

# THE IMPERATIVE OF PHRONETIC EDUCATION FOR PRACTICING FREEDOM IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLE'S LITERARY DISCOURSE

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*Abstract*

The article intends to investigate the relationship between the gift of pondering and human freedom. We aim to prove that phronetic education is a prerequisite for the practicing of freedom in reflective thinking, and thus helps the human subject to establish itself as fully free. Phronetic teaching, which reflects on one's actions and gains from one's experiences, is oriented towards the increase and improvement in exercising freedom. Hermeneutic sensibility enhances the recognition of freedom as

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the virtue which is born in the mindful process of phronetic teaching. Investigating the notion of *phronesis* according to Aristotle, we affirm phronetic education's decisive impact on reflectivity and the use of one's free will. We explore the reality of phronetic pedagogy as a dialogic encounter and profess the challenge of the unanticipated as its crux. The centrality of the unexpected which happens in phronetic teaching leads to a conclusion that it is an education of hope, open to the exercising of freedom and to granting it.

*Keywords:* phronetic education, freedom, Aristotle, H.-G. Gadamer, hermeneutic sensibility.

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### **Imperativ fronetičnega izobraževanja za udejanjanje svobode v luči bibličnega literarnega diskurza**

#### *Povzetek*

116 Članek namerava raziskati razmerje med darom razmišljanja in človeško svobodo. Želimo dokazati, da je fronetično izobraževanje predpogoj za udejanjanje svobode v reflektivnem mišljenju in potemtakem pomaga, da se človeški subjekt vzpostavi kot popolnoma svoboden. Fronetično poučevanje, ki reflektira posameznikova dejanja in ki ga plemeniti njegovo lastno izkustvo, se osredotoča na povečevanje in izboljševanje udejanjanja svobode. Hermenevitična občutljivost stopnjuje pripoznavanje svobode kot tiste vrline, ki se rojeva s čuječnim procesom fronetičnega poučevanja. Sledeč Aristotelovi ideji *phronesis*, želimo poudariti odločilen vpliv fronetičnega izobraževanja na reflektivnost in uporabo svobodne volje. Resničnost fronetične pedagogike se razgrinja kot dialoško srečanje, njeno jedro predstavlja izziv nepričakovanega. Osrednjost nepričakovanega, kakor se godi znotraj fronetičnega izobraževanja, vodi k sklepu, da gre za izobraževanje upanja, ki je odprto za udejanjanje in zagotavljanje svobode.

*Ključne besede:* fronetično izobraževanje, svoboda, Aristotel, H.-G. Gadamer, hermenevitična občutljivost.

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## Introduction

The article claims that phronetic education is a process which originates and facilitates free reflective thinking, as well as leads to establish oneself as a free, individual human being. We investigate the imperative of phronetic education for the practicing of freedom in light of hermeneutic acuity, employing Gadamer's reflection on temporality, provisionality, and historicity of human existence. In its orientation towards freedom, phronetic education is a dialogic encounter, in which the unexpected plays the crucial role in uncovering reality, and the reality of an individual human being as they are. It takes hermeneutics to comprehend reality as it presents itself. Thus, in the first part, we examine phronetic education and the question of freedom in light of hermeneutics, asserting that phronetic teaching acknowledges the temporal, conditional, and historical aspects of human experience. We can say that hermeneutic insight and phronetic perspicacity are both born in the lived experience of a human being. Hermeneutics recognizes the practice of phronetic wisdom as its inseparable reality: "Hermeneutic existence is a phronetic existence aiming at nurturing practical wisdom in human life: it originates with life, affects life, and transforms life. Hermeneutic truth is the world-disclosive truth of understanding." (Wierciński 2015, 204) Phronetic education is life-oriented. It profoundly shapes life and is life-transformative.

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In the second part, we draw on Aristotle's definition of *phronesis* in "Book VI" of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he describes it as a virtue of practical knowledge allowing to differentiate between what is good for a human being and what is not (cf. Aristotle 1999, 89). Tracing phronetic teaching back to Aristotle, we reflect also on the import of two other qualities which he mentions, *phantasia* and *proairesis*, as inextricably connected with *phronesis*. We accentuate that those two qualities significantly impact phronetic education in its focus on practicing freedom.

In the third section, we identify unexpectedness as the crux of phronetic education, demonstrating that phronetic teaching is a dialogic encounter, in which the respect for the unknown and the unforeseeable constitutes its core, and invites to practice freedom as the only viable response. In this way we demonstrate that phronetic education is an education of hope, whose concern

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with the exercising of freedom originates and fosters not only free reflective thinking, but also meaningfully inspires and enhances a human being's development as a fully free agent.

### **Phronetic education, hermeneutic acuity, and the question of freedom**

Governed by the very nature of human existence, which is always temporal and conditioned by historical context, phronetic education opens itself to that which in Gadamerian sense is fitting in particular circumstances. The fittingness goes beyond the sociological level of understanding of what suits a given situation. Hans-Herbert Kögler highlights the significance of Gadamer's thought in this respect by pointing to the uniqueness of circumstances, as well as subjectivity involved in experience as evaluative factors that constitute the very basis for understanding (cf. Kögler 2010, 353). To follow *phronesis* in education means to be oriented towards the awareness of a situation in its entirety, which is illuminative in the particular circumstances the educated and the educator are involved. Therefore, phronetic education rests on the hermeneutic sensibility which informs its ways and possibilities of actualization.

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With the gift of hermeneutic acuity at its side, phronetic education is an inconclusive process. It cannot be said to ever come to an end. However, as a lifelong enterprise, it relies not on amassing new experiences, but on the openness to that which presents itself in front of us according to Gadamer's idea of what it means to be an experienced human being (cf. Gadamer 2013, 364). Gadamer's explication of the crux of what it means to be an experienced man draws our attention to the ever new and the unexpected as constitutive of phronetic teaching. Education in its very foundation aims at improvement, or/and perfection. The two important qualities of human agency, to improve and to perfect, are not separated from the lived experience. On the contrary, they are wholly immersed in what we can call after Gadamer "the consummation of experience," which leads to openness, to learning anew, to absorbing the unpredicted, or even the inverse. These are not lofty and unattainable ideals, but they are achievable in the process of education. Gadamer asserts:

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The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward a new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experiences but is 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. (Gadamer 2013, 364)

The many, or even incessant improvements proclaim an increase both in wisdom and freedom, which are phronetic teaching’s ultimate gains. The processual nature of phronetic education mirrors the reflective character of wisdom, which is not miraculously bestowed on us, but is gained via a thoughtful recognition of what happens when one performs certain actions, and when one chooses.

According to Gadamer, understanding is always conditioned by “[...] the historical being that we are” (Gadamer 2013, 313). His notion of the historically-effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) embraces both the historicity and finality of our being as human beings, but also the incompleteness of the knowledge we possess about ourselves: “*To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.*” (Gadamer 2013, 313) The temporality of our experience affects the way we are, the way we understand, and followingly, the way we teach and learn. If phronetic education draws on the hermeneutic conditionality and temporality of human experience, its premise, which is also its strength, is an awareness that exterior knowledge is not decisive for our understanding. Phronetic education does not focus on the acquisition of objectified knowledge, or the blind abiding by norms. Van Niekierk and Nortjé put it very vividly:

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[...] phronesis (or prudence) is a kind of knowledge wherein I try to act in accordance with the precepts or action guides that I acknowledge, and which are prudently applied to the situation in which I find myself, and where I must act in such a way that I can live with the consequences. This application requires deliberation—a rational interchange that moves to and fro between the requirement of the norm and the requirements of the situation” (Van Niekierk and Nortjé 2013, 30).

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Phronetic education reaches the nucleus of an accessible human experience and enables to discover what presents itself when confronted with the norm and outside requirements.

In its focus on situatedness, phronetic education reflects the situatedness of human existence, thus it is not the kind of teaching that is detached from life, but it adheres to its very heart. The use of *phronesis* in education, by contrast to the *techne*-oriented teaching, means to concentrate on the discovery of what needs to be unveiled, not through the instrumental accomplishment of an external goal, but through an insight into what happens to the educated in all her uniqueness and diversity. Phronetic education embraces objectives that are intrinsic to acting. Van Niekierk and Nortjé elucidate further the relationship between the outside norm and the particularity of a given situation, and define *phronesis* thus: “[...] it is knowing how to act in the practical situations of everyday life where the norms and rules need to be applied. Such situations should influence policy formation rather than serve as firm rules.” (Van Niekierk and Nortjé 2013, 30) Phronetic education seeks to meet the internal  
120 aims of the action itself, therefore it attempts to avoid instrumental thinking and uncritical adherence to norms. This approach is highlighted by the believers in the contemporary revival of Aristotle’s *phronesis* and *phronimos* (Faure 2012, 197)

Gadamer speaks of the specificity of our being aware of the hermeneutic situation and the challenge it constitutes:

To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished.” (Gadamer 2013, 312)

The standing within a situation, and not outside of it, beckons the search for solutions. Metaphorically, the “standing-within” can be depicted as the staying within the stream of light against the backdrop of darkness, the light which is peremptory in our use of freedom. Gadamer’s reflection on the situatedness of our being as human beings reminds us that as discrete individuals we have at

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our disposal one particular way of seeing things at a time and not another. This, however, is a continuous invitation to enter a horizon, while already having a horizon. Gadamer explicates the reality of the horizon as follows:

[...] to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. (Gadamer 2013, 313)

His connecting of the two notions, that of horizon with the situatedness of human experience, leads to an important conclusion that pertains to phronetic education. He observes that:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon.” The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. (Gadamer 2013, 313)

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Entering a horizon, having a horizon, and an awareness of the difference of horizons, contributes to the wisdom of fullness that phronetic education upholds, and helps overcome the rigidity of compartmentalized thinking. This means that we are capable of understanding things, not in their enclosed limitedness, but more openly, with the mind attuned to the situational complexity and versatility, and hence we are more adjusted to exercising freedom.

The situatedness of human experience relates to what Gadamer discovers while scrutinizing what it means to be an experienced human being. Crucially, Gadamer sees human experience through the prism of its poignancy or disagreeability. It is through the unfulfillment of one’s expectations that one comes to an insight. This, however, is not just an insight into the particularity of a given situation, but, much more importantly, it is an insight which embraces our finitude as human beings. Gadamer discloses the import of obstructing our expectations as the wellspring of our understanding:

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Experience [...] involves many disappointments of one's expectations and only thus is experience acquired. That experience refers chiefly to painful and disagreeable experiences does not mean that we are being exceptionally pessimistic, but can be seen directly from its nature [...] Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation. Thus the historical nature of a man essentially implies a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight. (Gadamer 2013, 364)

122 It is exactly the intuition of one's finiteness afforded by experience that becomes the space for practicing freedom. Our finitude signposts the way in which we approach life and choose what is good for us, and thus are capable of expressing fully our potential as human beings. One can venture an assertion that to learn via negativity is the touchstone of all efficient learning. At the utmost level, it is irony and derision, and the pain they involve, that partakes in construing what one learns through negative experiences. However, if the imbalance of the negative and the positive is exorbitant, the negative creates a predicament which can block effective learning, as it both preconditions and obstructs an embracement of the good solutions which arise intuitively.

The import of disappointment and disagreeability that we suffer in the process of learning leads us to another level of phronetic education's relationship with the practicing of freedom. Reflective thinking entails an increase in free thinking, whose pathway leads from ambiguity to disambiguation of what needs to be understood. The indispensability of freedom is constitutive of an increase in being (*Zuwachs an Sein*). By paying close attention to the situation we are placed in, phronetic education grants us a true possibility to hold to that which is within it, and to choose adequately, thus the choice which is confusing for us is less likely to occur. However, as Comte-Sponville clarifies, since practical wisdom relates to the contingent nature of human experience, it involves:

[...] uncertainty, risk, chance, and the unknown. A god would have no need of it, but how could a man do without it? [...] One deliberates only when one has a choice to make, in other words, when no proof is possible

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or adequate—that's when one must want not only good ends, but also good means, in order to achieve them. (Comte-Sponville 2002, 32–33)

*Phronesis* reminds us of the centrality of the exercising of freedom because each situation is never the same as the other, and it requires a fresh and new insight, which results from a free, unrestricted, and uninhibited approach. As a result, we do not feel entrapped in the external system of norms, but rather are invited to use our freedom to choose in accord with what the situation “says.” This, however, has nothing to do with the disregard for norms and convictions, but rather inspires to transform and synchronize the outside norms with the hermeneutic mental intuition.

To be phronetically educated means to use *phronesis* as an aid in modeling, or/and stretching one's capacity to choose freely. The choice of the right thing to do does not fall with categorical ethics, and, obviously, the very question of what we understand by the right thing to do can produce potentially versatile and contradictory answers. This does not mean, however, that we are to feel at a loss, or to relinquish our moral capacity to some disorderly ethical position, which would base our ethical response solely on good motives, or demean the consequences of an action. Comte-Sponville makes a strong claim in this respect:

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Good motives aren't enough, and it would be wrong to act as though they were: hence an ethic of responsibility requires that we answer not just for our intentions or principles but also for the consequences of our acts, to the extent that they can be foreseen. It is an ethic of prudence, and the only valid ethic. (Comte-Sponville 2002, 31)

If the formative task of phronetic education is inseparably connected to establishing oneself as a free, fully-grown individual, and if to deliberate means to be enlightened to the effect of obtaining an ever-widening perception, we need to bear in mind that the conditionality of our being, at the same time, delimits our self-knowledge. This also means that practicing freedom undergoes modifications and happens in various degrees of realization.

Phronetic education adheres to the union of desire, reason, and choice. Knowing what is good for myself, motivating myself, and practicing virtue

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require an incessant exercising of my autonomy. The art of understanding is not a mere possession of rules to be applied. Phronetic teaching does not succumb to the rigor of the so-called universally right application. It also is not concerned with the reproduction of objective knowledge, but the productivity of the always new understanding. To be phronetically educated means to be willing to understand, and this willingness to understand is an unwavering employment of my free will. My eagerness to understand, desire, and reasoning are not outside of my experience, but they pertain to my inherent call to practice autonomous approach each time anew. The unrepeatability of each situation in a Gadamerian sense of our standing within the situation precipitates the use of independent thinking and acting to come to terms with the situation each time in a potentially novel or different fashion. Acting then calls for considering varied standpoints and alternative ways in which human freedom is pronounceable.

124 Significantly, *phronesis* is not only essential for the virtue of character in a moral sense, but it is a lifelong prerequisite for exercising autonomous thinking. The inextricability of the bond between *phronesis* and freedom orients reasoning towards what is fitting in a particular educational milieu. The phronetic educator embodies thus not just ethical values, but a free, unadulterated reasoning, which ensues from the identification of appropriate action. Entering education in the phronetic sense of it, means to search continuously for solutions not in terms of measurable ends. Murray Faure illuminates the basic distinction between *techne* and *phronesis*, and its consequence for the understanding of action's ends thus:

*Techne* and *phronesis* also differ from each other in terms of the relation posited between means and ends. In the former, the end produced by art or craft is separated from the craftsman's technique, irrespective of both being predetermined. In the latter, the ethical action in pursuit of the good performed by the *Phronimos* is its own end [...]. (Faure 2013, 200)

Phronetic education embraces both an understanding of the educator's and the student's ethical positions, as well as an understanding of the teaching context as such. We are invited to participate in practicing freedom, in which

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the choice of the most appropriate means and ends involves a specific attuning to what is needed, and not to what is expected due to some outside requirements of the often very unrealistic policy in an educational institution.

Education which uses *phronesis* is a pedagogical model that promotes developing moral dispositions so that the reasoning of the educated would not be distorted by bad habits, and in this very sense phronetic education is both a challenge and a necessary guide for exercising human freedom. The unity of education and ethics is inescapable. The concomitance of the ethical stance that is taken as the educative process happens has been deftly expressed by Burns and Rathbone:

By engaging in a cooperative process of reflection and action, both the teacher and the student can flourish within the practice of moral education itself. The good being realized in a moral life—here and now—not solely the promise of reaching a particular level of character or disposition in the future. (Burns and Rathbone 2010, 125)

The part of a teacher to advance reflection rather than to inhibit it calls for a virtuous thinking backed up by the invaluable performance of autonomy. The part of the student to learn reflective thinking in the unrepeatability and diversity of contexts means to show the virtue of persistence, but, equally importantly, it encompasses the use and manifestation of freedom.

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Phronetic education fosters the inseparability of the abstract, theoretical principles and the moral qualities of character, and this can thrive only in the environment of freedom. The moral intricacies encountered in education require phronetic wisdom to ensure human success and development, while the use of *phronesis* is always interwoven with the necessity of practicing one's free will to decide in the best possible way and at the best possible time. Taking that into account, phronetic teaching not only acknowledges the conditional and temporal character of human existence, but also endorses the pedagogy of human freedom. It takes *phronesis* to know how to use one's freedom to a righteous effect, and how not to miss one's potential.

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## Aristotle, phronetic thinking, and the free will

According to Aristotle, human acting grants a person with her own possibility of pondering on the right decision to take, as well as on the right time and way. Phronetically, the virtue towards which human acting is directed is not regulated by the universal framework imposed on her, but always takes the form of concrete acting, in which the singularity and unrepeatability of a situation discloses the decision that can be taken. The practical wisdom of reflecting on various possibilities determines one's way to position oneself with respect to the universal norm. However, it is me, and only me who chooses an action. The norm is subservient, it cannot be said to control or settle the action that is chosen. The phronetic propulsion to a continuous exercising of virtue is simultaneously an urge to practice freedom. Dietrich von Hildebrand's succinct assertion: "The sphere of virtue is the very core of reality" (*Hildebrand Project*), reminds us of the inseparability of virtue and the lived experience. Practicing virtue inescapably coalesces with the exercising of human free will as human existence always involves some choice of an action. We are always in the position to choose.

For Aristotle, prudence is the key virtue, all other do not exist without it: "We cannot be fully good without prudence or prudent without virtue of character." (Aristotle 1999, 99) The interlocking nature of practical wisdom and virtuous character says something important both about the true locus of prudence, which is one's striving for a more conscious and effective discernment of what it means to be wise, and about moral virtue itself, which cannot thrive without wisdom. Aristotle says: "For one has all the virtues if and only if one has prudence, which is a single state." (Aristotle 1999, 99) This is a weighty message, inasmuch promising as demanding. For educators who follow practical intelligence, the centrality of prudence is evident in opening the space for developing all other virtues and even skills, as a prudent person knows, as well as discovers how and when she can develop her full potential. Aristotle also affirms: "The decision will not be correct without prudence or without virtue—for [virtue] makes us achieve the end, whereas [prudence] makes us achieve the things that promote the end." (Aristotle 1999, 99). Carrie Birmingham reminds us that Aristotle sees *phantasia* (imagination) as a significant factor contributing to *phronesis*. As a

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matter of fact, the two are viewed by the thinker as interlocking (cf. Birmingham 2004, 315). To teach with wisdom and imagination, to deploy Aristotelian *phronesis* and *phantasia*, would always mean to follow the engaging path of autonomy, the autonomy which embraces the teaching and learning positions alike. It is imagination that enables us to discern and decide about the right course of action, as it transgresses the rigidity of thinking, its pigeonholing and compartmentalization.

Prudence preconditions an ethical choice, it equips us with the right judgement, with the accuracy of moral discernment. The inextricable bond of practical wisdom and freedom shows itself in the constant necessity to differentiate between what is the right thing to do and what is not. It also shows itself in the decision to act in accord with our choice of the right thing. Freedom presupposes the possibility of the choice of the thing which is not right. Among seven kinds of freedom, Susanne Bobzien distinguishes “freedom to do otherwise” (Bobzien 1998, 133). This type, in fact, intermingles with the freedom of decision, and of the will. One is free not to follow something. One can always choose a negative alternative. If, however, we do not choose the right thing, we break our inner conviction that the choice of the virtuous act serves us good. This breaking of our firm belief, enrooted in the moral code of being, brings also an educatively meaningful result, if only we reflect on what happens to us in case of the unrighteous choice, and how we can introduce a change and choose rightly in the future.

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Practicing prudence that takes place in phronetic education involves, in fact, a continuous practicing of freedom. One can and should choose the right conduct according to practical wisdom for one’s own good, however, what we choose has a bearing on the Other and on the communal life, even if it has not a direct effect. Community life requires the prudent behavior of individuals. Choosing the right thing to do, means not delimiting the Other’s freedom, not imposing one’s own views, not affecting the Other’s conscience, thinking, or doing in a bad way. Anne Kinsella avers the inseparability of *phronesis* and ethics in professional environment thus:

If one is to take *phronesis* as professional knowledge seriously, then ethics is of central concern. When considering the criteria by which

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practitioners might make phronetic judgements in practice, consideration of ethical concerns appears to lie at the centre. (Kinsella 2012, 49)

We can take the above assertion as expressive of the milieu of phronetic education, with its constant care for the ethically good. Being phronetically educated, or rather sustaining and following the need for phronetic education and phronetic self-education, as these are inconclusive processes, calls for an unwavering effort to recognize what is good for me, and what is good for the Other, in my care for the Other, and an awareness that the results of my actions are not indifferent to what the Other thinks and feels.

128 Aristotle's *phronesis* involves also the notion of choice (*proairesis*). If one chooses a virtuous action, it must be for the sake of virtue itself. If someone else persuades or forces you to choose a virtuous act, you are not acting virtuously, but only "as if" you were virtuous (cf. Aristotle 1999, 27–33). It is central to discern the difference between the seeming and the genuine virtuousness in light of Aristotelian thinking (cf. Miller 1983, 29). Phronetic education encompasses the frail but significant boundary between the suggestion of the righteous act and forcing it artificially. In its orientation towards freedom, its enhancement of freedom, phronetic education is a response to the need of a genuine virtue as the free choice that makes a human being free. It aims to create the space for practicing freedom. We can even talk about the spaciousness of phronetic teaching. This spaciousness is the narrative of inclusivity, as phronetic teaching offers a whole panoply of solutions, always fresh and attuned to a given teaching situation *per se*. The teacher searches for an answer which would invite a dialogue with the wholeness of the pupil's situation. The answer is thus both conditioned by and immersed in the whole of the pupil's reality. This reality is not silenced, on the contrary, it is thoughtfully considered and reconsidered by the teacher. This mindful cognition and recognition include all that serves the preparation and execution of the student's exercising of her faculty of freedom in reflective thinking, and in life on the whole. Riccardo Dottori helps us encapsulate the choice/decision/good paradigm that *phronesis* involves thus:

Practical knowledge is this unitary phenomenon of reason and behavior: the choice of action or the decision to follow the purpose

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of the glance turned towards good. This choice, the *proairesis*, is both reason, *dianoia*, and desire, *orexis*: the concrete practical knowledge, *phronesis* is both knowing what is good for myself and motivation to action and practice of virtue. (Dottori 2009, 7–8)

The interlacing of reason, desire of the good, and self-motivation is also a profound expression of what phronetic pedagogy aims at.

We should like to finalize this part with a closer look at the idea of deliberation, which is central to *phronesis*, and is encrypted in the notion of choice that pertains to phronetic teaching. Even a quick glance at the structure of *de-liberation* (italics mine) allows us to see liberation as an important part of deliberation. In the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, we read:

deliberation (n.)

late 14c., *deliberacioun*, “act of weighing and examining,” [...] noun of action from past-participle stem of *deliberare* “consider carefully, consult,” literally “weigh well,” from *de*, here probably “entirely” (see *de-*) + *-liberare*, altered (probably by influence of *liberare* “to free, liberate”) from *librare* “to balance, make level,” from *libra* “pair of scales, a balance” [...]

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The interplay of *liberare* (“to free”) and *librare* (“to weigh well”) expresses the crux of “to deliberate”—a balanced action that both predicates itself on freedom and calls for it. Thus, phronetic education, which uses deliberation as its primary tool presupposes free human action in weighing well the right course of action, as well as enhances the practicing of the virtue of freedom. Deliberation includes a great degree of carefulness. Its strength rests not on a hasty, bravado decision, but on a mindful consideration of things, in which the self-dependent movement of no urgency originates autonomous and successful action. It is *phronesis* that enables us to decide on the degree of care, independence, and autonomy that we are to display to be truly preserving, self-sufficient and free (cf. Zagzebski 1996, 221; Birmingham 2004, 319).

To apply *phronesis* in one’s action, to deliberate, also means not to succumb to one’s initial impulses, which is meaningfully interconnected with the

practicing of freedom. Phronetic education aims at teaching a sensible approach to what needs to be done, thus a careful recognition of the time something must be done, and, in the first place, a decision to follow an initial idea, or forsake its prospect completely. *Phronesis* provides space for a thoughtful use of one's freedom in the face of the outside pressure, if one discerns that what is pressurized is not good for oneself. It also helps oppose one's inner censor, or the voice of the habit, e.g., excessive dutifulness, overprotectiveness, or submissiveness, if such an attitude does not serve one's good. One can draw here on William James' salient words regarding the decisive impact of the habits we cherish and the personalities we have on our destinies: "Sow an action, and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny." ("William James Quotes"). One of the targets of phronetic education is to break free within the established ways of thinking. And this concerns also the fossilized ways of behavior, through which we reap, according to James, our destiny. Most crucially, phronetic education is the education of hope as it—via the implementation of a meticulous and accurate cognition of what is, of the outside reality, and of the self's reality—facilitates the break with the disagreeable and unbeneficial for one's developmental features of character, or even with one's destiny. In this way, phronetic teaching is a powerful teaching of hope that begets and fosters the freedom of an individual human being.

### **Phronetic education as a dialogic encounter: the challenge of the unanticipated**

What happens in educational situations is more often than not unpredictable, and to capture the complexities which may arise remains within the domain of *phronesis*. If the primary aim of a phronetic teacher is to induce and enhance reflective thinking in students, it requires virtues such as openness, devotion, and responsibility. We see these as crucial in the development of reflectivity after Dewey's identification of wholeheartedness, open-mindedness, and responsibility as the fundamental moral values predicating and enhancing free reflective thinking (cf. Dewey 1932, 112–114). In equal measure, however, reflectivity requires the practicing of freedom as there are no prescribed ways to act within the uniqueness of a given set of conditions and circumstances. On the side of the student, the process of accommodating reflection via inferences,

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judgments, evaluations requests to comply with a continuous practicing of freedom, which becomes a habit, a virtue. Both sides of the educational situation are bound together into a conduct which, on the one hand, necessitates reciprocity, but, on the other hand, is oriented towards my free choice of co-perception and cooperation. If one party resigns, the conduct is broken and the meticulous building of a possibility to truly teach and learn gets shattered. This, however, is the risk of entering an educational situation.

To follow the imperative of phronetic education for practicing freedom means to let oneself be led by the completely unanticipated and the new. As an exercising of practical wisdom, it involves neither mere reconstruction of knowledge nor delving into ideas for their own sake. The educative process that we deem phronetic embraces the kind of reasoning that applies the formerly unexplored ways of thinking to the fullest extent. Thinking in terms of the previously unknown, or what has not been taken into account, demonstrates phronetic education's openness to free reflection and criticism, and thus enhances the freedom of an individual, of a group, or a community. Phronetic education addresses the singularities of our experience, and, in this way, it opens itself to freedom as an expression of individuality and uniqueness. It places itself at the interstices of human experience, knowledge, language, and freedom, and partakes in constant negotiating of our being-in-the-world and everything that this being involves in the interweaving of experiential, lingual, epistemological, and existential planes.

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According to Gadamer, meaning and understanding, and truth in general, cannot be found otherwise than in the process of communication. This, however, is not about transmitting information, but it is the kind of communication, in which “[...] subject matter becomes mutually accessible for two or more people, while the medium which gives us this access withdraws from its prominence (Gadamer 2013, xiv). The dialogical encounter, in which Gadamer sees the locus of understanding, happens between individuals, but also between the text and its reader. Education as a process that aims at seeking and uncovering truth must be conscious of the ways in which it can fulfill its main objective. Phronetic education predicates itself on the potentially unimpeded, and also inconclusive dialogue between the educator and the educated. It is the unrestricted nature of the dialogic encounter in which truth

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emerges. The educated is not viewed as intruding upon the authority of the educator, but rather as one who co-participates in and co-creates what is to be discovered via learning. Phronetic education is thus a continuous invitation to co-respond, co-interpret, co-create, and above all to con-verse, as the ultimate goal of education is a meaningful change that happens while the educator and the educated are involved in a conversational exchange. The educator's inviting gesture is the gesture that enables the practice of freedom, as none of the possible responses, interpretations, reflections is *a priori* considered as being less important, or simply incorrect.

132 The manifold and intriguing nature of the dialogic encounter which takes place in phronetic education can be well explicated through an excerpt from the Gospel—the encounter between a young man and the Good Master. The young man in the Gospel recognizes his deficiency, and thus he wants to learn. He recognizes his need of the gift of education (cf. Wierciński 2017, 70). On the face value, he lacks nothing. Abiding by God's law since his early youth, he almost sets a perfect example. And yet, the human heart is quite complex. It takes *phronesis* to understand it. The incongruity between the call to fulfill one's innermost potential and the outside view of one's self generates an urgent need to exercise one's freedom. The young man is free in the question he asks the Good Master, and is led by a firm belief that it is the right person to address his query to. It is practical wisdom that governs the intentionality and actuality of what happens. We can talk here of the hermeneutic *Bewegung* which affords the space for *phronesis* in which the dialectics of the question and answer takes place.

The dialogic hermeneutics of the Gospel episode shifts our attention from the young man to the Good Master and what he says. The young man's question is answered with a question: "Why callest thou me good?" (Matthew 19:17) This question and its follow-up ("[...] there is none good but one, that is, God [...]") (Matthew 19:17) not only direct the young man's mind to seek truth and its wellspring in the Highest Good, that is God, but remind us of the fundamental source of human capacity to do well—*Homo Capax Dei*. The Gospel highlights the import of good by mentioning it three times: "Good Master," "Why callest thou me *good*?" "[...] here is none *good* but one, that is, God [...]" (italics mine). The young man places trust in the teaching. One does

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not expect a good teacher to allure you with a facile solution. Not only does the “good” imply a qualitative value in terms of morality, but it draws attention to the heart of phronetic teaching—which is not deceptive or manipulative, as it opens itself to the practice of freedom. Both the educated and the educator are invited to exercise freedom in order to follow the ideal of phronetic intelligence that presupposes an openness to what presents itself, to what emerges as the outcome of the dialogic encounter between the two parties.

The Good Master focuses on the practicality of the solution that the situatedness, provisionality, and contingency of the context requires: “[...] go and sell [...]” (Matthew 19:21). The radicalness of the vow is inasmuch shocking as unbearable. It seems to be important that the Teacher says first “go,” and then “sell.” The “go” implies the loss of the introspective clinging to oneself, to one’s inner life. “Go” among those who are very much like you in their humanness, minor insufficiencies, or acute lacks, and weaknesses. “Sell” means “let it go,” not so much deprive yourself, but rather lose the rigid grip you display on what you have. There is no other way to learn how to live well unless you let go. Let go all you claim as yours, the precious possessions of your mind and heart. The Gospel episode bears witness to a possibility of a remarkable exchange, which does not come to realization. Let it go, and I will give it all to you. It is the practical wisdom that informs the Good Master’s conduct, and it is the practical wisdom in which the young man fails. The encounter between the two, which is a hermeneutic conversation, is always, in its very essence, open to the exercising of one’s free will. Furthermore, it teaches one to practice free will in questioning, dialoguing, disbelieving, approving, accepting, translating to one’s own language, adopting as one’s own. Freedom is both the rudimentary basis of the encounter and ensues from it as its most invaluable goal.

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Phronetic education is antidogmatic. It orients itself towards freedom, it respects human free action, endorses it, and teaches it. The climax of the story of the young man is the moment of his exercising of freedom. Although he chooses to go away, to forsake the teaching he so ardently desires, to use the Greek term, his behavior is an expression of *akrasia*, he is in the position to practice free will. The Gospel is silent about what happens to him next. We can only speculate. What is more important, however, is the phronetic educative

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process which takes place here. The Good Master challenges the young man, but this is the kind of challenge which embraces the genuine possibility of an enactment of what seems to be the best choice in the particularity and uniqueness of the young man's situation. One can say that it is hardly possible to find a young man of such high level of virtuousness, and yet this righteous man seeks even a higher, or different dimension of what it means to live well. The Good Master adjusts his teaching to the individuality and unrepeatability of the situation that unfolds in front of him. He does not follow a ready-made solution, or a certain matrix, but rather selects this unique, one-of-a-kind advice which is the best suited one in the entirety of the young man's life position and disposition. Following the example of this biblical story, we can see clearly that it is the situatedness of the encounter between the teacher and the pupil, and what ensues from the pupil's personal history, that govern the phronetic educative process, and not the realization of a prescribed answer.

134 The undogmatic character of phronetic education takes us back again to Gadamer's notion of the experienced human being. Gadamer's reflection highlights the dialectic of experience which lies not in fulfillment, but in openness:

[...] the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone 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 definite knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (Gadamer 2013, 364)

From this, we can draw a conclusion that the situatedness of the dialogic encounter that happens in phronetic education interlocks with the newness and openness of human experience for which it provides space, and of which it takes full cognizance. Phronetic education embraces both a retainment and an abandonment of one's former convictions. It includes a verification of one's presuppositions. When they are corroborated, one sees the bias, or the unhealthy judgments one issued. Taking care of practical wisdom strengthens the sense of one's integrity, it enroots one in the hermeneutic thinking. Practical wisdom

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enhances thinking that is unadulterated, that is not infused with the dogmatic, the obligatory, or what is proclaimed to be correct. Phronetic education both invites and enables to exercise freedom as it shows care for a human being to make it possible for her to become fully developed. It draws on the ancient Greek ideal of the care of the soul. Phronetic pedagogy follows the need to state what one could be, and does accordingly, with the self's immersion in the given situation, it listens to what it says.

It needs to be accentuated that phronetic education as a dialogic encounter is a dynamic event that has a transformative power. Not only does the educated party change, but it is the educator who undergoes a meaningful change, too. As temporal, finite, and historical aspects of human experience preclude any absolute or objective truth, phronetically guarded education does not strive for securing an ultimate truth, but is rather in itself a model of a hermeneutic conversation with its openness to the freedom of reflective thinking and the freedom of a human being in the fusion of the apparently often very divergent horizons of understanding.

## **Conclusion**

Our aim was to demonstrate that phronetic education is a process which enhances free reflective thinking, and through being the locus of exercising freedom it leads to establish oneself as a fully free, individual human being. As it relies on the deepened examination of one's actions and gaining from one's experiences, phronetic teaching orients itself towards an increase and improvement in exercising human freedom. We have drawn on Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* and its impact on the foundations of phronetic education. And we have expounded on Gadamer's hermeneutics of finitude and historicity, and its impact on phronetic pedagogy.

Reflection on education in light of Aristotle's practical intelligence allows us to conclude that phronetic teaching opens itself to a full acknowledgement of human free will, and benefits from exercising it. Practical wisdom, as the core of phronetic education, not only originates and facilitates the possibility of the exercising of human freedom, but brings it to full fruition. In this way, the imperative of phronetic education for practicing freedom bespeaks the ideal of education *per se* as freedom

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looms over the horizon of the human being's existence as the most fundamental and most desirable value which can be discovered and cared for in the process of education. Gadamer's explication of the situatedness and provisionality of human experience leads us to see that the temporality, conditionality, and historicity of human life embrace the situation of teaching. Teaching, therefore, is not something that is detached from human life. Just on the contrary, it needs to take into account the provisional, final, and historical aspects of human existence.

Phronetic education which breeds itself on Gadamer's hermeneutic sensibility is capable of identifying the exercising of human freedom as its most irreducible value. The hermeneutic insight, therefore, affords the practice of freedom in phronetic teaching, which helps center on students' purposeful behavior as wholly enmeshed in reality as it is. Phronetic pedagogy cares for the reality of the given situation, and this reality informs it about the right action that should be taken. Meaningfully, phronetic education seeks to align theoretical knowledge with students' lives. A particular, practical stand an individual is taught to take bespeaks phronetic teaching's strength, or even  
136 its superiority over other forms of teaching. As taking the challenge of the unanticipated, phronetic education is a true dialogic encounter, in which human freedom is its ultimate gain.

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