

***Bildung* and Moral Self-Cultivation in Higher Education: What Does it Mean and How Can it be Achieved?**

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One of the most fundamental questions that can be asked about education is what it is for. Why do we need education? Which are its most fundamental purposes?

The most obvious and generally accepted answer is that education aims at providing students with knowledge and skills which match the demands of employers, thus enabling students to find jobs and employers to find employees—call this the *vocational* goal. However, many thinkers and traditions of thought have stressed the importance of non-vocational goals of education. In Greek thinking, the ideal of *paideia* included the development of moral virtues and logical and rhetorical skills which were thought essential for becoming a good human being and democratic citizen. In a similar vein, today's *liberal education* in the US and other countries aims at providing students with a basis of general, non-specialised knowledge and skills which allow them to contribute actively and positively to society. In German philosophical and educational thought, J. G. Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others have developed the concept of *Bildung*, a word which in its most literal sense means formation, but which here refers more specifically to formation or cultivation, in education or otherwise, of human moral virtues and other capacities. (Herder 2002, Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, Gadamer 1960/1989.)

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the German philosopher, linguist, and educational reformer, is arguably the most influential member of the *Bildung* tradition, and combines theoretical and practical educational perspectives in a way that makes him particularly interesting for anyone concerned with both the theoretical analysis of the idea of human self-cultivation and its consequences for educational practice. In a philosophical treatise from 1791-92, Humboldt defines *Bildung* as “the highest and most harmonious development of [Man’s] powers to a complete and consistent whole” (Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, ch. 2: 10), and, working as an educational reformer for the Prussian state, he says the following about it in a report to the king from 1809:

[The] undertaking is... to allow each of your Royal Highness’ subjects to be educated (gebildet) to be moral men and good citizens (sittlichen Menschen und guten Bürger)... The following must therefore be achieved; that with the method of instruction one cares not that this or that be learned; but rather that in learning memory be exercised, understanding sharpened, judgment rectified, and moral feeling (sittliche Gefühl) refined. (Humboldt 1903–36 vol. X: 205, quoted in Sorkin 1983: 64. On the relation between individual and civic *Bildung* in Humboldt’s thought, see Sorkin: 66ff.)

According to Humboldt, freedom and a variety of situations are the main conditions for *Bildung*; a many-sided development of human virtues and capabilities can be hindered by political oppression, but also by a one-sided cultivation of some special faculty or set of faculties at the expense of others. (Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, ch. 2: 10.)

Sweden is one of the countries in which the *Bildung* tradition has had a considerable influence on educational thought. For example, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has recently published a series of booklets about *Bildung* and education (www.hsv.se/bildning), and my own university college, Södertörns högskola (South Stockholm university college), states *civic Bildung* (in Swedish *medborgerlig bildning*) as one of its three main educational goals or profiles, the other two being multiculturalism and multidisciplinary. (www.sh.se) But despite its indisputable influence on educational theory

and ideology, it has been questioned whether the idea of *Bildung* has had much practical impact on Swedish higher education. (Barrling Hermansson 2005.) My own experience as a university teacher struggling with the task of implementing the *Bildung* ideal in educational practice has led me to suspect that this is more than a coincidence or a result of insufficient determination or effort by universities and university teachers; the very concept of *Bildung*, I believe, is vague, ambiguous, and difficult to put it into practice in a way that, for instance, multiculturalism and multidisciplinary are not. Striking evidence of this can be found in a recent candidate thesis in didactics which discerns twelve main meanings of the concept as used in contemporary Swedish educational debate: general or non-specialised knowledge, cultural activity (going to the theatre, etc.), democratic education, moral responsibility and reflectiveness, ability to understand things by placing them in wider contexts, knowledge in certain essential parts of the humanities and social sciences (such as history), ability to transform information into knowledge, personal development, learning skills, critical thinking and a critical attitude, multidisciplinary knowledge, and ability to see things from more than one perspective. (Lindskog 2007.) This long list reveals both the great ambiguity of the concept of *Bildung* and the importance of many of the ideas associated with it for any serious debate on the general goals of education. In fact, the problem of ambiguity seems to go back to the beginnings of the *Bildung* tradition. In Humboldt's fragment "Theory of *Bildung*" from 1793 or 1794, the central notion is explicated in a multitude of ways, the internal relations of which are far from clear (Humboldt 1793/1794/2000); Humboldt seems to equate "*Bildung*, wisdom, and virtue" (Humboldt 1793/1794/2000: 59), the task being "to transform scattered knowledge and action into a closed system, mere scholarship into scholarly *Bildung*, merely restless endeavour into judicious activity" (60), but he also describes *Bildung* as "the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay" (58), "the interplay between his [man's] receptivity and his self-activity", "the heightening of his [man's] powers and elevation of his personality", and "the changes that any intellectual activity gradually acquires as it proceeds, [and] the changes that the human character undergoes in particular nations and periods, as well as in general, through the occupations it takes up" (60).

Despite the great amount of literature that already exists, I believe it is necessary, therefore, to ask: What is *Bildung*? Or rather: What *can* we mean, or rather, what *ought* we to mean by *Bildung* today if it is to function as a goal of higher education? And how can it be put into educational practice? In which ways can university teachers working in a contemporary system of mass education encourage students to develop their full potentials of human capacities in the ways envisioned in the *Bildung* tradition? The problem has two sides, one theoretical and philosophical, concerning the interpretation and critical evaluation of the ideal of self-cultivation, one practical and educational, concerning possible methods for the realisation of the ideal, or some version of it.

To answer all these questions, a much larger investigation would be required than what is possible here. However, I will try to identify what I believe is a main difficulty with the idea of *Bildung* as an educational goal in contemporary society; it is difficult to see how teachers can stimulate their students' *moral* development into responsible and reflective persons without imposing on them ready-made moral values, thereby hindering their *cognitive* development into critical and independent thinkers. This is the theme of the first section below. In the second section, I point to some didactic methods which I believe makes it possible to handle the difficulty, and thereby to help teachers put the *Bildung* ideal into educational practice.

Moral development and critical, independent thought

In English, *Bildung* is usually translated as *self-formation* or *self-cultivation*, sometimes as *self-perfection*. (See for instance Bruford 1975.) In favour of the term “self-cultivation” speaks the fact that Humboldt and other thinkers in the Romantic era often explain *Bildung* in analogy to the organic process of growth in plants; like a seed, a human being has a certain inherent potential which is only brought to realisation if cultivation, or favourable natural circumstances, provides the right conditions. (See, for instance, Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, ch. 2: 13.) Following Kant’s division of reason into theoretical, practical and aesthetic reason, it has traditionally been divided into a dimension of knowing or (non-evaluative) thinking, a moral dimension and an aesthetic dimension. (Klafki 2000: 96.) (It is interesting to note how Martha Nussbaum, without explicitly placing herself in the *Bildung* tradition, follows the same division in her argument for critical thinking, world citizenship, and narrative imagination as goals of liberal education; Nussbaum 1997.)

As indicated above, I believe that one of the main difficulties with the *Bildung* concept has to do with its moral dimension. Many of the classical thinkers in the tradition considered the development of moral autonomy and responsibility and a readiness for morally motivated action to be the most important aspects of the *Bildung* process (Klafki 2000: 96). And regardless of historical matters, the ability to make well-grounded moral and other action-guiding evaluative judgements and to act upon them are clearly of immense importance in a world man’s technical capabilities have developed beyond the wildest dreams of earlier generations, while nothing comparable seems to have happened in the field of moral thinking. But while teachers can claim special authority in their various fields of expertise—which, among other things, gives them the right to assess students’ knowledge and skills and grade them—they can hardly do the same with respect to moral values and virtues. For instance, it would be next to absurd for a teacher, at least at the university level to put grades on his students’ moral responsibility and readiness for moral action. What, then, can it possibly mean to promote moral development and self-cultivation as part of higher education?

Let me again use Sweden as an example, and compare higher education with the primary and secondary school system on this point. The general goal of the Swedish compulsory and non-compulsory school system as stated in the national curricula is in close agreement with the *Bildung* ideal: “The task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby actively participate in social life by giving of their best in responsible freedom”. (Lpo 94 and Lpf 94, sec. 1.1.) The emphasis here is thus on freedom as a condition of self-cultivation. However, it is freedom within clearly defined limits, since it is also stated that “the school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those values on which our society is based” and a list of such values is given: the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, solidarity with the weak and vulnerable, justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility, and, more generally, “the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism” (loc.cit.).

By contrast, the main goals of Swedish higher education as stated in the Higher Education Act is to “develop the students’ ability to make independent and critical assessments and to independently perceive, formulate and solve problems”, and to develop their knowledge, skills and critical and communicative competence in their particular fields of specialisation. (SFS 1992:1434, sec. 8.) Note how this differs in several ways from the statement of educational goals in the school curricula. First, it puts certain formal or abstractly methodological restrictions on students’ *processes* of thinking; in essence, that they should be critical and independent. Second, and presumably as a consequence of the emphasis on cognitive independence, it says little or nothing about the substance, or *content*, of students’ thought; although it stipulates in rather vague terms that higher education

institutions should promote sustainable development, equality between the sexes, and understanding of other countries (sec. 5), it gives no list similar to that in the school curricula of moral values or virtues to be instilled or formed in students. Third and finally, nothing is mentioned about personal development, discovering one's own uniqueness as an individual, or anything of the kind. Thus, a central element in the *Bildung* process is *not* considered to be a central task for higher education.

It seems to me that these three points of difference are closely interrelated. Schools can claim an authority over children and youths of much the same sort as that which they parents possess (although not of the same degree). Higher education institutions, however, cannot; although university teachers can put formal and methodological demands on students' thought, there can be nothing like a set of moral values which university students must come to accept as part of their education, at least not of the sort that can be said to form essential parts of someone's personality. To put it drastically and simplistically, school teachers can tell their students *what* to think, while university teachers can only tell them *how* to think. As a consequence, schools can make credible claims to cultivate the personalities of their students, or at least to strive for it (although they may of course fail)—they try to foster a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility, respect for human life, and so on—whereas for higher education institutions, it is difficult to explain how, if at all, they can do something similar. Indeed, it could be argued that they *should* not do any such thing; being adult citizens in democratic societies, university students enjoy freedom of speech and thought and should not be compelled to accept the verdicts of any supposed higher authorities on moral, political or other evaluative topics.

Interestingly, much the same point is strongly emphasised by Humboldt. "State measures", he writes, "accustom men to look for instruction, guidance, and assistance from without, rather than to rely upon their own expedients", and thereby directly counteract the development of men's own faculties. The best system of instruction, therefore,

unquestionably consists in proposing, as it were, all possible solutions of the problem in question, so that the citizen may select, according to his own judgement, the course which seems to him the most appropriate; or, still better, so as to enable him to discover the solution for himself, from a careful consideration of all the objections. In the case of adult citizens, the State can only adopt this negative [emphasis added] system of instruction by extending freedom, which allows all obstacles to arise, while it develops the skill, and multiplies the opportunities necessary to meet them. (Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, ch. 3: 19-20.)

Consequently, Humboldt argued for a progressive increase in freedom and responsibility in education. In elementary school (*Elementarunterricht*), students were to learn basic skills. In high school (*Schule*), the curriculum would aim to show students how to learn and make them intellectually independent as well as to learn specific material. At university, finally, they would be free members of a community devoted to learning. (Sorkin 1983: 63.)

The university teacher is therefore no longer a teacher and the student no longer someone merely engaged in the learning process but a person who undertakes his own research, while the professor directs his research and supports him in it. (Humboldt 1903–36, vol. XIII: 261, quoted in Hohendorf 1993/2000: 8.)

It follows that moral self-cultivation at university level should typically *not* be based on ready-made lists of values to be internalised by students, although such lists may well have their role to play at lower levels of education. But if this the wrong way to promote moral *Bildung* in higher education, what is the right way?

For the reasons just stated, it must involve a very high degree of freedom for students. However, if this is taken to mean simply that students should choose freely among available courses and higher education institutions, then it becomes questionable whether, in the reality of today's societies, much can remain of the ambition that higher education should contribute to moral development. In a system of mass education, many students will tend to think of education as little more than a means to get a job and hence as having no other legitimate goal than the purely vocational one. Moreover, many students are under financial pressure to complete their studies as quickly as possible and to aim for jobs that allow them to pay back their study loan debts or save money for their children's education. Consequently, even among those who would prefer if possible to devote at least part of their higher education to *bildende* topics of study, many will choose not to do so. In other words, the freedom which is necessary for the higher stages of moral self-development can easily lead to a situation where little or no moral self-development takes place.

It is my belief that this conflict or apparent conflict between freedom and moral development is one important reason why the *Bildung* ideal, despite its merits, seems to have had relatively little practical influence on higher education in Sweden, and, I surmise, in other countries. Realising that they cannot claim legitimacy for a system where students are given lists of values to internalise, and being aware of no plausible alternative way of stimulating moral self-cultivation or development in adults, politicians, authorities, and higher education institutions in democratic states have given up, in their educational practice if not perhaps in their rhetoric, most or all ambitions to make moral development an essential part of higher education. Add to this the fact that it seems much easier, generally speaking, to gain acceptance for public and private expenses on education by describing them as cost-efficient investments in economic growth for the country and future incomes for students, and you get a situation where it is difficult maintain any other goals for education than the purely vocational one.

A crucial question, therefore, is whether the conflict between freedom and *Bildung* is real or merely apparent. Are there methods of moral self-cultivation, applicable to higher education, which do not come into conflict with freedom in the way just described?

Again, this is a problem with both a theoretical-philosophical and a practical-educational dimension. In what follows, I will argue that Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic re-interpretation of the *Bildung* concept (Gadamer 1960) and certain elements of the so-called transformative learning tradition in education provide a double solution to the problem. Gadamer develops a "negative" theoretical analysis of self-cultivation as a process of wrestling with problems without pre-defined answers, even without pre-defined formulations of the problems themselves. Transformative learning theory, or certain concepts and models borrowed from it, explains how teachers can work didactically to promote such processes of self-cultivation.

The didactics of Bildung: fusion of horizons and transformative learning

In his *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer sums up much of the *Bildung* tradition and transforms it by basing it on a hermeneutic theory of interpretation (Gadamer 1960: 9-19). According to Gadamer, it belongs to the nature of interpretation that it involves the interpreter in a sort of dialogue which transforms the interpreter as a moral subject. A text always has some subject matter (*die Sache*), that which the text is *about*. When the truth, or reasonableness, of that which the text says about the subject matter seems unproblematic from the interpreter's point of view, then there is normally no need for interpretation; instead, understanding comes about spontaneously, or immediately, without any special effort, as in most everyday talk on uncomplicated matters. But if that which the text says about the subject matter seems radically incompatible with the interpreter's own views on the subject

matter, then interpretation is called for. For example, when we are told to love our enemies, the question what that really means in the Gospels (or at least *one* such question) arises precisely because it seems at least *prima facie* extremely difficult to accept. (Gadamer does not use this particular example.) In other words, the need for interpretation, as opposed to immediate understanding, arises because the interpreter is confronted with a text written from a radically different perspective, or “horizon of understanding” than his own, and thereby finds his own views on the subject matter challenged. Understanding always takes place from within a horizon, and in the confrontation between the interpreter’s and the other’s horizons of understanding, the two conflicting systems of convictions eventually must be integrated in a “fusion of horizons”. (Gadamer 1960: 306-307.) According to Gadamer, interpretation therefore requires something like a *dialogue* with the other, in which the interpreter tries to reconcile the opposing views on the subject matter. In this way, understanding the *meaning* of what the other says becomes inseparable from accepting it as true, or reasonable; *Verständnis is zunächst Einverständnis*, “understanding is, primarily, agreement”. (Gadamer 1960: 180.)

Drawing on Gadamer’s theory, Bernt Gustavsson has argued that the understanding of other cultures is a paradigmatic form of *Bildung*, in which the interpreter’s factual and moral outlook is transformed by confrontation with radically different horizons of thought. (Gustavsson & Osman 1996. Cf. also Gustavsson 1996.) This is of course not to say that it is the *only* form of *Bildung*. Any confrontation with different systems of beliefs and values should have the same potential to change one’s horizons, if one enters into it with the aim to reach agreement with the other on the matters at issue. (The opposite would be to adopt an attitude of “openness of indifference”—see below.)

I believe that Gadamer’s analysis of the concept of *Bildung* provides essential clues in the search for didactic methods that can promote moral self-cultivation without imposing ready-made values on students. Note how well the analysis fits in with Humboldt’s idea of the “negative” didactic method of presenting “all possible solutions of the problem in question, so that the citizen may select, according to his own judgement, the course which seems to him the most appropriate”. (Humboldt 1791-1792/1993, ch. 3: 19, quoted earlier.) In the process of *Bildung*, as Gadamer explicates it, the student or participant in the process is (i) made to reflect on a certain problem, (ii) presented with more than one possible solution without being told that this solution or the other is the right one, and thereby (iii) provoked or stimulated to think independently on the problem. Such “negative” learning can take different paths. Humboldt seems to imagine a method of first presenting a problem and then possible solutions. By contrast, the problem in a Gadamerian confrontation with the radically other may well be one which I have not explicitly formulated until I realise that someone else has treated it in a way different and incompatible with my own. Before I learn that others have different beliefs, values, and customs, I may have been unaware that there existed alternatives to the beliefs and customs of my own people or group, and consequently have failed to realise that there existed a *problem* about the matter, in the sense of a genuinely problematic question, an important question to which the answer is far from obvious. The *Bildung* process as described by Gadamer could be called doubly negative; neither the solutions nor the problems are pre-defined, or at least they need not be so.

What does this imply for educational practice; what “negative” didactic methods are available for the teacher who wants to promote moral self-cultivation in students?

I see no reason to limit oneself, in the search for such methods, to thinkers or traditions explicitly associated with the idea of *Bildung*. Other traditions may well have formulated methods that are negative in the sense just explicated and contribute to moral development.

One such tradition (although not the only one), is transformative learning theory. In a seminal article, Jack Mezirow focuses on processes of development in beliefs, values, self-image and behaviour which takes place when we learn:

“to become critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that influence the ways we see ourselves and our relationships and the way we pattern our lives. Let me refer to this as learning about ‘meaning-perspectives’... [We] undergo significant phases of reassessment and growth in which familiar assumptions are challenged and new directions and commitments are charted.” (Mezirow 1977: 154.)

“When a meaning-perspective can no longer comfortably deal with anomalies in a new situation, a transformation can occur. Adding knowledge, skills, or increasing competencies within the present perspective is no longer functional; the attempt to integrate new experiences into one’s frame of reference no longer resolves the conflict.” (Mezirow 1977: 157.)

Nothing seems to exclude the possibility that perspective transformation, as Mezirow describes it in the passages just quoted, could happen by means of non-rational processes, such as religious conversion. But another possible way—and clearly the one that Mezirow has in mind—is critical thinking, or “critical appraisal of the assumptions underlying our roles, priorities and beliefs” (Mezirow 1977: 157).

Stephen Brookfield, another thinker in the transformative learning tradition, outlines a way in which this particular form of critical thinking can proceed. Much in the same spirit as Mezirow, he emphasises how “we are imprisoned in our own histories and constrained by the inevitably narrow paradigms of thought and action we inhabit” (Brookfield 1987: 91), and investigates strategies for liberating oneself from these narrow constraints. According to Brookfield, the two central components in such strategies are the activities of identifying and challenging assumptions, or presuppositions of thought and action, and of exploring and imagining alternatives. (Brookfield 1987: 15.)

Trying to identify the assumptions that underlie the ideas, beliefs, values, and actions that we (and others) take for granted is central to critical thinking. Once these assumptions are identified, critical thinkers examine their accuracy and validity. (Brookfield 1987: 7.)

Central to critical thinking is [also] the capacity to imagine and explore alternatives to existing ways of thinking and living... When we realize that alternatives to supposedly fixed belief systems, habitual behaviors, and entrenched social structures always exist... we exhibit what might be called reflective skepticism... People begin to look critically at their past values, common-sense ideas, and habitual behaviors, [and] begin the precarious business of contemplating new self-images, perspectives, and actions. (Brookfield 1987: 8-10.)

What didactic methods exist for implementing such ideas in practical education? An example is provided by Christine van Halen-Faber: a course in “Reflective Practice” at the preservice level of teacher education, consisting of four distinct parts. First, students listen to stories told by experienced teachers. Second, students reflect orally on these stories, employing concepts that focus attention on processes of learning and transformation described in the stories. Third, they describe their own teaching practice in a practice-teaching assignment, with particular emphasis on critical incidents (events which stand out as especially good or bad experiences). Here they are encouraged to analyse and critically reflect on their teaching experiences, using their practice-teaching logbooks and theoretical concepts (for instance, Schön’s “concept reflection-in-action”; Schön 1987). Fourth, and

finally, they prepare an essay in which they reflect on what it means to become “an intentionally thoughtful teacher”, and for which, apart from that, they are given only a minimum of instruction. (van Halen-Faber 1997: 54-55.)

My intention here is not to provide an overview of “negative” didactic theories and methods for moral self-cultivation, but only to give a few examples. However, it seems to me that much of what has been called “second wave” theories of critical thinking is relevant and useful here. In an overview of critical thinking theory, Kerry S. Walters criticises a traditional “logicistic” approach to critical thinking, which defines it exclusively in terms of logical principles and methods, such as inductive and deductive reasoning, fallacy recognition, statistical calculation, evidence assessment, and argument analysis. (Walters 1994a.) According to Walters and other thinkers in what he calls the second wave of critical thinking theory, good thinking requires logical skills but is not exclusively defined by them. Creative imagination, empathy, and self-reflective awareness of one’s own presuppositions are equally important. (Cf. again Mezirow 1977, Brookfield 1987, and, for example, King & Kitchener 1994, Thayer-Bacon 2000, the contributions in Walters 1994b, and Brodin 2007, ch. 3.) The good thinker goes beyond received claims and problems to envision other possibilities, and empathises with perspectives contrary to his own in order to explore their possibilities. In doing so, he takes care to follow the hermeneutic method of interpreting the arguments, statements, and actions of others in terms of their wider contexts. (Walters 1994a.) I think it is fair to say, therefore, that first wave theories are primarily oriented towards the “positive” didactic task of teaching pre-defined logical methods and principles of thinking (in a wide sense of “logical”), while in second wave theories, the aim is typically to identify more open and “negative” methods and processes of learning, where encounters between different systems or traditions of thought are, or at least can be, decisive for setting the processes in motion.

To sum up, then, I have argued that transformative learning theory, or certain strands in it, indicates ways to implement the ideal of moral *Bildung* in educational practice. When pointing out parallels between theories and theoretical traditions in this way, one should of course not ignore their differences. Apart from what I have mentioned here, transformative learning and *Bildung* theory contain elements that cannot easily be reconciled, both between and within the traditions. But considering the limited practical impact that the ideal of *Bildung* seems to have had on education, at least in its moral dimension, and considering also the way in which goals and concepts in the respective theories or families of theories seem to overlap, I think that answers to problems that arise within one of them may well be sought in the other.

Conclusions

We began by asking two questions: what can moral *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, possibly mean if it is to function today as a goal of higher education, and how can it be implemented in teaching? This two-part problem was narrowed down to another one, namely: how can moral self-cultivation be a part of higher education if it is not to be taught by the “positive” method (as it could be called) of instilling pre-defined values in the minds of students? What “negative” didactics methods, in Humboldt’s special sense of the word, can be employed for this purpose? And what can moral self-cultivation *mean* if it is to proceed in this way? A double answer was found in Gadamer’s idea of *Bildung* by means of confrontation between horizons of understanding and fusions of such horizons, and certain strands in transformative learning theory. The core idea was that moral self-cultivation is a process of (i) realising *alternatives* to one’s habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, thereby (ii) becoming able to identify the *presuppositions* or assumptions underlying those ways of thinking, etc., which

in turn leads to (iii) critical assessment of these presuppositions—and, we may add here, to (iv) critical assessment of the alternatives.

Of course, there are problems connected with the idea of learning by means of encounters between conflicting perspectives. I think it is important, to begin with, to distinguish rational from non-rational processes of learning or belief and perspective revision—a distinction which too often is not clearly drawn in second wave theories of critical thinking. The objections from second wave theory to logicism should not be taken to imply that logic, argument, and reasoning has no role to play in critical thinking, perspective transformation, or moral self-cultivation. Quite on the contrary, I think, it is only if transformation and development happens by means of reasoning and argumentation that it can have any place in a system of education (as opposed to religion, for instance). Hence, it is decisively important to emphasise (as Mezirow and Brookfield do in the works quoted above) the role of critical assessment of assumptions, or presuppositions, in the process of perspective transformation. If one's meaning perspective changes merely because of group pressure, for instance, the change is of no value for self-cultivation in education.

Moreover, it is crucially important in encounters between incompatible perspectives, or horizons of understanding, that the participants aim at reaching agreement, in the way envisioned by Gadamer. The mere co-existence of different views, in a spirit of unconditional tolerance, is not sufficient. This point has been well argued by Allan Bloom, the American political philosopher, in an attack on the wide-spread idea that cultural relativism implies greater openness towards other traditions. (Bloom 1987.) Before the massive influence of relativism in the last decades, it was usual among university students to believe in the existence of something like objective moral truths and to attempt to learn something about those truths by studying the classics of literature and philosophy. Now, students mostly believe that values are relative to each culture and period, perhaps even to each individual; the moral visions of, say, Shakespeare and Aristotle may have been true *for them*, relative to *their* respective world-views, or societies, or something of that kind, but are not therefore true for people today. In one way, this does imply a greater openness towards other cultures and traditions. If there is nothing in those traditions that can challenge one's own beliefs, one has little reason to criticise them. With a well-coined term, Bloom calls this the *openness of indifference*, the openness or acceptance of someone who is *not* prepared to critically question his own views, and who therefore can accept other views the more easily and effortlessly.

This is an important word of warning. What is required for transformative learning, moral self-cultivation, and *Bildung*, I believe, is a “negative” didactics of learning and reflection by means of confrontation with incompatible perspectives, or systems of beliefs; but this cannot take place in the spirit of tolerant indifference. Instead, it requires the critical and rational openness of someone who is prepared to say, as Karl Popper once put it, “I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort we may get nearer to the truth”. (Popper 1966: 238.)

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