

PHRONETIC EDUCATION TO INTEGRITY

CAPABILITY, COURAGE, AND PASSION FOR THINKING

Andrzej WIERCIŃSKI

University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education, Mokotowska 16/20,
00-561 Warsaw, Poland

andrew.wiercinski@gmail.com

Living our lives means situating ourselves in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of that which has been thought, then expressed in the different ways taken up by human activities, all within the history of the world. It is not only a question of reading historical texts but trying to understand the totality of human experience. Since times immemorial, from Plato and Aristoteles, Augustine and Aquinas, Hegel and Kant, Dilthey and von Humboldt, Heidegger and Gadamer, Derrida and Ricoeur, our thinking is accompanied by the array of voices that help us to position ourselves in-between. In the in-between, the human and the divine, earth and sky, we experience the poetics of in-betweenness and not the division that would fain separate us from each other. It is the poetics of the flows. Thus, our reading of life is a never-fulfilled praxis that situates us, always, in-between suspicion and sympathy, critique and conviction (cf. Wierciński 2003). Hermeneutics allows us to see the resulting tension, not as something to be determined, resolved, and

overcome. Indeed, maintaining this tension and carrying it with courage and passion for life seems to be our existential mission and the main task for the hermeneutics of education. Reducing education to being the key to the job market and a stimulus for personal growth and development, which keeps societies in an upward motion, does not do any justice to the role it can play in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. Understanding education as an event (*Ereignis*), as something that is happening to us in life even beyond our conscious wanting and doing, is, thus, elevated to being the greatest existential and educational project around. The event-like character of education emphasizes that what is happening in this trans-formative process, does not only happen as the result of pedagogical action but through being together as essentially incommunicable individuals,¹ and yet dedicated and committed to sharing our lives.

Philosophy and education: the task of, and for, thinking

6

The central task of education is to understand the totality of our experience of the world in the pleasure and pain of thinking. The desire to know, to understand what is happening to us and in us, awakens and motivates us to undertake an indefatigable search for self-understanding. How do we arrive at this self-understanding?

In order to understand ourselves, we need the recognition that comes from the Other, and which is experienced by us through the Other.² The way to self-recognition, and thus to self-understanding, does not go through domination over the Other, but through the realization that we are able beings (*l'homme capable*). We can think something with ourselves and

1 Cf.: "Persona est intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia." Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* 4, 22.

2 "If I nevertheless had to name a category that corresponded to the categories of imputability and responsibility [...] involved in the return to the self, I would choose the term recognition, so dear to Hegel in the Jena period and throughout the subsequent course of his work. Recognition is a structure of the self, reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude to justice. Recognition introduces the dyad and plurality into the very constitution of the self. Reciprocity in friendship and proportional equality in justice, when they are reflected in self-consciousness, make self-esteem a figure of recognition." (Ricoeur 1992, 296)

also say something to ourselves *and* Others. We can listen to ourselves and Others, and thus learn from ourselves and Others. We can do something, take responsibility for the way we act, and we can rejoice in the presence of the Other and suffer with the Other. Thus, as acting beings, we are suffering beings (*l'homme agissant et souffrant*). The highest vocation of a teacher is to awaken the consciousness of being able to be somebody, in the students, and to do that can help the students to engage with somebody whom they can recognize as a partner in a conversation. Further, it encompasses the recognition of oneself in the Other, which opens up in a conversation. Thus, the awakening to this realization that we are able beings is the main task of education and also its greatest achievement. The discovery of what needs to be understood, the whole process of understanding, is an existential obligation and calls for responsibility, dedication, and commitment. Without this profound comprehension of the essential importance of the engagement with one another, there is no way of being formative. As educators, we accompany each other on our way to self-understanding in patience and serenity, taking our time for everything that is important, and without rushing into easily recognizable and measurable results. Education becomes an engagement toward overcoming the dichotomy of learning/teaching, toward mutual learning, within a hermeneutic horizon of sharing life.

7

On the way to self-understanding, we also have a chance of recognizing our own problems and mistakes, and to correct them accordingly. The need to acknowledge that we are in need of formation and trans-formation fundamentally changes us as human beings. We may indeed experience long periods of darkness on our way to self-understanding: the experience of *tenebrae* (*plurale tantum*) is much more than a simple absence of light. The emergence of darkness empowers us to see things differently and to search for self-understanding by comprehending that absence is, in fact, a mode of presence.³ Education assists us

³ “What has-been which, by refusing the present, lets that become present which is no longer present, and the coming towards us of what is to come which, by withholding the present, lets that be present which is not yet present—both made manifest the manner of an extending opening up which gives all presencing into the open.” (Heidegger 1972, 17)

in our discernment and leads us toward living life in trust and confidence.

The promise of education is the promise and passion of thinking. It is the passion to read everything that wants to be read and allowing others to read us, or even more, inviting them to enter into our lives. This invitation is the expression of our hospitality toward the Other and brings with itself the risks that are attached to being a vulnerable person. If education cannot help us to love ourselves and others, it is *not* education. And love means: to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is the very condition of knowledge since it makes us sensitive to all the details that are relevant to our engagement with life: awakening to ourselves. It encompasses transforming the inexplicable into the real fabric of life, a life that can be experienced by everybody who is able to do the necessary exegesis (ἐξήγησις—“reading from”) without falling prey to imposing one’s own pre-conceived ideas of the projected meaning (εἰσήγησις, *eisegesis*—“reading into”). This transformation is a long and laborious path to the discovery of meaning. It is an exercise in allowing that which needs to be interpreted to speak to the interpreter.

8 The accent in this interpretation lies not on arriving at the possession of meaning, but on the readiness for, and actuality of, being shaped by the meaning. Such an understanding reshapes the task of education in its decisive turn toward being the mode of being a human being within the horizon of finitude, while open to transcendence.

By exploring and experiencing the unpredictability of education,⁴ we will not find the formula for successful educational structures and processes, but we realize and appreciate the need for the continual development of our self-understanding to come nearer to or reach its maturity. The role of an educator goes far beyond the transmission of knowledge and embraces the successful awakening of oneself and others to self-understanding, to living one’s existence in openness toward the development and maturing as a human being. Education, in that respect, is a question of the recognition of one’s own vocation as a human being and, in consequence, the vocation toward the integration of one’s own life with the life of a *comm-unio* with the Other. Education is also a matter of understanding that the Other, too,

4 Cf. Kearney 2012, 177–196. Cf. also Wierciński 2019b, 292–294.

is searching for self-understanding, which can only be arrived at through the recognition that comes through the other person. The educators, by helping themselves to arrive at self-understanding through receiving the recognition from the Other, can help students to awaken to this need for recognition and can give them the recognition they need.

As human beings, we are not in-*dividua* in the sense of separation from the Other, but always in the community, together with the Others. Education, as self-education toward self-understanding, is not predominantly about what needs to be done for the community, but an awakening to being with others (*Mit-sein*), which leads toward the recognition of oneself and the Other and openness to each other. This openness must be seen and be recognizable. “Let your gentleness be evident to all: τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις” (Phil 4:5). St. Paul speaks here of gentleness and kindness, ἐπιεικὲς, which is practically expressed in being considerate (ἐπί—“on,” and εἰκος—“equitable, fair,” thus ἐπιείκεια—equity and justice). He encourages the Philippians to make their attitude to become and be known to others: γνωσθήτω (γινώσκω—“to come to know, to recognize”). Being gentle and considerate is not a sentimental wish, but a call to live beyond what is required by ordinary justice. 9

Education encompasses imagining the world in which we live with a passion for the unknown, unfamiliar, and unpredictable. There is no rush in overcoming the difficulties we have with our comprehension, rather, we need to be patient with what is inconceivable, undecipherable, and incomprehensible. The power to imagine, foretaste, entertain, and make it possible, sensitizes us on the way to self-understanding. Tenderness of description and patience of discovery help us to treasure all aspects of being capable human beings, without silencing all those difficult experiences that are connected with our incapacity for being. It is essential to learn to understand ourselves from neither the perspective of ability nor of inability, but to embrace being a human being in its totality, interconnectedness, and diversity. It is also important to see the indisputable significance of sheer possibility, i.e., the immense power of the human mind to make something happen that seems virtually impossible. Here it is difficult not to refer to

the Heideggerian preference for possibility over reality.⁵

Education to narrating the world embraces narrating ourselves, and expresses the long way we must walk to our personal identity, which is a narrative identity.⁶ Telling the story of our life requires much more than receiving formal training in the ways we can use language and make the story comprehensible to ourselves and others. Education toward telling the story of our life is the education toward facing life. The *What?* of the story, and the *How?* of narration, build our access to self-understanding, through the privileged mediation of signs and symbols that accompany us in historical and fictional narrative. While reading a story, we do not only follow what is told but narrate, at the same time, our own story. The reading is never complete, never final. The same can be said about writing. The way of telling the story and the way of understanding the story are always interconnected.

10 Education toward story-telling helps us to understand that everything can always be said differently, because there is no perspective which can embrace the whole.⁷ We do not have the God's eye perspective; therefore, we must *learn* to appreciate our own effort to depict reality, which (basically) always escapes us. Moreover, we learn to treasure the effort of others since we understand that only together can we come nearer to reality.

The promise of education today does not predominantly regard the unhindered access to information, but the culture of interpretation.

5 "Higher than actuality stands a *possibility*. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility." (Heidegger 1962, 63)

6 "Narrative identity does not exhaust the question of the self-constancy of a subject, whether this be a particular individual or a community of individuals [...] The practice of narrative lies in a thought experiment by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us. In this sense, narrative exercises imagination more than the will, even though it remains a category of action [...] Reading also includes a moment of impetus. This is when reading becomes a provocation to be and to act differently. However, this impetus is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand! So narrative identity is not equivalent to true selfconstancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy. It is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to link up with the nonnarrative components in the formation of an acting subject." (Ricoeur 1987, 249)

7 "It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all." (Gadamer 2000, 296) Cf. also Wierciński 2019a, especially 7–56.

Wisdom comes through interpreting by uncovering the hidden dimensions of the unity between thinking and speaking. On top of all this, education as self-education is also concerned with the struggle experienced by the community concerning the diverse ways of living together in freedom. Great art assists us in our endeavor to understand ourselves since it reveals something important about life. The work of art does fascinate us and captivate us, and lets us arrive at our self-understanding in it. This discovery happens in-between all unconcealment and concealment, and it was Heidegger's significant contribution to make us think this in-betweenness in the first place.

Heidegger showed that the Greek concept of concealment (aletheia), only represented one side of man's fundamental experience of the world. Alongside and inseparable from this unconcealing, there also stands the shrouding and concealing that belongs to our human finitude. This philosophical insight, which sets limits to any idealism claiming a total recovery of meaning, implies that there is more to the work of art than a meaning that is experienced only in an indeterminate way. (Gadamer 1986, 34)

11

In the world of secularization and technologization, art plays a special role in awakening our being self-conscious to the recognition of transcendence as the essential experience of our being-in-the-world. Immanence cannot satisfy our human desire for self-understanding, which has to include our openness to the Beyond. Therefore, the task of education *has* to embrace our reflection on the fate of human beings as finite, lingual, and historical beings within the horizon of transcendence.

The passion of education is the passion for describing and interpreting life; it lies between description and interpretation. It is a passion of describing while taking time, without rushing or taking shortcuts, paying attention to all the details. Even to taking time to look at the work of art, painting, sculpture, architecture. To listen to music. Or to read a poem:

Czesław Miłosz: “A Poetic State”

As if I were given a reversed telescope instead of eyes, the world moves away and everything grows smaller, people, streets, trees, but they do not lose their distinctness, are condensed.

In the past I had such moments writing poems, so I know distance, disinterested contemplation, putting on a T, which is not T, but now it is like that constantly and I ask myself what it means, whether I have entered a permanent poetic state.

Things once difficult are easy, but I feel no strong need to communicate them in writing.

Now I am in good health, where before I was sick because time galloped and I was tortured by fear of what would happen next.

Every minute the spectacle of the world astonishes me; it is so comic that I cannot understand how literature could expect to cope with it.

Sensing every minute, in my flesh, by my touch, I tame misfortune and do not ask God to avert it, for why should He avert it from me if He does not avert it from others?

I dreamt that I found myself on a narrow ledge over the water where large sea fish were moving. I was afraid I would fall if I looked down, so I turned, gripped with my fingers at the roughness of the stone wall, and moving slowly, with my back to the sea, I reached a safe place.

I was impatient and easily irritated by time lost on trifles among which I ranked cleaning and cooking. Now, attentively, I cut onions, squeeze lemons and prepare various kinds of sauces.

Berkeley, 1977 (Miłosz 2003, 356)⁸

12

⁸ The poem—translated from the Polish language by its author and Robert Hass—stems from Miłosz’s *Hymn of The Pearl* (1981).

Sharing the beauty of description and interpretation with others helps to treasure the beauty of the world. Creativity and trans-formation open up new ways for encountering ourselves and others, who accompany us on the way to bringing ourselves into the open. This is the meaning of posing questions when we seriously and courageously entertain the possibilities that something can not only be understood differently but can *be* otherwise. Such an approach is a real risk: it is a phronetic risk. It is the willingness and the determination to widen our horizons.

Understanding, like action, always remains a risk and never leaves room for the simple application of general knowledge of rules to the statements or texts to be understood. Furthermore, where it is successful, understanding means a growth in inner awareness, which as a new experience enters into the texture of our own mental experience. Understanding is an adventure and, like any other adventure, is dangerous. Just because it is not satisfied with simply wanting to register what is there or said there but goes back to our guiding interests and questions, one has to concede that the hermeneutical experience has a far less degree of certainty than that attained by the methods of the natural sciences. But when one realizes that understanding is an adventure, this implies that it affords unique opportunities as well. It is capable of contributing in a special way to the broadening of our human experiences, our self-knowledge, and our horizon, for everything understanding mediates is mediated along with ourselves. (Gadamer 1981, 110–111)

13

Education toward deliberating with oneself, in order to make a responsible judgment in a given existential situation, discloses the proximity of hermeneutics and ethics. A human being as *l'homme capable* is a φρόνιμος, a practically wise being, who can responsibly dwell in the world. However, as *l'homme capable*, a human being is also a δεινός, a being capable of moral knowledge and able to take advantage in and of every existential situation (cf. Gadamer 2000, 320). This unrestricted capacity makes a human being ἀνευ

αρετής, without virtues.⁹ As the name says, the δεινός,¹⁰ “dreadful, terrible,” is also capable of evil.¹¹

Thinking critically about our integrity is the task of education. The passion for our inquiry into the educational processes is and must be accompanied by our wish to mature, to develop as human beings. This passion generates a desire to grow and enthusiastically moves us toward meeting what we do not yet have. The name for this yearning and longing is hope, which comes from the future. It is the anticipation of the things to come. Education is an enduring exercise in the art of imagining and catching glimpses of the future. Imagination helps us to address what is possible, it expresses our passion for the possible, for what is not yet, but can happen. It is not important when it merely entertains what is possible: it plays an essential role in what happens. It opens up the horizon of possibility and widens our ways of understanding.

14 As the Editors of this issue, we are grateful to Dean Komel of the Editorial Board of *Phainomena* for his generous invitation and continuous support, and for making this journal into *the* forum for discussing philosophy and education toward the integrity of thinking, feeling, and acting. We would like to thank our contributors for their papers and their collegial cooperation. Through it, we have experienced a great deal of mutual inspiration and received that assistance, which makes any collaborative project into a passionate search for expressing not only what is genuinely ours but the matter itself (*die Sache*). We also appreciate the help we got from the reviewers and believe that careful consideration of their critical comments contributed to the quality of the published papers. We hope that the symphony of voices we are offering herewith will invite the international readership of *Phainomena* to re-address the phenomenon of education and its role for the contemporary society, and inspire everyone to re-think education as a mode of living our lives.

9 Cf.: Aristotle, *Politics* 1 1,1253a, 36.

10 Cf. Mt 26:18. Here, it means only a certain person, without using his name.

11 For Paul Ricoeur, a human being as *l'homme capable* is capable of the greatest and the worst. Cf. Ricoeur 1965; 1966; 1969.

Bibliography | Bibliografija

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1981. "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy. [1972]" In Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence, 88–112. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

---. 1986. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Ed. by Robert Bernasconi. Trans. By Nicholas Walker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

---. 2000. *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. ed. Trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: Harper & Row.

---. 1972. *On Time and Being*. Trans. by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper.

Kearney, Richard. 2012. "Diacritical Hermeneutics." In *The Hermeneutic Rationality/La rationalité herméneutique*, ed. by Maria Luisa Portocarrero, Luis Umbelino, and Andrzej Wierciński, 177–196. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Miłosz, Czesław. 2003. *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001*. New York: The Ecco Press, 2003.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1965. *Philosophy of the Will: Fallible Man*. Trans. by Charles Kelbley. Chicago: Henry Regnery.

---. 1966. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Trans. by Erazim V. Kohák. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

---. 1969. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Trans. by Emerson Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press.

---. 1987. *Time and Narrative III*. Trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

---. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wierciński, Andrzej (ed.). 2003. *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*. Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press.

---. 2019a. *Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World*. Zürich: LIT Verlag.

---. 2019b. *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education*. Zürich: LIT Verlag.
