattimo, 2007b: 216). *Caritas* frees one from adoring truth (Vattimo, 2007b: 218), for it recognises our state as “heirs to a tradition of the weakening of the strong structures of Being in every field of experience” (Vattimo, 1997: 40). Where *caritas* is present within an individual, there

is recognition that there are no facts, but interpretations. Such recognition within an individual will make them more open to their fellow human being. The reasons for this openness are that individuals filled with *caritas* will not be adhering to strong structures which encourage violence. If one does not believe in the absolute truth of certain religious or political dictates, then violent dogmas associated with extremism are unlikely to be believed in and acted upon. Therefore, while *caritas* aims at tolerance as its manifestation, its attitudinal basis is a recognition of the dissolution of strong structures of Being due to the impossibility of a 'view from nowhere' to ascertain objective truth in the context of the irreducible plurality of interpretations within contemporary society. In other words, it should lead to one listening to the other.

In real terms, this approach to managing cultural pluralism would involve rejecting dogmatism, not only tolerating multiple approaches, but also learning from the other; a natural cultural convergence could take place over time if everybody was practising *caritas*. The key for management in this setting would not be to prescribe ways for dealing with cultural clashes, or put forward a party line which to which everybody should conform (a point to be expanded on in the next section) for attempts of this kind to resolve tension would be to control culture by legislation and rules. While controlling cultural currents using legislation and rules could work, in theory, the Vattimian way emphasises, instead, the changing of *habitus* (a socially defined subjective dispositional state). An ethically-sound *habitus*, on Vattimian terms, is one directed towards *caritas*, one which acknowledges the provisionality and relativity of one's own culture (viewing one's culture weakly), while simultaneously being open towards the other. How management can create this *habitus* in their

organisation is a moot point, and is one which shall be covered later when considering Vattimo's philosophy in the light of one of the key influences on Vattimo, the work of Thomas Kuhn.

There are then, two main aspects of Vattimo's thought for managing cultural pluralism which could have implications for managing cultural pluralism in an educational setting. The first is epistemological, the second is ethical. The epistemological aspects of Vattimo's thought for cultural clashes are concerned with the ideas that the world has become a fable due to the radical subjective perspectivism as advocated by Nietzsche: there are no facts, but only interpretations. The ethical aspects of Vattimo's thought follows on from the epistemological, and that is that strong structures should be not abolished, but twisted, weakened through the attitude of *caritas*. On this view, the reduction of violence, chiefly through the twisting of all metaphysical claims (broadly, all notions of truth), is an aim. Now it is time to see how these two implications of Vattimo's thought impact on current thinking on the theory of management in relation to cultural conflict.

The application of Vattimian hermeneutics to models of management

In this section I will be drawing upon Tony Bush's (2011) models of management to explore the implications of Vattimo's thought for managing cultural pluralism, for, to a significant extent, for Bush's models represent 'a comprehensive overview of the range of relevant theory' on aspects of management, according to Professor Jacky Lumby, as quoted on the back of the fourth edition of

Bush's *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (2011). The logical corollary of Vattimian hermeneutics for management is the Subjective model, the product of thinkers such as Thomas Greenfield and Ribbins et al. "Organizations are", says Bush summarising this model (Bush, 2011: 126), "social constructions in the sense that they emerge from the interaction of the participants. They are manifestations of the values and belief of individuals". Vattimo inherits the Heideggerian view of the subject as Dasein, that 'each confirmation or falsification of a proposition can occur only within the horizon of a prior opening', the latter dependent on the conditions into which one has been 'thrown' into the world (Vattimo, 1997: 14). These 'openings' constitute how, due to the circumstances into which one has been thrown, one interprets the world. From the angle of the other major thinker who has inspired Vattimo, Nietzsche, one could relate the Subjective model to Nietzschean perspectivism, that each individual has their own beliefs, values and way of seeing the world. For our purposes, the outcome is the same, epistemologically, in the sense that on both the Nietzschean and Heideggerian inheritances in Vattimian thought, there is no non-interpreted, value-neutral world, but a play of interpretations which relate to one another in the social sphere. Placing emphasis on the individual rather than the institution, on the Subjective model reality is not defined by the latter but by each example of the former: "There are...as many realities as there are teachers" (Ribbins et al, 1981: 170; quoted in Bush, 2011: 128). Where 'reality' is defined at the level of the individual (the 'teacher'), either in terms of perspective or as a prior 'opening', an educational institution is a manifold of these realities.

The issues with the Subjective model are twofold. Firstly, while harmonious interaction may exist at the surface so long as matters remain routine (Wallace, 1999), there could exist little

common ground to draw upon when the extraordinary occurs. In essence, the subjective model is descriptive of the differences between staff members in an educational organisation. The model goes further by stating that this is all the organisation is. However, the likely outcome of using this model in an educational setting would be a significant culture clash; there is no arbitrating culture or mechanism to settle a dispute between two or more subjects. Nevertheless, there are organisations that do work despite, or perhaps because, of these cultural differences between individuals. The Subjective model, then, does not tell the whole story of managing cultural pluralism, and this leads back to Vattimo. While the Subjective model is the logically corollary of Vattimian hermeneutics, it does not reflect the ethical dimension of his thought, that of *caritas*. Vattimo was not content merely to restate the Nietzschean-Heideggerian tradition of the world becoming a fable to the point of radical subjectivity (Nietzsche's 'perspectivism'), but to try to reduce the inter-subjective violence which could be the outcome of this nihilistic position.

Away from the Subjective model is the Cultural model, where an educational organisation is kept together as a working body through cultural harmony, for Cultural models 'assume that beliefs, values and ideology are at the heart of organisations' (Bush, 2011: 170). The 'sharing of values and beliefs is one way in which cultural models may be distinguished from the subjective perspective' (Bush, 2011: 174). Bush notes that the subjective theorists 'stress the values of individuals', by contrast, 'the cultural model focuses on the notion of a single or dominant culture in organisations' (Bush, 2011: 174-175), even if—crucially—"individual values' are not "always in harmony with one another" (Bush, 2011: 175). The Cultural model avoids homogenisation, allowing for a plurality of interpretations, but is kept together in some way which goes beyond reducing the educational

institution to a plurality of interpretations, avoid both ‘formalism’ (which would reduce individuality) and ‘cultural relativism’ (which would prevent unity) (Vattimo, 1992: 117). If the Subjective model describes the hermeneutical aspect of Vattimian epistemology, and the Cultural model represents its ethical centre, what can Vattimo tell us about how one can authentically—i.e., within the limits of his thought—move from the former to the latter? In other words, how can one accept the implications of radical subjectivity, of, for instance, the Nietzschean perspectivism as understood in Vattimian hermeneutics, yet go beyond the Subjective model’s bald statement that an educational organisation is but the wielding together of the manifold of subjectivities and move instead in the direction of forming cultural harmony out of this manifold?

To explore possibilities of moving from the description (Subjective model) to the ethical centre (Cultural model), other models put forward by Bush (2011) will be analysed in light of the aspects of Vattimian hermeneutics we have considered. The first of these is creating cultural harmony on rational grounds. This approach is associated most with the Formal model of management. The Formal Model’s characteristics include, among others, an emphasis upon systems, official structure, hierarchy (with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)/Head taking key decisions), goal-seeking, rationality, authority and accountability. ‘Rationality’ is at the heart of the Formal Model, as put forward by Bush. On this view, the beliefs and values decided upon by those with authority (the SLT, for instance) which, together, form the culture of the educational setting are normative because of their rationality. However, it has already been shown that according to Vattimian hermeneutics the idea of there being a single, objective rationality is no longer tenable because the world has become a fable. It would be wrong to conflate ‘truth’ with ‘rationality’.

However, ‘truth’ and ‘rationality’ have been conflated in the past and still today, with the consequence- and possibly the intention- of excluding other belief claims. In his attempt at a *Verwindung* of metaphysics, the primary target was to ‘twist’ objective truth claims to prevent such exclusion. For this to take place, one would need to use one’s reason to twist these truth claims in a way to weaken them. Therefore it would be incorrect to regard truth and reason as synonyms. Nevertheless, where rationality is put forward in a strong way, in cases in which reason is elevated to a position which is objectifying and exclusionary, Vattimian hermeneutics would rule it out. Historical examples of this tendency would be Logical Positivism and, more recently, the writings of Richard Dawkins on religion. In both cases reason was put forward as the touchstone of truth to the exclusion of other beliefs. Logical Positivism, a view held by the Vienna Circle under Moritz Schlick in the early decades of the twentieth century, thought reason could decide what is meaningful based on truth in conformity to its dictates whereby a proposition had meaning if it were analytic (such as ‘ $2+2=4$ ’) or synthetic (‘The headmaster is in his study’). Propositions which are neither analytic nor synthetic are meaningless because of their lack of truth value on these rational grounds. Similarly, Dawkins rejects not only religion (Dawkins, 2006), but also other forms of belief such as alternative medicine (Dawkins, 2007) by holding reason in a ‘strong’ way in the Vattimian sense of the term. Analogously, where rationality is used as a method in an objectifying way, through the Formal Model or by any other model of management, to impose a cultural consensus to the exclusion of other beliefs, it is being used in a way which is counter to *caritas*. The corollary of this insight for cultural imposition on a Formal Model of management is that their dictates are reduced to

voluntarism, with no more rational purchase than those of the lowliest status in the educational setting.

Moving away from rationality and the Formal model in the search for that which could create cultural harmony in an educational setting on Vattimian terms, there are two further models which can, in certain lights, be seen as two sides of the same coin. These are the Political and Collegial models (Bush, 2011). Collegial models “determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus” (Bush, 2011: 72). Power is distributed, and educational organisations run on the Collegial model are more democratic than the formal model (Bush, 2011: 75). The Political model “assume[s] that in organisations, policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining. Interest groups develop...Conflict is viewed as a natural phenomenon” (Bush, 2011: 99). Politics is a metaphor for the way in which educational organisations’ decisions on this model run like local or national government is perceived to run, that interest-groups, individuals and cliques compete to gain power to dominate scarce resources. The Political model usually sees conflict as inevitable within educational organisations (Bush, 2011: 103), due to factors such as personal and professional goals, values, and cultural clashes. By contrast, the Collegial model has “a strong harmony bias” (Bush, 2011: 103). In both models, though, there is an emphasis on negotiation, whether to create harmony (the collegial model) or to ensure, in a broadly utilitarian fashion, as many people within the educational setting get as much as they want. Clearly insofar as the Collegial model involves negotiation and listening, it is a model in line with the tendency for weakening, *caritas*, Vattimo regards as central to a postmodern ethic. However, where strong claims are put forward, either political ideologies or dogmatic views in general, these would

be alienating in terms of forming consensus on the Collegial model, or negation on the Political model. Those views which are put forward as true assume the metaphysical categories associated with truth. Vattimo interprets Heidegger as stating that metaphysical categories reduce Being to that which is measurable and manipulable (Vattimo, 1999: 31), the act of ‘enframing’. Where ideology strongly held becomes part of an admixture of a Collegial cultural statement (if it is possible) or is bargained with, Vattimo would argue that one is opening the door to the objectification of others. If somebody within an educational setting thought of staff in terms of their roles (“They are the head of department”), this would be an example of ‘enframing’. Enframing objectifies people, which “forces the “presencing” (*anwesen*) of entities into [their] metaphysical “stamp or mould” (*prägung*)” (Peters, 2002: 129). On ethical grounds, Vattimo follows Heidegger in disapproving for the most part of any strong, secure structure (Vattimo, 1999: 31).

Of course, negotiation (on the Political model) or the creation of cultural harmony (on the Collegial model) may yet work on Vattimian grounds. This would rely upon strong claims not being placed into the admixture of cultural claims out of which the negotiation/harmony creating is fashioned in the first place, that is, at the hiring stage. One possible way to do this would be to make a school policy not to hire those affiliated with certain extremist groups. The government in the United Kingdom has stated that teachers supporting the British National Party (BNP) should be allowed to teach in British schools, but should be banned if they promote racism (Harker, 2010), as has recently happened to a teacher in County Durham, England (JournalLive, 2010). Employment law, then, would militate against a straightforward ban of certain individuals entering the educational organisation. Therefore, a way to get around this problem is to build in particular personality traits

into the selection criteria. Interviewing alone is relied upon to determine character and beliefs as people may pretend to be other than they are. However, a more reliable method can be found in psychometric testing which, in conjunction with the interviews, could be used to discern the character of the individual who wishes to become a member of the particular educational organisation, such as whether they hold beliefs dogmatically, or are flexible. Psychometric testing is common in Britain for a vast range of careers, but not usually for educational positions. If ‘strong claims’ are omitted from the pool of cultural beliefs, values and practices, it would either be easier to create a cultural consensus collegially (if a Collegial-Cultural model is adopted), or it would be an environment where tolerance is more likely to be achieved through *caritas* if those within an organisation did not explicitly adopt a cultural model (more along the Political-Subjective axis).

Logically, there is the possibility of a person passing the interview and psychometric test and yet revealing, or developing, ‘strong thought’ tendencies. As Vattimo’s thought aims at the reduction of violence, an ethical implication of his thought in an educational setting would be to take steps to manage this violence, much in the same way that the aforementioned screening aimed to prevent it. How, then, can *caritas* be encouraged? On this, Vattimo himself says little outside of his primarily theoretical analysis of *kenosis* as secularisation. However, insights can be gained from drawing upon the ideas of a thinker who Vattimo interpreted in relativistic terms, who greatly influenced his own thought: Thomas Kuhn.

Paradigms: the Disciplinary Matrix and Exemplars

A possible solution for how to ensure that those within an educational organisation think and act in accordance with *caritas* can be found by drawing upon the ideas of an author who inspired Vattimo: the philosopher and historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, in particular his notion of paradigms as outlined through his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, henceforth *SSR* (Kuhn, 1996). Hermeneutically, the fundamental Kuhnian insight is similar to Vattimo's: there is no theory-neutral space, that every worldview is an interpretation, not of an objective understanding of reality, but a stand-alone, relative, incommensurable set of beliefs and values. Kuhn called these worldviews 'paradigms'. However, in the second edition of *SSR*, Kuhn included a Postscript to clarify what he meant by the term 'paradigm', in response to Margaret Masterman's (1970) critique of the diffuse meaning of the concept used by Kuhn in his first edition. Kuhn divided the paradigm concept into 'exemplars' and the 'Disciplinary Matrix', with the former a subsection of the latter. The Disciplinary Matrix is "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn, 1996: 175). While individuals share a deep commonality, an embedded culture, the Disciplinary Matrix allows room for variation "affected by the features of individual personality" (Kuhn, 1996: 185). Kuhn provides the example of how while some nineteenth-century chemists used aspects of Dalton's atomic theory, such as "constant proportion, multiple proportion, and combining weights" (Kuhn, 1996: 180), they disagreed about the existence of atoms (Kuhn, 1996: 180). On the notion of the Disciplinary Matrix, unity does not then require uniformity.

The success of the model of the Disciplinary Matrix nonetheless posits prior agreement on fundamentals even if variation is permitted at a level nearer the surface. How is this culture to be embedded? Here one draws upon one particular aspect of the Disciplinary Matrix: the ‘exemplar’. For Kuhn, exemplars are puzzles which create “the community fine structure of science” (Kuhn, 1996: 187), the solving of which inculcate the principles, practices and values which pertain to the paradigm in question. In the context of science (examples for schools will be outlined below), the conical pendulum, Keplerian orbits, and the inclined plane are exemplars of various paradigms. Although information is given in propositional form (“X is the case”), this is not presented in a form consistent, in Vattimian terms, with *pensiero forte*. Were this the case, then to a potential initiate (somebody wishing to join the community), such strong truth claims could be off-putting, especially if the beliefs put forward as true conflict with aspects of their culture. By contrast, although information of a propositional kind is put forward by the community, it is only to guide and inform the initiate in their engagement with the exemplar. A belief about motion may be given to a physics initiate before, or during, their engagement with the inclined plane. Mere statement of belief is not sufficient to acculturate the initiate to the community, but the performative participation in the exemplar inculcates the worldview meaning that there is a cultural transference, that they are somehow part of the community.

A way of understanding how Kuhnian exemplars can inculcate the *habitus* of the educational institution towards *caritas* is through a change of discourse. Discourses “are not about objects...they constitute them” (Foucault, 1974: 49) and, crucially, through a set of practices. “Meanings arise”, Ball writes, “not from language but from institutional practices, from power relations” (Ball, 1990:

2). The efficacy of the exemplar is greater than policy and prescription. An analogy can be drawn between developments in curriculum and the proposed shift towards a performative form of management. A 'prescriptive' curriculum is seen as both less meaningful and more prone to restriction and the perpetuation of power relations in educational institutions (and society more broadly) (Goodson, 2008). A curriculum delivered top-down will effect a power relation which is Marxist in the way in which one interprets the power, that is, repressive and restrictive. Similarly with management, attempts to resolve cultural conflict in a prescriptive way could be less meaningful and interpreted in a way which is heavy-handed. Shaping the mindset of agents within an educational setting through a change in discourse, of the language and practices of the institution, will let the power flow from the bottom up in a way more reminiscent of the type of power described by Foucault, a power which will shape others in the institution and beyond. Arguably, this is not a totally faithful representation of both discourse and Foucault's notion of power, for discourses are usually broader than those restricted to a particular educational setting, and 'power' on Foucault's view is not something consciously directed. Nevertheless, I chose 'discourse' rather than merely 'culture' to highlight the power of Kuhnian exemplars to shape subjects through performance, through the practice of *caritas* in order to inculcate the virtue in others.

While, structurally, Kuhn's notion of exemplars helps explain how *caritas*, at the centre of the Disciplinary Matrix and therefore the core meaning of the exemplar, can be used by management to shape an institution in relation to cultural harmony, it remains to be seen how Kuhn's notion of exemplars works out concretely. In other words, how can management of an educational institution create the *habitus* required for its members to have the attitude of *caritas*, of holding their cultural

beliefs and values weakly (and therefore being more likely to get along with one another)? The Disciplinary Matrix has a fundamental cultural core of beliefs, values, and practices which is shared among the individuals who work in the educational institution. Drawing upon Vattimo, that core should be *caritas* itself. *Caritas* as the cultural core of an educational institution, while it has to be put in a propositional way to inform lived experiences, is best exemplified through performance. Among staff members, this *habitus* could be inculcated through joint activities which include the initiate but involve cooperation where *caritas* is demonstrated in a meaningful way. Bush (Bush, 2011: 176-177) states that ‘Organisation culture assumes the existence of heroes and heroines’, where, translating into Kuhnian terms, these heroes are exemplars of *caritas*. Who one would pick would depend on one’s situation, but it would have to be somebody who brought people together through thoughtful moderation. For instance, meetings where decisions are made are more realistic than contrived teambuilding exercises and therefore are a better candidate for inculcating the *habitus* of *caritas*. A weakness of this approach is that while *caritas* as the core of an institution’s culture is certainly a noble idea, how can this be exemplified and made into a reality? To have a meeting which exemplifies *caritas*, one must already have an attitude of *caritas* in place among influential members of the staff; this argument is circular. While the idea has been put forward of showing initiates *caritas* in action, how does one build an institution where such *caritas* can be shown to initiates? Charity can be called for and demonstrated by some individuals, but a clear message does not always become internalised. Part of the problem is that, as mentioned near the beginning of this paper, educational institutions do not exist in a vacuum; it is hard to insist upon *caritas* when the outside world is seldom charitable. One way of exemplifying *caritas* can be taken from my own experience as an

Religious Studies teacher, and that is, in a lesson, of removing the idea that there are some points of view which cannot be discussed. Refusing to discuss a viewpoint is instantly divisive and can also give the impression that it is 'true' and unchallengeable. Building up counter-arguments against a viewpoint weakens its sense of 'absolutism', but does not disapprove, of it, even if such counter-arguments themselves must be acknowledged to be coming from a particular standpoint. Pupils have mentioned to me in my Religious Studies lessons that they have been taught in Primary school in a way that events such as the Flood described in Genesis happened, i.e., were 'true'; that the story could be an interpretation was not even discussed. By opening up the story to different interpretations it 'weakened' the story in terms of its aura of 'absolute truth', but brought more people together in the lesson by not creating an instant barrier between the 'atheists' and the 'theists'. Transferring this exemplified *caritas* from the classroom to the staffroom and staff meetings could be a way of putting the value at the centre of the school. This is but one possible way of changing the attitude of the school at the level of mindset, of *habitus*.

Potential objections to a Vattimian Subjective Model and how they might be overcome

An objection that could be brought against following through the implications of Vattimian hermeneutics for managing cultural pluralism is that it could seem as dogmatic as the 'strong thought' it opposes. Vattimo himself posed the question whether with promoting *caritas* 'will this not

be simply to uncover another eternal ‘metaphysical’ value to replace that of truth?’ (Vattimo, 1997: 40). Nevertheless, Vattimo answered this question himself in the negative, for *caritas* ‘is not really ultimate and does not possess the peremptoriness of the metaphysical principle’ (Vattimo, 1999: 64). There cannot be any attempt, Vattimo thinks, to pronounce definitively on Being (Guarino, 2009: 30).

If Vattimo himself recognises that his hermeneutical thoughts are collectively but an interpretation of reality, why should anybody share his interpretation, let alone act upon it? Surely somebody else could interpret reality differently? ‘That each experience of truth is an experience of interpretation’, Vattimo wrote, “is almost a truism in today’s culture” (Vattimo, 1997: 5). For Vattimo, Nietzsche and Heidegger had not only changed philosophy, but also the cultural landscape. Against Vattimo, there are statements to the contrary which suggest that absolute truth is alive and well in the hearts and minds of people in the West today, most notably in extremists of various causes. Nevertheless, Vattimo thought his interpretation of the play of interpretations in the West today, with its emphasis on weakening of Being, was “the most reasonable and the strongest precisely from our point of view in late modernity” (Vattimo, 1999: 68-69). The word ‘our’ here is important, for the reasonable nature of Vattimo’s interpretation comes not from its truth—a notion he would reject—but because it makes sense of the pluralism of the late modern, a place where there is an absence of the epistemically neutral. To avoid conflict, weakening strong structures appears reasonable. Those individuals who insist upon the veracity of their claims, on this view, have not take the condition of the late modern seriously enough.

A more serious possible objection stems from attempts to follow through the implications of Vattimo's thought in an educational context. Where Vattimo built on the thoughts of Heidegger on the ethical issues concerning enframing, using psychometric testing to determine whether a potential initiate into the educational organisation has tendencies towards holding beliefs in a dogmatic fashion appears to be guilty of doing just that, measuring an individual and objectifying them. Moreover, the separation of humans into 'strong' and 'weak' thinkers would require greater clarity in terms of the division, if the division itself is palatable in the first place. Dividing humans in this way could cause greater conflict than it would solve. Rather than divide in this way, encouraging greater *caritas* through a collective weakening—the *kenosis* continuing in the late modern, as envisaged by Vattimo—may be more preferable. However, in dealing with the hypothetical educational organisation, the context is microcosmic and only deals with wider society by extension. As the question here concerns with implications of Vattimian thought for educational management of cultural clashes in an educational setting, it is more preferable for the greater good of the institution to take on members of staff who are flexible, realise that the way they see the world is not factual but an interpretation, and are willing to compromise where appropriate.

Conclusion

Individuals who work in educational settings do not first encounter culture when they join organisations. Rather, they bring to work their own beliefs, values and traditions with them from an increasingly diverse set of backgrounds. Organisations commonly have their own formal culture running parallel to plural cultures held by its individual members. The potential for cultural conflict, then, is significant. Gianni Vattimo is contemporary postmodern philosopher who is interested in the reduction of violence in the Babel-like plurality of late modernity. It has been to him that I have looked for implications of his thought for managing cultural pluralism in an educational setting.

I have shown that there are two significant aspects of Vattimian hermeneutics that have implications for managing cultural pluralism in an educational setting: epistemology and ethics. The two are very much interlinked. Epistemologically, Vattimo follows Nietzsche's line that there are no facts, only interpretations, and this itself is an interpretation which Vattimo regards as being the best interpretation of the late-modern (or postmodern) condition given the inescapable plurality of views which have emerged during the information age through the end of colonialism and the rise of communications technology and the media. Reality is interpreted, which could be understood on a Nietzschean 'perspectivist' view, and/or through the Heideggerian notion of Dasein interpreting the world through an 'opening' according to the way in which they have been 'thrown' into the world. Where one does not realise that there are no facts, only interpretations, strong structures prevail, leading individuals or groups to push humans into metaphysical categories, causing exclusionary

violence. Vattimo, instead, thinks we have a responsibility to create a hermeneutical ethic based on *caritas*, which is the reduction of exclusionary violence through the weakening of strong structures; while everybody has to have a way in which they interpret the world, it is better to hold it ‘weakly’ to avoid a return to metaphysics.

An implication of Vattimian hermeneutics for managing cultural pluralism in an educational setting is that it moves beyond a Subjective model of management to one which is Cultural. Whereas the former acknowledges the epistemological side of Vattimian thought, of plurality, there is nothing which holds the educational setting together, which lacks emphasis on *caritas*. By contrast, the Cultural model acknowledges plurality, but places culture as that which can unite the educational setting. The implications for how this can be achieved in accordance with Vattimian hermeneutics are interesting. The first implication of Vattimian hermeneutics for managing cultural pluralism is that one cannot appeal to rationality, either to create and/or uphold a culture or to arbitrate between cultures. Rationality, where it is held ‘strongly’ (appeal to ‘facts’, ‘truth’) ignores how the world is always interpreted. Approaches to educational management outlined by Bush (2011) that are based principally around rationality in this strong sense, such as the Formal model (and possibly the Collegial) would not be the optimal way of managing cultural pluralism on Vattimian grounds. Secondly, another implication would be the lack of wanting ‘strong’ claims within either a blend to create a shared culture (on the Collegial model of management) or of a bargain pertaining to cultural issues (on the Political model of management). Such strong claims are exclusionary for they assume truth as a metaphysical category which objectifies humans within that category, which Vattimo rules out on the same grounds as Heidegger did before him. A solution would be to prevent those who

hold their cultures so ‘strongly’ being admitted to the staff in an educational institution in the first place, through the recruitment process. However, this method is not infallible both because it can appear as exclusionary as that to which it opposes and also due to the reality that recruitment processes do not always reveal a person’s character. Therefore, something more is required actively within the school to promote weak thought, *caritas*, and the reduction of exclusionary violence through culture clashes.

The ideal of the Cultural model can be realised on Vattimian grounds if *caritas* itself is the ‘culture’ of the school in the sense that it is an approach to the claims of one-another in terms of weakening, a disposition towards claims which is non-absolute, flexible, and respectfully listening and questioning. This is more active than ‘tolerance’. To draw upon Sfard’s (1998) distinction between ‘acquisition’ and ‘participation’ metaphors for learning, *caritas* is not merely tolerance which can be acquired and put on the shelf, like a training manual. Instead, it is an active disposition, a *habitus*, which remains at the heart of the educational setting as that which has been instilled in initiates (if they were not already so disposed) through exemplars, to borrow from Kuhn, not only during training, but also through the life of the educational setting more broadly.

REFERENCES

- BALL, S. J., 1987. *THE MICRO-POLITICS OF THE SCHOOL: TOWARDS A THEORY OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATION*. LONDON: METHUEN.
- BALL, S. J., ED., 1990. *FOUCAULT AND EDUCATION: DISCIPLINES AND KNOWLEDGE*. LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE.
- BLASE, J. & ANDERSON, G. L., 1995. *THE MICROPOLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: FROM CONTROL TO EMPOWERMENT*. NEW YORK: TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS.
- BUSH, T. & MIDDLEWOOD, D., 2005. *LEADING AND MANAGING PEOPLE IN EDUCATION*. LONDON: SAGE.
- BUSH, T., 2011. *THEORIES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT*. LONDON: SAGE; FOURTH EDITION.
- DAVIES, P., 1999. WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED EDUCATION? *BRITISH JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES*, 47(2), PP. 108-121.
- DAWKINS, R., 2006. *THE GOD DELUSION*. LONDON: BLACK SWAN.
- DAWKINS, R., 2007. *THE ENEMIES OF REASON*. TV PROGRAMME IN TWO PARTS.
- DIMMOCK, C. & WALKER, A., 2002. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN CONTEXT – SOCIETAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES. IN: T. BUSH & T. L. BELL, EDS., *THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT*. LONDON: SAGE, PP. 70-85.

FOSKETT, N. & LUMBY, J., 2003. *LEADING AND MANAGING EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS*. LONDON: PAUL CHAPMAN.

FOUCAULT, M., 1974. *THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE*. LONDON: TAVISTOCK.

GOLEMAN, D., 1998. *WORKING WITH THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE*. LONDON: BLOOMSBURY.

GOODSON, I., 2008. SCHOOLING, CURRICULUM, NARRATIVE AND THE SOCIAL FUTURE. IN C. SUGRUE, ED., *THE FUTURE OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES*. LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, PP. 123-135.

HARKER, J., 2010. OFFICIAL: IT'S FINE FOR RACISTS TO TEACH. *THE GUARDIAN*.
[HTTP://WWW.GUARDIAN.CO.UK/COMMENTISFREE/2010/MAR/13/BNP-RACISTS-TEACH-CLASSROOM](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/13/bnp-racists-teach-classroom)
ACCESSED 29/12/13.

GUARINO, T., 2009. *VATTIMO AND THEOLOGY*. LONDON: T&T CLARK INTERNATIONAL.

JOURNALLIVE, 2010. [HTTP://WWW.JOURNALLIVE.CO.UK/NORTH-EAST-NEWS/TODAYS-NEWS/2010/03/06/NEW-BLOW-FOR-BNP-TEACHER-ADAM-WALKER-61634-25973148/](http://www.journallive.co.uk/north-east-news/todays-news/2010/03/06/new-blow-for-bnp-teacher-adam-walker-61634-25973148/) ACCESSED 29/12/13.

KUHN, T., 1996. *THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS*. CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS; THIRD EDITION.

LUMBY, J., & COLEMAN, M., 2007. *LEADERSHIP AND DIVERSITY: CHALLENGING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION*. LONDON: SAGE.

MASTERMAN, M., 1970. THE NATURE OF A PARADIGM. IN: I. LAKATOS & A. MUSGRAVE, EDS., *CRITICISM AND THE GROWTH OF KNOWLEDGE, PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL*

COLLOQUIUM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE, VOL. 4. CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, PP. 59-89.

NAGEL, T., 1986. *THE VIEW FROM NOWHERE.* OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

NIETZSCHE, F., 2001. *THE GAY SCIENCE.* J. NAUCKHOFF, TRANS. CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

OFSTED, 2007. EARLY YEARS: GETTING ON WELL.

[HTTP://WWW.OFSTED.GOV.UK/RESOURCES/EARLY-YEARS-GETTING-WELL](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/early-years-getting-well) ACCESSED: 29/12/13.

PETERS, M., 1996. *POSTSTRUCTURALISM, POLITICS AND EDUCATION.* WESTPORT, CONN. AND LONDON: BERGIN AND GARVEY.

PETERS, M., 2002. *HEIDEGGER, EDUCATION AND MODERNITY.* OXFORD: ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD.

SFARD, A., 1998. ON TWO METAPHORS FOR LEARNING AND THE DANGERS OF CHOOSING JUST ONE. *EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER*, 27(2), PP. 4-13.

VATTIMO, G., 1988. *THE END OF MODERNITY: NIHILISM AND HERMENEUTICS IN POST-MODERN CULTURE.* J. R. SNYDER, TRANS. AND INTRO. CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G., 1992. *THE TRANSPARENT SOCIETY.* D. WEBB, TRANS. CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G., 1993. *THE ADVENTURE OF DIFFERENCE.* C. BLAMIRE & T. HARRISON, TRANS. BALTIMORE: THE JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G., 1997. *BEYOND INTERPRETATION.* D. WEBB, TRANS. CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G., 1998. THE TRACE OF THE TRACE. IN: J. DERRIDA & G. VATTIMO, EDS., *RELIGION*. OXFORD: BLACKWELL, PP. 79-94.

VATTIMO, G., 1999. *BELIEF*. L. D'ISANTO & D. WEBB, TRANS. STANFORD, CALIFORNIA: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1999.

VATTIMO, G., 2002. *AFTER CHRISTIANITY*. L. D'ISANTO, TRANS. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G., 2003. AFTER ONTO-THEOLOGY: PHILOSOPHY BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION. IN: M. WRATHALL, ED., *RELIGION AFTER METAPHYSICS*. CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, PP. 29-36.

VATTIMO, G., 2007. TOWARD A NONRELIGIOUS CHRISTIANITY. IN: J. W. ROBBINS, ED., *AFTER THE DEATH OF GOD*. NEW YORK AND CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, PP. 27-46.

VATTIMO, G., 2007B. A DICTATORSHIP OF RELATIVISM? R. VALGENTI, TRANS., *COMMON KNOWLEDGE*, 13, PP. 214-218.

VATTIMO, G., 2010. *THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PHILOSOPHER*. W. MCCUAIG, TRANS. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS.

VATTIMO, G. & ZABALA, S., 2002. "WEAK THOUGHT" AND THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE. *COMMON KNOWLEDGE*, 8(3), PP. 454-463.

WALLACE, M., 1999. COMBINING CULTURAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES—THE BEST OF BOTH CONCEPTUAL WORLDS? IN: T. BUSH, L. BELL, R. BOLAM, R. GLATTER, & P. RIBBINS,

EDS., *EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: REDEFINING THEORY, POLICY, AND PRACTICE*. LONDON:
PCP, pp. 129-141.