

MIRA MILADINOVIĆ ZALAZNIK – DEAN KOMEL
(Eds. | Hrsg.)

EUROPE AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONTEMPORARY WORLD
100 Years after the Great War

EUROPA AN DEN SCHEIDEWEGEN DER GEGENWÄRTIGEN WELT
100 Jahre nach dem Großen Krieg



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Europe at the Crossroads of Contemporary World
Europa an den Scheidewegen der gegenwärtigen Welt

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Learning toward Understanding the Tradition that We Are

Abstract: Hermeneutics as the art of being in the world promotes an interpretive approach to the phenomenon of education and educational processes. Understanding hermeneutics as an educational experience opens new paths to the reinterpretation of hermeneutics and its potential impact on education. The risk of education is a challenge and an outstanding experience that can change our educational practice.

Keywords: hermeneutics of education, phronetic education, risk, unpredictability, poetic discourse¹

In the *Statesman*, 268 d, Plato addresses the need for being flexible whenever we engage the Other in a conversation: “πάλιν τοίνυν ἐξ ἄλλης ἀρχῆς δεῖ καθ’ ἑτέραν ὁδὸν πορευθῆναί τινα.” “Therefore, we must begin again from a new starting point and travel by a different road.”² Thus, taking a different road, ἕτερος ὁδός, becomes a mode of hermeneutic thinking which acknowledges that everything can be seen differently, and that, in fact, “we understand in a differ-

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- 1 This paper is a revised and extended version of a paper published in Polish: “Ryzyko edukacji: życiowe wyzwanie,” in *Ryzyko jako warunek rozwoju: Transformatywne aspekty hermeneutyki edukacji*, ed. Klaudia Węc and Andrzej Wierciński (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2016), 415–29. The author is grateful to the publisher for permission to reuse the copyrighted material for this publication.
 - 2 “VISITOR: Then we must travel some other route, starting from another point.” Plato, “Statesman,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 1997), 310.

ent way, if we understand at all.”³ To understand what wants to be understood, we need to recognize that we cannot escape from the past: The salvific turn to the past allows for a deeper understanding of the “tradition that we are.”⁴ The necessity for, and the productivity of, tradition (*Überlieferung*) and language (*Sprache*) for human thinking disclose the essential mode of understanding as *the* way of being a human being in the world. The hermeneutic call for our attentiveness and responsiveness to the “tradition that we are” inspires us to see (un-cover) things in their *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Learning is looking “beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.”⁵ We learn always differently, if we learn at all.

Understanding ourselves means that we understand ourselves as “the tradition that we are.” We do not possess the tools for accessing this understanding, not because we cannot arrange for some means to achieve this purpose, but because such tools are neither possible nor, in fact, desirable. Rather, when we understand ourselves, today, as having arrived at some crossroads, we need to thematize what it means to us, and for us, to stand at these crossroads. Instead of tools, we need a readiness for taking on and experiencing new experiences. As Gadamer says, an experienced person is not someone who has accumulated the greatest number of experiences, but someone who is genuinely ready for a new experience:

The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experiences but is also open *to* new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call “being experienced,” does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone

3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 296 (italics omitted).

4 *Ibid.*, 363.

5 *Ibid.*, 304.

who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.⁶

If we understand that the task we have before us at the crossroads is to untangle a cultural and educational problem, then we need to thematize what culture and education mean for us. When we speak of the mortal threat of a general political impasse in our time, we might indeed be well advised to turn back to Heidegger and the old threats of the Cold War that were leading us toward nuclear annihilation. Heidegger was unequivocal about the cultural, political, educational, and social situation of that time. The greatest danger he sensed in those times, lay in the calculative way in which we live our lives. In *Gelassenheit*, where he criticizes instrumental rationality, he makes a distinction between contemplative thinking (*besinnliches Denken*), which gives sense to being and action, and calculative thinking (*berechnendes Denken*), which is, technically, an exploitation of the knowledge we possess. This distinction becomes fundamental for the understanding of human existence.⁷ The modern human being avoids

6 Ibid., 350. “If it is characteristic of every phase of the process of experience that the experienced person acquires a new openness to new experiences, this is certainly true of the idea of being perfectly experienced. It does not mean that experience has ceased and a higher form of knowledge is reached (Hegel), but that for the first time experience fully and truly is. In it all dogmatism, which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier. Experience teaches us to acknowledge the real. The genuine result of experience, then—as of all desire to know—is to know what is. [...] Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. [...] Genuine experience is experience of one’s own historicity. Our discussion of the concept of experience thus arrives at a conclusion that is of considerable importance to our inquiry into the nature of historically effected consciousness.” Ibid., 351.

7 Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 46.

thinking by following safe paths with his/her thinking, without noticing that these do not engage anyone's thinking. On the contrary, absorbed in their calculation, people are fascinated by the fact that their instrumental, technical thinking is easily verifiable and brings them, in consequence, to tangible benefits very quickly. Heidegger draws attention to the fact that the human being is his/her own greatest enemy. Calculative thinking alienates a human being from himself/herself and obscures one's self-understanding.⁸ The drama of alienation is magnified by the fact that we live in a world for which instrumental rationality, effectiveness in action, and social verification have become the decisive aspects of valuing human activity. Yet, distancing oneself from the world and its expectations does not mean, in itself, a (recommended) withdrawal from all activity; it is not an escape *from* the world, but a meditative involvement *in* the matters of the world.⁹

Heidegger also reminds us that an ability to remain at a distance to oneself, to others, to things, and to the world, needs to be accompanied by an openness to mystery. Reflection on oneself and the world, the development of contemplative thinking, skepticism toward instrumental rationality, and the acceptance of radical responsibility for one's integral development characterize the human being who is conscious of his/her own human condition. The *conditio humana* is the condition of a human being rooted in the world, i.e., a human being who poses questions about himself/herself and others, and who does not give in to stagnation and self-satisfaction due to having achieved successes, but who asks creatively, constantly, and in a new way the question regarding one's mode of being. With that we understand an integrally developing existence within the horizons of the truth of struggling for one's life as a life struggle and concrete experience.

8 Cf. Gary B. Madison, *On Suffering: Philosophical Reflections on What it Means to be Human* (Hamilton: Les Érables Publishing/McMaster Innovation Press, 2009).

9 Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

The Risks of Education: A Lifetime Challenge

The world (*Umwelt*), which is the environment of one's life, is the source of being exposed to having to live through constant challenges. It is the challenge (*Herausforderung*) to be ready to give an answer (*re-spondere*), to situate ourselves in this environment in accord with our understanding of the duty we have toward the voice that calls us to accountability (re-sponsibility, *Verantwortung*). To have an understanding of this challenge means taking the following triad seriously: listening, reflecting, and acting. An inner listening to this voice, an attempt to understand its message, and the uniqueness of this existential challenge do lead to acting, to taking a stand vis-à-vis the challenge. It is a responsibility for us, in the deepest sense of an existential engagement. To collide with the world, to cope with life, are the biggest tasks facing a human being. It represents a human being's mission *in* the world and *for* the world.

An understanding of this mission and its implementation are the central tasks of education, which cannot be narrowed down to the transmission of information, or to the mastering of some particular technique. Zbigniew Herbert rendered what is involved in all this quite excellently in a letter to Czesław Miłosz dated February 17, 1966:

I am more and more convinced that the source (of understanding,) which can be so easily hidden away, pulses (with life) because of certain spiritual qualities in the author, and not because of his/her mastery of a technique or language. I will write about it against the blowhards from the avant-garde. The necessary qualities are: Selflessness, an ability to contemplate, a vision of a lost paradise, courage, goodness, compassion, a certain mixture of despair and humor. Never write because you suddenly realize that you have "to close" an era, "to summarize," or to move forward into another phase. The development must follow naturally and not be forced. An acceptance of one's limitations, as the wise Chinese say: "search for talent in your deficiencies." And also, for an agreement between the hand and the soul.¹⁰

10 Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz, *Korespondencja*, ed. Barbara Toruńczyk

Education, for Herbert, means “selflessness, an ability to contemplate, a vision of a lost paradise, courage, goodness, compassion, a certain mixture of despair and humor.” How is one to adopt such a vision as one’s own? How is one to learn to accept it, and how should one teach it to others? Poetry, as with everything that is existentially important, can help here. Instead of promoting a shortcut, it invites us to exercise ourselves in patience on our way to understanding (ερμηνευτική τέχνη).¹¹

Zbigniew Herbert

The Path¹²

It was not a path of truth but just a path
with a red root across pine needles on the side
the forest full of berries and airy-fairy spirits

it was not a path of truth because it suddenly
lost its cohesion henceforth in life
our goals are unclear

There was a wellspring on the right

and if you choose the spring you would go up some stairs of dark
the touch leads blindly into increasingly deeper darkness
to the mother of elements worshiped by Tales
to reconcile in the end the damp heart of things
with the dark grain of the cause

(Warsaw: Fundacja Zeszytów Literackich, 2006), 57. My translation.

- 11 “The subject, I asserted, does not know itself directly but only through the signs deposited in memory and in the imagination by the great literary traditions.” Paul Ricoeur, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 16. See Andrzej Wierciński, “Hermeneutics and the Indirect Path to Understanding,” in *The Task of Interpretation: Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis, and Literary Studies*, ed. Edward Fiała, Dariusz Skórczewski, and Andrzej Wierciński (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 2009), 11–44.
- 12 Zbigniew Herbert, “Ścieżka,” from the volume *Napis*, in idem, *Wiersze zebrane* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo a5, 2008), 325. My own translation.

There was a hill on the left

it radiated peace and revealed a good view
the forest border its dark mass
with no leaves on wild berries' stems
a calm in-the-know that this forest is one in the many

Is it not possible then to have all at once
the clear spring and the hill of ideas and a leaf
and convey multitude without fiendish furnace
of dark alchemy of too bright an abstraction

To reach understanding means to search for a path that is our own; it is about the courage to take a definite risk. This courage seems to be a necessary condition to get to know oneself and to develop as a person on an ever-growing basis. It is something that differs from a mere spirit of rebellion or pure resistance; it is, rather, this readiness to take a risk, to transform oneself creatively. In this sense, education as an expansion of one's own horizons *is* transformation. It means awareness and becoming aware that it is worthwhile to work on one's self (trans-formation is always formation). When Herbert writes about the wise Chinese, searching for "talent in their deficiencies," it is impossible not to refer to St Paul and his 2 Cor 12:9–10:

The Lord has told me: "My grace is enough for you. For the strength perfects itself in one's weaknesses." So, I will gladly boast of my weaknesses so that Christ's power will dwell in me. That is why I am pleased with my weaknesses, insults, insufficiencies, persecutions, oppression because of Christ. For whenever I am weak, I am strong.

This is not the glorification of weaknesses for their own sake, but an opening to a different understanding of oneself: One's strength perfects itself in weakness, δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. We can understand it as a juxtaposition of the memory of the past, painfully experienced through weakness, with the

reality of the present; a present that is shaped by the strength that comes to us. It is a departure from concentrating on one's own limitations in favor of the discovery and appreciation of the gift (*Gabe*), with which a specific task (*Auf-gabe*) is integrally connected. The strength hidden in the gift is always greater than our powerlessness. The art lies in seeing this gift, understanding it, and using it. The more one is open to the gift, the stronger one becomes. It is also impossible not to recall here the voluntary humiliation of Christ mentioned in Phil 2:7, "[he who] emptied himself" (ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου). This kenotic (κένωσις) vision is a real antidote to the intrinsically imprudent human dreams of power and greatness. It is easy to be deceived by empty words and promises (ὕμᾱς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις διὰ, Eph 5:6). The kenotic understanding of education offers a real grasp of its inherent strength by giving up dominance, by ceasing to exercise power and control over others, in order to truly serve human beings and accompany them on the paths of their lives. Education, when understood as a personal gift, is not a recipe for cooking up a measurable success in any particular field, but an invitation to discover perspectives, including those that lie on the border of almost impossible possibilities.¹³

Education is also a reflection on what, how, and why we can learn. On the educational path, we discover what kind of people we are, as well as what we want to become, or can indeed become. The readiness to take the risk of education is testimony to the recognition of the necessity for transformation, which results from a profound conviction that we do not have some finite vision of ourselves, no matter what moment of life we find ourselves in, as human beings. An understanding that everything can, and could, be different, is fundamen-

13 Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, "Educative Encounter as a Meeting of People in Need," in idem, ed., *Hermeneutics-Ethics-Education* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2015), 491–504.

tal to education as a transformation. The sentimental and stubborn persistence in the belief that this *is* already the case and cannot be otherwise, is equivalent to our consent to stagnation. Everything that is creative and beautiful in life is variable, dynamic, unfinished, and always on the way of becoming.¹⁴

“Just a path” is a very personal way of looking at a human being, which marks out a specific route for one’s individual choices, a route that is often not entirely transparent or understandable to oneself. It can be a very complicated path, but at least it is one’s own; a path that is unmistakable among other paths, full of uncertainties, turns, or even life dramas. Education is a matter of seeing various aspects of the route, and of finding one’s self on different paths at the same time. “Just a path” is not an easy route for any human being; it is the way of living one’s life chosen by a person who does not hesitate to deal with ethical anxieties, who inquires, seeks, and does not succumb to schematic arrangements, especially with regard to the problematic nature of choices and potential threats. This route is the slow, difficult, and dangerous one, quite unpredictable, and full of risk and insecurity in connection with getting to know oneself. It is the path of our particular decisions; the path on which the drama of the individual, the one and only existence, is essentially incommunicable in its very uniqueness and unrepeatability.

Going along this path requires constant concentration and an awareness that we are radically responsible for our choices, and hence getting the courage to go through with it. “Radically” means that even when nobody else can understand those choices, that is, what is being done. This radicality is the readiness to take a risk, above all because we cannot be content with the norms which are obligatory on the path of truth. The level of generality and abstractness on this path can-

14 Ricoeur places all human creativity within the horizon of incompleteness—unfinished, insatiable, unfulfilled: “Under history, memory and forgetting. / Under memory and forgetting, life. / But writing a life is another story. / Incompletion.” Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 506.

not satisfy us. An awareness of the uniqueness of our own existence makes us go on and choose in our own way, which does not mean that we necessarily take liberties, but that we make very personal decisions. The apparent, and actually rather problematic, nature of such choices lies in the virtual impossibility of their social verification, because in their deepest sense they occlude such verification. Nobody is able to make those personal, individual choices *for* us, hence no one is able to capture what is their innermost structure and most *ours* in them. This is the deepest dimension of the risk we take in the making of choices, both on the side of the human being taking a risk and on the side of that human being's environment. All dilemmas related to such choice-making remain within the horizon of tension; both the internal tension experienced by that human being, and that related to society at large. The tension lends a specific color to human existence, which is always, in its essence, an ethical existence.¹⁵ In the reflection on human action, the ethical *motif* is not an added element but is the most fundamental dimension of our being-in-the-world. Human life relies on searching and struggling, and not on following an established path.¹⁶ And it concerns not only more or less justified introspection, but the constant exercising of one's capacity for seeing a human being in the other, regardless of whether, and perhaps especially when,

15 Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, "Hermeneutic Existence as a Phronetic Existence: Radicality of Human Responsibility," *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 236, no. 2 (2015): 204–28.

16 A human being who tries to understand himself/herself, an other, or the text, discovers not only the world that reveals itself to one, but dis-covers oneself in the world which unfolds before one. "[... U]nderstanding is not just one of the possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself. It is in this sense that the term 'hermeneutics' has been used here. It denotes the basic being-in-motion of Dasein that constitutes its finitude and historicity, and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world. Not caprice, or even an elaboration of a single aspect, but the nature of the thing itself makes the movement of understanding comprehensive and universal." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxvii.

one of them is or seems to be unfamiliar and foreign to us.¹⁷ The risk of education is the source experience, the primordial dimension of human creativity, which is not satisfied with ready-made arguments, but casts out feelers for its most eloquent expression. It is not a mere striving to be unique, but a recognition of the need for a radical response to the gift and task which human existence has received and requires. In education, this radical responsibility is the readiness for a creative transformation. Education as transformation takes place on the path in search of truth, investigating it, struggling for its whereabouts. Education is not so much a matter of giving one's consent to possible dangers and dilemmas that may arise; rather, it is a conscious approval of the risk of making a choice which cannot be reduced to a lesser choice by any decisions relatable to a system as such. The inevitability of dilemmas is not an unfortunate coincidence, but the source of living and of creative experience for a human being, in their deepest sense. An ability to take risks is, above all, the fundamental human capability as *homo capax*.¹⁸ Education is the readiness to modify

17 It is difficult not to recall here the words spoken by Max Frisch—especially in the context of the painful migration-immigration experiences in the most recent history of Europe and the world: “*Ein kleines Herrenvolk sieht sich in Gefahr: man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen. Sie fressen den Wohlstand nicht auf, im Gegenteil, sie sind für den Wohlstand unerlässlich.*” [A small sovereign population smells danger: they have summoned workers, and lo, human beings came instead. They do not devour the general prosperity; on the contrary, they prove indispensable to the general prosperity.] Max Frisch, “Vorwort,” in Alexander J. Seiler, *Siamo italiani—Die Italiener: Gespräche mit italienischen Arbeitern in der Schweiz* (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1965).

18 Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, “Paul Ricoeur’s Anthropological Hermeneutics of the Person as *l’homme capable*,” *Analysis and Existence* 19 (2012): 161–76. With reference to Gabriel Marcel, Ricoeur understands a human as *homo capax*. *L’homme capable* and *l’homme agissant* are synonyms for him. Fundamental human capacities (*capacités*)—speaking, acting, narrating, sensitivity to the Other, and taking responsibility—have their counterpart in vulnerabilities (*vulnérabilités*). See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), also Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur Between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

one's life creatively. This existential dynamics makes us aware that education does not focus on measurable results, but on making a human being more sensitive to the need to take responsibility for his/her own development, for shaping the mind, will, emotions, body, and the relationships with others and with the surrounding world. The drama of education is concentrated in *not* making the huge creative potential that lies within every human being go unnoticed. But formalized education not only risks frequently an acceptance of mediocrity and a lack of quality: It even promotes these, often even quite consciously.

Education does not mean safer, more predictable, and risk-free formal arrangements: Sometimes it is a way of finding oneself stranded between promise and hope. This promise applies to a vision of life which everyone entertains differently. And everyone is radically responsible for the development of this vision. No one can take this responsibility from a human being, even where the human being would be very happy to be rid of this incubus. The promise cannot be predicted on the basis of results taken from the past. The promise, *ἐπαγγελία*, is what reveals itself to us. Its biggest enemy is calculation, spiritual parsimony. And its greatest friends are uncertainty, consent to risk-taking, talent, and determination. The promise of education is not an anticipation of, and a calculation for, future results, but an invitation to courageously clash with life as a task, to look into the future which cannot be determined by our desires and expectations alone. The risk of education is the danger of not noticing the potential that lies in development as a human being, an inability to imagine the almost unlimited personal possibilities of maturing and growth. Education is not the multiplication and accumulation of the information that gathers momentum around a human being and in its living environment, but a constant growth of the human being as a human being (*Zuwachs an Sein*, an increase in Being).¹⁹ The focus on development

ton, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), as well as Gaëlle Fiasse, ed., *Paul Ricoeur: De l'homme faillible à l'homme capable* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007).

19 "That the picture has its own reality means the reverse for what is pictured, name-

and growth becomes a way of being that makes education possible. This way of being, despite an apparent weakness, uncertainty, and unpredictability in itself, not only allows a human being to reach his/her self, but also represents the chance of opening oneself to the other. The hermeneutics of education, understood in this way, becomes at the same time the hermeneutics of hospitality. It is an invitation to take the risk of education on the chin bravely. In this sense, the risk is not a deficiency (*defectum*), but a way of discovering life, which is a constant challenge and call issued to all individual persons.

Transformation is the main task of education. It is the shaping of an understanding of oneself as a human being in-the-world, who capably determines conscious and free choices. An ability to make free choices, and a willingness to take responsibility for them, cannot be achieved through the mere transmission and checking of information about a human being and one's own environment. Education is more like a school of life; the school of being an attentive and sensitive human being in love with the world, and compassionate about the world. The transformation of a person is the goal of education and its ultimate fulfillment. The key to such an understanding of education is the belief that education is self-education (*Erziehen ist Sich-Erziehen*).²⁰

The task of the hermeneutics of education is to reflect on what is happening to us, and in us, when we learn from others or when

ly that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there. It does not follow that it is dependent on this particular presentation in order to appear. It can also present itself as what it is in other ways. But if it presents itself in this way, this is no longer any incidental event but belongs to its own being. Every such presentation is an ontological event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, *an increase in being*. The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 135 (emphasis in original).

- 20 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Education is Self-Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 35, no. 4 (November 2001): 529–38. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

we teach others. Any educational reforms that merely concentrate on structural problems, and decisions about these, are doomed to failure, but not only because they do not see some, or even the most important elements to do with the system being investigated. Their failure is due to their calculative orientation, which makes it impossible to reflect on what is most important in education: the human person. Education cannot forget about itself (*Selbstvergessenheit*). Forgetting about what education really means, in its deepest and most rooted sense, is also its greatest drama, despite its undoubted advancements in the transmission and accumulation of information about the world. The contemporary human being possesses an impressive knowledge and does, at the same time, and quite disproportionately, lack an ability to understand and thus to interpret what is happening *in* and *with* himself/herself in the educational process. A critical and involved presence in the world allows us to look calmly upon the attacks on education, which are regularly thrown at it from various sides. It is clear that education deals well with those attacks, and with the urges of various political forces to have an influence on it. One can even say that political attacks on education often immunize and strengthen it. Yet a lack of reflection on itself inevitably leads education to get somewhat lost, almost as if it were on an aimless track and going off-road.

Education as transformation is a formation, which is the formation of the person in the stance of his/her ability to learn. Learning is the shaping of the learner's awareness, of the determination and readiness to discover the unknown. It is the courage to face difficulties, which involves the transgression of oneself, allows one to discover one's own limitations, and to look for ways of dealing with them. Education is self-confidence; it is an understanding that to learn is good and that one can do it. Learning is also the taking of the risk that we can actually succeed in something concrete. An educational failure is not a matter of not mastering some particular section of the material or a failure in an exam: It is an inability to take responsibility for self-development, for the need to think, to understand, to talk to oneself

and to others. An engagement in thinking is, existentially, one of the most demanding and perhaps most difficult challenges of education. It is also an understanding that there is no access to oneself without the mediation offered to us by understanding that which is different, unknown, austere, and practically ascetic.²¹ Education means to learn to overcome distance, and to come closer to oneself and to the other.

The risk of education is a beautiful risk.²² The beauty of this risk is conditioned by the beauty of education. It is the beauty of reaching out to ourselves and discovering the richness that awaits us in the world. Like in Zbigniew Herbert's poetry:

The Prayer of Mr. Cogito—Traveler²³

Thank you Lord for creating a beautiful and very varied world
and for allowing me in your unfathomable goodness to visit places
that were not places of everyday anguish

—that in Tarquinia I lay at night in the square by the well
with the swinging voice of a bell which reverberated your wrath or forgiveness
and when a little donkey in Corcyra on the island of Corfu
sang out from its bellowing lungs the melancholy wedded to the landscape

and in the ugly city of Manchester I discovered people good and wise
nature repeated its reasonable tautologies:
the forest was a forest the sea was the sea the rock was a rock and the
stars circled overhead and all was just as it ought

—Iovis omnia plena—forgive me that I thought only of myself

21 "There is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts; in the last resort self-understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms." Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 15.

22 Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Boulder, Co.: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).

23 Zbigniew Herbert, "The Prayer of Mr. Cogito—Traveler," from the volume *Raport z obłożonego miasta i inne wiersze*, in idem, *Wiersze zebrane* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo a5, 2008), 454–56. My own translation.

while the lives of others cruelly irreversible turned around me
 like the great astrological clock of St Pierre in Beauvais
 that I was lazy distracted too timid in labyrinths and caves

and forgive me I did not fight like Lord Byron for the happiness of conquered
 peoples
 and only treasured the risings of the moon and museums

—I thank you that the works created for your glory have let me partake in your
 mystery and
 in my conceit I could envision
 that Duccio van Eyck Bellini painted also for me

and the Acropolis which I never really understood
 did patiently reveal its mutilated body to me

—Please reward the gray-haired old man
 who offered me graciously the fruit from his garden
 on the sun-drenched native island of the son of Laertes

and also Miss Helen from the misty island of Mull in the Hebrides
 for being hospitable Greek style and asking me to leave
 a lit lamp in the window overlooking Holy Iona each night
 so that the earth's lights would send greetings to each other

and also all those who showed me the way saying *kato kyrie kato*

that you would look after Mother Spoleto and Spiridion of Paxos
 the good student from Berlin who saved me from oppression and when
 unexpectedly met up
 in Arizona took me to the Grand Canyon
 which is like a hundred thousand cathedrals turned upside down

—Lord let me not think of my foolish moist-eyed gray stalkers
 when the sun goes down in the truly indescribable Ionian Sea

so that I might understand other people other tongues other pain
 and above all let me be humble
 one who desires the wellspring

thank you Lord for creating a world beautiful and so varied

and if this is your seduction I am seduced
for good and no regrets

Herbert is quoted both at the beginning of my paper and at the end; just like the *motif* of beauty is in Gert Biesta's book, entitled *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, and in the "Appendix."²⁴ The power of poetry is the power of beauty, thanks to which we experience the joy of life and the joy of education. It is the joy and pain of struggling for oneself, taking risks; it is the transgression and transformation of a person as the subject *and* object of education. It is just a path which gets tangled up, like everything in life, and is full of silence and tension; the path that seduces "for good and no regrets."

The experience of education as an event (*Ereignis*) is an ability to experience some specific existential tension that accompanies our constant discovery of the beautiful and very varied world. Hence, this is a rudimentary experience, in the deepest philosophical sense, because it keeps a human being suspended in a state of astonishment at the mystery of Being. The experience of education is above all a creative experience, and not just an imitative one.²⁵ Education is an event that keeps a human being in the state of readiness for constant transformation.

The risk of education is the risk taken on by maturing and noticing the problem one has with oneself and the world; it is an understanding that one has to deal with this problem in a way which every one of

24 "Appendix: Coming into the World, Uniqueness, and the Beautiful Risk of Education: An Interview with Gert Biesta by Philip Winter," in Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*.

25 "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of the text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. Perhaps it is not correct to refer to this productive element in understanding as 'better understanding' [...] Understanding is not, in fact, a better understanding, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a *different way*, if we understand at all." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296.

us needs to discover as their own way of life.²⁶ Are we ready to take the risk of education regardless of how much we feel trapped in the existing educational structures?

Education is a conversation.²⁷ And every conversation is a slow and difficult path that does not promise us quick learning outcomes. It rather invites us to think about the sense lurking in the question of effects and their measurability. It teaches sensitivity, the finesse of thinking, creativity, virtuosity, restraint, and an awareness of dilemmas. Like Aristotle, it teaches us to *be* good by learning from others who *are* good. It encourages everyone to practice goodness. Phronetic education is a clear alternative to systemic education, which is aimed at developing specific skills, competencies, and capabilities, and is, above all, an alternative to the predictability of education.²⁸ Education is movement, *δύναμις*; it is the search for the path of truth. It is the patient training to find oneself, the constant growing up, becoming, and reworking of all that is complicated, confusing, and difficult (Freudian *Durcharbeiten*).²⁹

The world we live in is beautiful in its diversity. Education is the creative way of being-in-the-world, an incessant and generous use we make of the richness which is laid out before us. It is relishing the beauty of the world. It is virtuosity that helps us to understand the inexhaustibility of our limitedness. Education teaches us to be humble in the face of the overwhelming nature of this world, and, in its essence, is grateful. The complexity, diversity, richness, and beauty

26 See David W. Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension between Love and Justice* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).

27 Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, "The Primacy of Conversation in Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation* ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 11–33.

28 Andrzej Wierciński, "Phronesis as the Mediation between Logos and Ethos: Rationality and Responsibility," in *The Hermeneutic Rationality/La rationalité herméneutique*, ed. Maria Luisa Portocarrero, Luis Umbelino, and Andrzej Wierciński (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 73–86.

29 Cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of the world call for gratitude. The meditative way of being-in-the-world is gratitude: “Thinking is gratitude,” *Denken ist Danken*.³⁰ Education teaches us this very attitude of gratitude (εὐχαριστέω). And thus, education as a risk to be taken on melds into gratitude.

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30 Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, trans. Jesse Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). See Dietmar Koch, “Warum kann das Denken ein Danken sein? Zu einer Bestimmung im Denken des Ereignisses im Werk Martin Heideggers,” in *Im Garten der Philosophie: Festschrift für Hans-Dieter Bahr zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Oya and Dietmar Koch (München: Fink, 2005), 131–40.

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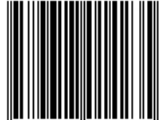
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