CONTRIBUTION TO A HERMENEUTICAL PEDAGOGY

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This article argues that philosophical hermeneutics, despite its ontological character, can inform higher education teaching in a meaningful way. After discussing theoretical aspects of philosophical hermeneutics, focus will turn to pre-understandings and historically effected consciousness. These concepts will lead to hermeneutics's transformative nature, with the notion of openness serving as a common thread. The review of three further concepts of philosophical hermeneutics—hermeneutical experience, authentic dialogue, and Bildung*—will provide insight into openness as a vanishing point without being a culmination. Parallels to Mezirow's method of transformative learning will be drawn and the concept of* Bildung*, central to philosophical hermeneutics, will be considered through the Humboldtian lens to better extract its practical implications, which lay beyond Gadamer's theoretical focus. Finally, the last section will cement the applicative intent of the article by presenting concrete teaching practices that flow from philosophical hermeneutics.*

Le présent article soutient que l'herméneutique philosophique, malgré son caractère ontologique, peut informer l'enseignement supérieur de manière non triviale. Après avoir discuté certains aspects théoriques de l'herméneutique philosophique, l'on se tournera vers les précompréhensions et la conscience du travail de l'histoire. Ces concepts conduiront au caractère transformateur de l'herméneutique, la notion d'ouverture servant de fil conducteur. L'examen de trois concepts supplémentaires de l'herméneutique philosophique, soit l'expérience herméneutique, le dialogue authentique et le concept de Bildung*, fournira un aperçu de l'ouverture comme point de fuite sans être un point culminant. Des parallèles avec la méthode d'apprentissage transformatif de Mezirow seront établis et le concept de* Bildung*, central de l'herméneutique philosophique, sera considéré à travers la lentille humboldtienne pour mieux en extraire ses implications pratiques, lesquelles vont au-delà de l'orientation théorique de Gadamer. Enfin, la dernière section cimentera l'intention applicative de l'article en présentant des pratiques pédagogiques concrètes qui découlent de l'herméneutique philosophique.*

Introduction

The term "hermeneutical pedagogy" in this article's title is problematic, especially as it follows from the understanding of "hermeneutics" in its Gadamerian sense as "philosophical hermeneutics." As a result, the two terms of the hermeneutic-pedagogy binomial find themselves in an uneasy cohabitation. For one thing, Gadamer writes little explicitly about pedagogical matters, and when he does, it is usually *en passant*,[1] recognizing his lack of expertise in this domain.[2] To be sure, he does have plenty to say about the university and education in general, for instance the social responsibility of the university, curriculum management (criticizing, in particular, the increasing student-instructor ratio), institutional autonomy, the unity of research and teaching, academic freedom, and bureaucratization and massification of universities.[3] By contrast, Gadamer writes little in the way of teaching other than extolling his former teacher Martin Heidegger while politely criticizing his lack of dialogical skills. For another, Gadamer seems to downplay the role of teachers in education, which he prefers viewing as an inherent process of self-education and self-cultivation.[4] Most damningly, philosophical hermeneutics is conceived and expressly presented in his work as escaping the realm of volition. It is not concerned with "ways of doing"—methods—but rather with experiences

[1] There are a few exceptions to this, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Über die Ursprünglichkeit der Philosophie," in *Kleine Schriften I. Philosophie. Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as UP; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Education is Self-Education," (tr.) J. Cleary and P. Hogan, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2001): 529–38. However, pedagogical theory remains thin and confined to generalities even in these essays. They will nonetheless be useful for our purpose.

[2] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Interview: The German University and German Politics. The Case of Heidegger," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, (ed.) D. Misgeld and G. Nicholson, (tr.) L. Schmidt and M. Reuss (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 3–14; Gadamer, "Education is Self-Education."

[3] Gadamer, "Interview"; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Primordiality of Science: A Rectoral Address," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, 15–22; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The University of Leipzig, 1409–1959: A Former Rector Commemorates the 550th Anniversary of its Founding," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, 23–36; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Idea of the University—Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, 47–60, hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as IU.

[4] Gadamer, "Education is Self-Education." Paradoxically, while Gadamer downplays the role of teachers in education as *Bildung*, he recognizes their influence on society at large: "teachers who through their profession indirectly have the broadest area of influence in the modern state" (IU, 49).

of truth that transcend them. How can an avowedly non-practical thought contribute to the practice of teaching?

And yet, this article argues that philosophical hermeneutics can inform higher education teaching in a meaningful way.[5] It is an exercise in applied philosophy that derives concrete prescriptions for pedagogical practice from principles of philosophical hermeneutics. Although commentators have devoted much attention to philosophical hermeneutics' relevance for a philosophy of education (after all, the hermeneutical experience is fundamentally an educational experience understood as *Bildung*), few attempts have been made to explore its practical implications for teaching in the classroom, and when so, usually in the form of mere "rules of thumb."[6]

With this goal in mind, this article will first consider philosophical hermeneutics in its intended form, that is, as a description of what always occurs when one understands, thus highlighting its event-like features. While so doing, focus will remain on insertion points for agency following Gadamer's suggestions. This approach will lead first to two key concepts of philosophical hermeneutics: pre-understandings and historically effected consciousness. These concepts will accentuate hermeneutics' transformative nature, with the notion of openness serving as a common thread. The review of three further concepts of philosophical hermeneutics—hermeneutical experience, authentic dialogue, and *Bildung*—will provide insight into openness as a vanishing point without being a culmination. All the while, practical anchor points will emerge. In particular, parallels to a contemporary pedagogical method called "transformative learning," developed by Jack Mezirow, will be drawn. In addition, the concept of *Bildung*, central to philosophical hermeneutics, will be considered through the Humboldtian lens to better extract its practical implications, which lie beyond Gadamer's theoretical focus. Finally, the last section will cement the applicative intent of the article by presenting concrete teaching practices that flow from philosophical hermeneutics and can serve as practical conditions for understanding.

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[5] Cf. Paul Fairfield, "Hermeneutics and Education," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, 541–49, here 544. Fairfield briefly presents four "conditions" for dialogue that can be interpreted as practical applications in the classroom.

[6] Richard B. Hovey, Charo Rodríguez, and Steven Jordan, "Beyond Lecturing: An Introduction to Gadamer's Dialogical Hermeneutics with Insights into Health Professions Education," *Health Professions Education*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2020): 465–71, here 469; Paul Fairfield, "Dialogue in the Classroom," in *Education, Dialogue, and Hermeneutics*, (ed.) P. Fairfield (London: Continuum, 2011), 77–90.

The Ontological and Eventive Character of Philosophical Hermeneutics

Historically, hermeneutics stood for a theory and technique of interpretation and was as such a praxis-oriented doctrine. Philosophical hermeneutics, however, is essentially phenomenology. It describes a fundamental mode of being of human existence in its mundane anchoring, more specifically in this case, the fact that human beings sustain a fundamental relationship of understanding with the world. In other words, philosophical hermeneutics is not primarily concerned with interpreting this text or that event but rather with the fact that interpretation and understanding constitute our original relationship to the world. In this context, "not understanding" also rests on this fundamental relationship of human beings to the world since "not understanding" has meaning only for an existence for whom it is possible to understand.

Gadamer focuses on phenomena that transcend the subject's will, although he does not negate the volitional dimension altogether. He is primarily interested in event-like occurrences, what "happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."[7] For instance, while fully engaged in understanding or discussing a matter, our attention is often drawn unwittingly to specific content, a specific perspective, using specific concepts. When we immerse ourselves in a truth-seeking endeavour, we allow ourselves to be taken to wherever the conversation leads us, guided as it were by the injunctions of the object (*Gesetz der Dinge*; UP, 18), rather than imposing our will on it. The conversation takes on attributes of an event, that is, something that happens to us that we do not fully control. It is these eventive aspects—the ontological dimension—that are the focus of phenomenological hermeneutics.

Humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), art, and religion are the paradigmatic objects of hermeneutical focus. In Gadamer's view, the humanities differ fundamentally from the exact sciences in the relationship they maintain with their object. While the latter aims to control nature through measurement and reproducibility, the former's goal is "participation in the heritage (*Überlieferung*) that they renew and articulate for us again and again."[8] Certainly, methods in the humanities

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[7] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (tr.) J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (London: Continuum, 1989), xxvi. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as TM.

[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer and Carsten Dutt, *Hermeneutik, Ästhetik, praktische Philosophie: Hans-Georg Gadamer im Gespräch* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2001), 14, tr. by

can help us fulfill this task, but as Gadamer points out, the application of methods does not explain why we engage in the humanities. The concept of participation provides insight into this question:

> We participate in the essential expressions of human experience that have been developed in our artistic, religious, and historical tradition—and not only in ours but in all cultures; this possible participation is the true criterion for the wealth or the poverty of what we produce in our humanities and social sciences.[9]

As this quotation suggests, the humanities do not strive to be objective but fruitful (on a scale from poverty to wealth) and to contribute to culture. The humanities open worlds to our understanding. However, this understanding is not the result of our volition but something like an event that occurs from our standing in the stream of tradition: "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (TM, 291).

That is why philosophical hermeneutics is not, in the most explicit way in Gadamer, a method. Gadamer's goal in *Truth and Method* was to call attention to a truth potential that does not rest on method, as in the natural sciences. One of the great missions of philosophical hermeneutics is precisely to criticize methodism, scientism, and objectivism, which have also found their way into educational sciences. This is not to say, as Gadamer often reminds us, that method and science may not uncover truth. While entirely acknowledging their validity, he takes issue with their exclusivism and imperialism within the space of knowledge. Nonetheless, this self-understanding of hermeneutics will lead commentators to assert, rightfully, that the "hermeneutics of education is not yet another method to be applied in an educational setting."[10]

This is undoubtedly problematic for this article's intention to explore how hermeneutical theory can inform pedagogy. To be of any use to pedagogy, a theory must be translatable into practical application, if not a method. If hermeneutics describes the fundamental

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R. E. Palmer as *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 40; *Überlieferung* is more commonly translated as "tradition." In Gadamerian thought, *Überlieferung* should be understood in its active meaning as *überliefern*, "to pass down" (*tradere*). Tradition in this sense is the transmission of cultural content from generation to generation.

[9] Gadamer & Dutt, *Hermeneutik*, 15; *Gadamer in Conversation*, 40f.

[10] Andrzej Wiercinski, "Hermeneutic Education to Understanding: Self-Education and the Willingness to Risk Failure," in *Education, Dialogue, and Hermeneutics*, 107–23, here 109.

structure of the "always-already," what always happens when one has understood, how can philosophical hermeneutics have a practical use? It was never meant as a methodology of the humanities, let alone of educational science, but rather as an effort to understand the genuine nature of humanities, including educational science, "beyond their methodological self-consciousness" (TM, xxii). It was never meant as a "procedure of understanding," but as a clarification of the ontological conditions of understanding that are always given when understanding succeeds (*ibid.*, 295).

Yet, Gadamer's hermeneutics is not devoid of any practical, perhaps even methodological, implications. He himself suggests as much when discussing key hermeneutical concepts. Take, for instance, the concepts of "historically effected consciousness" and "pre-understanding." Although the first is "more being than consciousness"[11] and the second "constitute[s] the historical reality of [one's] being" (TM, 278), Gadamer states very succinctly in a debate with applied hermeneutists, "Yet it seems to me that only the resolute recognition of the concept of pre-understanding and the principle of history of effects offers a methodological basis for the unfolding of what we have called the consciousness of history being always at work in consciousness [*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*]."[12] Gadamer says no more, but the agency implied in a "resolute recognition," although merely attitudinal, suggests an element of volition that lends itself to practical application and compels us to look closer into these two concepts.

Pre-Understanding and Historically Effected Consciousness

A central precept of philosophical hermeneutics stipulates that all understanding rests on a non-thematic, pre-reflective pre-understanding of the subject matter (*die Sache*). Such a pre-understanding—also referred to as pre-judgment (*Vorurteil*)—precedes any epistemic relation to an object and forms the horizons from which this object is understood. It originates in the "facticity" of the human being who "always already" maintains a relation of understanding with the world. In Heideggerian terms, we would say that understanding is a mode of being-in-the-world that inherently governs our relationship with the

[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II. Gesammelte Werke 2* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), 11, 247.
[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, (tr.) R. E. Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 59; Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II*, 106.

world. Therefore, one cannot simply dispose of these prejudices through rationalization or a phenomenological *epoché*. Equally illusory is the alleged scientific neutrality or objectivity. According to Gadamer, by overlooking the preliminary structure of understanding, one runs the risk of allowing oneself to be determined by it unawares.

Pre-understanding provides the raw material, the substance from which arises thematic and reflexive understanding. This primary substance constantly comes up against the resistance of the object under consideration, conjuring the original kinship of *objectum* and *obstaculum*. The expectation projected onto the object thus has to be revised according to the requirements of the object itself and turned back onto the object, which then again acts as a partial obstacle effecting a negative determination… and so on in an endless back and forth through which the understanding of the object takes shape. The reader will likely have recognized in this description the well-known hermeneutic circle to which, it is claimed, all understanding is subject.

This shaping of the pre-comprehension described by the hermeneutic circle is intended, both in Heidegger[13] and Gadamer (TM, 294), to be an ontologically descriptive representation of the phenomenon of understanding. The hermeneutic circle "is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved" (*ibid*., 269). However, "primarily" does not mean "entirely" or "exclusively." And indeed, Gadamer repeatedly calls on us to engage in sound hermeneutical practices, like so many tasks to be taken on: the interpreter "must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought" and "break the spell of [his] own fore-meanings"; he must "let himself be guided by the things themselves," which is "not a matter of a single, 'conscientious' decision, but is the 'first, last, and constant task'" (*ibid.*, 269–70). We are called as interpreters to conduct our work in a way congruent with hermeneutical principles. While attempting to understand a subject matter, we will inevitably harbour latent pre-judgments. As a result, our interpretations will not quite "fit" with the text or matter at hand. In these cases, we must deliberately exercise self-criticism and reexamine our beliefs to align them better with the object of our attention. Put affirmatively, we should "remain open to the meaning of the other person or text" (*ibid.*, 271). Openness is perhaps the most important habit of mind required in hermeneutics, one that is under our volition. (More on this in a moment.)

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[13] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (tr.) J. Stambaugh (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1967), §63; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), §63.

Although derived from, and secondary to, an original ontological moment, the hermeneutically informed practice should, according to Gadamer, be understood as the "radicalization" of what we always accomplish when we understand (*ibid.*, 270). Methodologically, therefore, it is a matter of first accepting and becoming aware of the inherence of preconceptions in the living movement of understanding so that they do not affect our views unawares. We must then expressly and critically test their validity: do they "fit" with other aspects of the subject matter? As Gadamer puts it, "Methodologically conscious understanding will be concerned not merely to form anticipatory ideas, but to make them conscious, so as to check them and thus acquire right understanding from the things themselves" (*ibid*., 272). This hermeneutical practice is to be seen as readying the mind for the unfolding of understanding.

Because the horizon of pre-understandings is understood as a legacy from the past, they have a distinct historical signature, which Gadamer explores under the concept of the history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). This German term refers primarily to the reception history of a text or other cultural artifact. Accordingly, a historical text is received and interpreted differently over time. By contrast, Gadamer's use of the term emphasizes a historical continuity between the text (and its author) and the interpreter where one would normally postulate an unbridgeable chasm. In this respect, the concept stands less for the effect of the text throughout history—although this moment is always present—than the action of history on the interpreter through tradition, as it passes on content and meaning from one generation to the other. In short, the history of effect corresponds to the action of history on consciousness. This action of history, of tradition, has its concomitant in the "passion" of consciousness, as it is being effected. That is why Gadamer asserts that the historically effected consciousness is more "being than consciousness" (see above). Being aware of the history of effect is to know oneself to be integral to the movement of history and tradition; it is to recognize that we cannot, as historical beings, wrench ourselves free from history and place ourselves above it as a disengaged subject. "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission" (TM, 291). Understanding is in this sense an event embedded in the flow of history and cannot, therefore, escape it, like Baron Munchausen pulling himself out of the mire by his own hair. In philosophical hermeneutics, there is no ahistorical viewpoint *sub specie aeternitatis*. We always understand from pre-understandings that were handed down to us and define a historical situation that leaves an imperceptible yet inescapable imprint on us. In this way, the

history of effect provides the questions and issues deemed "interesting" and "relevant," as well as arguments considered "convincing" (*ibid.*, 300), all played out at a pre-reflective level.

However, this factual and ontological dimension of the history of effect, defined as lying beyond our free will, does not exhaust its significance. After establishing the ontological character of the history of effect, Gadamer often turns to its practical import, which imposes a task on individuals. For example, after describing how consciousness is effected by history, he asserts, "It is important to produce within ourselves a consciousness of this operativeness [*ein Bewusstsein dieses Bewirktseins*]—just as the past which we experience forces us to deal with it and so to manage it, and in a certain respect to take its truth upon ourselves."[14] As with pre-understanding, the history of effect's practical aspect is secondary and derivative *vis-à-vis* its ontological moment, but it nonetheless calls for a task to be taken on by the interpreter. This task consists foremost in becoming aware of our embeddedness in the flow of history and in retracing the historical threads that weave the current fabric of the concrete situation in which we find ourselves, knowing at the same time that this is an infinite task. Here too, the requirement consists in submitting oneself to the facticity of understanding and, more precisely, the ontological dimension of history's action on consciousness. In negative terms, it is about shunning the ahistorical point of view of the omniscient observer. In the end, it is about being self-critical and knowing our own historically determined limits. "We are not saying, then, that history of effect must be developed as a new independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences, but that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work." (TM, 300).

The Hermeneutic Experience

The hermeneutic experience incorporates the above concepts in a way that best illustrates how learning and understanding unfold in a transformative process. It highlights a further aspect of understanding that, without directly providing prescriptions for pedagogical practice, points to specific virtues or self-discipline as conditions for its realization.

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[14] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment," (tr.) T. Wren, *Philosophy Today*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1972): 230–40; Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II*, 143.

The hermeneutic experience, like the other hermeneutic concepts analyzed above, is also an ontological event that does not stand under one's control. Hermeneutical experience is an inherently negative and dialectical process (in the Hegelian sense that involves determinate negation) by which an alien, unexpected or discordant element becomes thematic and must be integrated (or "applied") into one's own horizon of understanding to allow for a more accurate and comprehensive self-understanding. But in contrast to Hegel, there is no finality to this process. In more strictly Gadamerian terms, one would say that through experience, one continually acquires a new and broader horizon of understanding by the fusion of one's own horizon with a colliding foreign horizon, whether of a person or an ancient text. When an integration or "application" occurs, the learner can then make sense of the initially foreign element, relate it to previous understanding and express it in words drawn from her linguistic arsenal. The learner becomes "at home in it," to use another evocative expression from Gadamer (TM, 13). However, contrary to Hegel's *Aufhebung* which teleologically results in absolute (*i.e.*, complete and all-encompassing) knowledge, the fusion of horizons leads to an ever-broader horizon that has the virtue of being more open to a subsequent fusion, thus preparing the ground for yet more understanding.

This is the crux of the matter: such an experience, which integrates the new and alien, makes us ever more receptive to new and alien occurrences in the future. Hermeneutical experiences lead to yet more experiences. This idea is reminiscent of John Dewey's concept of "educative experience," whose distinctive function is to lead to more experiences and "continued growth."[15] Popular wisdom reminds us that "the greater the ignorance, the greater the dogmatism" or that "a little learning is a dangerous thing"[16] insofar as it closes us to new experiences. Accordingly, the only remedy for too little learning is more learning. If we are to drink from the fountain of knowledge, we should avoid small gulps and instead "drink deep." The experienced person is always open to new experiences. Past experiences make us "radically undogmatic" and steer us toward "absolute openness" rather than absolute knowledge (TM, 350).

According to Gadamerian logic, such openness results from the mind being guided by the subject matter when understanding "always already" occurs. Still, it is also possible to recognize in openness an epistemic virtue essential to hermeneutic understanding, a

[15] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* [1938], [http://ruby.fgcu.edu/courses/ndemers/colloquium/experienceducationdewey.pdf], accessed April 10, 2022.
[16] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* [1711], Project Gutenberg, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7409/7409-h/7409-h.htm], accessed April 10, 2022.

perspective that has implications for our purpose, as it could be made fruitful for a hermeneutically informed pedagogy. Students whose closed minds are rife with obstacles to new and alien experiences will be hindered in their development. If the hermeneutic experience necessarily leads to a greater openness to new ideas and a more comprehensive understanding, teachers must ensure that students can engage in this process in the first place. The epistemic virtue of openness serves here as a catalyst for a movement that draws the student into a path of ever-growing openness and willingness to self-correct rather than self-assurance in one's knowledge.

Gadamer himself looks favourably on disciplining such virtues. When discussing the concept of experience and experimentation in Francis Bacon, Gadamer finds little of interest in Bacon's substantive concept of induction while highlighting "his real achievement" (TM, 322), which consists in bringing to light the negative prejudices fettering the mind and closing it to new experiences. Admittedly, such a perspective, reduced as it is to the negative features of experience, does not allow for a full understanding of hermeneutical experience, but it is nonetheless one of its constitutive elements. What Bacon proposes is a "methodical self-purification of the mind that is more a discipline than a method," which "first and foremost makes the methodical use of reason possible" (*ibid.*, 344). Although understanding is more event (*Geschehen*) than intention, the latter being only an external aspect of the hermeneutical experience, a discipline of the mind is nonetheless an "indispensable" ingredient of understanding (*ibid.*, 457). While not part of the hermeneutical experience *per se*, openness-as-an-epistemic-virtue (as opposed to openness-as-the-result-of-the-hermeneutical-experience) clears a path toward it and makes it possible. This interpretation will bear fruit for the pedagogical reflection in the last section of this article below.

Interestingly, a pedagogical-andragogical method called "transformative learning" shares similar theoretical assumptions with philosophical hermeneutics and can help tease out its educational implications. Although not directed *per se* at understanding texts and keeping one's attention on the *Sache selbst*, this method popularized by Mezirow[17] presents striking similarities that offer a pedagogical foothold to hermeneutics. It, too, starts from the premise that knowledge and understanding result from pre-understandings and that "we all have to…operate within horizons set by ways of seeing and

[17] See Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991); Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3–33.

understanding that we have acquired through prior learning" and "our particular culture."[18] Mezirow focuses not only on the biographical sources of pre-understandings but also on the historical horizons in which we find ourselves: "[T]he defining factor of modern times is our becoming conscious of living in history,"[19] rather than standing against an impersonal account of it. This relation to history imposes on us a duty of self-reflection to make sense of our experience: "This individual and collective awareness of the influence of our own history and biography on the way we make and validate meaning also celebrates the emergence in our culture of an age of reflection."[20] As in hermeneutics, the trigger for the learning process is the experience of a "disorienting dilemma" (or "contradictions") in which the object of learning conflicts with our preconceptions (we recognize here the experience of the alien in hermeneutics). This "source of disequilibrium" prompts the learner to undergo "self-examination" and to "critically assess" her own assumptions. After several other steps in which the learner explores alternatives, the learning process finally concludes with a "changed self-concept…on the basis of conditions dictated by a new perspective."[21] As in philosophical hermeneutics, the outcome of the learning process is more openness: Mezirow describes the transformative process of learning as one "that moves the individual toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective."[22] The last section of this article will identify concrete pedagogical practices consistent with the hermeneutical concepts of pre-understanding and the history of effect by tapping into the pedagogical strategies of transformative learning.

Dialogue and Dialectics

The openness peculiar to the hermeneutic experience, as Gadamer reminds us, is an openness to the possibilities of being, which always has the structure of a question: is it this or that? A genuine question does not lean one way or the other, but the formulation itself in a "this" and "that" (*i.e.*, options) embedded in language orients the question in a particular direction, giving it a perspective. Although such an orientation makes it possible to anchor the question, it can also conceal

[18] Mezirow, *Transformative*, 17.
[19] *Ibid*., 65.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid*., 110.
[22] *Ibid*., 19.

undue prejudices and hinder the presumed openness. Hence the importance of asking the "right" questions, namely those whose answers, although limited by a specific perspective, are truly undetermined, that is, questions for which there are no preempted answers.

Given the radical openness in which the seekers of truth find themselves, each response brings about yet again the undetermined "this or that?" question. Thus is the logic of question and answer carried on into a living dialogue with the subject matter. For Gadamer, this dialogical character of thought describes the essence of Platonic dialectics. Dialectics is essentially the inner dialogue of thought with itself as it is guided by the truth of the subject matter. In keeping with Gadamer's ontological approach, this inner dialogue with oneself describes thought as it always already occurs when understanding is successful. Effective dialogue between real interlocutors, for its part, is a derivative of dialogical (or dialectical) thought. Nonetheless, the exercise of an open dialogue between individuals is the best preparation for, and reflection of, authentic thinking and as such has pedagogical value. In a way, the art of dialogue is training in the art of thinking. The more divergent the interlocutors and the more they are confronted with alien elements that trigger hermeneutical experiences, the more dialogue will mirror authentic dialectical thinking, as long as the interlocutors are motivated by nothing other than getting to the truth of the matter. Certainly, classroom discussions can also help cultivate other competencies, including relationship building and collaboration. However, from a hermeneutical perspective, the preeminent goal of discussion is to serve as a model for thinking and self-reflection. The object of pedagogical improvement is, in the words of Gadamer paraphrasing Plato, the "interior dialogue of the soul" (TM, 547f.), which the external dialogue with fellow students can help cultivate.

Be that as it may, class discussions do not typically live up to the ideal of authentic hermeneutical dialogue. Gadamer suggests that the pedagogical question posed in a learning context is inauthentic insofar as it is not open and undetermined. "Every true question requires this openness. Without it, it is basically no more than an apparent question. We are familiar with this from the example of the pedagogical question" (TM, 357).[23] The teacher already knows the answer to her questions and often seeks to guide the discussion toward a predetermined outcome.

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[23] See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Europa und die Oikoumene," in *Hermeneutik im Rückblick. Gesammelte Werke. Band 10* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 274; Jean Grondin, "Gadamer's Experience and Theory of Education: Learning that the Other May Be Right," in *Education, Dialogue and Hermeneutics*, (ed.) P. Fairfield (London: Continuum, 2011), 19 n. 18.

One way to avoid inauthentic class discussions is to focus on conversations between students rather than teacher-students exchanges, as several commentators have done.[24] Student conversations can be fruitful in that participants are not privy to canonical answers and can freely and authentically explore a question from all angles. In this scenario, the teacher is not one of the interlocutors, but she does have a pedagogical role in correcting factual errors, calling out non-productive biases and unblocking the impasses that may arise in the discussion. The students, for their part, learn to let themselves be surprised by unexpected perspectives from classmates and seek to integrate these into new horizons of understanding. Ideally, this guided exercise eventually instills hermeneutic habitus (more on this in the final section).

Gadamer would not perceive such an exercise as a methodological reduction and is famous for himself constantly wanting to engage in conversations. As he is wont to reiterate, there is no method for learning to ask questions. However, a guided discussion is certainly good pedagogical practice, an activity that disciplines thought and makes it receptive to hermeneutical experience while providing an appropriate point of insertion for a hermeneutically informed pedagogy.

The Concept of *Bildung*

The hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, and hermeneutical experience all reflect from various angles the process of *Bildung*, an educational concept central to Gadamer's understanding of philosophical hermeneutics. It is a term difficult to translate into English but customarily rendered as "self-cultivation" or "self-formation."

In 18th and 19th century Germany, the notion of *Bildung* strongly shaped the humanist ideal of education. Undoubtedly, Wilhelm von Humboldt was one of the most prominent spokespersons for the *Bildungsideal* of the time. He had in mind not simply "training" (*Erziehung* or *Ausbildung*), which are external goods (*i.e.*, learning objects distinct from the self), but the more ambitious goal of engaging the learner in a holistic process of self-development, self-cultivation, and self-transformation that is not exhausted in the educational setting

[24] For instance, Katsuhide Yagata, "*Bildung* as an Essential Disposition in Becoming a Reflective Practitioner: Practical Application of Philosophical Hermeneutics to Second Language Teacher Education," *Reflective Practice*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2018): 322–32; Fairfield, "Dialogue in the Classroom"; Charles Bingham, "The Hermeneutics of Educational Questioning," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2005): 553–65.

but becomes a genuine way of life.[25] Such an understanding of *Bildung* is reminiscent of Dewey's conception of education as growth. For Dewey, "growing is life," which means in educational terms that "the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and [it] is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming."[26] As such, *Bildung* is a good internal to the life of the human spirit, which unfolds as a return to and transformation of oneself, with no other goal than itself. The cultivated individual makes the multiple facets of the world her own through self-transformation, thereby realizing her full human potential.

Gadamer incorporates into his thought the traditional concept of *Bildung* as an elevation to humanity in its universality, where the cultured individual (*der Gebildete*) sees the world from the perspective of what is common to all humans instead of a parochial view. He approvingly quotes Humboldt, who describes *Bildung* as a "disposition of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavour, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character" (TM, 9). However, *Bildung* takes on a more ontological and spontaneous turn in Gadamer as it is grasped through hermeneutical concepts. Thus, in a way that mirrors hermeneutical experience, *Bildung* is said to describe the spontaneous movement of the fusion of horizons by which the spirit is confronted with the alien (the other), recognizes itself in it and returns to itself in a broader and therefore elevated horizon, which allows for an ever-greater openness to the world. This is a process of understanding as existential (in Heideggerian term) in which every individual is always already engaged (*ibid.*, 13) and from which derives "the state of continual *Bildung*" (*ibid.*, 10). Aside from this uplifting moment, *Bildung* is for Gadamer a state in which the educated person moves, which is best described as "keeping oneself open to what is other" (*ibid.*, p. 15). Openness is certainly a useful concept in a pedagogical context, as noted above, but is it possible to tease more out of the concept of *Bildung* and elaborate a substantive pedagogy?

Let us follow here a thread in Humboldt, whose concept of *Bildung* is akin to Gadamer's. We find in Humboldt an echo of the ontological and eventive character of *Bildung*, insofar as the educational reformer attributes a certain innateness to *Bildung*. For Humboldt, self-cultivation is first an impulse (*Bildungstrieb*) with anthropological roots before being an educational program centred around the humanities

[25] See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Bildung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as SB.

[26] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* [1916], Project Gutenberg, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/852/852-h/852-h.htm], accessed April 10, 2022.

(languages, philosophy, history, and arts). The best educators can do is give it some space and allow it to unfold spontaneously (SB, 240), thereby opening a path for individuals to access their humanity through self-cultivation (*Selbstbildung*). Viewed in this way, *Bildung* is the prerogative of all humans (*Menschenbildung*), not merely the privileged classes (notwithstanding the bourgeois prepossession Humboldt may have effectively been harbouring).

Reference to Humboldt is helpful in this context because, despite the innate and autonomous character of *Bildung*, the Prussian reformer dedicated his career to institutionally supporting *Bildung* in a pedagogical context. Presumably, although delineated in its ontological character, Gadamer's idea of *Bildung* can be similarly instrumentalized for pedagogical purposes. Humboldt's work has the advantage of providing a bridge between the theoretical concept of *Bildung* and a concrete educational praxis.

Humboldt described two conditions for a *Bildung*-based pedagogy. Although his field of application is the educational institutions as a whole, especially the university—after all, he was serving as a government official in the Prussian state—his principles of action are equally applicable in the microcosmic setting of the classroom. According to Humboldt, the "first and indispensable condition" of *Bildung* as the "telos of the human being" is *freedom* (SB, 76); not abstract freedom, but freedom buttressed by a context of choice—to use Will Kymlicka's expression—offering the individual a variety of situations from which to draw. Indeed, freedom without options to choose from is not meaningful freedom.

This freedom described by Humboldt is expressed in several ways in an academic context. At an institutional level, freedom translates into the principle of the independence of the university (*libertas scholastica*) secured by state funding without state oversight. In addition to this protection against political and financial influence from the external environment, academic freedom ensures material freedom regarding curriculum organization and student selection. At a personal level, which is of particular interest in our context, academic freedom takes the form of freedom for researchers-teachers (two sides of the same coin for Humboldt and Gadamer), who are granted the right to hold and share their own scientific opinions and choose their teaching content and methods (*libertas philosophandi*). For the student, academic freedom manifests itself as complete autonomy to shape one's learning path, as expressed most vividly by this quotation from Humboldt:

> True reason can wish for no other condition than one in which everyone not only enjoys the most unfettered freedom to develop

> himself by his own means and in his own individuality but also in which external nature receives no other shape from human agency than that which each individual himself gives willingly, according to the measure of his needs and inclination, as bound only by the limits of his powers and rights.[27]

This radical take on the learner's freedom includes both a subjective and objective dimension, allowing the possibility of acting on oneself and the world. According to Humboldt, what is not freely chosen does not penetrate the individual's very being (*Wesen*); it remains a foreign body that can be used instrumentally and superficially but is never internalized as a human good that defines the self.

The second condition of *Bildung* is *social interaction*,[28] by which Humboldt reaffirms his humanist convictions. In their finitude, individuals who see to their *Bildung* can hope to achieve excellence (*Vollkommenheiten*) only in limited spheres, realizing some human possibilities to the detriment of others. Through social interchange with peers, the individual has the possibility of "making the richness of others one's own"[29] through a free exchange of ideas. The other is thus a path that leads to *Bildung* in the same way as freedom. Humboldt went as far as to declare that "the isolated individual is just as unable to educate himself as the individual in chains."[30] His explicit

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[27] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen. Institut für soziale Dreigliederung* [1792]. [https://www.dreigliederung.de/essays/1792-wilhelm-von-humboldt-ideen-zu-einem-versuch-die-grenzen-der-wirksamkeit-des-staates-zu-bestimmen], accessed April 10, 2022; trans. mod. It diverges from the translation in Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government* [1854], Online Library of Liberty, [https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/589/0053_Bk.pdf]. The original: "*…die wahre Vernunft dem Menschen keinen andren Zustand als einen solchen wünschen kann, in welchem nicht nur jeder einzelne der ungebundensten Freiheit genießt, sich aus sich selbst in seiner Eigentümlichkeit zu entwickeln, sondern in welchem auch die physische Natur keine andre Gestalt von Menschenhänden empfängt, als ihr jeder einzelne nach dem Maße seines Bedürfnisses und seiner Neigung, nur beschränkt durch die Grenzen seiner Kraft und seines Rechts, selbst und willkürlich gibt*."

[28] Here, I diverge from Gadamer's view in which freedom and solitude were the conditions of *Bildung* in Humboldt (Gadamer, "The Idea of the University," 48). In this, I prefer to follow the compelling evidence in David Sorkin, "Wilhelm Von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (*Bildung*), 1791–1810," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1983): 55–73.

[29] My translation of "den Reichtum des andren sich eigen machen." The Humboldt 1854 translation proposes more loosely: "to participate in the rich collective resources of all the others" (Humboldt, *Ideen*).

[30] "Der Isolierte vermag sich ebenso wenig zu bilden als der Gefesselte" (Humboldt, *The Sphere*).

intention was to create, develop, and nurture this space of freedom and human interaction conducive to *Bildung*, and the university was to embody such a space (SB, 152f.). One could add for the purpose of this article: the classroom should also be set up as a space of freedom and social interaction to ensure the deployment of *Bildung* if institutional freedoms are not to be nullified. More on this in the last section of the article.

Humboldt also examined the pre-university classroom environment in his work in the Education Section of the Ministry of Interior. Because he had in view the historically determined context of the primary school in the Prussian state, the details of his accounts are less important to us than its spirit. Humboldt had found in the pedagogy of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, as adapted by his disciple Carl August Zeller, the conditions favourable to *Bildung*. Pestalozzi is a famous Swiss pedagogue and educational reformer who took inspiration from the humanism and romanticism of his time, reflecting, among others, the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He aspired to an education in which the student develops her individual and innate faculties and thinks for herself; in other words, to a *Bildung* based on the principle of freedom. In this vein, Humboldt highlights the students' freedom, which, within general rules, gives them room to grow by themselves, individually and socially, through mutual support (*ibid.*, 181). Humboldt finds in Pestalozzi-Zeller the conditions of freedom and sociality necessary for *Bildung* to flourish. In a government report from 1809 (*ibid.*, 166-200), Humboldt explores the particulars of the Pestalozzian-Zellerian method, such as student centricity, the importance of developing all faculties, accountability and understanding, moral development, class management, and active learning. In a university context, however, the first two core concepts should be sufficient to inform the practical application field of *Bildung*.

Hermeneutically Informed Teaching Practices

The hermeneutical principles discussed above can serve as a starting point for the pedagogical reflections of humanities teachers in higher education and help shape their teaching practices. This last section presents concrete classroom applications that may be drawn from these hermeneutical principles, and which I have applied in my own teaching. Of course, many other practices may also be compatible with them; the following is merely a selection of activities that have proven fruitful, not an exhaustive list.

For simplicity's sake, hermeneutically informed teaching practices in the classroom can be boiled down to five activity clusters:

(1) The first is about introducing students to cultural artifacts, especially authoritative texts, which serve as the substance of enquiry and set off the movement of participation in tradition. This first step cannot be left to students' arbitrary discretion. Few instructors have been spared the frustration of having students fail to complete required readings before class. According to a source, only 20 to 30 percent of students read the required texts.[31] Subsequent hermeneutically driven activities are seriously compromised without this preliminary step. To ensure readings are completed, the "flipped classroom" methodology can be an effective tool.[32] In this model, students must complete an online quiz prior to class, answering simple multiple-choice and true-or-false questions related to the reading. The quiz's purpose is not primarily to ensure understanding of the text, although this outcome may follow incidentally and to a limited extent, but simply to ensure that reading was done. The actual effort of deep understanding happens during class discussions. Thus, simple information extraction and concept definitions are sufficient in this phase. It is worth noting that this preliminary step involves minimal effort from the teacher, as grading is done automatically by the online tool.

From the student's perspective, this step is not hermeneutical in itself but sets the stage for hermeneutically informed learning. However, from the teacher's perspective, there is a hermeneutical moment involved in selecting course content. While effort is made to select texts that will speak to students, facilitate "application," and "awaken" ideas,[33] the process of selection is determined by the understanding horizon and pre-understandings of the teacher. In a speech to University of Leipzig faculty members held in 1945, which contains his earliest comments on education, Gadamer stated that "we can only teach when we are in agreement with ourselves" (UP, 12). This statement is a call to action for teachers, who should seek to reach this "agreement" with themselves by critically questioning their historically determined understanding horizon.[34] This can certainly be done in the

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[31] Cynthia S. Deale and Seung Hyun (Jenna) Lee, "To Read or Not to Read? Exploring the Reading Habits of Hospitality Management Students," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2021): 1–12.

[32] Carl Reidsema, Lydia Kavanagh, Roger Hadgraft, and Neville Smith, *The Flipped Classroom: Practice and Practices in Higher Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 160.

[33] Gadamer, *Interview*, 7.

[34] In this 1945 speech, Gadamer does not yet use the vocabulary developed in *Truth and Method* (1960) and thereafter, opting instead for a more typically Heideggerian terminology. For instance, in this context, *Weltanschauungen* (worldviews) is used for "horizon" and *gesellschaftlich-geschichtliches Schicksal*

solitude of one's own ratiocinations, but as Gadamer suggests in the same 1945 speech as he defines the essence of genuine democracy, "we can learn from others to go even against our own subjectively certain convictions" (*ibid.*, 21).[35] For this reason, preference should be given to discussion groups with fellow teachers to discuss possible biases that come into course content selection. Literature in equity, diversity, and inclusion is, in this context, an excellent resource for self-criticism, but nothing replaces the critical potential of a live discussion with peers from diverse backgrounds.

(2) Another activity cluster acquaints students with the basic tenets of philosophical hermeneutics, focusing on the notions of pre-understanding and history of effects. The goal is to make them aware of the unconscious forces that shape their understanding and hone a critical and self-critical mindset. This is typically done in an explicit fashion in the introductory classes and alluded to during the semester as interpretive principles. Because this is not simply an interpretive criterion but also a learning objective in an educational context, it should appear prominently as a learning outcome in the course syllabus, for instance, in the following form: "develop critical self-awareness of assumptions and values that shape one's understanding and interpretation of cultural artifacts."

In addition, Mezirow's transformative learning theory described above proposes a range of pedagogical practices that take into consideration the idea of pre-understanding and the learner's historical determination. Whereas Gadamer intended to describe from a theoretical perspective what "always already" occurs in successful understanding, Mezirow, for his part, has a clear, pedagogical objective aiming to help the learner critically self-develop and spur increasing openness. Although teachers cannot directly inculcate self-transformation, a task to be borne by students alone, they can create the right conditions to foster transformative learning. Among the practices identified in the transformative learning literature,[36] the following are noteworthy. The teacher should:

(social-historical destiny) for the history of effect. However, the fundamental ideas of philosophical hermeneutics are already present.

[35] "…das Wesen der echten Demokratie…: Belehrt werden auch gegen unsere eigene, subjektiv gewisse Überzeugung."

[36] Susan Santalucia and Caryn R. Johnson, "Transformative Learning: Facilitating Growth and Change Through Fieldwork," *OT Practice*, vol. 15, no. 19 (2010): CE-1–CE-8; Patricia Cranton and Brenda Wright, "The Transformative Educator as Learning Companion," *Journal of Transformative Education*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008): 33–47.

- serve as a role model by demonstrating the appropriate behaviours and dispositions
- create a trust-building environment where exploration and mistakes are welcome
- create a community of learners in which peers actively engage in truth-seeking
- engage in the interpretation process with an open mind
- question students in a way that encourages self-questioning

These practical guidelines for teaching are considered more in detail below. Suffice it to say at this point that, while the last two practices are commonly associated with Gadamer's thought, the first three can also be found in his exoteric work.[37]

(3) The hermeneutical teacher also works toward the cultivation and habituation of the epistemic virtues required to be a good interpreter, with a particular focus on the virtue of openness, but also the secondary virtues related to it, such as benevolence (principle of charity), curiosity, discernment, honesty, humility, objectivity, and the like. Gadamer was explicit in his earlier work about the virtues required to conduct "originary" science. The first was objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*): "The virtue that one has to recognize here is unconditional involvement in the subject matter (*Sache*)."[38] The second is resolute self-criticism, which echoes his practical appeals in *Truth and Method* (see above). The third was humility, which appreciates the interpreter's finitude while acknowledging the judgement of others (*ibid.*). Openness encompasses all of these virtues.

Greater openness is the inherent result of the hermeneutical experience or the transformative process, but initial closedness can hinder its realization. Hence the importance of actively fostering openness from the outset—openness to the fact that one may be wrong, that others may be more experienced, and that one can learn from multiple perspectives. As it engages the learner's agency, openness is not an easy thing to teach. Here, we stand in the long tradition of the liberal arts, whose explicit goal was to cultivate virtue, *humanitas*, through education in the humanities. The Ancients understood that we do not intervene directly in teaching virtues but merely prepare the ground. In a famous passage from his *Letters to Lucilius*, Seneca mused, "'Why,

[37] For the teacher as a role model, see IU, 54; Grondin, "Gadamer's Experience," 6; and Fairfield, "Dialogue in the Classroom," 87. For an environment where "one can again risk one's own judgement," "free from censorship and reprimand," see IU, 57f. and Wiercinski, "Hermeneutic Education." And for the "free community of those who come together in solidarity," see IU, 59.

[38] Gadamer, "On the Primordiality," 21.

then, do we educate our children in the liberal studies?' It is not because they can bestow virtue but because they prepare the soul for the reception of virtue…. The liberal arts do not conduct the soul all the way to virtue, but merely set it going in that direction."[39] This certainly flows from the fact that, in the cultivation of virtue as with understanding in philosophical hermeneutics, something "happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (TM, xxvi). In other words, the cultivation of virtues, of openness in particular, is not an activity under our complete control, as it grows from a successful hermeneutic experience. Nonetheless, as teachers, we must "prepare the soul" and "set it going in that direction" by calling out instances of closedness, fostering perspective changes, instilling self-criticism and self-doubt, and inculcating a readiness to learn from divergent views.

The path from perfunctory behaviour to internalized and habituated virtues is best described by Aristotle,[40] who provides the most valuable pedagogical guideline relating to openness: the teacher should serve as a role model for openness and inspire emulation in learners. With practice, encouragement, feedback, and guidance, this initial learning stage evolves into a proper internalization. When cultivating the epistemic virtues that prepare for hermeneutic openness, there is no other way around the learner putting in the work and thinking for herself. As a reinforcement for students who are often pragmatic and mark-driven, it is also helpful to use "openness to alternative views" and "considering an issue from multiple perspectives" as marking rubrics, thus reinforcing the appropriate disposition.

(4) Another area of habituation for students is the dialogical exploration of a subject matter through concrete interaction with peers. This area relates to both Humboldt's requirement of social interaction for realizing *Bildung* and Gadamer's implied preparation for dialectical thought through actual dialogue. As argued above, training in the authentic art of discussion is more likely to occur with classmates than with the instructor who, at any point, may fall back into authority-based interactions, even if unwittingly. Learning sciences and dialogical pedagogy has produced a vast literature on promoting dialogue in the classroom while avoiding potential pitfalls. Although dialogical

[39] Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, (tr.) R. M. Gummere (London: William Heinemann, 1917), II, LXXXVIII.

[40] See Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 78, no. 2 (2004): 61–75.

theory in education tends to gravitate around Vygotsky and Bakhtin,[41] dialogical principles are remarkably similar to hermeneutical principles. They highlight similar features such as the inclusion of alternative perspectives, the moment of "application," the role of the teacher as a facilitator, required social and discursive skills, the importance of open-ended, undetermined questions, the willingness to revise one's opinions in light of the evidence, the inauthenticity of the "pedagogical" questions, and more. Pedagogical tools range from "status intervention" to group composition, teacher prompts, and role assignation.[42] This literature should be regarded as a helpful resource in the hermeneutical teacher's toolkit.

Among the many ways of fostering dialogical skills, the following is suited for the university setting. Discussion training is optimized by separating the class into smaller groups to create conditions conducive to rich interactions. At the end of class, discussion notes are submitted as a group assignment and graded collectively based on criteria such as relevance (which assesses how closely students were guided by the subject matter) and the extent to which participants examined the issue from different perspectives (which serves as a measure for openness). In these conditions, not all group discussions are equally fruitful, but that is a necessary consequence of aiming for authentic discussions, undetermined by definition. The role of the teacher in this context is to unblock and reorient stalled or otherwise hampered discussions and step back again to let the discussion take its new yet still undetermined course.

(5) The fifth type of activity derives from the principle of freedom and autonomy, identified above as an essential condition for *Bildung* and the hermeneutical experience. The previous pedagogical activity already alludes to this freedom, as the teacher should not control the flow of the discussions in a hermeneutically informed learning environment. This freedom may extend further by allowing student discretion on the specific topic of discussion following an introductory exposition by the instructor. Again, this may lead to unequally fruitful exchanges, but it allows for greater freedom and relevance to students who can better "apply" the topic to their lived realities. More importantly, allowing students to choose the guiding questions is a way

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[41] For instance, Gordon Wells and Rebeca Mejia Arauz, "Dialogue in the Classroom," *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2006): 379–428; Neil Mercer, Rupert Wegerif, and Louis Major, *The Routledge International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education* (London: Routledge, 2020); David Skidmore and Kyoko Murakami, eds., *Dialogic Pedagogy: The Importance of Dialogue in Teaching and Learning* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2016).

[42] Noreen Webb, "The Teacher's Role in Promoting Collaborative Dialogue in the Classroom," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 79, no. 1 (2009): 1–28.

to eschew the trap of pseudo-questioning typical of the classroom setting. Additionally, research in dialogical pedagogy has shown that student- rather than teacher-initiated discussions lead to richer discussions, both in length and linguistic complexity, while increasing student engagement.[43] For many university instructors, this requires learning to relinquish control over how class discussions progress.

Here, too, many possibilities for class configuration are available. The following practice describes how greater responsibility for initiating group discussion can be devolved to students. Each student takes turns during the semester in first presenting an outline of the text's main arguments (a step that helps anchor the focus on the matter at hand) and subsequently submitting a few open questions for discussion. Presentation notes and discussion questions are later peer-rated by group members based on rubrics such as relevance and, more importantly, the "capacity to spark a rich discussion." These assessment criteria encourage students to avoid closed-ended or otherwise unproductive questions that are unhelpful in delving deeper into the text. As is often the case, following the indeterminacy of discussions, the group can reorient leading questions in more relevant and fruitful directions as the discussion progresses. As with the guideline recommending greater freedom to discuss, questions freely chosen by students are more likely to speak to them. For the same reason, essay topics should also, as much as possible, be chosen by the student, under instructor guidance.

Conclusion

Despite the decidedly ontological character of philosophical hermeneutics, it is possible to articulate pedagogical practices that are consistent with it. This was done by exploring the practical insertion points in the theory, which suggested the following directions: 1) Assume attitudinal dispositions in agreement with hermeneutical theory, namely in recognizing certain forces silently shaping consciousness in the form of historically determined pre-understanding. 2) Link hermeneutical principles to related learning theories (notably transformative learning and dialogical pedagogy) with the goal of leveraging their wealth of pedagogical practices. 3) Cultivate epistemic virtues such as openness and other cognate habits of mind that constitute practical conditions for the hermeneutical experience. 4) Link the concept of *Bildung*, fundamental to philosophical hermeneutics, to

[43] Wells & Arauz, "Dialogue in the Classroom," 388, 394.

Humboldt's understanding of it in the concrete context of university education, which opens it for practical considerations.

While the first path is mere awareness-building of theoretical-hermeneutical considerations, the second proves more impactful in that it takes advantage of most practices defined and yet to be defined in existing pedagogical approaches. Clearly, these practices must in each case be proofed for agreement with hermeneutical principles and adapted to the university setting (most pedagogical approaches being conceived for child education), but the practical potential seems tremendous. The third path alone could offer a whole pedagogical program, and it, too, can draw from existing educational approaches known as "virtue education" (prominent in the Montessori philosophy) and "character education," which have been the subject of much educational enquiry for centuries. As for the fourth path, although similar in nature to the two previous ones, it is not associated with a clearly defined learning theory (if one omits the Pestalozzian method Humboldt refers to). The focus on the principles of freedom and sociality is part of a diffuse humanist philosophy of education that permeates a broad subset of child-centred and progressive educational outlook today. In it, the hermeneutical teacher can find much inspiration for practice. The pedagogical practices discussed in this article are a small sample selected for their relevance, and because I have successfully applied them in my humanities classes.

In the end, it seems that the apparent uneasiness emanating from the amalgamation in the idea of "hermeneutical pedagogy" can to a large extent be allayed once the affinities between philosophical hermeneutics and specific educational theories and outlooks are brought to light.

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