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Survival through Bildung. On the topicality of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's philosophy of education

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS

DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation

Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung

E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de

Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Helge Kminek (ed.)

Survival through Bildung

On the Topicality of
Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's
Philosophy of Education



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Survival through Bildung

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Dr. Helge Kminek, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany

Prof. Dr. Christian Thein, University Münster, Germany

Helge Kminek (ed.)

Survival through Bildung

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Survival Through Bildung: Introduction to the Topic and the Contributions

Helge Kminek

The central reference point of the anthology is Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's essay "Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a Prospect" (1974/2024; original: "Überleben durch Bildung. Umriß einer Aussicht"), which was translated into English and has subsequently been made available to the wider public for the first time. Despite this 50-year gap, Heydorn's text is fascinating insofar as the survival of humanity—at least a qualitatively substantial survival—seems extremely questionable today.

Heydorn and his work polarised discourse over *Bildung*¹ at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies in Germany. Some called him a leftist renegade, others a conservative revolutionary.

These differing points of view are better understood if one considers a few biographical facts and the basic outline of his extremely demanding critical theory of Bildung. A very brief outline of Heydorn's biography and his theory of education will be given at once. As far as the biography is concerned, I mainly refer to Gernot Koneffke's (2004) explanations in the

1 Bildung has no obvious English-language substitute. It has been translated variously as education, edification, formation, learning, culture, cultivation and literacy. Bildung was given canonical definition by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999) as "the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay" (p. 58). In keeping with the breadth of this phrasing, Benner and Brüggem (2004) define Bildung as "the process of the forming [die Formung] of humans, as well as the determination [Bestimmung] of the goal and purpose of human existence" (p. 175)—further underscoring the vast, ill-defined semantic space that this term occupies in the German language. In addition, Bildung signifies the ideal of the autonomous, self-determined and self-reflected personality in its full realisation. But Bildung goes beyond this as well. Bildung cannot be completely contained by terms such as "education", "socialisation", "instruction" or "schooling". Bildung identifies a kind of "becoming human" that spans biographical, collective, institutional and historical dimensions. As such, it opens up the possibility of a generative process through which we are formed by the world, form ourselves and form the world (immediately) around us.

I would like to thank Norm Friesen for his hints, and a first text template to which I strongly attached myself (see Friesen, 2021).

first volume of the study editions. After this, I will outline central aspects of Heydorn's educational theory and his position on educational policy.²

1 About the Biography of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn

Heinz-Joachim Heydorn was born on 14th June 1916 in Altona on the Elbe (today a district of Hamburg) and died on 15th December 1974 in Frankfurt am Main.

Both his father and mother came from merchant families. For Heydorn, his relationship with his father was particularly formative. He represented the position of political liberalism, worked as a lawyer and, according to Koneffke (2004), his passions were classical studies, the classical languages and the "great early period of the European spirit" (p. 12; translated by H. K.). In the cellar of his parents' house was an extensive organic library, which Heydorn used intensively from an early age. It was the first place of "discoveries, first insights [and] the emerging self-confidence" (p. 12; translated by H. K.). Heydorn passed his school-leaving examination (Abitur) in 1935 at the humanistic grammar school Christianeum in Hamburg. In the winter semester 1935/1936, he began studying Philosophy, Chinese and English at the University of Hamburg; he resumed this after the end of the Second World War and completed in 1949 with a dissertation on Julius Bahnsen.

After the National Socialists seized power, he joined the Confessing Church, which was in itself an act of resistance. Whilst still a pupil, he also made contact with emigrated members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Furthermore, Heydorn's anonymous publications in resistance journals have been documented but have yet to be identified.

In 1938 and 1939, he took a job as a German teacher in Wales for a year. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Heydorn returned to Germany from England due to his father's terminal illness.

During the war he was drafted into the Wehrmacht, where he worked in the administration department and was plagued by remorse. Heydorn deserted in 1944 and was sentenced to death in absentia, but survived the rest of the war by hiding on a farm in France.

Immediately after the war, Heydorn co-founded the German Socialist Students' Union and became one of its first two chairmen. For the

2 Only the most important aspects are mentioned. Andreas Seiverth is currently working on an interdisciplinary biography of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn.

German Social Democratic Party, he later sat in the Hamburg parliament. Whilst still a member, he almost succeeded in obtaining a party resolution opposing the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany.

After a party decision stating that it wasn't possible to be a member of both the German Socialist Student Union and the German Social Democratic Party, Heydorn was expelled. The party leadership had thus rid itself of an internal opponent. Finally, it's important to mention Heydorn's involvement in the peace movement and in the Easter March movement, where he took an unambiguous stand against anti-Semitic tones within the wider German peace movement.

Heydorn had always decided against a career as a professional politician, even though this was a difficult decision for him. After all, this would have been a way to intervene more directly in political decisions. However, it is therefore unsurprising that he accepted offers from the university side and not pursued his political career.

In 1950, Heydorn was appointed as a lecturer at the Kiel University of Education (regional state Sleswick-Holsatia). In 1952, he moved to and was appointed to the Pedagogical Institute in Jugenheim, one of the two training centres for primary, elementary and secondary school teachers at the time in the regional state of Hesse. Finally, in 1961, Heydorn moved to Frankfurt to the "Hochschule für Erziehung" (College of Education), which was integrated into the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main in 1967 as the Department of Educational Science.

When one considers Heydorn's political position—which left little room for doubt—it appears he was a left revolutionary and not a leftist renegade or a conservative revolutionary. This becomes clear when one considers his critical theory of education and his educational policy position.

2 On Heydorn's Theory of Bildung and Educational Policy Position

At least in my view, Heydorn's theory of Bildung is characterised by three structural elements that are intertwined. For this, Heydorn draws on the philosophy of Kant; the dialectical philosophy of Bildung and history of Hegel; and, above all, the dialectical materialism of Marx. First of all, Heydorn links (i) reflections on the philosophy of Bildung with (ii) a historical and systematic analysis of natural and social power relations.

Greek antiquity with its transition from myth to logos forms a historically decisive point of reference for Heydorn. Socially, the primary focus is on the economic interest of Bildung for the purpose of mastering

nature. Ancient Greece must promote Bildung for and in the service of the economy. But simultaneously, through this Bildung, an interest in the real realisation of an emphatic freedom for human beings emerges, both as freedom from the forces of nature and from the (economic) power of human over human, on which economic relations rest and which is required for its reproduction (cf. Heydorn, 1970/2004a, p. 14).

Put differently: The forces of nature and the economic relations of production and power in Greek antiquity required the promotion of Bildung, even if in and through Bildung the economic relations of power are endangered. Power aims at a Bildung that directly serves its purposes.

Bildung, in turn, endangers the economic relations of power and yet at the same time depends on them. For example, an increase in productivity allows more people—and for a longer period of time—to devote themselves to Bildung as they are freed from the necessity of reproductive labour. In turn, Bildung aims at economic conditions that promote a Bildung which is freed from economic power. Thus, economic power and Bildung are opposites, which are nonetheless dependent on one another and conceptually contain one another.

According to Heydorn, the dialectical constellation just outlined came into the world in Greek antiquity. It changes historically, develops further and is annulled in higher stages, but can no longer be erased from the world until the dissolution of the dialectic and—if successful—the emphatic liberation of the human being.

(iii) To work on a positively desired form of the dissolution of the dialectic, especially as a result of the historical relapse into barbarism through National Socialism, is the third structural element of Heydorn's theory of Bildung. This means, above all, to oppose the decay of the Bildung claim.

In concrete terms, this means Heydorn opposed and vehemently argued against the introduction of the comprehensive school—the educational policy project of the political left in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. The comprehensive school was intended to abolish the tripartite school system in Germany. In this system, the *Gymnasium* is the most advanced, with the *Realschule* ranked second and the *Hauptschule* ranked third.³ At the *Gymnasium* the students are taught in a most demanding

3 The *Hauptschule* is a secondary school which offers Lower Secondary Education (Level 2), according to the International Standard Classification of Education. 1970 only 1.4% of the pupils received their school degree, the *Abitur*, from the *Gymnasium*, 10.9% from the *Realschule* and 87.7% from the *Hauptschule*. Today in Germany, there are many comprehensive schools besides the *Hauptschule* (not in all federal states), the *Realschule* and the *Gymnasium*. In 2019, 34.6% of the pupils received

manner. And only those pupils—apart from a few exceptions—who had attended the Gymnasium and passed the Abitur (the degree of the Gymnasium) were allowed to study at university in Germany. The tripartite school system was regarded—from the political left—as the ruling system of the bourgeoisie that only conservatives and reactionaries wanted to preserve.

Yet Heydorn was not against a school for everyone per se. On the contrary, Heydorn demanded the Gymnasium for everyone. And, if the Gymnasium was politically unenforceable for all pupils, then, in his view, the divided school system in Germany should have remained in place. From Heydorn's point of view, it was the Gymnasium and only the Gymnasium that could enable all individuals to consciously contribute to Bildung in the emphatic sense, towards a liberated and humane society. In addition, the unfair and unjustifiable segregation of pupils into different classes would remain in place, but was at least visible in a three-tier school system. In the comprehensive school, the segregation would remain but would be made invisible.

For Heydorn, the political conservatives, who were in favour of maintaining the divided school system and thus also keeping the Gymnasium limited to a minority of pupils, were on the side of the revolution—contrary to their own ideology. The political left, then, which voted for the comprehensive school, was on the side of reaction, also contrary to their own ideology. Against this background, it is unsurprising that Heydorn was called a leftist renegade by some and a conservative revolutionary by others.

3 Brief Overview of the Contributions of the Anthology

Heydorn's work can be regarded as a forgotten—perhaps even repressed—classic of pedagogy in Germany. This is true even though a few anthologies regarding his work have appeared in recent years (see the bibliography at the end of the anthology).

The present anthology provides the broader public with access to the last piece Heydorn ever published, a 1974 essay entitled “Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a Prospect”. His essay has been translated and printed here with the generous permission of Mirjam Heydorn. Following

this, the collection then offers contributions that examine the text from each author's perspective and questions Heydorn's article in terms of its relevance and potential for us today.

The contributors have taken up the challenge of dealing with a text and author who they had limited to no prior knowledge of. Respectively, they relate their perspectives to Heydorn's text and, above all, explore connections with their own work. This is an extremely promising approach to opening up and dealing with Heydorn's work and feeding these arguments into the international discussion of educational science.⁴

Helge Kminek's contribution opens the discussion on Heydorn's text. He asks what we can learn from Heydorn today, especially for the issue of the socio-ecological crisis, for which he uses the concept of the Anthropocene. In doing so, he attempts to reconstruct Heydorn's argumentation and, at the same time, to negotiate the question of contribution. In doing so, he also raises the question of what arguments could be made against using Heydorn's contribution today.

In the second contribution, *Norm Friesen* is also drawing a parallel between the threat to humanity in 1974, the year Heydorn's contribution was published, and today's threat to humanity in 2024, indicated by the term Anthropocene. Friesen outlines this current threat in order to analyse it from a theoretical-historical perspective. In order to reconstruct Heydorn's contribution, Friesen first analyses the role of nature in Wilhelm von Humboldt's "Theory of the *Bildung*" which Heydorn was undoubtedly aware of. In the course of his argument, Friesen, drawing on the work of Günther Anders, asks about *Bildung* and human development in the light of the Anthropocene.

In the third contribution, *Fernando Murillo* reads the text from a personalist perspective. He discusses key passages with reference to various philosophies and theories of education, and in doing so repeatedly recalls the contemporary relevance of Heydorn's contribution. His central thesis is that Heydorn's "survival through *Bildung*" presupposes an ethics of salvation that involves the whole human person.

The fourth contribution is by *Ana Inés Heras*. She draws on the interdisciplinary work of Enrique Pichon-Rivière and José Bleger to examine Heydorn's contribution. In doing so, she pursues the central question of

4 Besides "Survival Through *Bildung*" (perhaps Heydorn's third major contribution), the remaining two major, extensive and ambitious contributions have yet to be translated into English: "Über den Widerspruch von *Bildung* und Herrschaft" [On the Contradiction of *Bildung* and Authority] (1970/2004a) and "Zu einer Neufassung des *Bildungsbegriffs*" [Towards a Revision of the Concept of *Bildung*] (1972/2004b).

the possibility of comparability between the three theorists and their theories in an internationally comparative way, so to speak. In her analysis, she traces intersections, such as the collective processes of knowledge generation for the development of relations free of domination.

The anthology concludes with a contribution by *Julia Bello-Bravo* and *Anne Namatsi Lutomia*. They relate their analysis of Heydorn's contribution to a case study of informal adult education in Africa. They ask about the potential of digital communication for collective design, for example for the learning capacity of network members and for the realisation of personality (identity), which has previously been excluded as a possibility. They argue that individuation and the transhuman or virtual realisation of human-non-human hybridity respectively overlap and can point the way to a good and fulfilled life.

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Frankfurt, April 2024
Helge Kminek

Heydorns Work Edition

Heydorn, H.-J. (1994–1999). *Heinz-Joachim Heydorn Werke in neun Bänden* (I. Heydorn, H. Kappner, G. Koneffke, & E. Weick, Eds.). Topos-Verlag.

Heydorns Study Edition

Heydorn, H.-J. (2004–2006). *Heinz-Joachim Heydorn Werke: Studienausgabe in neun Bänden* (I. Heydorn, H. Kappner, G. Koneffke, & E. Weick, Eds.). Büchse der Pandora.

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Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a Prospect

Heinz-Joachim Heydorn

I.

The terms require pre-clarification. They are not self-evident. The concept of Bildung primarily eludes convention; preparation for a practical occupation is designated by this concept just as much as self-forgetfulness about a work of art; it encompasses the flick of the wrist that has to be learned and the ability to also feel at home when one is remote. The dichotomy of the term is coagulated history—class history above all—through which it is reflected. Nevertheless, even the survival of humankind is by no means evident; on the contrary, it is entirely mediated, tied to conditions. Only the clarification of the terms can introduce their relationship, their present relationship, which contains the possibilities of the future. Bildung and survival are assigned to our present, and their unique prerequisites are made accessible. The starting point is where we are today, the conditions of a highly industrialised region under a capitalist constitution is the genesis of these conditions. The entire world society is progressively influencing these conditions, but we can only include them in our range of ability and connect them to this genesis.

II.

Survival refers, first of all, to a biological process: like all other creatures we, as humans, want to live, to continue as a species. However, this is also true to only a limited extent. A difference separating humankind from animals becomes apparent, which is in truth the expression of an incredible difference. The human may want to die, and may pursue their own destruction. The biological expectation therefore becomes null and void. The individual motivation for such a decision is manifold; it can be based on illness, a world which has become silent or aversion, but this will can also be based upon the will of the Platonic Socrates to place himself above death. One's chosen death can be sublime, an expression of the mastery of fate, but also an expression of open despair.

If one pursues the question of the voluntary renunciation of survival, then beyond the accidental interweaving of the individual, a revealing set of facts becomes comprehensible. The question of survival and death is linked to the historical dimension of humankind, which is the distinguishing feature of existence; it is subordinate to historical time. Freud's insight that the death drive is part of the constitution of humankind is valuable here, pointing to an epoch in which the rituals of death are renewed to a contradiction that perpetuates irrationalism and robs suffering of its power. It refers to the psychological aspect of late capitalism, to its inner nature. With the act of obscuring humane expectation, the decay of productive consciousness which is directed towards the fulfilment of the future, death gains a new power. It becomes a seduction. Eros and Thanatos appear as a life-absorbing connection, and the dissolution of contradictions is sought through death. All forms of self-destruction, the artificial expansion of consciousness, which no longer has a grip on its reality, are forms of the death instinct, a feeling related to intoxication. The more it is denied the ability to unload these contradictions outwardly, for example, in the form of war, the more significant they become. If the human being's ambivalence is also the product of their entire antagonistic history, then the growing instinct for self-destruction is the recognisable symptom of expired societies. The deeper contradiction of our time also has its own form, which shows its distinctive character. The developed technical independence from rationality as a deceptive semblance of freedom from contradiction, the revolutionization of productive forces and the strangulation of the human being characterise a relationship that is continuously intensifying. In this respect, survival is not a matter of course, humankind wants to survive as a human being; if such a possibility appears closed, the death relationship is changed. Hope is taken away, the fear of nature operates simultaneously as the prospect of the infinite meaningful reproduction of the genus; grasping this is an indication of a final confirmation. The self-destruction inherent in human society as an expression of its unrevoked contradiction gains an extraordinary power with the decay of a historical structure; this is a point of view that needs to be considered from the outset. The collective neurosis that late capitalist constitution produces is a form of potential suicide. Psychological damage is created, which restricts the ability to act. The question of survival can thus not be answered by excluding war alone, nor by social criteria that are materially limited. Dehumanised survival turns against itself; new processes of destruction emerge to replace the old ones. A threat becomes apparent that can only be eliminated by changing the entire constitution of things; the possibility of human survival is linked to a realisable perspective, to a new method of realisation. Humankind has emerged from its history, as a potentially

rational being seeking its own articulation. So, the question is: how can we survive? Are we to survive as physical cripples, as countless people in the slums of our world have already done and continue to do in the dialectical St. Vitus Dance, as citizens of a besieged fortress which already carries the plague that rages at its gates as a mental illness?¹ Are we to survive as objects of traffic planners, Social-Darwinian cretins representing the new type of rule? Can we, as humankind survive the rise to become aware of ourselves?

The frame of reference for this topic already includes, with the first term, the conditions to which we are subjected; clustered under the one single blanket of a common word. It should be noted, however, that societies that get into the depths of their own contradictions also contain a clue to overcoming it. The rising bourgeois class sets its sights towards the future in the deathly decay of the Baroque, as a reflection of feudal agony. The remark may seem literary, but it already points to an overcoming consciousness. In decay, life becomes recognisable, successful work. It is humankind's will to survive that stirs under the blanket, a force of liberation, but today more than ever with the noose around its neck. In the long dying process of capitalist society, this too becomes apparent; history does not know mechanical solutions. Humankind alone remains history's perpetrator.

III.

If the concept of survival is already without self-evidence, if its connection to the death relationship of humankind is to be understood in a broader context, then this applies even more to the concept of Bildung. It is detached from any original natural relationship and denotes an exclusively human quality. The formation of human genus is the history of humankind. It follows the course of this history. Here too, the future cannot be understood without the past, from which the present arises for

1 Some of Heydorn's language can appear outdated and discriminatory by today's standards. However, it is well documented that he advocated for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including multiple supervisees from the so-called Global South. He also took an active stance against antisemitism and showed awareness of gender inequalities. At the same time, he may have defended the use of this language because, after all, the well-intentioned, non-discriminatory use of language could conceal the persistence of structural discrimination. Be that as it may, the decision was taken to translate the text as literally as possible. By doing so, the text remains open to critical scrutiny, which would be lost in a translation that conformed to contemporary language conventions.

a moment. The reference to the concept of *Bildung* can only contain a few aspects. From these aspects arises a task.

The definitive reference is formulated at an early stage in the history of the human mind, long before any mature development, thus pointing to the anticipatory power of thought which, must, however at first remain empty. The processed experience is missing, without which consciousness remains ineffective. According to this, *Bildung* presupposes the departure of humankind from a direct relationship to nature; subject and object gain their own peculiar, contradictory relationship. With the reflection which results, the given is dissolved, it loses its traditional claim; we are thrown back on ourselves, can experience ourselves, to think beyond the given, as a successful being. Only through this experience is a historical relationship established. The human being who was experienced in one's history now appears fragmentary, unfinished, at the mercy of foreign forces. As *Bildung* reveals itself as a force overcoming reason, we become Atlas that carries the unfinished human being on his shoulders in order to bring this being to its goal. Humankind should emerge as the subject of its own history, less of pain and old attachments which one must overcome. The reflection that determines the concept of *Bildung* points to a division and to a coming to terms with this divide. The illusionary character of *Bildung*, which always accompanies a coming to terms, its beautiful appearance, belongs to this division. In an imagined world, in the duplication of our being, we recognize ourselves as what we are and as what we are destined to be.

The abstract formulation remains at first a shell, but it seems necessary to indicate the premise. *Bildung* is thus a constant uncovering of the future as a process of human realisation, a concept aimed at constant change. If one seeks to grasp its present possibility, it is essential to include the past to the extent which we are directly based on it.

It was first the bourgeois world that gave the concept of *Bildung* its full content; the bourgeois class was the first comprehensive organiser of *Bildung*. In the enlightened process of creation, the concept of *Bildung* is linked to humankind's subjugation of nature, the rational process of liberation. It is only in this connection that historical consciousness develops, and finally, a concept of class becomes recognisable, which enters into the process of liberation. Although the formation of the organiser of the subjugation of nature differs from the formation of the servant right from the beginning, the rising bourgeoisie still grasps the concept of *Bildung* for the entire genus that undertakes a common work. The struggle against feudalism is still unfinished; the bourgeoisie sees itself as the spokesperson for all humankind. Thus, later decisive class aspects of *Bildung* are still directly related to each other, *homo faber* and *homo ludens*, the inventive revelation of nature and aesthetic playfulness, productive

work and imaginative development; they belong to the same self-expression. The characteristic contradiction of Bildung, in which we are simultaneously subject to reality and have already escaped it, knowing ourselves as slaves and already as freedmen, only now becomes the contradiction of the whole of history, in which the contradiction must be overcome. It is this enlightened concept of Bildung that first determines the universality of the human genus in terms of its history, that makes it a historical task from which every continuation must start. If we look at the condition of the bourgeois genesis of Bildung, it was the result of relative economic autonomy, of the compulsion to reflect in the first phase of banking and trade, of the first experience of an abstract world that compels us to become constantly aware of ourselves. In substance, however, Bildung, despite its earlier conceptual universality, remained limited to a small few. It was only with the industrial revolution, which marked the real beginning of the historical power of the bourgeois class, when organised mass Bildung began to meet changing needs. The reference to division contained in the concept of Bildung now becomes recognisable as class history, to which the history of Bildung is also subject. It is only now that bourgeois theory of Bildung sets itself apart from the proletariat in order to also define its newly won status in this area. Nature and spirit, the material and the immaterial world are coming apart. The immaterial world becomes the legitimation of those who are far removed from direct slavery, the working off of matter becomes a matter for the disenfranchised, sensually bound, dull determination. The individual stages of this development can be demonstrated in detail. However, even here the bourgeois concept of individuality, which replaces the concept of human genus as a justification of class rule, still contains the aftermath of initial universality, often fascinatingly translated into the aesthetic liberation of humankind. Purposeless Bildung is not only the formulation of a class status; it is simultaneously an anticipation of the human being who has become free from the constraints of domination and natural forces, dreaming over the abyss of fear in the mechanism of competition. As a result, late bourgeois Bildung thus develops the individual towards their imagined form of development, seeks universality in them, and thus establishes their unique dignity. It does this at a moment when the existence of the bourgeois individual is already being questioned, and is beginning to lose its basis with rising monopoly capitalism. The way out of bourgeois individuality, its economically mediated agony, finds a literarily significant expression; it is precisely here that it becomes clear how a lapse into death takes the place of life that is liberating itself. The bourgeois individual is robbed of their condition; with that it also ends the productive theory of Bildung of the bourgeoisie in the strict sense. “Fin de partie”, to paraphrase Beckett (1957/1974); social development

transcends bourgeois individuality. What remains is fascistoid, a decline in consciousness, burgeoning irrationalism, and finally an exploitation positivism in the interest of the big industry.

The historically completed task, whose value for the future is thus immeasurable, is passed on to others; *traditio lampadis*, as Comenius put it, passing on the torch. With the inclusion of the masses in the process of Bildung, as forced by the industrial revolution, a decisive change is taking place. Although this mass formation remains abridged, it is directed towards deformation, in that intellectual tradition is closed to the mass formation, but it is the machinery itself that contains the prerequisite for new processes of Bildung. It is only the work determined by natural science and its rational stringency that brings reflections *en masse* closer; only the machine generates a relationship to the object that contains unprecedented subjugation and rational power at the same time. An obvious possibility is thus indicated, the possibility of a comprehensive realisation of consciousness, which, however, cannot actualise itself. The machinery also makes it difficult to gain a historical identity from this consciousness and hides its precondition. It sets itself up as a timeless counterpart. In this way, allowing itself to be positioned as a scientific necessity, as a new path of destiny. However, the mission of Bildung on the ruins of bourgeois civilization is returned to the *genus*, now no longer in thought, but in reality; it is handed down to the universal proletariat, the mass of the inferior, into which the old bourgeois subject also falls back. The production of abundance contains an incomparable precondition; the elementary process of coping with nature is finished. Contradiction and the removal of contradiction are brought into their sharpest relation with the scientific construct of society; society has overcome its naturalness and at the same time made itself comprehensive in a capitalist way. History keeps a possibility of a universal Bildung in the background; it constantly creates conditions that make this possibility richer. Nevertheless, the objective existence of a possibility is irrelevant as long as humankind cannot grasp it, as long as one's humankind remains barred. Possibility and reality must be brought into relation with each other. It requires a brief analysis of the present state, the real starting position.

IV.

With the attempt to clarify the concepts of relationships and to trace their historical context, the present was already included. So much remains to be said that Bildung can only grasp survival as a process, can only understand it as a growing extraction of human content. The idea is

expanded by the realisation that mere survival, from which no fulfilment is gained, contradicts itself; it contains the consequence of a progressive self-destruction of the human being. Nevertheless, the physical survival of the genus is an indispensable condition, which is by no means certain today. The question that is beginning to emerge is directed towards the possibility of human liberation during the protection of the prospect of survival. The goal which it contains is as clear as it is difficult to achieve. The recommended topic focused on the level of Bildung that society must have in order to enter the next millennium with a chance of survival. The millennium is near, only a few decades separate us. At the borderline of the 19th century, Schiller (1789) was still able to write down his verses with unbroken trust: “How gracefully, O man, with thy palm-bough, Upon the waning century standest thou, In proud and noble manhood’s prime!” (lines 1–3).

The Enlightenment represented a step towards humankind. No one can speak in the same way today. The declamations, with which we are offered an iron law of progress as the truth of faith, only laboriously hide the fear that generates them. Our face shows traces of destruction. Rosa Luxemburg’s alternative: “socialism or barbarism” denotes a real decision, the result of which is by no means guaranteed. A relapse into barbarism is possible, a relapse which will be incomparably more hopeless than all the barbarism of human beginnings, since the history of an entire civilization is already behind us. Signs of such a relapse are abundant in our century. We have only learned to forget everything immediately because we can no longer process the magnitude of what has happened. Indeed, it is beginning to destroy our identity.

A brief outline of the given condition must limit itself to the subject matter, but even under this condition, it can only take into account a few dominant considerations. It makes a condensing of the statement inevitable; the detail is left out. If we again go back to the history of Bildung, it becomes clear that a continually growing number of people have been subjected to an organised process of Bildung; after all, Bildung becomes comprehensive. The industrial revolution marks the turning point. The expansion of organised Bildung continues as the productive forces are revolutionised, as the processes of change accelerate. Bildung becomes a life-long institution. In terms of scope, an unusual result is achieved. If the institution is even one aspect of the history of the Bildung of humankind, which is understood here as the entire history of consciousness, its growing importance is unmistakable. With the institution, society seeks to serve its needs in a planned manner; with its theory of Bildung, it reveals this need; it reveals its essence. From this point of view, a reference to the present condition should be made.

The monopoly capitalist character that organised Bildung is acquiring is only slowly taking hold, with the delay that is characteristic of all institutions of Bildung. It only reveals what has long been present in society, but which now needs targeted instrumental pedagogical assistance. Bildung is unreservedly being brought under the concept of exploitation. With it, the relics of a productive approach to Bildung are preserved. Since the process of Bildung is included in the process of how humankind copes with nature, the tool-like-utilitarian reference of this process remains a continuous moment. It is, however, isolated and replaced by a canopy of destiny, thus implementing a restriction that limits the predictability to temporary purposes, whose context remains unrecognisable. If one formulates one's understanding in the sense of concepts that have become historical, the relationship between training and Bildung, between practical preparation and the simultaneous subjectification of the human being is torn apart. The late bourgeois theory of Bildung already separated Bildung and training with all consistency; it had assigned Bildung, now already powerless in its content and has become a harmonising disguise of brutality, to the bourgeois class, training to the proletariat. With the liquidation of the old bourgeois class, its decline into monopoly capitalist development, the remainder of Bildung is also eliminated; its legitimising function also becomes superfluous. Training now becomes general; monopoly capitalism continues the class-formation of the industrial proletariat under changed conditions, but now these changes affect everyone, thus showing the extent of alienation. Generality in alienation underlies the equality of this particular concept of Bildung; with it, a general proletariat is produced through Bildung. It is understood in passing that the criteria of Bildung are adapted ever more towards the abstract production, insofar as they do not remain the same; the scope of Bildung also expands, since the economic qualification systematically overlaps with the field of consumption, with it also occupying the extended free time. Bildung, by which in reality only Bildung for exploitation processes is meant, takes possession of the entire human being.

It corresponds to the translation of technology to the process of Bildung that education science sees itself as scientifically-oriented positivism. Thus, all quality of the human being is reduced to quantity, and the human subject dissolves into statistics. As in society as a whole, the domination which results becomes invisible, whereas the increased class contradiction in the matter becomes more acute. It presents itself as a scientific truth that can be checked at any time. It abolishes the contradiction between essence and appearance by making the appearance absolute, by depriving it of its historical condition. Humankind becomes

the sum of its functions, a sum which can be determined in the process of exploitation.

The exploitative character of Bildung, with which its concept is mutilated and paralysed in its historical possibility, is surrounded by behavioural research, which abolishes the difference between humans and animals. The danger that the subject nevertheless emerges from the sum of its functions and relates them to itself thus becomes controllable. The externally determined human being is protected against the intrusions of one's consciousness. The mutation of the human type is far advanced. The planning of society is being developed in animal experiments; biologism as a fascist reservoir of ideology is obvious. It is a form of inner-societal traffic planning, an unconscious functional system on the surface level. Skinner (1971) set out his premise in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* as one of the leading North American theorists: Human dignity based on consciousness and freedom produces chaos, it prevents survival. That requires total adjustment, the ideals of human ascent are irrelevant. The utopia of the Enlightenment, which refers to overcoming contradictions, appears here as a farce. Humankind is liberated by being freed from its consciousness. The contradiction now becomes helpless, self-destruction without consequences, their object is withdrawn. The antithesis can no longer feed in the body of the thesis, and it becomes part of the thesis' agony.

The conclusion still needs to be clarified. In the structure of late capitalism, within which organised Bildung only has the character of an unlocking subdivision, the possibility of identification is taken away from the human being. They become ahistorical. Breaking out of the latticework that keeps humankind enclosed thus remains a blind, irrational revolt that cannot break through the given condition. The suffering subject remains at its mercy. Nevertheless, at this point, it is necessary to refer to a certain overall context.

Society has made Bildung comprehensive. It corresponds to the degree of its rational structure, the abstract character of its production. There is a second point of view that is connected to this precondition. Technological society is steadily accumulating rationality, which offers itself as a means of human liberation. The comprehensive character that Bildung has acquired in the face of the state of technological development corresponds to a general paralysis as a means of switching off its revolutionary power. In the Enlightening concept of Bildung, it became clear that humankind gains its Bildung through confrontation with nature, which he seeks to master, and that the liberating character of Bildung unfolds in this confrontation. The mastery of nature meant that the organisation of society as a class society was inevitable; it has a historical justification. This justification has now disappeared. Humankind's elementary struggle with

nature is over; humankind becomes free. The total character of *Bildung*, forced by historical development, points to this freedom. Humankind is beginning to emerge as the subject of its history, breaking old chains. In the historical relationship of domination, *Bildung* now becomes the most developed instrument to close off the knowledge of one's own possibility to humankind. The generality of *Bildung* thus contains a double necessity: to equip humankind for the revolution of the productive forces and to prevent the revolution of one's consciousness. It is essential to recognise this connection. Only when we know where we are, do we know who we are. Knowledge processes become all the more decisive because, in a society of abundance, we can no longer rely on material misery when we want to initiate changes. Thus, it seems at first to be inevitable to free the concept of *Bildung* from its burial, to make its contents present anew. *Bildung* aims at the all-round development of the human being as a conscious being. Nature and spirit are simultaneously preserved in it and want to be reconciled with each other. Humankind is toolmaker and dreamer, worker and artist, universal designer of itself. The general public, which has won *Bildung*, points out that the moments in which *Bildung* can overcome one's class historical disunity, becomes universal in a liberated species. It is necessary to educate the person for whom the time is ripe; only now does the idea of *Bildung* become a reality. The anti-cultural economism of the predominant leftist theory of *Bildung* is only a reflex of the existing constitution and does not get beyond it. At a moment when the economic determination of the past begins to dissolve, it clings to this very past. It is the business of *Bildung* to look at the person who wants to emerge from it, to express their need as a human being.

V.

Attention was drawn to prerequisites that are reflected in society's concept of *Bildung*. The social power that stands in the way of change has multiplied with technical equipment. We realise that we are inferior, that we cannot escape from this inferiority, that liberation is in it and that it takes on a general character. The initial condition must be extended by a point of view that at first seems remote but directly affects the constitution of one's inner social landscape.

The peace that is manifesting itself has been forced by the growing danger of collective suicide; the survival of humankind is no longer certain in the face of the instruments of annihilation. A new, *balance of power* is emerging worldwide. It is decisively supported by the United States and the Soviet Union; the growing importance of the great Chinese power is

an integral part of this global balance. The powers involved possess the decisive destructive potential of humankind. Their spheres of interest are largely enclosed, although by no means static; there are open areas with a wide range of possible conflicts. However, there is an unmistakable tendency to mediate these conflicts rationally. A tacit agreement has entered into the world balance of interests. This agreement is based on the mutual recognition of social systems within these respected spheres of interest. The contracting counter-parties guarantee each other's systems, thus *plein pouvoir* within them. It is done in the knowledge that the relative foreign policy status quo, which is forced by the will to survive, is tied to the practical inviolability of social constitution in the most important regions. An abrupt social change in an industrialised nation—be it possible—thus becomes a security risk for the whole of humankind. The shadow of destruction now also lies over the attempt of such a change. There are factors of considerable uncertainty in the emerging web of global control, but there are more decisive factors against which it can be based. Survival appears here in a remarkable dovetailing: the need for physical survival, which is collectively threatened, has been compounded by the interest in maintaining existing systems of domination. This interest positions itself as an interest in survival, and it eludes free availability. It puts every theory of revolutionary change in a predicament. It is a rational conservatism that binds everyone's compulsion to survive in accordance with their own interests. Since securing naked survival requires a highly developed state of consciousness, even an enlightening note cannot be denied to this conservatism. On the other hand, the revolutionary theory, which sees itself as the heir of the Enlightenment, appears to be rather close to factual irrationalism. The revolution, which seeks to abolish the social contradiction and the violation of reason contained in it, is designed to have consequences that cannot be ignored, that are beyond rational control and contain the risks of spontaneity that affect survival. Revolution and self-preservation come into conflict. The conservatism of the ruling systems is metaphysical-less, pragmatic, and thus also refers to the revolutionary theory and the need becoming recognisable in it at least psychologically in the proximity of theology. The historically predetermined roles appear reversed. The interlocking of interests points to a profoundly changed historical starting position. It becomes possible against a background of unprecedented threat.

Physical and human survival is thus torn far apart. Prague and Santiago make it clear what is meant here. Approaches that call the existing constitution into question, that bring a new perspective to the historical process, are crushed in the de facto consensus of the forced counterparts. It should be noted that the organisation of the destruction of capital, the destruction of abundance, is hardly restricted by this peace. Armament, as

the most visible form of this destruction of capital, is maintained. Abundance is blowing up the systems; its continuing destruction is part of their alliance. The destruction of abundance is the reversal of the consequence of the process of a successful dominion of nature, the reversal of its potentially-enlightening violence. The entire system of traditional rule is threatened by internal collapse. It is precisely what makes its own sensitivity understandable. If this thesis applies unreservedly to capitalism, it must not be ignored here that the social constitution of the Soviet Union is also beginning to become anachronistic. It is falling into its contradiction. The maintenance of anachronistic systems, however, on which the paralysing world condition rests, leads to progressive decay, to the psychological impoverishment of people in the industrial centres and new forms of a worldwide class struggle of oppressed and starved peoples. Both phenomena refer to each other. The present condition is thus more adequately, albeit immensely shortened, outlined. In the relationship between *Bildung* and survival, consciousness of its own condition becomes the starting point; it denotes the first step of liberating engagement. With it, the question of new forms of confrontation arises, a question that is appropriate to the conditions. Traditional concepts often prove to be inadequate. They are directed towards a process of coming to terms with nature that was still essentially unfinished. An attempt is to be made to define *Bildung* from this point of view in a way that complements it.

VI.

With its elevated dominion over nature, humankind enters into a changed history. Only now does one become free for humankind. The establishment of a society that becomes one's own property is the task by which one recognises oneself. It is not easy to determine routes. A revolutionary path in the classical sense is blocked. It is unrealisable; this is especially true for industrialised societies. If one takes the counter-concept to revolutionary violence that the 19th century developed, the concept of an evolution through which the ultimate goal is to be achieved, as it were, behind the back of the subject, its questionability is no less. There is no compelling unit of the process that connects the progress of the productive forces with the progress of humankind. The productive forces are breaking their limits; one can at the same time wither away, be incomparably destroyed. The formation of consciousness, which enables humans to act with knowledge in the vulnerable tissue of their own condition, is gaining significance like never before. It initially means

Enlightenment as patient work. Bildung reckons with long-term processes, its results cannot be produced like industrial products. The number of people who can assume a liberating task of Bildung is limited for the time being. Nevertheless, the impoverishment of society, as the impoverishment of its human content, is continuously accelerating. This contradiction cannot be resolved. We can only tolerate it.

Changes that decisively determine history take place as real changes in people. Revolutions only reveal processes that have been prepared for a long time. Their real humane content lies in this preparation; a revolution without this content is in constant danger of falling back into the past, which has just been overcome. The assertion of the bourgeoisie against feudalism was a process which lasted for centuries; it should be added, that it succeeded entirely in only a few countries. With it, a changed human appears, one who understands oneself progressively. New literature is born, new art, new music. The growing economic autonomy of the bourgeois subject is its condition, but this condition does not remain isolated. Only with one's ability to penetrate the material condition intellectually and thus transform it does humankind become a subject. If one transfers the reference to the present condition, then this means that the economic autonomy of the working masses is the precondition for their all-round intellectual development, but that this development is already a necessary component of change.

Cultural development requires economic development as a precondition: without simultaneous cultural development, the economic content remains separate from its human content. For the proletariat as an alienated mass, the decisive difference from the emergence of the bourgeois subject is that it does not find an economic condition within which it can develop its subjecthood. The revolutionization of human labour thus becomes the first condition. It cannot be materially fixed; with the material shared in the social product alone, one remains under the given condition but only psychologically is one subjected to it in a more lasting way. What is decisive is the change of the entire working condition, with which it is stripped of its destructive effect; but in truth, this is only possible if it changes the ownership relationship and at the same time redefines the needs of humankind. Work organisation in the form of the council principle points to how the masses become economic subjects; it is a radical democracy in its final form. Only through such a path can humankind take possession of one's free time, which becomes decisive for one's cultural development. With the revolution in work, humankind also takes possession of the free time that is robbed today in order to keep it under the control of a misanthropic demand system. In reality, here the processes converge too; the revolutionization of work and the revolutionization of leisure are processes by which humans rises to be a

subject. Both processes must begin simultaneously as an expression of a change in needs. The coming universality of humankind finally means here that one can be a skilled industrial worker in the factory and a skilled archaeologist outside the factory or whatever one likes at the same time. The road to this is long, but its goal will only be reached if it is pursued from the beginning. The development of humankind is not a product of political changes that will come later, but it is the precondition for real change.

The constantly expanding free time and its connection to the revolutionising of the work process, the realisation that humankind can win itself as a total need in this connection, allows the outline of a concept of *Bildung* that the present requires. Universality is thus understood not only through the work process, in which the interchangeability of functions increasingly manifest themselves; only in the relationship between work and time freed up does it acquire its real content. *Bildung* is based on the passing through processes of appropriation, through which new reality is continuously caught up. The appropriation of the production process is overtaken by the appropriation of human identity. The changed relationship of humans to nature, their triumphant emergence from this relationship, makes the overarching appropriation a decisive aspect. It is not possible without its origin in the entire heritage of human ascent, of which we are the continuators. The changed natural relationship of humankind now allows this appropriation for all. With it, philosophy and history, art, literature and music become the necessary stock of a general *Bildung*, which includes *Bildung* for the production process and at the same time humanises it. The instruments of humankind become human instruments. Only now can a further mediation emerge, which continues as a creation whose scope becomes unlimited. It is no coincidence that the capitalist *Bildung* of institution restricts the possibility of cultural appropriation, only defining *Bildung* as a channel of exploitation. It thus also cancels a changing self-awareness of the human being that is only possible today. *Bildung* of assistance that must be provided is the finding of a human identity. The appropriation of the cultural legacy, which is repressively curtailed, becomes a condition of identity, self-discovery and creative continuation. The indivisibility of the need, with which one's work first wins and lets one step out of their determination, is the basis of a humanistic concept of *Bildung*, which separates itself from vulgar economism as well as from an empty idealistic veiling. *Bildung*, in its entirety, is included in the whole of reality. It places its trust in the unlimited empowerment of humankind.

The process to which reference is made here aims at the complete transformation of our condition; at the same time, it follows a tradition of *Bildung* of history with which humankind understood itself as the future.

This historical assertion must be understood as a process by which society is ultimately brought to collapse from within. An immediate demand is the complete liberation of Bildung from any planning of needs with which society removes its abundance. With the changed distribution of the social product, decisive processes can be initiated. The prerequisite for a universal Bildung of opportunity is created with it; Bildung is no longer fixed on future exploitation but is general in every form. The demand itself heralds the emerging change.

The collective character of society, its comprehensive socialization, the universal system of its dependencies all point to a concept of Bildung that reveals a new possibility. It is about uncovering the content that reveals itself as a nascent and unmissable history. With the means of society, however, consciousness is kept in the dark. We have internalised the mechanism of competition, and it has deformed us. Work and free time are of gruelling intensity. Attempts to escape are quickly integrated into the existing system, and their fruit cannot be carried out. Social power becomes invisible. The articulation of the human being is exposed to constant drying up, a constant withdrawal; every word falls into foreign hands and is added to the existing as new violence. Liberation refers to an infinite number of laborious steps, which are continually being broken off again, turned into their opposite, ending in resignation. Nevertheless, a need is discernible that transcends reality; the need has progressed beyond reality. It points everywhere to the future. In it, there is human experience, a common experience of humankind, the growing experience of all, since we all become victims, crucified and liberated consciousness.

New antagonisms are emerging, produced by late capitalist society. They possess a changed quality. With them, humankind as subject announces itself in the form of an immediate seizure, as a total need. This need eludes its material definition, it points beyond its material condition, seeks to take it into human possession. The strikes in Italy and France, in the first silhouette of them also in our country, are beginning to lose their limited character. They are proving to be an attempt to revolutionise the working condition as a whole, to organise all production itself, to be free from any incapacitation. A turning point becomes apparent, a real transition into the future. All limitations are overcome. One must have observed the street theatres in France, with which people play out their destiny and understand themselves, no longer as participants in a prescribed consumption, but as a human who wants to get hold of themselves. A new song emerges, brittle, penetrating, of deep pain and militant hope. The content and aesthetic quality of these testimonies are unusual. One notices that it is the same process that underlies the occupation of a factory, the simultaneity of economic and intellectual liberation, a comprehensive self-presentation, the totality of becoming a

subject. The will for self-liberation rises as a need of the vanguard of the working classes, today and now, and it embraces all expressions of life. It is linked to the entire liberation process of history, which it only makes comprehensive. The demand for the abolition of private ownership of the means of production is linked to the demand for the abolition of intellectual property. Here politics is not undermined by *Bildung* in order to avoid the harshest contradiction, but the political process itself is conceived as a process of universal *Bildung*. The mass liberation with which the universality of the genus is brought to an end as a task of *Bildung*, as the epitome of all self-disposal, can only be realised through a long chain of independent acts. The experience of happiness that they contain is irrevocable. When the need is fully developed, the old society collapses, it cannot resist.

The future becomes the expression of real experience in which it is already contained. We experience the change in ourselves. With this experience, we are already set free, even as those still a subject. The process we are dealing with here requires the highest level of awareness, a constant assessment of the political condition, it moves over dangerous territory. Suicidal releases are obvious. The difficulties are obvious, and the navigation is without a nautical chart. Nevertheless, spontaneity is required. With it, humankind emerges more abruptly, not only are the protective shells crushed, the contradictions of our arrest exposed; hidden content is also resolved, a human voice that is subject to all history and wants to be heard. Humankind emerges and refers to its need; for a moment, one destroys all the constraints imposed by the process of education of one's history. Spontaneity requires constant reference to controlling reflection in order to become a form; but the form also nourishes itself from reference, from its reference to the future, to free, redeemed, and reconciled creation, to a human being who is not threatened by their history.

All of utopia that wants to become historical is rooted in *topos*. It must be created in this condition and must already be experienced in it. It is nothing more than an anticipated reality, an imagined development of a recognisable beginning. It is the memory of a darkened world. The universal genus, which releases the fullness of its possibilities, is the completed utopia of *Bildung*. Here, too, the future is no more than what we can be today. The future reality is not substantially different from that which is already being experienced, which was painfully hidden in the old, which matured in it, in which chains were broken.

VII.

For the history of consciousness, the intellectual remains an important authority. The intellectual is a product of bourgeois society. They created its own corrective, a negation behind its back. As a commercial society based on reflection, it made a reflection upon itself the stock of its reality. This remains a productive achievement of unfinished catching up. It was the bourgeois milieu that generated the doubt; the intellectual was the citizen turned against themselves. They were the symbol of extreme opposition to physical and intellectual work. They were the nomad of society, led it to the end it had created in itself, was a citizen of two worlds, living in growing, abstract cities, with no earth beneath their feet. It was their task to dissolve the existing, to experience the complete dissolution in itself. They were the marked children of society, its broken reflex as a broken relationship to itself, but more than that. In the dissolution, which is always also a process of dissolving and regaining the self, in the anatomy of the existing, shattered humankind is exposed and saved.

With the decline of the old bourgeois society, the object by which the intellectual gained consciousness, experienced powerlessness as intellectual power, is also lost. Their joy becomes sick. The object has changed; one crumbles oneself on something that turns out to be nothing, but which is nevertheless monstrous. This realised commodity society, which makes the subject disappear, has left intellectuals to infirmity just as much as the society whose product they were. The intellectual now produces for consumption, as part of the machine of exploitation, is itself consumed. One can witness the truth, but there must be someone to beat one for it, there must be an audience. Even suffering needs a sublime joy to be bearable. In the functional system of late capitalism, nothing remains. The intellectual becomes a cynic; they are only pauperised.

To escape his demoralisation, the intellectual becomes the self-proclaimed leader of the masses. They set themselves up as a guardian and continue the division of labour indefinitely. They find a new function to prevent their dethronement. Their private property is the intellectual property of which they are the epitome, and they want to make it eternal in order to perpetuate immaturity. They discover the domain that opens a way out. They deny the class they come from, but only to continue its domination. The damaged product of an ancient society has a choice between abandonment and *salto mortale*.

There remains one last task that falls to the intellectual. The intellectual has to prepare their annulment, as an annulment of the contradiction that has begotten them. The contradiction of the division of labour, of the loneliness of consciousness and unconscious loneliness, which with they experience its extreme intensification, must be overcome in a recognising

way. Their help is nothing more than incorruptible work, as a question of the whereabouts of humankind, and the determination not to tolerate any violation of this question. The practically political work is maintained through countless mediations, and the realisation of a next step, however modest, is their worthy commandment. However, there is also something else that evades this condition and settles history. *Bildung* and the ability to survive refer to a consuming relationship; the word is in danger of failing. It is the intellectual's process of annulment, brought to an end in the most vulnerable self-respect, which with its execution exposes humankind that comes from that which was destroyed, from the destruction that cannot speak out. It is their slow demise that is linked to their ascent, linked to their recovery as a human being.

VIII.

History is without certainty. It does not guarantee a future. It does not contain a law that is carried out independently of humankind to bring itself to its goal. The suffering that happened in it will not be undone, cannot be reconciled backwards, because it was experienced by living people who never return. Only imagination wants to erase it because senselessness hurts us; reason looks back on the path of history to understand it as a path to itself and comes up against painful limits. There are hints for the future, but no certainty. The certainty of ultimate fulfilment is faith, not uncovered by experience, but not confirmed by it alone. Humankind can be damaged physically and psychologically to the point of being pushed below the threshold of resilience, unable to cope with its future, denatured by neurosis and hunger. It is not impossible. The exploitation of 'human capital' is constantly wearing out. Within scientific society, a new myth has arisen with which society imposes itself upon us as the inevitable truth to which we are at the mercy of. Its demythologisation requires altered complicated thought processes. We have only learnt to convict what is openly irrational; the irrationality that masquerades as rationality remains hidden. Capitalism is by no means at an end; it is rather proliferating, deeply internalised, occupying the imagination. Only the old bourgeois class as a productive intellectual phenomenon has perished. Liberating collective processes have unequal importance in countries such as China, where a communal organisation of labour, skipping capitalist traffic, has been able to transfer itself mostly unscathed into the present. In our society, the same process carries with it psychological infirmity from the very beginning. Nevertheless, we can only derive our future from our condition, into which the foreign condition is included, as a common

cause of humankind, but does not solve our task. If the interdependence of all is extended more and more with world traffic, it is only an attempt to escape, to expect liberation from others. We must make ourselves recognisable as human beings in our contradiction.

The process of execution is without mercy. However, under the blanket of society, there is a recognisable need to overcome it, to go beyond it with a complete change of humankind. The contradictions are no longer left in the unconscious where they destroy us; they become the lever of change. The more humane future will be the result of countless attempts, a constant new beginning in the sum of setbacks. An entire past is to be overcome. The change of humankind, which cannot be brought about by changing a political system alone, remains the most challenging task. If humankind's victory over nature opens up an unknown possibility of its becoming, no dogmatism helps subject that reality to a compliant concept and thus stops humankind. All previous knowledge must be correctable. Dogmatism is a regression into a past in which we were immature, unable to stand on our own feet. It is used to maintain dominion over us. It is the negation of the Enlightenment, with which the question of ourselves is made infeasible. On a wall at the Frankfurt University, a sentence from 1968 is readable, even if faded: "Take the freedom of science, discover what you want!" What remained were dogmatists who held on to one another therapeutically. The freedom of becoming wants to be endured, and it is a heavy burden.

If one returns again to the starting point, humankind cannot bear a dehumanised survival; it turns against itself with a destructive impulse. Physical survival, however, is the prerequisite for any design of the future. It is not guaranteed today. Bildung is understood as the progressive liberation of humankind to itself. It can only understand survival as the opening of a richer life. The change that this requires, however, meets narrow limits; the historical system of interests stands in its way. It can invoke the necessity of physical survival. The contradiction is not indissoluble. The consciousness that causes Bildung is also the consciousness of its own condition, of the condition of the feasibility of its perspective. The revolution in permanence will have to move within limits set by the threat of collective self-destruction. Nevertheless, the reasonable prospect remains that humankind will become irresistibly human. Society must be formed in such a way that it knows its human purpose and the peril in which it finds itself. The path between purpose and peril must be found. Consciousness is everything.

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Survival Through Bildung in the Face of the Destruction of Human Livelihoods

Helge Kminek¹

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to argue that Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's critical theory of education, with specific reference to "Survival Through Bildung" (1974/2024),² should be included and discussed within educational reflection and theory-building today. I will attempt to justify the significance of Heydorn's contribution, particularly regarding the theorisation of both education for sustainable development (ESD)³ and the desired socio-ecological transformation with regard to the crisis diagnosis of human-environmental relations, for which I will refer to the concept of the Anthropocene.⁴

As I see it, the central argument of Heydorn's text is for an emphatic Bildung for all, that is also a purpose-free Bildung, which allows for a "richer life" (p. 33 in this anthology). In my view, this meaningful, fulfilled and happy life is one that is free of socially avoidable evils and grievances—for everyone. From here on, I will simply refer to this as *emphatic Bildung* and the *emphatic life* respectively. These two concepts are the necessary conditions for the survival of humankind.

1 I would like to thank Simone Blandford very much for the thorough editing, and Giulio Pennacchioni and Nora Marie Kustoss for the constructive advice.

2 Compare p. 3 within this anthology regarding the term Bildung.

3 The term education for sustainable development is widely understood and used. This is probably due to its educational designation by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which is the reason I have chosen to use it. Hence, the arguments developed in this contribution also apply in large part to related concepts, such as environmental and sustainability education, environmental education or global citizenship education—at least it appears this way to the author. Regarding the thesis that education science must face the environmental issue in its normative reflection, see also Kminek et al., 2021.

4 The term goes back to the publication by Paul Crutzen (2002). I will explain the term in more detail below. On the controversy surrounding the term, see for example: Bauer et al. (2021) and Gibbard et al. (2022).

Heydorn's thinking appears in the wake of historical and dialectical materialism; specifically, the dialectic of base (economy) and superstructure. However, rather than seeing the centre of gravity or the decisive point in the base, this is instead superstructural, regarding the development of humankind. And within the superstructure, *Bildung* is the central perspective for Heydorn. So, even without the material conditions as a prerequisite for the realisation "of a richer life" (p. 33 in this anthology) for all, emphatic *Bildung* is the guiding principle for dissolving the possibility of a fundamental destruction of humankind. Moreover, Heydorn revitalises a classical theory of *Bildung*, which is probably not held in high esteem in the field of ESD today.

Even if I have already anticipated the locus of my argument, this contribution critically questions Heydorn's theory. Hence, a central question arises: Can we possibly learn anything from Heydorn and his argumentation today, especially for the field of ESD? Following this, the first sub-question must be negotiated: *How* does Heydorn argue in his contribution? The second section of this paper will build upon Heydorn's reconstructed argument; and the third section will discuss what we might *not* be able to learn from Heydorn and his argumentation today, and why this might be.

There are two reasons for thinking through why we may no longer learn anything from Heydorn today. Firstly, there is the problem of either prematurely rejecting or adapting abstract papers such as Heydorn's. Because such abstract papers offer few concrete starting points, they are often either hastily rejected as a philosophical castle in the sky, or one's own position is linked to them by association. Thus, the critical and rigorous examination of validity, which is so necessary for the progress of scientific knowledge, fades into the background. Therefore, I will first attempt to argue that Heydorn's contribution is not relevant for us today. In order to do this, I will present a counterargument which, if it were true, would cause Heydorn's argument to collapse. If this counterargument can be refuted, however (and I think it can), then the actual argument of this paper is strengthened.

Secondly, this critical examination is based on the motive of not prematurely attributing to a historical paper—even if, from the perspective of 2024, the Heydorn paper can be classified as recent history—a topicality and argument which it may not have at all. By raising these possible concerns and succeeding in disproving this counterargument, it will not yet have been proven that Heydorn's argument is relevant to us today, but the fundamental objection would have been dispelled.

This is where, in the third section, I will start by addressing Heydorn's reference to nuclear war, as an immediate threat to human survival. This point is a particularly good inroad to refute his argument. However, because I conclude that his argument holds up even at its weakest point, I

turn to the central perspective of the article; namely, the question of whether we can learn anything from Heydorn in view of the structural threat to humankind's survival by a self-inflicted destruction of the natural foundations of life. This includes, but is not limited to, climate change, loss of biodiversity and chemical pollution, which I understand as partial problems of the Anthropocene.

In the fourth section, I turn to the state of research on the human-environmental relationship and the now widespread concept of the Anthropocene.

In the fifth section, I discuss one reading of Heydorn's text in connection to the human-environmental relationship. It is a reading that seems obvious when examining the text, but which I will reject. Then, in the sixth section I discuss what I understand to be the correct reading.

In the seventh section, I deal with Heydorn's thesis that Bildung, as it is currently practised, prevents emphatic living.

The eighth section is dedicated to the potential of Bildung as a precondition to ending the destruction of human livelihoods and, at the same time, a condition for survival within the Anthropocene.

The question of what we can learn from Heydorn today is at the centre of the ninth section, and the paper ends with a summary and outlook in section ten.

Both the thematic references I have mentioned here, and Heydorn's underlying text are extremely complex and multifaceted. Due to the thematic density and diversity of Heydorn's text, and because the central motive of this article is to remain closely connected with his argument, it is useful to read Heydorn's text beforehand. However, because of this density, I can only analyse a few carefully selected elements. Otherwise, I would have to present a much longer paper, which would go well beyond the space available here.

2 On the Argument in Heydorn's Contribution

How does Heydorn argue in his contribution? This section will negotiate this question, as a prerequisite to answering whether we can possibly learn anything from Heydorn and his argumentation today, especially for the field of ESD.

In his paper, Heydorn's argumentation is complex and demanding due to its interweaving of systematic considerations through historical analyses and contemporary diagnoses. Furthermore, it can be argued that Heydorn deliberately wrote his contribution in a linguistically sophisticated style in

order to challenge the decline of both educational standards and concentration. After all, reading his text requires a great deal of focus.

In order to map the shape of his argument, it makes sense to formulate subheadings for each section. These are simply headed with Roman numerals. I propose the following subheadings:

- I. Introduction and the starting point of the argument
- II. On the concept of survival
- III. On the concept of Bildung
- IV. Analysis of the current political and educational situation
- V. On the balance of power in the face of a possible collective suicide
- VI. Attempt to update the concept of Bildung
- VII. On the intellectual
- VIII. Outlook and Summary

These headings already make clear the basic lines of argumentation throughout “Survival Through Bildung”. However, these various theses always include historical and contemporary diagnostic reflections, in addition to focusing on the current socio-political situation, as a result of the task and possibility of Bildung. But the following reconstruction of these arguments claims to be no more than an attempt to extract the most useful aspects for the research interest of this paper.⁵ Thus, I do not strictly follow Heydorn’s presentation in his contribution, but have chosen to reconstruct the argumentation in a way that seems most suitable for working out the central considerations of his paper.

Thesis 1:

The terms Bildung and survival are oriented towards the “the elementary process of coping with nature [which] is finished” (p. 20 in this anthology).

Thesis 2:

Bildung removes humankind from its direct relationship with nature; “subject and object gain their own peculiar, contradictory relationship” (p. 18 in this anthology).

Thesis 3:

Through this separation, the given social conditions become conceptually resolvable in principle, and at the same time it becomes recognisable that

5 For example, I omit the explicit references to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory; therefore, compare the contributions by Ana Inés Heras (pp. 97–114) and Fernando Murillo (p. 81–96) within this anthology.

the given social conditions—and thus humankind—could also be different.

Thesis 4:

The process of “coming to terms with nature” (p. 26 in this anthology), to which humankind has been subjected, is complete. Through its “elevated dominion over nature, humankind enters into a changed history. Only now does one become free for humankind. The establishment of a society that becomes one’s own property is the task by which one recognises oneself” (p. 26 in this anthology).

Intermediate conclusion 1:

Because the given social conditions can also be conceived differently, humankind can be understood as a successful and emphatic being, that wants to survive.

Thesis 5:

Humankind wants to survive as emphatic beings.

Thesis 6:

Humankind can want to die and pursue its own destruction, especially through nuclear war.

Thesis 7:

The way in which humankind deals with the question of survival as emphatic beings, and death as a will to die, depends on the historical period.

Thesis 8:

In the present situation, because of the contradiction between the rationality of being emphatic beings—regarding the possibility of realisation on the one hand and the refusal to realise on the other—death becomes a seduction.

Intermediate conclusion 2, which raises an ethical demand:

Because humankind wants to survive as emphatic beings, which is (in principle) possible, an ethical demand arises: “Humankind *should* [emphasis added] emerge as the subject of his own history, less of pain and old attachments to be overcome” (p. 18 in this anthology).

Intermediate conclusion 3, which raises a second ethical demand:

Because humankind wants to and should live as the subject of their own history and as emphatic beings, and since the previous process of mastering nature has been completed, we need to update the concepts of Bildung and survival to take into account this development and demand.

Thesis 9:

Bildung today must anticipate a potential future that the emphatic being will make possible. For example, to be “a skilled industrial worker in the factory and a skilled archaeologist outside the factory or whatever one likes at the same time” (p. 28 in this anthology).⁶

Thesis 10:

Such a Bildung, and the changes in social conditions that it would bring, are in contradiction with the current political relations of power and dominion.

Thesis 11:

The transformation of current social conditions, especially of political relations of power and dominion, *should* not be attempted through abrupt revolutions. In such a case, there is a danger of humankind’s collective suicide, especially using nuclear bombs, because of an extreme shift in the “*balance of power*” (p. 24 in this anthology).

Thesis 12:

Furthermore, *abrupt revolutions* do not promise the necessary qualitative transformations of social conditions that could lead to the possibility of the emphatic human being.

Thesis 13:

Resolving the contradiction between the existing possibility of realising the emphatic human being and the actual realisation of the social conditions “is not indissoluble” (p. 33 in this anthology).

Thesis 14:

Bildung, which already establishes the emphatic human being in the here and now, is the necessary condition for the corresponding qualitative transformation of social relations, which is by itself a *permanent revolution*.

Conclusion:

“The revolution in permanence will have to move within limits set by the threat of collective self-destruction. Nevertheless, the reasonable prospect remains that humankind will become irresistibly human. Society must be formed in such a way that it knows its human purpose and the peril in which it finds itself. The path between purpose and peril must be found. Consciousness is everything” (p. 33 in this anthology).

6 At this point, it is natural to make a connection with *Die Deutsche Ideologie* [The German Ideology] (Marx & Engels, 1932). It would be a separate work to examine how Heydorn takes up historical materialism and the work of Karl Marx.

As explained in the introduction, I will now address a possible counterargument to Heydorn's contribution, with regard to its topicality. However, it goes without saying that I cannot discuss all possible counterarguments in the space available here. The issues of posthumanism (cf., e.g., Thomsen & Wamberg, 2023), transhumanism (cf., e.g., Doat & Dorte, 2023; More & Vita-More, 2013), digitalisation (cf., e.g., Jörisen, 2023)⁷ and artificial intelligence (cf., e.g., Suzuki, 2023) and its effects on people and their societies are not directly addressed. The choice I have made is motivated by the desire to stay as close as possible to Heydorn's paper.

3 About the Thesis of the Immediate Threat to Humankind's Physical Survival

This reconstruction of Heydorn's argument offers many opportunities for critical examination and questioning. This section specifically asks what the weakest point in Heydorn's argument is, and if his argument can be proved incorrect at this weakest point. If this were the case, then the central question of the article (can we learn anything from Heydorn and his argumentation today, especially for the field of ESD?) would no longer arise.

I will first deal with the immediate danger of human extinction by an uncontrolled nuclear war between the great powers, and thus implicitly with thesis 6 (see above). I have chosen this point of entry for the discussion because, in my view, thesis 6 appears to be the easiest to refute. And if it is disproved, Heydorn's entire argument would collapse.

It was probably not only his own experience of fascism, the Holocaust and the Second World War, but also the consistency of Heydorn's political vigilance that led him to say the following: "The peace that is manifesting itself has been forced by the growing danger of collective suicide; the survival of humankind is no longer certain in the face of the instruments of annihilation" (p. 24 in this anthology). This statement, which goes back to

7 The relationship between gaining autonomy and collective social relations through the possibilities of digitalisation (therefore, compare the paper of Julia Bello-Bravo & Anne Namatsi Lutomia, 2024, pp. 115–154 in this anthology), and the creation of dependency on technology (which is the opposite of autonomy) should also be examined. In this context, it would be worth discussing whether—and, if so, to what extent—Heydorn would understand digitalisation as an expression and consequence of the destruction of the human being and, at the same time, as an attempt to escape this.

Robert Oppenheimer,⁸ refers to the danger of nuclear war and, consequently, the end of humankind.

Many readers may be surprised by these and similar passages in Heydorn's text, which seem extremely topical.⁹ Specifically, the recent tensions between North Korea, on the one hand, and South Korea, the USA and Japan, on the other; ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India; and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, with the constant threat of the use of tactical nuclear weapons.¹⁰ However, it can be argued that the threat to humankind's survival from nuclear war was much greater during Heydorn's lifetime than it is today. This thesis is particularly supported by the numerous nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (cf., for instance, Business Insider, 2015).

Against this background, I will now ask whether there was a danger of collective self-destruction in the years leading to 1974, and whether this danger still exists today. By raising these questions, I am examining the possibility of a counterargument against the idea that Heydorn's contribution is still relevant. This includes the suggestion that because humankind is still alive fifty years after the publication of his text, it is self-evident that the argument was not valuable, and thus it is not topical today. Furthermore, if the threat to humankind's physical survival—which is one of the central theses—turns out to be false, then it seems to me that his entire argument collapses.

In my view, this part of Heydorn's argument is particularly suitable for critical examination for the following reason. Without being able to fully develop and discuss Charles Wright Mills' (1959) grand theories here, I will nonetheless build upon his criticism. Grand theories, and in my view, this includes Heydorn's theory of *Bildung*, are so abstract that it is difficult to prove and, if necessary, reject. If it is possible to eliminate a potential criticism, i.e., the possible refutation of an argument put forward by Heydorn, then his argument is not proven to be correct and true beyond doubt. Yet, with this form of examination, his argument is at least recognised as worthy of serious consideration. With this in mind, I will now examine one of Heydorn's arguments which is comparatively concrete and therefore most likely to be refuted.

8 "If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of the nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and Hiroshima. The people of this world must unite or they will perish" (Oppenheimer, 1945).

9 Furthermore, with regard to this, Heydorn discussed the emerging importance of China for international relations.

10 Additionally, it has also been discussed that military assistance for Ukraine should not be too far-reaching, as this could lead to the use of nuclear weapons by Russia.

If we reflect on the current threat of nuclear war, as well as this threat in Heydorn's lifetime, the idea that we can learn nothing from Heydorn today because we are still alive becomes untenable. Let's take the Atomic Scientist's Doomsday Clock, with which Heydorn would probably have been familiar. The clock stood at nine minutes in 1974—three minutes shorter than in 1972 (cf. "The Doomsday Clock", 2023). However, this reference only proves that Heydorn was not alone in his assessment of the immediate threat to humankind's physical survival. In the years before (and after) 1974, there had been ups and downs in the perceived level of danger by the Atomic Scientists, and this was visualised through the Doomsday Clock. However, a fundamental objection still remains. Wherever the hand of the Doomsday Clock has been, the absence of full-blown nuclear war—despite extremely tense political conflicts—is a precise indication that humankind is able to calculate and anticipate the consequences of this, and is therefore able to avoid it.

This optimistic position on humankind's ability to avoid nuclear war is morally desirable, but it should not be left to chance. After all, if this supposed ability to avoid nuclear war fails, there is no second attempt. This moral argument is correct; however, it seems to me that there is now an even stronger, historically informed counterargument to this optimistic position, which supports Heydorn's diagnosis of his and our times, and thus solidifies his argument. I will now expand on this.

Heydorn and the Atomic Scientist's time-agnostic thesis is particularly justified through historical review. For example, it was not until 2002 that it became known that nuclear war was prevented during the Cuban Missile Crisis (14 October 1962 to 28 October 1962) through more than just the actions of the politicians involved—and thus more than merely responding to the danger that was known worldwide at the time. Additionally, during the Crisis, in contrast to the two other officers authorised to make decisions, Vasily Alexandrovich Archipov vetoed the use of a nuclear torpedo by a Soviet submarine that had been launched from US Navy ships. Moreover, the US officers in turn did not know that the submarine was equipped with a nuclear warhead (cf., e.g., "The Submarines of October", 2002).

Because this example is characterised by mere coincidence, it shows that people would definitely make the decision to start a nuclear war and act accordingly. This case, and the many others that almost triggered nuclear wars, proves that Heydorn, like many other scientists, was right in his diagnosis.¹¹

11 I have chosen this example because, on the one hand, it relates to the timing of Heydorn's contribution and, on the other, it illustrates the extent to which political decision-makers are also

This historically informed argument refutes the position that we can learn nothing from Heydorn today because we are still alive. However, this does not ostensibly explain *what and how* we can learn something from him and his argumentation. I now turn to this by focusing on Heydorn's answer to the problems of the Anthropocene, which structurally question the survival of humankind. I am thus (implicitly) discussing theses 1 to 4 (see above) in the following three sections.

4 On the Structural Threat to Humankind's Survival and the Epoch of the Anthropocene

So far, I have reconstructed and critically examined Heydorn's argument. I will now turn to the question of what we can learn from Heydorn. But here, too, the focus will be on the (partly implicit) critical examination of theses 1 to 4 (see above).

On the surface, Heydorn's contribution says nothing about the structural threat to human life on earth today. That is, the environmental issue posed by the self-inflicted destruction of the natural foundations of life. Climate change and loss of biodiversity, which have become newly obvious, are the two most pressing threats, even if the consequences are only just beginning to materialise.

The Pacific Island States (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Resettlement marks the finality of this process (Böge, 2013); however, before that, the inhabitants of many islands will have to cope with and respond to the consequences of climate change. This is already happening today, through extreme weather events such as cyclones, droughts, heavy rainfall, floods, coastal erosion and water shortages. Alongside these island nations, it is often the world's economically poorest countries that are most affected by environmental change, even if they are hardly responsible for it (Oxfam, 2022). In addition to the regions of the world which are already heavily effected, countries in the so-called Global North are increasingly at risk.¹²

dependent on, or have to react to, the comparatively random actions of other—in this case state—actors.

12 For instance, in mid-July 2021, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany experienced heavy rainfall, which led to a flood disaster that caused many fatalities and destroyed local infrastructure.

According to the sixth assessment report of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC), there is no longer any doubt that current global warming patterns are human made (IPCC, 2021). Furthermore, global warming is progressing faster than feared. Some consequences are irreversible, even if emissions are drastically reduced, including increased heat, droughts and rising sea levels. Even if people still have the power to prevent the worst from happening (IPCC, 2021), we are also becoming more aware of additional dangers such as chemical pollution (Sylvester et al., 2023).

In addition to this destruction, which is already taking place, and the crisis diagnoses of the natural foundations of human life, there are also basal crisis diagnoses in the social dimension.¹³ Inequalities and injustices are currently increasing worldwide, particularly with regard to income, health and life expectancy as well as educational equality. This trend has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic (see, e.g., Mahler et al., 2021). In addition, anti-democratic, authoritarian regimes that question the rule of law and human rights are gaining strength (cf., e.g., Pongiglione, 2023). This also applies to democratic states, whose stability is being eroded by the spread of so-called fake news and conspiracy theories (cf., e.g., Forchtner, 2020). Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that scientists have become pessimistic. Well-known climate researcher Stefan Rahmstorf, for example, has declared that unchecked climate change—which would result in the earth becoming three degrees warmer on average—is an “existential threat to human civilisation” (Rahmstorf, 2022, p. 30; translated by H. K.). Historians point out that a collapse of contemporary human society would not be a historical novelty (cf., e.g., Cline, 2021); however, they also point out that a collapse would be inevitable nonetheless (cf., e.g., Linkov et al., 2024). And Werner Bätzing (2023), for example, argues from a cultural-historical perspective and pleads for the recovery of humanity’s self-restraint in its interaction with nature.

The US state of California, on the other hand, is experiencing a new drought with far-reaching consequences for agriculture, among other things. Moreover, in August 2021, there was daily news of fierce forest fires in Algeria, Greece, Italy and Russia. Global warming does not seem to be the only cause of these events, and yet human-made global warming is said to be a significant contributor to their force and intensity. But these are all just events in economically rich countries, most of which—according to current forecasts—will not be among the regions particularly affected by climate change. This combination of comparatively low impact and simultaneous economic strength indicates the importance of environmental issues for people worldwide, and for humankind as a whole.

- 13 These so-called natural foundations of life are also the lives of animals and plants. In this article, I cannot go into the question of what rights animals and plants should have. I do not wish to deny that animals in particular should have rights, but I cannot go into the particulars and consequences of these rights.

The concept of planetary boundaries claims to map when limits or thresholds are crossed, the permanent crossing of which would make the living conditions of today's social formations unsustainable and impossible (cf., e.g., Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). Consequently, according to this model, humanity's goal must be to shape the human-environmental relationship so that it moves within these boundaries.¹⁴

Today, these problems are often summarised and characterised by the term Anthropocene.¹⁵ The Anthropocene represents a threshold, that marks a sharp change in the quality of the relationship between humans and the natural world. This is “represented by the ‘impossible’ fact that humans have become a ‘force of nature’ and the reality that human action and Earth dynamics have converged and can no longer be seen as belonging to distinct incommensurable domains” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 3). “Humans have become a telluric force, changing the functioning of the Earth as much as volcanism, tectonics, the cyclic fluctuations of solar activity or changes in the Earth’s orbital movements around the Sun” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 3). Furthermore, it is precisely the socio-political conditions which are affected, both in terms of understanding and the expected consequences for humankind. These can no longer be seen as separate from the natural sphere: The “understandings of economy and markets, of culture and society, of history and political regimes need to be rematerialised. They can no longer be seen only as arrangements, and conflicts among humans. In the Anthropocene, social, cultural and political orders are woven into and co-evolve with techno-natural orders of specific matter and energy flow metabolism at a global level, requiring new concepts and methods in the humanities. ... It’s a world where the geographical distribution of population on the planet would come under great stress. And it is probably a more violent world, in which geopolitics becomes increasingly confrontational” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. 4–5). Like the Great Oxidation Event—which determined the natural equilibrium that allows humans to live on planet Earth (cf. Bauer et al., 2021—the Anthropocene is also an event.

14 Compare p. 52.

15 As much as the Anthropocene—whatever the official classification of the term will turn out to be—has nowadays entered the debates in the social sciences and the humanities, the decision as to whether we can speak of an age of the Anthropocene has not yet been made (cf. Subramanian, 2019). The contribution by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (2013) can be read as a critique of this sceptical scientific investigation regarding the appropriateness of the term Anthropocene, which hinders and complicates the necessary socio-ecological transformation in the face of the dramatic threats to people now and in the future, caused by processes that are summarised by the term Anthropocene.

We can now read Heydorn's theory of Bildung within "Survival Through Bildung" as contributing to an understanding of the problems just outlined. Especially since, as we shall see, he also speaks of a new quality in the human-environmental relationship. I will now broadly examine this reading, before an alternative reading is proposed.

5 About Coping with Nature and its Domination in Heydorn—Interpretation I

How does Heydorn's argument relate to the self-inflicted threats on humankind? Even if various constraints to natural forces are addressed, the threats are not explicitly addressed by Heydorn at all.¹⁶ Additionally, it is not only this absence, but also Heydorn's explicit statements about nature¹⁷ (and the relationship between humankind and nature) that suggest the thesis is outdated: today "the elementary process of coping with nature is finished" (p. 20 in this anthology) and, with "its elevated dominion over nature, humankind enters into a changed history. Only now does one become free for humankind. The establishment of a society that becomes one's own property is the task by which one recognises oneself" (p. 26 in this anthology).

In view of the dangers just outlined, there can be no question of dominating nature. However, in actuality, humankind's attempt to dominate nature leads to nature striking back. Because the control and domination of nature is seemingly ensured by modern techniques and technology, we—humankind—want to free ourselves from nature and yet nature comes back through the revolving door, with very negative side effects (see section before).¹⁸ Hence, it seems that Heydorn, like other thinkers, is "flying into the future but facing backwards, fleeing from a horrible past of suffering and oppression but unable to see the destruction that lies ahead" (Hamilton, 2015, pp. 38–39).

16 Herein lies, at first glance, another reason that Heydorn's paper "Survival Through Bildung" could be considered outdated and thus pushed aside.

17 If we take the term nature to mean processes that are not influenced by humankind, then it is reasonable to ask whether we still have nature on the planet today, and not just the environment. To avoid confusion, I use the term nature here because it is used by Heydorn. However, I understand nature here in a broad sense; this includes the environment and is not separate from it.

18 In the context of this paper, I can only refer to the position of the "Good Anthropocene", see, for example, Prouteau (2023).

Is this way of reading Heydorn's paper plausible? As someone who was known to be a politically minded and sensitive thinker—particularly in light of his reflections on the threat to humankind from nuclear war detailed above—I am not convinced. I will counter this reading by arguing that Heydorn's paper is deliberately responding to socio-political developments and the emerging environmental crisis of his times, without explicitly referring to them.¹⁹ The likely reason for this, according to my interpretation elucidated below, is that Heydorn wanted to challenge the readers of his essay to think for themselves. In order to justify this, I will first develop an alternative reading to the passages quoted above.

6 About Coping with Nature and Domination in Heydorn—Interpretation II

If we combine other aspects of Heydorn's theory with the two statements above, we can develop a different understanding that does not immediately mark his argument as outdated.

(i) The thesis that the “elementary process of coping with nature is finished” (p. 20 in this anthology) is based on the (traditional) idea that humankind must wrest survival from its environment. This idea is supported, for example, by the argument that the development of the first plough (some 6,000 years ago) made agricultural work, and people's lives, much easier.²⁰ It can therefore be said that, particularly in the so-called Global North, we humans no longer realise how strenuous individual and collective survival once was. Although Heydorn does not say this explicitly, it seems to be an implied background assumption of his argument.

If this background assumption is combined with his consideration of the Enlightenment—which starts for Heydorn with the Greek classics (cf. Heydorn, 2004)²¹—and the scientific revolution in the early modern pe-

19 Just to recall two dates from this period: the founding of Greenpeace (in its present organisational form in 1979) goes back to 1970. In addition, in 1972, the Club of Rome had presented its well-known report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972).

20 Whether humankind has evolved towards better living conditions (cf., e.g., Morris, 2011), or whether this thesis should at least be considered in many ways, if not rejected (cf., e.g., Graeber & Wengrow, 2021), is a controversial question.

21 What cannot be discussed here is the question of whether, and if so to what extent, Heydorn's thesis follows the narrative of Eurocentrism, which is sharply criticised by decolonial studies today. It is possible that Heydorn would counter this accusation by pointing out that ancient Greece was a diverse society and culture, even in its self-understanding (see, e.g., Malkin, 2004).

riod, then it can be stated that, in line with Heydorn's argument, the previous fight for survival has been overcome; that "coming to terms with nature" (p. 26 in this anthology) is completed. Now it is possible to turn to the liberation of humankind for a fulfilled life, which has historically gone hand in hand with the process of coping with nature. Because, according to Heydorn, this process began with the transition of humankind from myth to logos (cf. Heydorn, 2004, pp. 8-30). And with the interest in humankind's mastery of nature, and thus humankind's liberation from the dominion of nature, a second interest arose: competition for liberation between humans.

Thus, something qualitatively new becomes possible for humans: The prospect of completing the mastery of nature. (ii) It is with "its elevated dominion over nature, humankind enters into a changed history. Only now does one become free for humankind. The establishment of a society that becomes one's own property is the task by which one recognises oneself" (p. 26 in this anthology).²²

So, historically, relations of human competition were not completely unfounded for Heydorn, as long as scientific and technical knowledge hadn't developed to a point that the abolition of the division of labour, and thus the abolition of relations of domination, was impossible. In conjunction with this form of dominion over nature, there is now the fundamental possibility of a liberated society, in which humans no longer rule over humans. "The mastery of nature meant that the organisation of society as a class society was inevitable; it has a historical justification. This justification has now disappeared. Humankind's elementary struggle with nature is over; humankind becomes free" (p. 23-24 in this anthology).

In the following section, I discuss the question of why humanity is not yet liberated and living in a liberated society, if the necessary conditions are met, and what role Bildung plays in this. In addressing this question, I (implicitly) address theses 5 to 8 (see above).

22 In the quotation, humans and nature are conceived as separate entities, which is now an extremely controversial issue. There seems to be a relatively broad consensus that humankind—especially the societies of the so-called Global North—is responsible for the crisis and should act responsibly, but this is far from enough.

7 The Realised Bildung as the Prevention of Living Emphatically

Even if the conditions for a liberated and thus emphatic life for humankind have been achieved, it does not mean that this will be granted automatically. In addition to the exploitative conditions of capitalism,²³ the system of Bildung is also responsible for this.

The emphatic life of humankind is not automatically and causally realised because education in general, and Bildung in particular, fulfils the function of stabilising power in late capitalist society. Historically, according to Heydorn, Bildung's emphatic, emancipatory and empowering possibility has been lost due to its curtailment, at least in the formal education sector:

The late bourgeois theory of Bildung already separated Bildung and training with all consistency; it had assigned Bildung, now already powerless in its content and has become a harmonizing disguise of brutality, to the bourgeois class, training to the proletariat. (p. xx in this anthology).

Furthermore, "Bildung, by which in reality only Bildung for exploitation processes is meant, takes possession of the entire human being" (p. 22 in this anthology). In this respect, Heydorn is arguing in line with other well-known educationalists (who are regarded as critical theorists of pedagogy), and is criticising the capitalist economic system (cf., only as an example, Giroux et al., 2022). If Heydorn went no further than this, he would be arguing along the lines of orthodox Marxists (cf., e.g., Bernfeld, 1925/1994). Bildung would then always stabilise power, and could not contribute to liberation and emancipation. However, Heydorn argues dialectically, and Bildung has the potential to contribute to an emphatic life for everyone within a society which becomes humankind's "own property" (p. 26 in this anthology). I will focus on this aspect of Bildung in the following chapter, paying particular attention to the problems of the Anthropocene.

23 Compare, for example: "The revolutionization of human labour thus becomes the first condition. It cannot be materially fixed; with the material shared in the social product alone, one remains under the given condition but only psychologically is one subjected to it in a more lasting way. What is decisive is the change of the entire working condition, with which it is stripped of its destructive effect: but in truth, this is only possible if it changes the ownership relationship and at the same time redefines the needs of humankind" (p. 27 in this anthology).

8 Bildung as a Prerequisite for Living Emphatically: Ending the Destruction of Human Livelihoods as a Condition for Survival in the Anthropocene

How can Bildung contribute to emphatic living in the age of the Anthropocene? This is the guiding question for this section. At this point, then, it makes sense to ask: what exactly is meant by Bildung? Heydorn's answer is perhaps surprising: "With it, philosophy and history, art, literature and music become the necessary stock of a general Bildung, which includes Bildung for the production process and at the same time humanises it" (p. 28 in this anthology).

Heydorn keeps in mind that human labour is still necessary. This means that there is no state of development where humankind does not work, and thus also enter exchange processes with the material environment, i.e., the so-called natural foundations of life. This is where Heydorn's argument can be extended to the problem of the Anthropocene. For him, the key to survival lies in the humanisation of work. There is no answer to the question of what exactly this means, or how Heydorn imagines a humanised work. If Heydorn claimed to already know what human societies would look like in a state that makes emphatic life possible, he would be (performatively) contradicting his (grassroots) democratic claim by providing the answers that all people should follow. Nevertheless, if we take the following quote into account, an idea can be sketched out:

Bildung aims at the all-round development of the human being as a conscious being. Nature and spirit are simultaneously preserved in it and want to be reconciled with each other. Humankind is toolmaker and dreamer, worker and artist, universal designer of itself. The general public, which has won Bildung, points out that the moments in which Bildung can overcome one's class historical disunity, become universal in a liberated species. It is necessary to educate the person for whom the time is ripe; only now does the idea of Bildung become a reality. The anti-cultural economism of the predominant leftist theory of Bildung is only a reflex of the existing constitution and does not get beyond it. At a moment when the economic determination of the past begins to dissolve, it clings to this very past. It is the business of Bildung to look at the person who wants to emerge from it, to express their need as a human being. (p. 24 in this anthology)

A comprehensive Bildung for all, dealing with the different aspects of being human, would lead to a liberated humankind. If we place these statements in the overall context of his text, then it seems to me that Heydorn is arguing that an emphatic Bildung for all, which is now possible because of the development of the economic base, cancels out human alienation

(cf., e.g., Jaeggi, 2014). This alienation, however, was historically necessary in order to reach this level of development of the economic base.

This abolition of alienation, which takes place through each individual's process of *Bildung*, leads to the liberation of humankind. Moreover, this path of liberation is not a path of torture. Instead, Heydorn sees emphatic *Bildung* as happiness:

The mass liberation with which the universality of the genus is brought to an end as a task of *Bildung*, as the epitome of all self-disposal, can only be realised through a long chain of independent acts. The experience of happiness that they contain is irrevocable. When the need is fully developed, the old society collapses, it cannot resist. (p. 30 in this anthology)

With this last quotation, we have reached the crucial part of Heydorn's argument needed to answer this paper's central question. The key point here is the talk of a developed need. What is this need? It is the need for *Bildung* itself. *Bildung thus becomes an end in itself and the leitmotif of liberated societies, enabling an emphatic life for all. Such a society, in which everyone has developed emphatic Bildung as a way of life, will establish lifestyles and social structures that make today's focus on material goods and thus the transgression of planetary boundaries obsolete.* Arguably, this is the response of Heydorn's text to the survival of humankind in general, and the Anthropocene in particular.

When *Bildung*—which today should be primarily cultural *Bildung* (philosophy, history, literature and music, see above)—creates the need for *Bildung*, and people realise the happiness associated with processes of *Bildung*, societies are created with a sense of purpose. *Bildung is a purpose that creates meaning. And it is this meaning that is needed to ensure the survival of humankind.*

Against this background, Heydorn's argument can be succinctly summarised. Until recently—when an exact meaning remained undetermined—"the elementary process of coping with nature" (p. 20 in this anthology) was unfinished. Thus, "coping with nature" (p. 20 in this anthology) was the purpose that humankind must strive towards. But a new meaning is necessary; otherwise, the expectation of humans and humankind is obscured by the consequence that, due to "the decay of productive consciousness which is directed towards the fulfilment of the future, death gains a new power. It becomes a seduction" (p. 16 in this anthology). Hence, a "human may want to die, and may pursue their own destruction" (p. 15 in this anthology).

If the real conditions to produce a better, i.e., emphatic, world are granted, but no work is done on the production of this possible world, then a contradiction arises. This is between the real possible conditions on the one hand, and the non-existent prospect of creating this world on the other. According to Heydorn, survival within the contradiction is not an

option. Humankind “wants to survive as a human being; if such a possibility appears closed, the death relationship is changed” (p. 16 in this anthology).²⁴ Consequently, a new meaning must be found and this lies in Bildung as an end in itself. In order to recognise this, Bildung today must be based on the question of meaningfulness. Heydorn sees these Bildung possibilities in philosophy, history, literature and music. Survival is possible through and by emphatic Bildung, because it is the way to a liberated and peaceful society and the emphatic life for all. In his lifetime, he saw evidence of this in “Prague and Santiago” and in the “street theatres in France” (p. 25, 29 in this anthology).

9 On the Question of What We Can Learn from Heydorn

The survival of humankind is a matter of course: “humankind wants to survive as a human being” (p. 16 in this anthology). Heydorn’s thesis for us today is that, in his view, the survival of humankind cannot be ensured without a realistic prospect of an emphatic and fulfilled life for all human beings or, in the most successful case, the *actual* realisation of this life.

It seems to me that an emphatic humane life is not just satisfying basic needs—although this is of course a necessary condition. Nor is it sufficient to live a contented life in addition to this by, for example, merely experiencing happiness. For some this may be a sporting achievement. For others, the birth of a child. But an emphatic humane life is only achieved when the sufficient criterion is fulfilled. This criterion is to lead a meaningful life, i.e., a life in which one carries out activities considered purposeful and meaningful for oneself and others.

If we look at the world’s most relevant policy documents, which are intended to provide successful solutions to the problems of the Anthropocene, the specificity of Heydorn’s argument becomes clear. Indeed, the concept of sustainability (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG; United Nations [UN], 2015) and the concept of education directly related to these goals (UNESCO, 2017) all lack notions of human purpose. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals refer to quality of life, but here

24 Compare as well: “The question of survival can thus not be answered by excluding war alone, nor by social criteria that are materially limited. Dehumanized survival turns against itself; new processes of destruction emerge to replace the old ones. A threat becomes apparent that can only be eliminated by changing the entire constitution of things; the possibility of human survival is linked to a realizable perspective, to a new method of realization” (p. 16 in this anthology).

quality of life is merely a consequence of sustainable development: “We recognize that sustainable urban development and management are crucial to the quality of life of our people” (UN, 2015, p. 13).

Applied to the Anthropocene, Heydorn’s argument is the exact opposite. There will be no sustainable development²⁵ without focusing on the realistic prospect of an emphatic and meaningful life for all. It is the absence of this perspective that Heydorn criticises when one applies his argument to the present. And it is not only in SDGs, but also in other significant contributions that the emphasis on an emphatic life and education is missing, which makes Heydorn’s argumentation unique. With the perspective gained by reconstructing Heydorn’s argument, these contributions could be analysed in future research.²⁶

However, this is not to give the impression that emphatic life and *Bildung* are absent from this discourse. For instance, Kate Raworth (2017) points out that, in the path to the Doughnut economy, “people need something to aspire to” (p. 282). And the Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen (WBGU; German Advisory Council on Global Change), in its report *World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability* (WBGU, 2011), stresses that sustainability is a question of imagination. Heydorn would probably have agreed, pointing out that literature classes in particular, and classical *Bildung* in general, can foster imagination. However, in contrast to Heydorn, such statements are not at the centre of these corresponding arguments.

Heydorn also takes a special position on the educational theory of ESD. He seems to contradict many other positions in the field, including the survival of humankind. The concept from UNESCO (2017), which is aimed at content-free competences, has already been mentioned. In contrast to UNESCO, Heydorn places disciplines and their content at the centre, because meaningfulness can only be achieved by engaging with philosophy, history, literature and music.

With this perspective, I think he would criticise other approaches without rejecting them completely. From his point of view, educational approaches that focus on and critique the continuation of colonialism (cf., e.g., Stein et al., 2022) lack the possibility of creating meaning. Approaches that focus on the political (cf., e.g., Slimani et al., 2021) would probably

25 It seems to me that my argument is also valid if one rejects the concept of sustainable development and argues, for example, in favour of the concept or model of sustainability. However, I will leave this debate out of this paper.

26 Just to give another example: “Our future will be vastly more peaceful, more prosperous, and more secure if we do everything in our power to stabilize Earth this decade than if we do not. Without urgent action, we can expect rising social tensions that will make it more difficult to solve civilizational challenges in future” (Dixson-Declève et al., 2022, p. 28).

not be fundamentally wrong, from his point of view, but these approaches also lack the perspective of meaningfulness. The same applies to approaches that place the problems of the *nexus* of humankind and the Anthropocene at the centre of educational practice (cf., e.g., Kminek & Wallmeier, 2020).

The reflections presented in this paper lead to different research approaches for educational science. Research in the wake of Heydorn's argument could raise these questions: What is the potential and possibility of Bildung for the "revolution in permanence" (p. 33 in this anthology)? Do they already exist and, if so, how do they manifest themselves?

Research that distances itself from Heydorn's approach, as well as the other approaches just mentioned, could comparatively analyse theory construction (and what these respective theories contribute) towards a general theorisation of ESD. For this approach, the development of a meta-theory of ESD would be essential (cf. Kminek, 2023).

10 Summary and Outlook

The future is not a given —far from it. Perhaps the most pressing questions we face relate to the fate of humankind. *Who will we become? How can we continue to be human in the current context, marked by climate change, ecosystem collapse, but also the augmented humans, profound social transformations and rampant radicalisation?* Our living environment has been inexorably altered, transhumanist theories abound, and researchers are seeking to surpass human limitations through technology. In this world, it is increasingly complex—even, sometimes, impossible—to 'form a society together'. We can no longer take our humankind for granted, but it is crucial to retain it. How do we define ourselves, and what do we want to make of ourselves? (Wallenhorst & Wulf, 2023, pp. viii-ix)

Heydorn's contribution can be read as an answer to these questions, which is particularly interesting because the answer not only contains rarely expressed arguments, but also relates to them in a rather atypical fashion. In this way, supposedly self-evident facts become questionable and can thus be reflected upon, especially for education theory more generally, and the theory of education for sustainable development in particular.

On the one hand, Heydorn adheres to the so-called big stories or grand narratives. Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984) uses the term grand narratives to describe the totalising narratives of modernity that have provided a legitimising philosophy of history for various ideologies (e.g., Enlightenment, democracy and Marxism). In contrast to postmodern thinkers such

as Lyotard, Heydorn argues for the fundamental possibility of realising such grand narratives.²⁷

And yet, on the other hand, Heydorn knows that this is not guaranteed—and there are currently even regressions. Because technology has developed to ensure physical survival for all people, and to satisfy basic needs, it is social conditions that are responsible for, for example, people suffering hunger. But Heydorn does not only rely on the changed economic basis with which humane conditions could be realised. Instead, the superstructure—specifically *Bildung*—is the decisive moment. Or to put it another way: a world without a vision of how to realise a grand narrative is without meaning. And without a meaning, life is meaningless, and nihilism pervades everything.

But Heydorn goes even further: the grand narrative of a humane world is not a means to an end; it does not automatically generate meaning. For him, the *realisation* of a humane world is fundamentally possible. His historical analyses function as a justification for this thesis: the grand narrative of the realisation of a humane world is not just an idealistic fantasy, but can be historically and materialistically substantiated and justified.

Heydorn thus implicitly takes a stance on Walter Benjamin's theses on history. Firstly, he directly addresses the dangers posed by humankind flickering on the horizon, as mentioned at the very beginning of this paper. In doing so, his gaze is not solely tied to the past, avoiding the danger of the future. Benjamin sees this motif in Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*:

It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at.... This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm. (Benjamin, 1940/2003a, p. 392)

27 I am unable to discuss here whether the extent to which the loss of grand narratives is also a major problem in the Anthropocene, because without a grand narrative, the desired socio-ecological transformation cannot succeed. But, at the same time, in view of the crimes of the 20th century, especially the two grand narratives of Stalinism and National Socialism, this loss could be understandable and justifiable. After all, these grand narratives led to unspeakable crimes against humanity.

At the same time, however, Heydorn is aware of the importance of history because, in his view, the destiny of humankind can be reconstructed from within it, as a process that fundamentally struggles to make a humane and fulfilling life possible for all people. For this reason, history is a central subject in Bildung.

Second, for him revolutions are neither the engine of history, as in Marx, nor the emergency brakes, as in Benjamin: “Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite different. Perhaps revolutions are the passengers of this train—the human race—reaching out for the emergency brake” (Benjamin, 1940/2003b, p. 402). For Heydorn, abrupt social changes, including revolutions, are dangerous because they could lead to a nuclear war that would wipe out humankind.²⁸ At the same time, in view of the current crisis of the Anthropocene, the question arises as to whether it is now necessary to apply the emergency brakes.²⁹

This creates a dilemma. A revolution in socio-ecological conditions is objectively necessary. At the same time, such a revolution would be the use of the emergency brakes, which, from Heydorn’s point of view, is forbidden because of the objective danger it poses. It seems to me that Heydorn had already recognised this dilemma. Thus he argues, one could summarise, for a “revolution in permanence” (p. 33 in this anthology), in which Bildung will be passed on to the next generation: “as Comenius put it, passing on the torch” (p. 20 in this anthology).

Given the problems of the Anthropocene today, the question is to what extent it is still justifiable to pass the torch to the next generation. After all, the adult generation is responsible for the failure to achieve the desired socio-ecological transformation. And if this responsibility is not taken seriously, the older generation will break its promise—which is the subject of all pedagogy—to the younger generation regarding progress and the improvement of social conditions. This brings us back to Heydorn and his final statement: “consciousness is everything” (p. 33 in this anthology).

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28 Compare: “An abrupt social change in an industrialised nation—be it possible—thus becomes a security risk for the whole of humankind” (p. 25 in this anthology).

29 Climate researcher Niklas Höhne, for example, argues along these lines (see Wille, 2023).

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Heydorn in the Anthropocene: Humanity and Nature, Bildung and Survival

Norm Friesen

*Nature is but a name for excess;
every point in her opens out and runs into the more;
and the only question, with reference to any point we may be considering, is
how far into the rest of nature we may have to go in order
to get entirely beyond its overflow.*

– William James (1909, p. 286)

As Heinz-Joachim Heydorn notes, his 1974 “Überleben durch Bildung” (“Survival through Bildung”, 1974/2024) was written during a time of great “peril” (p. 33 in this anthology), in the middle of the Cold War, with the survival of humanity hanging in the balance. The path leading *away* from this grave peril, Heydorn argues, is *Bildung*.¹ It offers not only an escape from imminent danger, but also from dehumanization. “Humanity cannot bear a dehumanized survival”, writes Heydorn in concluding his text, “Society must be formed in such a way that it knows its human purpose and the peril in which it finds itself. The path between purpose and peril must be found” (p. 33 in this anthology). Today, the conditions of the Anthropocene mean that the survival of the human race is again radically open to question. The threat in this case, however, is neither dehumanization nor nuclear destruction (although these remain important); it is instead environmental degradation and catastrophic climate change. And *Bildung*—especially in this broad sense of coming to know about oneself and one’s condition—is clearly relevant to it. But this

1 The meaning of *Bildung* is not captured in any single word in English. (In this and other matters of translation, I use my own renderings of Heydorn’s essay.) In “Survival Through Bildung”, Heydorn himself points out the polysemy of *Bildung*: The “concept of *Bildung* primarily eludes convention; preparation for a practical occupation is designated by this concept just as much as self-forgetfulness [in contemplating] about a work of art; it encompasses the flick of the wrist that has to be learned and the ability to also feel at home when one is remote” (p. 15 in this anthology). It can refer to progress, cultivation, culture and even literacy, and as Heydorn uses it in his essay, it clearly refers to human development in a broad sense.

is certainly *not* a *Bildung* that, as Heydorn remarks, represents “the progressive liberation of humankind to itself” (p. 33 in this anthology) and that is centered only on *human* purpose.

The Anthropocene is a new geological era, one in which human activities have a decisive impact on the Earth’s geology, oceans and atmosphere. First discussed in 1938, and developed as an idea since the 1960s, the inauguration of the Anthropocene in human history has been identified with the first deployment of the atom bomb and the ‘great acceleration’ in production and resource use starting in the 1950s (e.g., Steffen et al., 2015). To put this unsparingly, the Anthropocene means that (according to the United Nations) the climate change to which we all contribute is already killing hundreds of thousands of people (e.g., via heatwaves, storms and degraded air quality) and later, is almost certain to deprive millions more of food and eventually, billions of water (Alston, 2019). It also confronts us with the fact that in the last 30 years, we have likely done more damage to our planet than in all of previous human history (Wallace-Wells, 2019), and finally, that to stop this means undertaking nothing less than a quasi-permanent mobilization on the scale of World War II (Alston, 2019). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic—holding much of the northern hemisphere in its grip as I write this chapter—has been called “the disease of the Anthropocene” (O’Callaghan-Gordo & Antó, 2020) reflecting the increasing inseparability of environmental and human welfare, and an interweaving of natural and human fates and histories.

In the Anthropocene, then, the condition of our planet is both our destiny and our danger. “The Anthropocene”, as Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) remark, “opens up a new situation for humanity, a new human condition” (p. 33). The horizon imposed by the Anthropocene is arguably a new *existentielle* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 70) in which the natural world no longer forms a set of silent and stable preconditions, a proscenium stage on which the human drama can unfold. Instead, as Latour (2014) suggests, events like mass extinctions, extreme weather—and now even the COVID plague itself—illustrate “a complete reversal of Western philosophy’s most cherished trope” (p. 13)—namely that the *human being* is history’s primary *protagonist*. Describing this reversal further, Latour (2014) exclaims,

human societies have resigned themselves to playing the role of the dumb object, while nature has unexpectedly taken on that of the active subject! ... through a surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is human history that has become frozen and *natural* history that is taking on a frenetic pace. (p. 13)

Unprecedented droughts, storms and wildfires are constant reminders that nature is no longer stable, supportive and sustaining; it is no longer that which is simply “given” [das Gegebene], an indispensable “load-bearing groundwork” that was traditionally “placed unproblematically at [our] disposal” (Böhme, 1997, p. 114). Instead, it has become a dominant actor in a drama that includes not just the human species, but *all* species—and whose scope ranges from a half-alive virus to the planet as a whole. After all, it was not a socialist or a Marxist revolution, but rather the Coronavirus that effectively pressed the ‘pause’ button on the global capitalist system from March to May in 2020.

Bildung certainly can no longer be seen to presuppose “the departure of humanity from a direct relationship to nature”, as Heydorn puts it (a departure in which “the given is dissolved los[ing] its traditional claim” (p. 18 in this anthology). Instead, as Roselius and Meyer (2018) note, the “contingency of what is the case is no longer stabilized by a natural order”, the “I/ego and the world”, can thus no longer serve as “solid cornerstones of *Bildung* theory” (pp. 226–227).² Indeed, if Bildung as mentioned above is the progressive liberation of humanity itself, then we can, with little difficulty, agree with Dipesh Chakrabarty that this liberation—what Chakrabarty refers to as the “mansion of modern freedoms”—“stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use” (2009, p. 208) that simply cannot be sustained.

Bildung must consequently be interrogated and rethought, starting from its original articulations and presuppositions through to its more recent formulations in Heydorn and elsewhere. This paper thus begins with an examination of the role of nature in the famous account of Bildung provided in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s (1999) “Theory of the Bildung”. It then provides a reconstruction of Heydorn’s conception on that basis. Finally, referencing the work of Günther Anders, it discusses how such understandings of Bildung and human development can be seen in light of the Anthropocene. Finally, following Anders and using COVID-19 as an example, this paper concludes by proposing some ‘spiritual exercises’ as an alternative.

2 The first of these quoted phrases is taken by Roselius and Meyer from: Peukert, H. (2015): *Bildung in gesellschaftlicher Transformation* (p. 130). Schöningh.

1 Bildung and Nature

Twentieth and twenty-first century German discussions of *Bildung* have their basis in the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Indeed, it would be unusual for contemporary German academics engaged in the history and theory of *Bildung* *not* to have produced their own interpretation of Humboldt's (1999) famous, late eighteenth century fragment, "Theory of the *Bildung*" (e.g., Brinkmann, 2019; Koller, 2012; Wulf, 2003). This fragment provides a baseline from which to understand our own changes in sentiment, language, and imagination. In addition, aspects of Humboldt's concept of *Bildung* are not difficult to identify in Heydorn's "Survival Through *Bildung*" as well. Humboldt (1999) begins by identifying his central concern, "the development of mankind" and by characterizing "man" himself³ in this context as a being who "strives", who is consumed by "inner unrest", and who is driven by an "inner compulsion" (pp. 58, 58, 60, 58, 61). Speaking in terms that echo Heydorn's invocation of a truly "humanized" "human purpose" (p. 28-33 in this anthology) Humboldt explains:

At the convergence point of all particular kinds of activity is man, who, in the absence of a purpose with a particular direction, wishes only to strengthen and heighten the powers of his nature and secure value and permanence for his being [seinem Wesen Werth und Dauer verschaffen will]. (1999, p. 58)

Humanity, our own human nature, our powers and our own permanence are at the center, forming a self-referential convergence point for all activity. Humboldt (1999) identifies the question of the "purpose" of such action as his own immediate concern. He finds the object of human striving and action precisely in that which is "nonman", what he calls "matter" [Stoff], "world", and—significantly—"nature". "Man need[s] a world outside himself. ... because both his thought and his action are not possible except by means of a third element, the representation and cultivation [vermöge des Vorstellens und des Bearbeitens] of something that is actually characterized by being nonman, that is, world" (p. 58). And it is through the means of this external element that Humboldt develops his canonical definition of *Bildung*, namely as "the linking of the self to [this] world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most

3 Humboldt's, Heydorn's, as well as Günther Anders', use of the term *man* is often impossible to eliminate, either through alternative translations or adaptations. I retain the use of the term here only for this reason.

unrestrained interplay” (p. 58). For this interplay to be realized, Humboldt emphasizes that the self must seek “to grasp as much world as possible and bind it as tightly as [it] can to [it]self” (p. 58). Humans, he also says, “must try to grasp Nature [*sic*], not so much in order to become acquainted with it from all sides, but rather ... to strengthen [our] own innate power” (Humboldt, 1999, p. 59).

The relation between self and world is characterized at this point in Humboldt’s (1999) fragment by terms like “grasping” [ergreifen], “linking”, “tightly binding” [eng verbinden] and “reaching” (to the world beyond oneself) [von sich aus überzugehen]. Elsewhere in his fragment, Humboldt speaks specifically of *nature*, for example, as also being “grasp[ed]” [ergriffen] (p. 59), or of “man leav[ing] a visible impression [Gepräge] of his worth” (p. 59) on it. In their manifold diversity, both nature and the world, according to Humboldt, “alone possess so complete an independence that [they] counter the obstinacy of our will with the laws of Nature [*sic*] and the decisions of Fate [*sic*]” (1999, pp. 59–60). It is nature that gives humanity not only the material for increasing its own power and substance, but also provides it with a challenge worthy of humanity’s own strength and willpower.

Finally, Humboldt (1999) also speaks of *physical nature* as lacking those characteristics of permanence and progression which humans and even Bildung itself strives to attain. Early in the fragment, he remarks that

without the comforting thought of a certain sequence of elevation and Bildung, human existence would be more transient than the existence of a flower that, upon withering, has at least the certainty of leaving behind the germ of its likeness. (p. 59)

Nature, in other words, presents us with a paradoxically persistent ephemerality: the withering flower leaves behind seeds only to reproduce, rather than to progress. In the concluding sentence of his fragment, Humboldt seems to complete this same thought: “Human Bildung manages to progress evenly and endure”, he says, “yet without degenerating into the monotony by which physical Nature [*sic*] goes through the same transformations time after time, without ever producing anything new” (p. 61). And in the face of nature’s perpetual monotony ephemerality, all of humanity’s external activity, Humboldt emphasizes, appears as “nothing but the striving against futility” (1999, p. 58).

Nature, and with it, world, means at least three things to Humboldt. These are: (1) a necessary countervailing factor to humanity’s expression, willing and striving, an obdurate substance that in being changed, seems to only hone the tools of human knowledge; (2) a material to be marked or “grasped” by “man”—not to actually “become acquainted with it” but instead “to strengthen his own innate power” (Humboldt, 1999, p. 59);

and (3) a rich but ultimately ‘monotonous’ order of transience that human accomplishment and progress can overcome and that is antithetical to human striving.

Heydorn, perhaps unsurprisingly, spills much less ink on the question of nature in his “Survival Through Bildung” than Humboldt. Although there *is* some overlap in their views, Heydorn begins by making it clear that for humanity, “the elementary process of coping with nature is finished” (p. 20 in this anthology). In doing so, Heydorn rejects out of hand the first aspect of nature identified by Humboldt: seeing it as a counterpoint for human striving. Instead of envisioning an ongoing struggle between human and nature, Heydorn celebrates humankind’s “triumphant emergence” (p. 28 in this anthology) from and “victory over nature” (p. 33 in this anthology). Heydorn further frames the results of this victory in terms of the dominance of consciousness, and the need to move beyond ‘traditional concepts’ that see our struggle with nature as still ongoing.

In the relationship between Bildung and survival, consciousness of its own condition becomes the starting point; it denotes the first step of liberating engagement. With it, the question of new forms of confrontation arises, a question that is appropriate to the conditions. Traditional concepts often prove to be inadequate. They are directed towards a process of coming to terms with nature that was still essentially unfinished. (p. 26 in this anthology)

Bildung and survival, in other words, start with *consciousness* rather than with any actual, physical confrontation between humanity and nature. Humanity’s striving for Heydorn is no longer directed against a defiant physical nature, but rather against “late capitalism”, its “dehumanization”—as well as against the perilous possibility of nuclear annihilation.

Given humankind’s decisive victory in its struggles with nature, it is no surprise that Heydorn’s essay goes on to deal with nature itself only indirectly. Nature can be said to appear in the form of “human nature”, in the guise of “production”, and further, in the potential role of production in the development of new and more comprehensive forms of human consciousness. It appears in the form of human nature, for example, when Heydorn characterizes “Purposeless Bildung” [Bildung-for-its-own-sake; zweckfreie Bildung], as “an anticipation of the human being who has become free from the constraints of domination and natural forces” (p. 19 in this anthology). Here, Heydorn suggests that remnants of nature still exist in vestigial form in human psychology—with the implication that these remainders, too, will be rooted out as humanity becomes “the subject of its own history” (p. 18 in this anthology). Nature appears in the

form of production in Heydorn's account of its "abstract" character, of the "abundance" that it generates. In his optimistic description, Heydorn also speaks of production, "productive forces" and "processes" as now "breaking their [own] limits"—and, consequently, as ripe for "appropriation" and "revolution" (p. 16, 21, 26, 28 in this anthology). Buried within such characterizations one can see the second aspect of Humboldt's treatment of nature: its potential to "strengthen [man's] own innate power" (1999, p. 59) when it is "grasped" rather than known for its own sake. Nature is sublimated in these references to production like raw material transformed into oil, precious metals, paper or diamonds.

Heydorn's use of the term production—above all, his claim of an abundant production breaking its own limits—is also reminiscent of Marcuse's (1968) claims from his *Essay on Liberation* five years earlier. Here, Herbert Marcuse appears almost to celebrate capitalism's "fantastic output of all sorts of things and services" (p. 50); he reasons that "available material and intellectual resources ... have so much outgrown the established institutions" (p. 7) that their revolutionary redefinition lies "within a very foreseeable future" (p. 4). In making this claim, Marcuse is defying critical theory's tacit interdiction against "utopian speculation", openly declaring that "utopian possibilities [are] inherent in the ... technological forces of advanced capitalism" (1968, p. 4). Heydorn repeats this same gesture. He also speaks of the immanence of utopia, writing somewhat more abstractly that the "future becomes the expression of real experience in which it is already contained" (p. 30 in this anthology) "With it", Heydorn continues, "humankind emerges more abruptly, not only are the protective shells crushed, the contradictions of our arrest [are] exposed ... [and] the universal genus ... releases the fullness of its possibilities" (p. 30 in this anthology). This, he concludes, "is the completed utopia of Bildung" (p. 30 in this anthology). Nature, controlled and sublimated in the form of production, in other words, does not simply strengthen our power, but is indispensable in releasing the fullness of human possibilities and human consciousness—in a fully-realized "utopia of Bildung" (p. 30 in this anthology).

Finally, the third aspect of Humboldt's (1999) conception of nature—namely its transient monotony, and its overcoming by human accomplishment—is evident in Heydorn, not so much in terms of humanity's physical and material achievements, but in the adventures of an ever-more powerful and comprehensive human consciousness. In the concluding paragraph of his essay, Heydorn suggests that if Bildung is indeed "the progressive liberation of humankind to itself" (p. 33 in this anthology) then consciousness develops further simply by becoming ever more self-aware and self-reflective. He concludes this paragraph (and with it his essay as a whole) by announcing that "consciousness is everything"

(p. 33 in this anthology). And he describes the consciousness produced through Bildung as “consciousness of its own condition [i.e., Bildung’s], of the condition of the feasibility of its perspective” (p. 33 in this anthology). In short, Heydorn sees the ultimate result of nature’s sublimation in production not just in humanity’s permanence but in human consciousness becoming both all-encompassing and also transparent to itself. Nature here is significant only as having enabled a total and self-identical form of awareness.

To conclude this brief examination, Bildung begins with Humboldt (1999) in a very direct relationship with nature. Nature’s paradoxical alterity and ephemerality simultaneously provides the foil, substance and challenge for the response of Bildung as concurrent permanence and improvement. Conversely, Heydorn’s essay begins from the assumption that any direct relation with this natural order has already been severed; nature is manifest only indirectly, in human nature and in production. And production, in its abundance, threatens the established order of production itself. Despite these differences, nature is manifest in both accounts in the role it has traditionally played in modern Western thought—namely as a set of stable preconditions serving as the basis for addressing human needs, wants and desires. One can regard Heydorn as going so far as to see in nature “but a name for excess”, to quote William James (1909, p. 286). Nature is a force that—through the production of advanced capitalism—is capable of fully counteracting not only the dehumanization that this capitalism imposes on society, but also the impulse towards human self-destruction that comes with it.

2 Survival and Bildung

To place Heydorn in the Anthropocene, in other words, to position Bildung in our present age, it is useful to begin with the term *survival*. There are both continuities and notable changes in the significance of this term as Heydorn understands it and as we are compelled to view it in the Anthropocene. Survival for Heydorn, of course, refers to an escape both from the annihilation of nuclear war and from dehumanization. In either case, Heydorn’s account of Bildung as the end of alienation indeed appears appropriate to such challenges: To thus become the protagonist of one’s own story is by definition to escape dehumanization. And through an all-but-immanent revolution in the means of production, Bildung also seems poised to transform swords into ploughshares, and Thanatos into Eros (compare p. 16 in this anthology).

Today, under the conditions of the Anthropocene, we are no longer confronted, as James (1909) said, with “nature” as “overflow”, as an embarrassment of riches. The Anthropocene in general, like the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, underscores the ‘limits to growth’⁴ and imposes restrictions on our pursuit of self-fulfillment. We can no longer pretend to one day be able to solve the problems of human alienation and self-destruction simply through a redirection or ‘humanization’ of surplus productive capacity. Instead, we must ask with Claudia W. Ruitenberg (2018) “how much human autonomy can the planet afford” (p. 110)? Although, at the same time, though, rejecting Heydorn’s proposals for survival does not mean also rejecting the frame provided either by dehumanizing production or by humankind’s potential self-destruction. It is instead a matter of seeing these from a rather different perspective. For the purposes of this paper, such a perspective is provided in the philosophy of Günther Anders, a contemporary of Heydorn who was also active in critical theory and also wrote on nuclear annihilation.

Anders, however, views both the “abundance” afforded by advanced capitalist production and “the growing danger of collective [nuclear] suicide” very differently from Heydorn (p. 24 in this anthology). While Heydorn’s conception of dehumanizing production is unabashedly utopian, his analysis of the contemporaneous global nuclear threat is surprisingly conventional, perhaps even conservative. “A new, balance of power is emerging”, Heydorn writes, “decisively supported by the United States and the Soviet Union” (p. 24 in this anthology). And despite ongoing tensions and conflicts—generally manifest in proxy wars and conflicts—the two superpowers demonstrate “an unmistakable tendency to mediate these conflicts rationally” (p. 25 in this anthology). Mathematical war-gaming, mutually assured destruction, the profligate incrementalism of the arms race and other clichés of the Cold War are neither refuted nor revised in Heydorn’s account. Most importantly, the nuclear threat for Heydorn simply represents “new processes of destruction” that have “emerg[ed] to replace the old ones” (p. 16 in this anthology).

Anders could not see these issues more differently. In a 1956 article titled “Reflections on the H Bomb”, he describes the dawn of the nuclear threat as *epochal* in the most radical sense of the word,

we are no longer what until today men have called “men”. Although we are unchanged anatomically, our completely changed relation to the

4 The title of a landmark study published in 1972, two years before Heydorn’s “Survival Through Bildung”.

cosmos and to ourselves has transformed us into a new species—beings [*sic*] metaphor—we are Titans, at least as long as we are omnipotent without making *definitive* use of this omnipotence of ours. (Anders, 1956, p. 146)

Our capacity for destruction, Anders (1956) argues, has given us a kind of omnipotence, a power once reserved for a Prometheus or another deity. We have acquired this capacity purely because of technological power. Whether manifest in terms of capitalist production, nuclear destruction or environmental apocalypse, this power not only renders us larger, but at the same time, also “smaller” than we are (or have been), “because we are the first Titans, we are also the first dwarfs or pygmies”, Anders (1956, pp. 147–148) explains. We are Titans in terms of our destructive omnipotence, but of much lesser stature when it comes to thinking, speaking and above all, our *imagining* and *feeling*. “Our imaginative and emotional capacities are too small as measured against our knowledge and power ... imaginatively and emotionally we are so to speak smaller than ourselves” (Anders, 1956, p. 152). Anders (1961/1962) also wrote that

in the course of the technical age the classical relation between imagination and action has reversed itself. While our ancestors had considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, today the capacity of our imagination (and that of our feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our praxis. (p. 12)

Anders (1956) illustrates his point by asking his readers to consider an act of murder: “To murder an individual is far more difficult than to ... release ... a bomb that kills countless individuals” (p. 151). Anders adds that “we would be willing to shake hands with the perpetrator of the second rather than of the first crime” (p. 151). The death of a single person is a tragedy, as Stalin supposedly said, but the death of millions, a statistic. It takes us years to mourn the loss of someone close, and we do not have the millennia it would take to mourn many thousands or millions.

At the same time, the conditions of the Anthropocene are clearly different from those of the nuclear threat that inspired Anders’ remarks. The crescendo of our effects on the globe—in whatever form it might eventually take—will likely have neither the instantaneity nor the finality of a global nuclear war. Although both apocalyptic outcomes, nuclear and environmental, are *anthropogenic*, one arises on the basis of substantial theoretical knowledge, while the other can be said to arise through a kind of ‘not-knowing’. Whereas the development of the nuclear bomb in the ‘40s was based on discoveries in theoretical physics, like those of Einstein and Fermi, the Anthropocene seems to repeatedly highlight our lack of knowledge. From recent discoveries of microplastic accumulations to the treatment and spread of COVID-19, we are repeatedly reminded of the

fact that knowledge always comes too late. To put it in terms of Anders' comparison above, it forms a disparity between what we know and what we are able to affect through what we do (see also Manemann, 2014, pp. 35–44). In terms of our knowledge, we are always playing catch-up to our capacity to act and to change the world—often irreversibly—around us. “If the earth were an apple”, Manemann (2014) hypothesizes, “our understanding would have penetrated only its skin, but with our actions, we would have already changed its core” (p. 36). Indeed, Humboldt’s (1999) imperative to “grasp Nature [*sic*], not ... to become acquainted with it ... but ... to strengthen [one’s] own innate power” (p. 59) appears in this light almost tantamount to Bacon’s declaration that “knowledge is power”—which in turn, constitutes the totalitarian impulse in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002).

Anders’ (1980/2015) critique of the abundance of capitalist surplus production involves further reversals of our presuppositions concerning nature, production, and our place within these “systems”. Like Marcuse, Anders recognizes the unprecedented surplus resulting from our contemporary means of production. The way this surplus is currently distributed implies that, at least for developed parts of the world, the production available to us greatly exceeds our needs. The problem, in Anders’ (1980/2015) words, is that there is “a *disjunction between what we produce and what we can use*” (§ 3) meaning, at least in a certain sense, that we can’t *need* enough:

our actual finitude no longer consists in the fact that we are animalia *indigentia*, needy beings, but quite the contrary: it consists in the fact that (as if to spite inconsolable industry) *we can need too little*; in short: *in our lack of poverty*. (Anders, 1980/2015, § 3)

We drive in capacious vehicles capable of great speeds, but we sit alone in stop-and-go traffic. I write this chapter on a laptop capable of solving all of WWII’s trajectory and code-breaking calculations nearly instantaneously. And I cannot come close to realizing this computational potential. Again, in an era of affluence and conspicuous consumption, we are surrounded by production, transportation, and even advertising machinery that dwarfs us as individual consumers and moral agents.

The result of such significant gaps and disparities, according to Anders, is that we ultimately also suffer from an unprecedented gulf within ourselves; namely, between what we *might expect* ourselves to be and who we *actually* are. We are certainly not inclined to see ourselves complicit in the worst outcomes of anthropocenic change, but we are nonetheless inextricably entwined in the system that accelerates our progress towards it

modern unmorality does not primarily consist in man's failure to conform to a specific more than-human image of man; perhaps not even in his failure to meet the requirements of a just society; but rather in his half-guilty and half-innocent failure to conform to *himself* [emphasis added]. (Anders, 1956, p. 152)

Everyday actions—from our daily commute to what is on our dinner plate—lose their innocence and their individuality when revealed as part of a larger system that will one day likely be our undoing. Indeed, Anders (1956) refers to a new and unprecedented “infernal innocence” (p. 151) as part of the condition in which our own self-destruction constantly threatens to engulf us.

The Anthropocene thus also means that our alienation is permanent. At least, this condition is not something, as Humboldt (1999) put it, that can reassuringly reflect back into our “inner being [a] clarifying light and the comforting warmth” (p. 59). We face the additional task of understanding how the dialectic between (ever greater) constraint and (and ever more restricted) possibility might unfold. Bildung is no longer “the linking of the self to world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay” (Humboldt, 1999, p. 58) but rather, the realization of how this interplay is always constrained, and the recognition that it always takes place in a circular economy of cause and effect.

Anders did not ask his readers to solve all of the issues and undo the myriad contradictions that plagued his nuclear era—nor would this likely be his expectation for us today. He instead insists that we ‘mind the gap,’ that we work to lessen the disparity between what we are and what we could be, between our praxis and our feelings and imagination and also, between our power to act and our power to know. Speaking directly to his readers, Anders insists that “you have to make the daring attempt to make yourself as big as you actually are, to catch up with yourself” (1961/1962, p. 13). We must work to bring not just our imagination, but also our knowledge, language and capacities to represent our own situation to ourselves “to match the incalculable increase of our productive and destructive powers” (Anders, 1956, p. 153; Anders, 2019). “Academic discussions”, Anders (1956) warns, “are pointless here: the question [of achieving this match] can be decided only by an actual attempt, or, more accurately, by repeated attempts”. Anders suggests that these attempts might take a form akin to “spiritual exercises” (pp. 153–154)—referring to those outlined by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. Loyola (1914) provided a kind of guidebook of exercises involving processes of meticulous self-examination, prayer and contemplation—all as part of a 30-day retreat of silence and solitude. The aim of these spiritual exercises, however, is neither humble nor inobtrusive, but it is intended to enable one “to conquer oneself and regulate one’s life” (Loyola, 1914, para. 21)—

to achieve, in Anders words, a “violent self-transformation” (1956, p. 154).

Lacking a guidebook for such transformation in our current age, this chapter can only make tentative suggestions and identify comparatively modest aims. As a start, however, one might think simply of re-imagining possibilities for human development by re-examining those formulations and texts that have given it direction for decades, if not centuries. In its most basic form, and following Latour’s “complete reversal of Western philosophy’s most cherished trope” (2014, p. 13), such a re-examination involves simply reversing or substituting references to ‘man’ with words signifying ‘nature’. To begin with Heydorn, our condition can be seen as one in which not humanity but rather nature becomes “the subject of its own history” (p. 18 in this anthology). Furthermore, unlike its apparent significance in the 1970’s, Bildung today can be seen to “presuppose” not “the departure”, but rather the *arrival* “of humankind from a direct relationship with nature” (p. 18 in this anthology). Going further back to Humboldt (1999), we can view nature rather than “man” as potentially occupying “the convergence point of all particular kinds of activity”—with the “wish” that we “secure value and permanence for [i/its] being” (p. 58). That we can now view such diametric inversions of humanity and nature as not just plausible, but perhaps even as desirable, testifies to the existence of what Loyola might refer to as some ‘spiritual’ development of our sensibilities. It suggests that our moral imagination has indeed changed, not just since Humboldt, but also from conceptions that appeared entirely plausible some 50 years ago, in Heydorn’s time.

3 Spiritual Exercises in the Anthropocene

An example of more involved ‘spiritual’ exercises may be provided by the repeated claim that we live in a world, an order, to which “there is no alternative”. This singular phrase—or slight variations on it—have been used by those in power on quite different occasions. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used it repeatedly to justify her unprecedented right-wing reforms in 1980s Britain; German chancellor Angela Merkel and her government used the term *alternativlos* (without alternative) to justify their treatment of debtor nations in the 2009 European financial crisis; finally, British Prime Minister David Cameron returned to Thatcher’s original phrasing to justify austerity policies that led up to the Brexit vote. In all of these cases, what we allegedly have no alternative to is always the same: to business as usual, to a form of capitalism based not on conservation but on excess—on surplus in both production and

consumption. The claim that “there is no alternative” has of course, been met with some resistance. Members of the progressive Left have coined the phrase “another world is possible” (e.g., McNally, 2002; Riccardo, 2003); meanwhile, the ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD), a populist far-right party now in the German parliament, represents the clearest response to Merkel’s *alternativlos*.

While further discussion of this “no alternatives” claim and its implications is beyond the scope of this chapter, the basic point is clear: such alternatives do not carry nearly the irrefutable weight and power of ‘actually existing’ capitalism⁵ that roars ahead and is all around us. To claim that there is no alternative, to thus (try to) shut down possibilities available to the collective imagination, is only to widen the gap that Anders highlights between our action and our ability to imagine something beyond it. This discrepancy is captured powerfully in another repeated political claims—namely that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism” (e.g., Fisher, 2009, p. 2). Attributed to both Fredrick Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, the central point of this observation is illustrated by the continuing popularity of post-apocalyptic films such as *Children of Men* (2006), *The Road* (2009) and *Snowpiercer* (2013). Our collective imagination, it seems, is much more drawn to narratives of ultimate destruction than to their alternatives—scenarios of recovery or future flourishing. Unlike the revisions of Humboldt and Heydorn suggested above, these narratives—together with slogans of “no alternative”—demonstrate how challenged we are in matching our transformative powers with our ability to imagine the actual possibilities presented by them.

In addressing the difficulty of matching our power with our imagination, we can again look to our recent experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this time, we approach it not so much as a manifestation of the Anthropocene, but as a way of coming to grips with it, a way of showing that alternatives are indeed possible. First, it is worth recalling that in the months of April and May of 2020, the global spread of the fragment of RNA that is the Coronavirus, accomplished nothing less than a brief but unprecedented ‘end’ to the international capitalist system. Governments around the world discovered new power in effectively pressing the ‘pause’ button on ‘business as usual,’ on a way of life which is at once destroying the planet, but to which there is supposedly no alternative. The result was not a global economic apocalypse, but (for example) wildlife tentatively roaming empty city streets.

5 “Actually existing socialism” was a phrase often used to describe the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

In making this argument, I do not intend in any way to minimize the death, suffering, deprivation, and job losses that the pandemic has meant for millions of people, and the way these have disproportionately affected marginalized populations and school aged children. Regardless, it is instructive to observe some of the *other* effects of the pandemic, not the least of which is a likely double-digit percentage drop in consumption of fossil fuels for 2020 (extrapolating from the International Energy Agency, 2020). This, in turn, could represent real progress on the journey to carbon neutrality. Moreover, by reshaping our everyday lives—from social distancing to restrictions on our travel—the pandemic has shown that aspects of the social and economic order can indeed be revised and reimagined. Whether it is queues and mask mandates, more time spent with family and local friends, or a deeper appreciation of one's immediate environment, the pandemic has forcefully and undeniably illustrated that another world is indeed possible. Still, the challenge remains for us to envision other—perhaps more desirable—scenarios for and variations on possible futures in the Anthropocene.

Sociologists have also pointed out that the rise of the pandemic has also meant the rise of forms of social solidarity (Klinenberg, 2020). Manifestations of this solidarity range from collective expressions of gratitude directed to essential workers, through to voluntary and mutually preventative measures (aimed just as much at others' health as one's own; e.g., see: Gaztambide-Fernández, 2020). Sociologist Heinz Bude has discovered in these and other changes a novel form of solidarity: it is not the solidarity of the worker's movement, located in the struggle of humans versus their exploitative dehumanization; instead, it is a struggle against a half-alive string of RNA (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020). Regardless of its modest constitution, this virus has rendered us all vulnerable. In this shared vulnerability we can no longer view ourselves as neo-liberal capitalism would want us to; namely, as entirely "independent" and "self-interest[ed]" (Türken et al., 2016, p. 35). The intimate but now banal bodily experience of the danger of infecting or becoming infected by this virus—through a sneeze or a moment of forgetfulness—as Bude explains, "pierces our individual isolation" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020). We are no longer atomic individuals in a crowd but now share at least "a common semantic space" in which we understand ourselves to be bound with others in a mutual concern for our health and our susceptibility (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020). We are forced to rediscover our own commonality in our shared bodily vulnerability.

Despite its tragic dimensions (or perhaps because of these) COVID-19 presents us with an exercise in imagination of the most valuable kind. Not only does it allow us to experience the kinds of aberrations and disruptions that will become ever more commonplace as the

Anthropocene continues, but it also helps us to imagine still further possibilities for responsibility and solidarity—however modest they might be. Resources of the imagination are desperately needed, both to cope with what is to come and also to deal with the enormous task of preventing and minimizing it to whatever degree possible. This amounts to a renewed and reframed struggle of humankind with the world. To borrow from Heydorn, what is needed in this struggle is indeed greater awareness and heightened consciousness. But this is not a “consciousness [that] is everything” (p. 33 in this anthology) that would also encompass even its own preconditions. It is instead a profoundly vulnerable and limited one, more than ever subject to the sometimes-obscure situation imposed by its own finitude and materiality.

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Bildung and the Human Person: A Personalist Response to Heydorn

Fernando Murillo

How vain is to hope for better times if man himself is not bettered.

– Wilhelm Rein (1893/2008, p. 10)¹

1 Introduction

The field of education has long grappled with questions that resist last words on the matter.² Questions about technique, methods, schooling, pedagogies and policies are only the tip of the iceberg of educational theory, and pale in comparison to other more interesting questions that precede those related to schooling and are decidedly more difficult. These are

- 1 Wilhelm Rein (1847–1929) was an educational theorist, widely seen as continuing in the footsteps of Herbart. He studied Theology and Pedagogy in Jena. After spending time in Heidelberg, he was appointed professor and director of the pedagogical seminary back at the University of Jena. His second major work in the field of education was *Outlines of Pedagogics* [Pädagogik im Grundriss] (1893/2008). In this volume he attempts to construct the outline of a systematic approach to Pedagogy, focusing on the question of “what education aims at and is able to do” (p. 3). The starting point of his systematic approach is the claim that “the most manifold lines of human reflection, and the most diverse motives of human action, centre in education” (p. 3). It is within this dialectic of reflection and action that Rein establishes the centrality of the human person as an anchoring point for education: “The cultivation of humanity must begin with man himself and radiate from him to society” (p. 10). As I will show later, a similar preoccupation with the cultivation of the singular person as a precondition for societal change can be seen in Heydorn.
- 2 Certain approaches from psychology and other social sciences have attempted to surmount the inherent complexities of education by divising best practices (sometimes referred to as high-leverage practices), protocols, and neuroscientific explanations that might help practitioners get things done. At the same time, other approaches that are less inclined to social engineering, such as philosophy and psychoanalysis, have recognised the impossibility of reducing the complexity of education to predefined practices and policies, and instead the need to work through it, accepting education as a difficult, relational phenomenon, often marked by a way of being rather than by a matter of expertise in particular practices. For examples of this see Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) and Britzman (2003).

questions about the human person and their place in the world, our possibilities for development as well as our limits, the purpose of education, how we become who we are, in what ways education modulates our sense of existential meaning, what it really means to be educated, what the start of education is and when it ceases and in what ways it intervenes in our processes of subjective reconstruction and social identification. These questions have been addressed over centuries of unfolding theorisations of educational thought, and through the lenses of more specialised academic fields such as general *Didaktik* and the more recent development (and reconceptualisation) of Curriculum Studies.³ In the history of educational theory, the notion of *Bildung* stands out as perhaps one of the most productive and encompassing, yet intriguing. This is partly due to its comprehensive scope that recognises education as a phenomenon of human formation beyond aspects of mere formal instruction. *Bildung* has long been the object of questions, discussions, and, of course, controversies regarding the understanding of human experience in the educational intersections of personality, culture, religion and politics.

Heinz-Joachim Heydorn (1916–1974) offers a vivid example of a theorising that engages boldly and productively with the difficult tensions that arise in the modern educational theory of *Bildung*, particularly as they involve a human person at the centre of competing worldviews struggling for instantiation in public discourse, politics and culture. Heydorn's paper "Survival Through *Bildung* – Outline of a Prospect" (1974/2024), represents a timely incentive for heart-felt discussion. At a time when we are still recovering from a world-wide health crisis, with a devastating death toll, and witnessing the rise of totalitarian ideological stances (appearing under the guise of posthumanism, antisemitism, political correctness and other expressions), we need to urgently reconsider the difficult questions that *Bildung* provokes around meaning and significance, technical capacity and responsibility and the questions of what we can hope for the future and what it means in terms of social coexistence. In particular, Heydorn is interested in inviting us to consider the ways in which *Bildung* can be related to our survival as a species but also, and perhaps more importantly, in terms of our subjective integrity. In Heydorn's words, "The question of survival can thus not be answered by excluding war alone (...) Are we to survive as objects of traffic planners, Social-Darwinian cretins representing the new type of rule? Can we, as humankind survive the rise to become aware of ourselves" (page 16-17 in this anthology)?

3 See, for example: Murillo (2018), Pinar (2022), Schleiermacher (1826/2022), Westbury et al. (1999).

To be sure, Heydorn's position is not easily discernible upon first reading. He grapples with what seems to be honest questions regarding the implications of Bildung at the intersection of theory and politics in modern times. It is in this struggle for meaning that his discourse seems to fluctuate between political stances that appear to oppose one another—at least in terms of their implications. At times, he argues from a perspective of class struggle and deems the history of Bildung as a product of bourgeois development. At others, he denounces the irrationality of revolutionary ideologies, and the anti-cultural effect of the predominant leftist theory of Bildung. He does not seem to shy away from these contradictions.

Perhaps in no small degree, Heydorn's work can be regarded as an expression of his own biographical and historical context. Heydorn's life, like his work, seems to have unfolded through internal pulls and turns that took place while grappling with difficult questions, which then found external expressions that were read as contradictory or simply as a general polemic stance. While Heydorn received a Christian education, and later officially joined the Confessing Church (which, for Kminek, represents in itself an act of resistance against Nazism's rise to power; see introduction in this anthology), he also embraced socialism. He rejected National Socialism but openly advocated for the international kind. But even within their ranks, his independent thought and stance was also considered problematic for the Social Democratic Party after World War II, to the point that he was expelled. Heydorn then supported the German Peace Movement but was at the same time vocal against their anti-Semitic tones. No wonder he was simultaneously considered a 'leftist renegade' by some, and a 'conservative revolutionary' by others. As Kminek comments, Heydorn's most polarising work on Bildung appeared in the late sixties and early seventies in Germany (see introduction in this anthology) which, interestingly, coincides with the emergence of the Reconceptualisation of the field of curriculum in North America, a retheorisation of education inspired in the humanities and, in no small part, by what the notion of Bildung represents in terms of human flourishing. In both cases we see expressions of a vigorous response to an educational system that, in trying to become efficient, had left the human person out of the question.

In these next few pages, I ask what might be revealed to us when interpreting Heydorn's notion of survival through Bildung from a *Personalist*

perspective.⁴ By providing commentary on some key passages from Heydorn's paper, I wish to posit that "Survival Through Bildung" presupposes an ethics of salvation⁵ that involves the whole of the human person. I further want to show that this ethics is already present in Heydorn, but it needs to be reconstructed.

2 Survival of the Human Person

Heydorn's paper "Survival Through Bildung" can be read as articulating three main themes. He initially focuses on a theoretical discussion of Bildung and the implications of survival from a philosophical perspective. He then turns to a discussion of historical and social controversies from a political perspective. And finally, Heydorn returns to a discussion on the implications of formation and survival for humanity. While, in my view, the paper is unmistakably written in political language to a considerable extent (using primarily Marxist concepts), I contend that Heydorn's main concern here is not political in itself but is actually working through a problem of existential significance. And while this issue is mediated by political conditions, the main consequences remain on the side of subjectivity and transcendence, that is, a matter of interiority. As I mentioned earlier, paying attention to matters of interiority, and thus, the survival of the human person, requires a certain ethics which is already at work in Heydorn. In my view, his ethical position follows a dialectical movement such as that modelled by Wilhelm von Humboldt: a personal stance followed by an expression and instantiation of such stance in the community, and then, quite importantly, a return to the self (Humboldt, 1999). Initially and for the most part, it is this movement that involves the whole of the human person and his situation that comes to define the essence of a transformational—and saving—experience.⁶ It is my conviction that, in order to do justice to the depth of the author's discussion, this terrain of education and, in particular, the notion of surviving through Bildung,

4 As a frame of reference, I take the work of Dietrich von Hildebrand (2017), John Crosby (2019), and Gabriel Marcel (2011). These authors represent a Personalist stance by emphasising the dignity and singularity of the human person, and the inadequacy of materialistic and instrumental approaches to do justice to the value of the person.

5 That is, following a Christian Personalist perspective, a way of conducting one's life in view of the traces we leave in the world by our vital activity while we are still on earth, and the consequences those actions entail for when we are no longer here.

6 For more on discussions on subjective reconstruction and processes of educational transformation from an English discourse, see Murillo and Pinar (2019).

needs to be navigated philosophically, not only in terms of politics. To do this, my approach to commenting on Heydorn's ideas is to remain as close as possible to his main theme of the human person, which is why I have chosen a perspective inspired by Personalist thought.

As mentioned, while Heydorn does make use of political language throughout the paper, I believe it would be a mistake to read it in political terms alone, particularly at a time when totalitarian ideologies have saturated all aspects of human existence with politics—including spheres of the private, sexuality and even spirituality. Instead, I wish to posit that we need to look at Heydorn in terms of his most primordial discussion, which is his preoccupation with the survival of the subjectively existing individual, an individual who at the same time lives in a situation. In other words, I propose to read him from the perspective of the human person, or Personalism, which to me represents the next step in the reconceptualisation of the curriculum field. If curriculum, or educational theory in general, is to make it as a field through these present times of hyper-ideologisation and anti-intellectualism, it needs to bring the attention away from struggles among groups (or 'identities') and back to the thinking-feeling-willing human person and their dignity. With this in mind, we can now proceed to considering three focal points that emerge throughout Heydorn's paper, which allow for a reconstruction of a Personalist reading and the possibilities of survival through Bildung.

3 Survival in an Existential Key

The first point I want to make is that the possibility of survival through Bildung is predicated on the human person. In the opening lines of "Survival Through Bildung", Heydorn points out that both elements of the title—Bildung and survival—require discussion. The terms are not self-evident. For one, they are broad and elude specific definitions. Also, they are inextricably tied to historical conditions. In the case of Bildung, Heydorn exemplifies its complexity by pointing out that it ranges from "preparation for a practical occupation" to the "self-forgetfulness" (page 15 in this anthology) one experiences when contemplating a work of art. For the case of survival, it initially refers to a biological process, but goes beyond that. Every thought, idea or imagination regarding society's present and its future presupposes that the individuals who conform such society will continue to exist, and that they will, in turn, leave descendence behind. Here, Heydorn can be seen as taking up Schleiermacher's observation that education persists precisely because there are new people continually being born, hence his analysis of education as a matter of relations between

an older generation and a younger one.⁷ Such a view rests on a once taken-for-granted sense of biological survival. However, recent history has shown that the survival of humankind as a species is not secured. One example is that, at one point or another, major military powers have flaunted their nuclear capacity as well as other weapons of mass destruction, making global devastation plausible. More recently, the fact of our fragility, the finitude of our lives, and the instinct for self-preservation became painfully clear during the years living through the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected millions of people on a global scale.

While biological survival is a fundamental precondition, Heydorn is clearly not primarily interested in it when discussing survival from a perspective of *Bildung*. He is more interested in the all-around cultivation of the person. That is why he very quickly takes an existentialist turn, moving towards a sense of survival related to an aspect of interiority. This becomes apparent when he decides to turn to Freud and his “insight that the death drive is part of the constitution of humankind” (page 16 in this anthology). While animals may be wired by an instinct to preserve their survival, the human, Heydorn recognises, “may want to die, and may pursue their own destruction. The biological expectation therefore becomes null and void” (page 15 in this anthology). Survival appears conditioned here by a completely different set of conditions, all of which share a threat and a possibility coming from the inner life of the person. It is with Freud that we learn that the drives for life, love and death stem from the inner life of the person: *Eros*, a drive to unite things, to draw connections with others, and develop bonds of love; and, *Thanatos*, on the other hand, a drive to undo those ties, and terminate life and love. When this death-wish pulls towards the endangering of the natural order of things, or even worse, a termination of one’s own life, it is something coming from a wounded heart or psyche. This growing instinct for (self) destruction is, for Heydorn, a “recognisable symptom of expired societies” (page 16 in this anthology). But as we have learned from psychoanalytic experience, this symptomatic expression of discontent always stems from within: it is a conflict of innermost desires. One cannot find the source of the problem in society at large, as Heydorn seems to suggest. A subjective or personal discontent that is not tended to and worked-through finds external expressions under the guise of political unrest and critique, or through self-destruction directly. Freud’s *Group Psychology* (1921/1990) is particularly illuminating in this regard.

7 See Schleiermacher, 1826/2022.

Heydorn's view of the present situation is that there is a contradiction between the level of development of our technical and productive processes, and the worsening of a human condition which expresses itself in the loss of hope. In his diagnosis, what we witness today is "the strangulation of the human being" (page 16 in this anthology), where, in spite of the revolutionary changes of the productive forces, "humankind wants to survive as a human being" (page 16 in this anthology). This preoccupation with the human being is the exegetical key to his discussion throughout the paper: It is the need to return to the human person. That is, a human being that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts, and cannot be separated from his existential situation or being-in-the-world. This is the primary sense of a *Personalist philosophy*, which defends the dignity of the human person, his singularity and value. That is why, for Heydorn, survival encompasses more than its biological dimension, and, as we will see, more than its political situation.

The contradiction and disparity that Heydorn observes between the development of productive processes and the state of the human person is reminiscent of the similar diagnosis made long before by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999) in his "Theory of Bildung", when he asserts that, "a great deal is achieved around us, but only little improved within us" (p. 58). Nowadays, it seems to be the case that, far from improving, the situation has only worsened. As Heydorn points out, the disparity created by a focus on improvement of external aspects alone results in psychological damage. This is the second theme that emerges from Heydorn's discussion and connects to a *Personalist* understanding of survival.

The second point I want to make is that survival through Bildung includes caring for the body, mind and heart. Heydorn takes psychoanalytic insights seriously. An education that focuses solely on depositing knowledge, transferring skills and certifying competencies, whilst remaining inattentive to the more subtle movements of inner life, the gentle and humble disposition of study, a sense of reverence towards phenomena and the fostering of loyal relations and friendship, cannot be called Bildung in the truest sense of the term. One can only speak of training, instruction and specialised didactics, but nothing more. This is an important part of the criticism levelled at the educational system fostered under the *Prussian* tradition of discipline and punishment; a system that, while changed dramatically in form (now presented as inquiry-based, or fostering critical thinking), did not change much in terms of its underlying logic.⁸

8 See for example William F. Pinar's curricular discussion on *The Confusions of Young Master Törless* in Pinar (2006).

While this education seems to enjoy more acceptance under its new guise, there is a cost, however, for ignoring the more relational aspects of education, and Heydorn points to it directly. With the decay of historical structures, a “collective neurosis” (page 16 in this anthology) develops; a condition that leads to potential suicide (not just of the individual, but the desire to undo the structures that supported the very possibility for the development of modern life). Heydorn pins this collective neurosis on capitalism, but, as we will see, his criticism is directed at more specific and better-defined problems. A system of relations (such as education) that loses sight of the person and his circumstance can only lead to a historically known consequence: “psychological damage” (page 16 in this anthology), to use Heydorn’s terms. In 1975, around the same time of the first publication of Heydorn’s paper, William F. Pinar addressed this issue in clear and sometimes harsh terms in a paper entitled “Sanity, Madness, and the School”. In this paper, Pinar criticises traditional schooling not in terms of its methods, but the type of relations they establish and their effects: the estrangement of body, feeling, emotion and a necessary sense of singularity without which madness ensues.

In the same vein, Heydorn does not seem to be interested in criticising pedagogical methods, but underlying logics that, in the final analysis, are dehumanising. “The question of survival can thus not be answered by excluding war alone” (page 16 in this anthology), Heydorn tells us, nor by “criteria that are materially limited” (page 16 in this anthology). Instead, a good education—an experience of subjective reconstruction and survival—requires attention to the symbolic and relational aspects of human experience. In Pinar’s diagnosis, we need to pay attention to the unintended effects of schooling: a dehumanising experience that produces credentialled but crazed, erudite but dissociated subjects, a diagnosis quite similar to the problem outlined by Heydorn.

In the Humboldtian tradition of *Bildung*, within which I situate Heydorn, we find evidence of an understanding of education that does not only consider, but actually places the human person and their fulfillment as the *raison d’être* of educational experience. Within this same tradition, when describing the characteristics of an educated person in his *Journal of my Voyage* in the year 1769, Johann Herder describes an enlightened, with good manners and cultured, sensitive, reasonable, virtuous and enjoying man (in Horlacher, 2016). Herder’s view of *Bildung* is a process of transformation and self-actualisation that encompasses all aspects of all-around development. Through his own experience having to face the unfamiliar and living outside of his comfort zone, he concludes that educational experience cannot be reduced to the decoding of information in the brain, but it is something that touches our capacity for aesthetic sensitivity, that interpellates our capacity to live and relate with alterity and that shapes our

very character. But it does more than that. In Herder's view, a good educational experience also fosters our capacity for enjoyment. Desire, enjoyment, *jouissance*, all manifestations of Eros, constitute what is perhaps one of the highest forms of expression of humanity. It is what makes us feel alive and connected. No wonder an education that becomes too formalised, too focused on materially limited criteria, not only feels barren and purposeless, but denies the individual a sense of humanity.

Devoid of love and a sense of value and dignity for the subjectively existing individual, an educational system (and a political system for that matter) that focuses solely on the material, the technological, and the collective, cannot hope to offer genuine chances for survival in the widest sense of the term. In such conditions, Heydorn wonders how we can aspire to survive. "Are we to survive as objects of ... Social-Darwinian cretins representing the new type of rule?" (page 17 in this anthology). But right away, while distancing himself from the social engineers (which continue to abound today, and have perhaps increased), he asks a key question that provides an interpretative orientation towards an answer: "Can we, as humanity survive the rise to become aware of ourselves?" (page 17 in this anthology).

Becoming aware of oneself, gaining consciousness of our existential condition, making the unconscious conscious, seems to be the way and ethical task to regain a sense of individuality, value, purpose and belonging. But becoming aware of ourselves and our circumstance is not easy. This is why I find it worthwhile to comment on three points that reflect on this process of self-knowledge.

Firstly, and while I do not necessarily agree with some of Carl Gustav Jung's ideas,⁹ he does have a point when he asserts that "there is no coming to consciousness without pain" (Jung, 1928, p. 193). Becoming aware of ourselves invariably involves coming across things we would rather not see, or did not imagine seeing in us, making us uncomfortable, disillusioned or ashamed of ourselves, revealing the gap between our ideal self and actual self, between what we think we believe and the reality of what our actions say about us. That is why devoting oneself to activism and the external world of the political is a clever form of avoidance.

9 At some point, it seemed that Jung could have been Freud's natural successor in advancing the field of psychoanalysis, at least in the vein that Freud had envisioned it. However, the relationship between the two scholars came to an end, on account of the positions taken by Jung, which departed from the doctrine. In my opinion, there are two major points of departure, that go against all psychoanalytic experience and evidence. First is the ideation of a collective unconscious (a sort of reservoir of psychic material shared by all humanity), as opposed to the individual and untransferable drives and desires that move and affect particular individuals in specific ways. Second, is the negation or downplaying of the sexual and erotic nature of the drives.

Secondly, becoming aware of ourselves encompasses bringing into view aspects of ourselves that have been completely overlooked, despite being the closest to us. In this sense, a phenomenological attitude towards educational experience represents a way of restoring a more careful attention to the lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relations of the human person and his circumstance.

And third and finally, another aspect that makes this process of becoming aware of ourselves difficult is that if we think about our survival, we cannot do so without considering the reality and certainty of death. Our own death. Heydorn recognises the close relation between the concepts of survival, death and *Bildung*. But death is more than just a concept. Philosophers have long played with the term,¹⁰ using it irresponsibly only to add dramatic effect to their otherwise dull and unimportant discussions.

But something different happens when one is faced with its facticity: the passing of a loved one or receiving a medical diagnosis of an incurable disease. Then one is faced with the question of what to do with one's life and with whatever time one might have left before leaving this earth. This is when *Bildung* takes on a whole other meaning. What type of person am I becoming? What kind of traces do I want to leave behind, once I am no longer here? Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999) points directly to the transcendental as a quintessential aspect of his theory of *Bildung*. In this respect, and while Heydorn can be situated within this Humboldtian tradition of *Bildung*, I see no traces of preoccupation with the transcendental in Heydorn, but I might be mistaken. There is, however, a preoccupation with what perhaps can be called the weaker aspects of human experience.

Heydorn says something rather enigmatic regarding this: "In decay, life becomes recognisable" (page 17 in this anthology). Firstly, this reminds us of the counterintuitive move of the *Paulinian principle*, that in order to save one's life, one needs to lay it down and be willing to lose it.¹¹ One is also reminded of Michel de Montaignes' (1580/2014) essay, "That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die". Following Heydorn's psychoanalytic framing, one is also reminded that for Freud it is precisely our consciousness of death that makes life bearable, knowing that there is a limit, an end to our suffering, efforts, and also, to our enjoyment. In this sense, consciousness of death is a driving force to prepare ourselves to do the best we can

10 For example, the famous 1967 paper by Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author*. Joseph Schwab referred to the curriculum field as moribund (1969). Elliot Eisner, following Schwab's line of argument, declared that curriculum scholars were "on the verge of death" (as cited in Murillo & Pinar, 2019, p. 161).

11 "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (*The Holy Bible, New International Version [NIV]*, 1973/2011, Matthew 16:25).

with the time we have, to become the best version of ourselves, to connect with others in meaningful ways, to seize the day. It connects us back to consciousness of the body, mind and heart.

It is on account of these humanly and existentially pressing aspects that a technological and bureaucratic view of Bildung is not only barren and incomplete, but that it is flawed, as it perverts the true and most meaningful purpose of Bildung, with the full extent of its existential vocation. In my view, this is the main reason behind Heydorn's criticism of Bildung. It is not that it originated in bourgeois circles, it is that in becoming institutionalised, Bildung lost its transformative power, focusing instead on methodological tricks for teaching and learning. Under the weight of its new bureaucratic form, Bildung becomes 'purposeless'. The direct consequence of this turn to scientifically oriented positivism is, for Heydorn, that "the human being is reduced to quantity, and the human subject dissolves into statistics" (page 22 in this anthology). The human person is dehumanised, objectified. Devoid of his sense of existentiality, humanity and capacity to think for themselves, the subject can be used, manipulated and exploited. An education that robs the subject of their sense of value and singularity, treating them as no more than part of a collective, violates the golden rule of Personalism,¹² for which the human person cannot be used as a tool for ulterior purposes (be it slavery or social revolution). In this purposeless Bildung, Heydorn warns, the person "is surrounded by behavioural research, which abolishes the difference between humans and animals" (page 23 in this anthology), a symptom of an educational practice that betrays and forgets its ontological and transcendent dimensions.

Directly connected to this, a third point I want to make is that in its existential sense, survival through Bildung depends on an approach that recognises the subjectively existing person and their process of subjective reconstruction in educational experience. Heydorn's key passage on this appears on the fourth division of his paper, where he first recognises that "the anti-cultural economism of the predominant leftist theory of Bildung is only a reflex of the existing constitution and does not get beyond it" (page 24 in this anthology). As a return to the original sense of Bildung, (as delineated by Meister Eckart, Johann Herder and Humboldt),¹³ Heydorn reminds us that "it is the business of Bildung to look at the person

12 In *The Personalism of John Paul II*, John Crosby refers to the personalist norm (a term used by John Paul II in his book *Love and Responsibility*), as originating with Kant: "The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) led the way when he formulated the first principle of morality: "Persons should always be treated as their own ends and should never be merely used as an instrumental means" (2019, p. 10).

13 See Horlacher (2016).

who wants to emerge ..., to express their need as a human being" (page 24 in this anthology). Furthermore, Bildung "aims at the all-round development of the human being as a conscious being" (page 24 in this anthology). Here we see that, when focusing again on its most fundamental and original purpose—the human person—the notion of Bildung is rehabilitated, reinvigorated and more space is opened to think of survival and salvation as not only a worthwhile effort, but also as necessity of spiritual urgency. In this all-around development mentioned by Heydorn, "nature and spirit are simultaneously preserved in it and want to be reconciled with each other" (page 24 in this anthology). What we see here is a particular relation between inside and outside, inner world and external world, a relationship that is the basis for the existence of education. In a Humboldtian sense, the formation and cultivation of the person requires that the individual expands his inner powers in a dialectical relation: a relation with his inner self, then the expression of his capacities in the external world, and a fundamental return to self. In this sense, alienation, and putting oneself outside of our zone of comfort and sense of safety, is absolutely essential for our process of formation. But equally important is coming back to ourselves, after having exercised our influence on the world, in a process of mutual transformation: the world becomes more like us, and we become more like the world. Following Heydorn, the starting point for a productive relation between Bildung and survival is gaining consciousness of one's condition. It is, in fact, "the first step of liberating engagement" (page 26 in this anthology).

An interesting issue opens up here when we take time to seriously consider the phenomenon of formation of the human person, and recognise with honesty and humility the struggles we experience as subjectively existing individuals. We find that the process of educating and being educated (in a Bildung sense) is far from linear, cumulative and always ascending, as most theories of learning depict it to be. In an existential sense, and as Heydorn recognises "Bildung and the ability to survive refer to a consuming relationship It is [the intellectual's] slow demise that is linked to their ascent, linked to their recovery as a human being" (page 32 in this anthology). This points to an important finding in my own investigations: the idea that self-actualisation cannot take place without crisis and without losing something. There is an intimate dialectic between subjective shattering and subjective reconstruction. In shattering, or crisis, there is a real possibility for one's own demise—to lose oneself. But counterintuitively, it is through this very process by which life can spring up. The perplexing reality of the existential situation of the human person is expressed throughout history, and failing to recognise this makes it impossible to progress within ourselves and the social realm. On the other hand, recog-

nising this reality can help uncover opportunities for much needed transformation. Following Heydorn, in order to change, and surpass the errors from the past, we must “make ourselves recognisable as human beings in our contradiction” (page 33 in this anthology). This is an important lesson to be learned from psychoanalysis.¹⁴ It reverberates an observation made by the apostle Paul: “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (*The Holy Bible, NIV*, 1973/2011, Romans 7:19).

4 Four Conditions for Human Development

What is one to do in such circumstances? One thing is for sure, and that is what Heydorn himself recognises in his final analysis: that change in man “cannot be brought about by changing a political system alone” (page 33 in this anthology). Matters of inner life cannot be regulated by decree. Survival through Bildung is a notion that rests on the all-around development of the person, including the body, mind and heart. In this respect, we find in Heydorn four conditions for the development of the subject. The first is gaining consciousness of one’s own condition (section V, page 24–26 in this anthology). This is the starting point for a productive relation between Bildung and survival. The second is the need to cultivate human content, and the personalisation of the social and the material through spiritual transformation (section VI, page 26–30 in this anthology). “Only with one’s ability to penetrate the material condition intellectually and thus transform it does humankind become a subject” (page 27 in this anthology). With these words Heydorn makes an important Personalist turn. The third condition is creating a conscious relation between work and free time (section VI, page 26–30 in this anthology). The development of human content and character requires hard intellectual and physical work, but also rest, enjoyment and recreation. Let us not forget that when Johann Herder describes an educated person, he says that besides being enlightened, reasonable, and virtuous, he is also an *enjoying* man. The fourth condition is the need for the humanising of productive processes through cultural content (section VI, page 26–30 in this anthology). This is nothing other than a Personalisation of processes that could otherwise easily degenerate into objectifying, dehumanising practices. This is a powerful reminder that

14 For an interesting discussion of the seeming contradictions that make up our psyche and sense of individuality see Judith Butler’s (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*.

even in business and productive processes, we must never think of the other as a tool to be used for ulterior purposes (as we saw in the Personalist principle of Kant), or as simply a replaceable component of a larger collective, as it happens in political practices.

5 Conclusion

Taken together, the three points I have extracted and interpreted from Heydorn's "Survival Through Bildung" represent, in the first place, a re-instantiation of the implications of Heydorn's critique of Bildung. While he is severe in his critique of a purposeless Bildung, and a practice of education that became available only to a few, he is by no means downgrading the virtue of Bildung, and much less suggesting that it should be abolished in favour of a more equitable and 'useful' training for all. On the contrary, it is my sense that Heydorn would have liked to see Bildung and the development of the all-around person propagated universally as the basis for all education, regardless of whether it is aimed at professional or vocational training.

While "physical survival ... is the prerequisite for any design of the future" (page 33 in this anthology), Heydorn asserts, he is careful to warn us that, in spite of this urgency, and in the face of the temptation to jump into activism, "humankind cannot bear a dehumanised survival" (page 33 in this anthology). A mode of existence that denies the dignity of the individual human person, the value of their singularity, and the expression of interior life such as love and devotion, would not be survival at all. It would be mere slavery disguised as freedom. Bildung must then continue to push for a richer life, instilling the values proper of a human person: reverence, faithfulness, responsibility, veracity, goodness, among other virtues (Hildebrand, 2017). In this sense, an education under the sign of Bildung, conceived from an ethics of salvation and focused on the good of the person, cannot consist of only easy words, as it necessarily needs to point to the difficult and sometimes painful acts of repentance and conversion.

Perhaps, the most difficult aspect of all is that, in the final analysis, survival through Bildung is only possible in its wider sense through a return to love. The close relationship between education and love is beautifully articulated by Hannah Arendt, for whom "education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (2006, p. 193). Such responsibility means, for the educator, to preserve what has been handed down through tradition, and to welcome

newcomers into such a world that antecedes them, preparing them to renew it. But these acts of service stem and are sustained in love for both the world and the individual. Arendt is again clear when clarifying that one cannot love groups, but only particular individuals, the ones who are encountered face to face.

In the face of certain death (whether at a massive scale through a pandemic or war, or at an individual level, by illness or accident), it is not politics or collectives that sustain us. It is love that makes us exclaim boldly “O death, Where is thy sting?” (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, 1 Corinthians 15:55).

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Learning and Bildung in the Work of Heydorn, Pichon-Rivière and Bleger – Connections Between Health, Critical Consciousness and Social Change

Ana Inés Heras

1 Introduction

In this piece I discuss my interpretation of Heydorn's text—"Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a prospect" (1974/2024, p. 15-34 in this anthology)—in relation to the work of Enrique Pichon-Rivière (1907–1977) and José Bleger (1922–1972). These two Argentinian authors worked in the fields of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, medicine and social psychology, and yet, they are well known for traversing disciplinary boundaries, to the point that they have become unquestionable references in other fields (Quiroga, 1986). In the field of education, for example, they are regarded as extremely original thinkers for their contribution to considering *learning* at the centre of human healthy processes and for developing a methodology to foster collective processes of knowledge generation through which individuals or groups can develop a self-reflective, critical perspective that may allow them to dynamically transform themselves and their communities towards non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and non-exploitative relationships (Bleger, 1958, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1967; Pichon-Rivière, 1956/2008, 1969a, 1995).

Like Heydorn, both Bleger and Pichon-Rivière (Pichon-Rivière hereafter) took a major interest in the complex links established when developing methodologies and epistemologies to foster critical consciousness and social transformation. The three of them discussed the role of class exploitation and power in the shaping of the society of their time as an issue that they urged to address. In other words, these authors were positioned in deepening a profound societal change, and not merely in developing methods that would only temporarily alleviate some of the challenges faced by people.

Bleger and Pichon-Rivière directly linked their understanding of critical consciousness to learning, and posed that health was ultimately a learning process, one in which also un-learning and relearning could occur. They asserted that when individuals or groups got sick, at a certain point, something had prevented the subject (or the group) from learning. Part of

their research program was to create a methodology to support conditions to learn, un-learn or relearn. They called this a methodology for operative learning groups (“grupos operativos de aprendizaje”; Pichon-Rivière et al., 1960) and they tested it in several different types of organizations (universities, hospitals, schools, community groups, etc.). Over time they developed and implemented methodologies for clinical work, for teaching at the university, for co-researching with families, schools and other organizations, and documented their processes to continually build their theoretical frame of reference (Pichon-Rivière, 1969b). They also provocatively stated that psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis should all be understood as *social* (psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis), and constructed a conceptual framework, in which they inverted the notions of health/illness. They insisted that instead of curing, professionals had to start preventing, and thus focusing on health instead of sickness (Bleger, 1966; Pichon-Rivière, 1977). Health, learning and critical consciousness became central concepts in their theoretical construction.

Heydorn, in turn, related critical consciousness to the concept of *Bildung*, and was very aware of the differential access that diverse groups across Germany had to education. He devoted part of his work to investigating the conditions in which the organisation of the schooling process in Germany had produced a highly segregated and segregationist system. He does not, however, use these terms in his writing, but rather speaks about class-differentiated systems of education (training for the working class, formation for the bourgeoisie). He unveiled the class history of the European educational process, to show the ways in which the dominant classes had succeeded in presenting the segregated German educational system as a taken for granted, common-sense perspective, and thus preventing any changes from taking place.

In what follows, I first provide some contextual information to situate these three intellectuals in their fields, countries, languages and biographies. Then, I present an interpretation of some of the topics that can be found in the work of these authors when read in relation to one another, focusing on the importance of nurturing critical collective consciousness and the epistemological challenges faced when education is not simply thought of as guiding someone by teaching them, but as a contradictory, complex and dialectical process. I don’t claim to discuss the complete *oeuvre* of these authors, nor all the possible relations amongst each other’s work, but rather I aim to provide enough evidence to reason through a question that I seek to respond: Can learning and *Bildung* be taken—respectively, in these authors’ writings—as equivalent concepts, and if so, what did these concepts allow these authors to do in their respective fields?

2 Biographical and Contextual Information on Enrique Pichon-Rivière, Heinz-Joachim Heydorn and José Bleger

Born fifteen and eleven years apart, respectively, in 1907 (Pichon), 1916 (Heydorn) and 1922 (Bleger), these authors belong to the same intellectual generation, even though they developed their work in very different political, geographical, linguistic, and sociocultural situations. It is curious to note that they all passed away relatively young. Bleger was just 49 years old (in 1972), Heydorn was 58 (in 1974) and Pichon-Rivière was 70 (in 1977). Bleger died of a heart attack, surrounded by severe critiques of his work, both by the Communist Party to which he belonged and by other orthodox psychoanalysts, grouped in the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association, as referred to by Volnovich (2002). Pichon-Rivière died amidst the most severe and cruel military dictatorship in Argentina, a situation to which he refers in his auto-biographical account collected in long interviews by Zito Lema (1976) between 1975–1976.

Both Bleger and Pichon-Rivière were born in the Province of Santa Fe, Argentina, in the northern part of the territory, and grew up in rural contexts, in middle class immigrant European families. Pichon-Rivière travelled extensively during his childhood and youth due to family relocations and to pursue his schooling (from the Province of Santa Fe to the Province of Corrientes, and later to the big city of Rosario and, finally, to the Nation's capital, Buenos Aires). Bleger also went to study in Rosario first, and later moved to Buenos Aires to teach and work as a clinician in psychology and psychoanalysis. Heydorn travelled extensively as well.

Pichon-Rivière and Heydorn shared a curiosity for learning different languages. Pichon-Rivière was fluent in French and Spanish, and learned to understand the Native Original Language Guaraní, because he grew up surrounded by Guaraní families. Heydorn studied Chinese and English.

Pichon-Rivière and Bleger went to university in the city of Rosario, located in the south of the Province of Santa Fe, in a much wealthier area referred to as Pampa Húmeda. They attended the university at different times, due to their age difference, but later coincided in their professional practice when they migrated to Buenos Aires.

At the time, the cultural and political atmosphere of Buenos Aires was changing. The country was experiencing economic transformations because of industrialization, reorganization of agricultural exploitation and mass communication. Many families migrated from rural to urban areas, and access to housing was difficult and expensive for them. The landscape of the city changed; big areas were occupied by migrating families, seeking a place to live, and this resulted in community and neighbourhood organizing as well. These migration patterns were an issue to which Pichon-Rivière paid special attention and were some of the themes that he

devoted to studying and co-researching with other professionals and the families affected (Fabris, 2007, 2009, 2014).

Additionally, Buenos Aires received migration from abroad in the 30s and 40s due to the diasporas experienced by European intellectuals seeking asylum since Nazism and Fascism had expanded in Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain. During these decades there were explicit links across Buenos Aires, London, New York and Paris, due to these migration patterns. Specifically, for the psychoanalytic communities in Europe, these were the cities where most of the professionals were established. Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina was, and still is, the centre of economic, cultural, and intellectual debate for psychoanalysts, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Later, other links across geographies, including Buenos Aires but also other cities of the Americas, emerged across progressive intellectuals who belonged to activist and militant youth groups at the time, and who were interested in political participation in Student Unions or Professional and Political Associations. Thus, militants connected across Africa, China, the Caribbean, several Latin American countries and some areas of the United States and Europe (Baremblyt, 1982; Dagfal, 2009; Grinberg et al., 1961; Heras, 2018).

Heydorn, Bleger and Pichon-Rivière lived in very different geographies, societies and languages (Germany and Argentina), and yet, due to their generation, they shared some contextual marks of their historical moment, such as the difficulties of the World Wars, the challenges faced in respect to political participation of the Left and their worries about the effects of industrial, alienated capitalism on people and institutions of society (school, family, government). The three of them were aware of the injustices that class differences brought in everyday people's lives and addressed these issues very early in their teaching, research and writing, and made these themes part of their professional perspective and theoretical focus.

3 Common Threads in These Authors' Work

Heydorn, Pichon-Rivière and Bleger took a committed approach to transforming society. In this respect, I place these authors together in developing a praxis of transformative de-alienation, informed by their research, political involvement and teaching work. They all experienced challenges in their professional and personal lives regarding what they constructed as a theoretical framework, because they were regarded as deviants. And, as a matter of fact, they were. They certainly chose a

differential path from that of many of their contemporaries. Time and study of their work and lives have made it possible to understand their perspectives as original and different, and this may also be the reason why their work is seen very differently by different authors. The actions they took were guided by their search for the maximum coherence possible, which also meant identifying and dealing with their own contradictions.

It may be accurate to hypothesize that the three authors developed their original ideas precisely because of their strong positions, which in all three cases were vastly informed by their theoretical work. They sought to explain their own work, and the work of others, as contextually and theoretically informed, and, for Bleger and Pichon, this was a central topic of the tasks they undertook together. They coined an acronym (ECRO) that stands for *esquema referencial conceptual operativo* (referential, conceptual and operational framework, as a more or less accurate translation). In adding the term *operativo* (operational) to their understanding of the notion of a referential and conceptual framework, they wanted to stress that it was only through a dialectical process that praxis emerged. In other words, from their perspective, no matter how sophisticated or complex any theoretical framework may be, concepts emerge because they are used to 'operate', and they are checked against the reality test. Thus, for them, praxis meant taking a political and critical philosophical perspective on the issues that the society of their times posed as challenges, difficulties and unresolved everyday topics, such as access to basic rights (schooling, health, housing, work, recreation, and culture), cross-cultural and cross-class segregation, patriarchal and ethnic sexism and racism.

In this regard, both Pichon-Rivière and Bleger were true to Marx's 11th Feuerbach Thesis, in that it is not only about philosophically understanding the world in which we live, but it is also mainly about transforming it. Heydorn may also be located in this tradition. Yet, precisely because of their commitment to transformation, these authors experienced, first-hand, the opposition of the context in which they worked and lived. Since the professional positions they took were explicitly related to the political sphere (be that society's politics or politics at the institutions and organizations they worked, such as schools, hospitals, universities) and, these positions tended to be against their contemporaries or critical of their contexts, these actions constituted, for them, a source of worries, difficulties and sometimes insurmountable trouble. In this respect, one can also identify a similarity in their biographies. In a way, Pichon-Rivière, Heydorn and Bleger were all ahead of their time, and yet they were also certainly men 'of their time', in that they pointed to the issues most necessary to address in their respective societies and acted accordingly.

Heydorn did this through critiquing the relationships between class exploitation and the educational system that reproduced inequality, and by proposing a different approach to Bildung, taking this concept here both in the sense of educational systems and organization of education in society. Yet he also pursued a reflection of how, through Bildung, new forms of doing things can take place, taking, in this respect, a perspective that links the notion of Bildung with that of forming, transforming and creating (Bauer, 2003; Geuss, 1996). He did this not only in his teaching and writing, but also in his militant work in the Student International Organization, the Socialist Democratic Party and in his refusal to participate directly in war matters, as documented by Barreda (2011). Bleger and Pichon-Rivière were committed to transformation in their intellectual and academic work, in their work as psychoanalysts and psychologists of the public health system and in their activism against all forms of inequality to access health, education and decent living conditions for the families and groups with whom they worked.

The three men also developed their thinking and developed proposals (*Aussicht auf*, both as in ‘perspective’ but also ‘hopeful prospective proposal’), some of which they could put into action, and some of which remained for future generations to consider and follow through. Indeed, in the case of Bleger and Pichon, their work grew over time, and is taken as a reference for those who, nowadays, practice committed educational, psychoanalytical and psychological work, both in América Latina and in some countries in Europe (for example, Spain and Italy; see *Area3*, in Spain, or *Scuola Bleger*, and the work of Leonardo Montecchi and Luciana Bianchera in Italy).

Furthermore, these three authors shared an interest in dialectical Marxism and were informed by Marxist theoretical frameworks in their conceptual perspectives, in their activism and in their professional practice. Their education in these matters seems to have come jointly from an intellectual, disciplined formation, and from their militant work. Heydorn and Bleger were active members of political parties, such as the German Socialist Democratic Party and the Argentinean Communist Party respectively. Pichon-Rivière participated formally in a political party in his youth (in the city of Goya he became a member of the Socialist Party). However, the way they enacted their ideological positions brought trouble for them in their militant activities. These three thinkers grew out of a party-like, hierarchical political structure, and both Heydorn and Bleger were reprimanded by their political organizations, to the point that they were disaffected altogether. Pichon, from very early on, was influenced by anarchism, and, in many ways, all his work attests to the fact that he remained truthful to the core notions of freedom and self-affirmation in collectivity, with which his understanding of anarchism

provided him. Once he was established in the city of Buenos Aires, he contributed by supporting the Republican fight in the Spanish Civil War and later, the refugees.

Building on these biographical and contextual notes, I have presented conceptual common threads running across the work of these three authors. In discussing the common threads, I also attempt to make visible to non-Spanish speaking audiences the work of Argentinean intellectuals, who are usually not well known in the European context or that are not immediately regarded as contributing to the educational field, even though Bleger's and Pichon-Rivière's work ultimately put learning at the centre of their research and practice, and more importantly, at the centre of their conceptual developments, which were very original at their time, and continue to be regarded in the Spanish speaking field of social psychology and education as main references.

4 Learning and Bildung and Survival

Can learning and Bildung be taken—respectively, in these authors' writings—as equivalent concepts, and if so, what did these concepts allow these authors to do in their respective fields? Here, we will address this question, building on the previous sections, to present some details related to the concepts of learning, Bildung and survival.

"The terms require pre-clarification" wrote Heydorn in 1974 (p. 15 in this anthology), referring to the fact that neither survival, nor Bildung could be taken for granted. These are loaded terms and, thus, they have become concepts. His starting point in this piece is stating that both survival and Bildung have been taken up unproblematically, yet, as he points out, each of them can only be understood in their historical context and, thus, in their changes over time. His perspective can be related to that of Koselleck (1923–2006) who invested a great part of his work to uncovering the relationships between words, their use, their status as concepts and the way they play out in society over time, to signify and to create communities of work, ideas and practice. Koselleck (1979), writing in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, posited the notion that to respond to whether a word can be considered a concept, one must historicize and contextualize its use. The methodology he proposed was to analyse the word in question in terms of its indexicality (where did the word appear, who used it, with what explicit purpose) and its capacity to becoming a factor, which I chose here to translate conceptually as its capacity to perform (that is, a word is a concept when any community takes it up in discourse, for example, and another community picks up on

this term to establish either a differential position or an opposite position altogether).

Following this way of understanding concepts, I interpret that Heydorn brings forth, at the beginning of his piece, two conceptual problems:

- One that relates to the meaning of the terms he wants to discuss, and their historically located signification (and thus, their time-loaded and class-related semantic qualities).
- The second relating to the relationship amongst the terms he brings into the discussion, namely survival and *Bildung*, and the consideration of whether or not a new proposal of prospective action could be proposed (that is, *an outline*). Throughout his writing, in this piece, he unravels these main points that are presented right from the outset.

In order to do so, throughout the piece he presents the reader with several different moments in the history of Western society, and organizes his argument into sections, each of them building on the prior and pointing to the next one. However, he does so not in a linear fashion, but rather in a dialectical manner, in such a way that, as readers, we find ourselves immersed in the prototypical, critical philosophical meditation that proceeds by stating a point, unveiling its contradictions and enumerating possible avenues to comprehend how to approach the issues presented, without clearly pointing to any solution. The solution, in other words, if any, needs to be constructed by the reader. This way of presenting his ideas, I interpret, is at the very core of his political, philosophical and educational perspective and, one may say, educational method, for there is not a clear position in his writing, but a provocation to think. These strategies come across clearer in his native language, German.

However, and interestingly, these are also a familiar way of presenting arguments in certain traditions in the Spanish speaking context, at least in academic settings. One of the reasons why this could be the case is because the Spanish speaking academic context was heavily influenced by German scholars in the decades between 1890–1933 in Spain. On the one hand, many of the intellectuals in the fields of medicine, psychology and psychoanalysis later had to flee and established themselves in different locations in Latin América (such is the case, for example, of Joan Cuatrecasas, Emili Mira i López, Àngel Garma). On the other hand, several German speaking intellectuals also had to escape Nazism, and established themselves in different parts of North and South America.

Additionally, Spanish speaking intellectuals were later influenced heavily by French philosophers and emulated these scholar's ways of presenting an argument. My point here is that we find a common trait in

Heydorn's writing methodology and that of Bleger and Pichon. The three of them proceeded by identifying complexities, contradictions and tensions in the concepts or ideas discussed, and enabled the reader to unravel them, not necessarily providing them with an all-rounded answer. It is true that, at least in the case of Pichon-Rivière and Bleger, they wrote several different types of texts (e.g., psychoanalytic texts, social psychology basic explanatory writings, provocative manifestos, psychiatric studies) and yet, paying close attention, one may risk saying that all their texts share a hallmark, that of provoking the reader to remain alert, and in a way, exercise a critical perspective over what they are reading.

In his piece on "Survival Through Bildung", Heydorn aims at clarifying how survival and Bildung have taken up several different meanings over the centuries and seeks to point critically to the fact that, at the time he was writing, these concepts, and their relationships, should be explored in the backdrop of industrial capitalism, destruction and detachment from life. At the time, he was seeing the effects of so-called progress in the industrial capitalist nations. In his text, he points out that humans believed that expanding production and consumption over care were not only appropriate but desirable, and therefore they enacted ways of living that, in the long run, could not be sustainable. Therefore, Heydorn concluded that this was a form of collective suicide.

His different analyses, even though very focused on the philosophy of education, approached society, politics, the economy and the cultural and philosophical consequences of ways of being human in a way that did not consider seriously the deadly implications of the systems they supported. In this respect, it is not easy to ascertain to what field one may say Heydorn's work belongs. As proof of this, over the past 40 decades, these issues have been sufficiently researched from several different disciplinary perspectives (e.g., geography, education, political science, ecology). Moreover, new interdisciplinary fields of study have been created to deepen the understanding of the effects of global warming, the proliferation of un-degradable materials contaminating earth and seas and severe consequences of psycho-sociological and cultural traumas due to continuing dispossession (i.e., expansion of capitalist exploitation of land and people through war, conquest or purchases, all of them protected by national and international laws; see Altvater, 1986/1990, 2008; Angus, 2012, 2013). Additionally, issues of human destruction of the Earth and other humans are continually pointed out by several different communities around the world in their activism towards a more just world, one that is taken care of, and one that may not otherwise continue to be sustainable for all species living on it. We now know for a fact that capitalism, which rests on the exploitation of so-called natural resources and appropriation by dispossession of land, people, and extermination of

non-humans, has become irrational. However, these facts were already pointed out by several different scholars and activists since the late 1970s and the early 1980s (e.g., Max Neef in South America, and André Gorz and Félix Guattari in Europe).

One could say that the attitudes, actions and beliefs of so-called capitalist progress, dispossession and expansion are based on an excess, or what in Ancient Greece was nominated by the term *hybris*. Heydorn actively sought to put forward a way of acting, believing, perceiving and knowing what we may call the antipode of a *hybris informed* perspective. He sought to do so by putting into question the supposedly self-evident relation between survival and *Bildung*, for example.

To present his reasoning, Heydorn's text "Survival Through *Bildung*" starts by stating the problematic meaning of the terms survival and *Bildung*. That is, his rhetorical strategy starts by using the preposition 'through' in the title and shifting into 'and' in the text. My take on this is that he is ultimately questioning whether 'through' *Bildung* humans may be able to acknowledge the risk of life as they are undertaking it, or as the powerful Nation States of the time and political classes are conducting life. Thus, by asking what the relation between survival and *Bildung* is, he indeed develops an argument about critical consciousness.

Heydorn highlights that *Bildung*, on the one hand, means to acknowledge the trans-generational passing on of things learned, stressing the side of the concept that one may link more clearly to the German term *Kultur* (culture). Yet, Heydorn makes us aware of the fact that *Bildung* stands for the capacity to freely create and, in this respect, to relate to beauty (an artistic perspective one could say). And yet also relating to the fact of longing for the place where one was born or raised (an identity perspective), or where one thought one belonged (an identification perspective), and the ongoing process of conducting an ethical life, full of tensions and thus full of choice (a philosophical perspective). Transmission, art, identification processes and philosophical meditations all form part of *Bildung*, as Heydorn allows us to see, and taken together these notions can be equated to a process of continually learning over time, which is how Pichon-Rivière and Bleger understood critical consciousness—as way to continually search for a fragile equilibrium where humans could seek health.

In Bleger's and Pichon's views, therefore, a healthy state was not a state one achieved, or even wanted or needed to achieve, but an ongoing process of dialectically seeking to understand, and operate on, the world around us. They described this as the 'non terminable' analytic work and,

building on Freud's notion of "Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse" [Analysis terminable and interminable],¹ they write:

The end of analysis is the culmination of a cycle that should be conceptualized and understood such as any other vital or developmental cycle in lifetime. What really ends is the analytic situation as such (in its specific time / space coordinates) precisely because the analytic perspective has been internalized as an internal process. From this perspective, we could state that analysis ends when it has been internalized as interminable. (Pichon-Rivière et al., 1977, p. 376; translated by A. I. H.)

In this respect, the authors position themselves clearly in stating that their methodology seeks to provide individuals and groups with tools to dynamically continue their analytic process, over time. In the same piece they end by stating that there are two concepts that one must consider concurrently, and those are the *span of time* and the *span of space*. Here, span refers to the amount of time and space that an individual or a group can commit to being responsible for conducting a task that they set themselves. In using these concepts in the context of this piece, what they meant was that all subjects (individuals and groups) live in time and space, and that when the span of time/space for continual internal analysis can be taken up as part of who they are, in this respect, it never ends. I find these conceptualizations very close to those of Heydorn's, in terms of his understanding of the formation of consciousness, when he writes:

The formation of consciousness, which enables humans to act with knowledge in the vulnerable tissue of their own condition, is gaining significance like never before. It initially means Enlightenment as patient work. Bildung reckons with long-term processes, its results cannot be produced like industrial products. The number of people who can assume a liberating task of Bildung is limited for the time being. Nevertheless, the impoverishment of society, as the impoverishment of its human content, is continuously accelerating. This contradiction cannot be resolved. We can only tolerate it. Changes that decisively determine history take place as real changes in people. (page 26-27 in this anthology)

Heydorn is clearly pessimistic as to the possibilities and effects of education over human interaction with one another, and with the world. However, he seems to point to—in line with his dialectical thinking—a contradiction that may be unresolved, but is worth acknowledging, in so far as it can become a topic that guides our reflection and action. The question thus becomes: What kind of life is the life we want to live, as a

1 An English translation of Freud's essay can be found in Freud (1937/1964).

species and in contact with other species and Earth Others, and what is at stake?

In a way, both Pichon-Rivière and Bleger shared this pessimistic approach, in as much as they also identified the social, political and economic issues of the time as imposing on people's health. Moreover, they were very vocal in denouncing that those impositions were uneven across society's groups (social and cultural classes, geographical regions in Argentina, rural versus urban areas, and so forth):

There is in our society a domination apparatus that acts to perpetuate the relations of production as they are now, that is, acts to perpetuate exploitation. These actions also configure an ideological perspective by which "healthy" means that one who adapts (or "puts up", tolerates) the exploitation and does not question it. And this domination apparatus also counts on a whole team of so-called specialists, namely, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and so forth, to implement precisely a hierarchical and authoritarian relationship not only in the way they act professionally, but also in the fact that they help reproduce alienation and non-critical perspectives. (Pichon, as interviewed by Zito Lema (1976, p. 82), translated by A. I. H.)

Yet, what seems very different across the work of Heydorn and that of the Argentinean psychoanalysts is how they approached the methodological implications of their theoretical insights. That is, even though their diagnosis about industrial capitalism, alienation, exploitation and class domination coincides, their attempted solutions seem to be different. To my knowledge, Heydorn was not able to collaborate with others in professional teams, in order to implement methodologies that could intervene in the institutions of society. In other words, even though he did actively participate in politics, and did take an activist stance in his teaching and professional work, Heydorn did not work on direct methods like Pichon-Rivière and Bleger.

In the case of Pichon-Rivière and Bleger, they purposefully sought to create a team of clinicians, professors, researchers and other health and education related professionals, to co-implement and co-research the results of their technique of *grupos operativos* and of the way in which the *esquema conceptual referencial* served in real situations for people to solve (operatively) what they sought to understand, work on, or act upon. Pichon-Rivière defined *critical consciousness* as the:

Acknowledgement of our own needs and those of the community to which we belong, acknowledgement that is in turn put into work at establishing relationships with others in a way that those relationships allow for creating new solutions to the problems and needs at hand. In this way one may say that critical consciousness is a way to relate to reality. (Zito Lema, 1976, p. 87; my translation from Spanish)

In closing this section, I highlight three themes that stood out for me when reading these authors in relation to one another:

- Their understanding of human survival and its relationship to a dynamic process of learning or of consciousness-formation.
- Their position to foster a critical collective understanding of context and its relationship to social change, which, in the case of the Argentines, they took the step of creating a methodology for intervention and research.
- Their documentation and questioning of the epistemological challenges in education as an institution of society and its relationship to transforming schooling and, in broader terms, all educational processes.

5 Conclusion and Further Research

We have put Heydorn's ideas in dialogue with the ideas of two contemporaries of his, who, from a different disciplinary perspective, also interrogated the not-self-evident relationship between life, death, health, social change and learning. These Argentinian authors, Enrique Pichon-Rivière and José Bleger, built a social-psychology theory of learning that may be of help in responding to Heydorn's un-answered questions. Heydorn is clearly pessimistic as to the possibilities and effects of education over human interaction with one another, and with the world. However, he seems to point to—in line of his dialectical thinking—a contradiction that may be unresolved, but it is worth acknowledging, in so far as it can become a topic that guides our reflection and action. The question thus becomes: What kind of life do we want to live, as a species and in contact with other species and Earth Others? If our whole planet is what is at stake, what are the tools we need to put to work, now?

Regarding the issues of survival and death, time has proven Heydorn right. Death and life are still crucial issues we humans face, and, over time, we have also learned to understand that it is Earth Others who are in danger if we persist, as a species, in a *hybris*-like position. What Heydorn could not anticipate, however, is the disaster that took place in the decades after his death, regarding our Earth, the relationships amongst humans and the levels of exploitation and suffering that most of the world's population is subjected to. Inequality has risen, authoritarian governments have proliferated and ecological disaster is taking us to the verge of collective suicide. Yet, in turn, consciousness about these very problematic

situations has been the common factor across very different groups on Earth, and, thus, one can identify several diverse ways in which human and non-human collectives are questioning the status-quo.

It seems appropriate to think that Western-like philosophies of education, and other related interventions, as critical as they can be, are still trapped in a conundrum from where there seems to be no resolution. However, as interesting and important Pichon-Rivière's, Bleger's and Heydorn's advancements have been, over time, we have constantly experienced the limitations of the kind of interventions in society that we seem to be continually reproducing. In this respect, there is already an important body of work that, coming from other perspectives which are clearly positioned as non-Western, not systemic and decolonial, have been questioning the meaning of the institutions of society, such as education, schooling and training. These scholars are underrepresented in colleges, universities and other educational and research organizations, and thus, as of yet, their perspectives are not easily accessed in mainstream society. Yet, many of them have taken an active stance of not wanting to belong to these structures or organizations and have started to refer to their methodologies as pedagogies, learning processes and consciousness building in their own terms, with their own concepts and through their own perspectives. Such is the case of Rivera Cusicanqui in Bolivia, who has coined the term *chí'xi'* (original from the Aymara meaning something that is dotted, and thus can be of two colours at the same time, meaning metaphorically something that is/is not at the same time) to name a mestizo consciousness. The mestizo consciousness, in her terms, is a way to operate over the world in which we live, considering its contradictions, but actively taking a stance to denounce domination and end it. On her end, and in a different part of the Americas, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) has been talking about rebellious transformation through a pedagogy with and in the Land. Her point of view is that we need to radically change the way we understand schooling, education and knowledge generation if we really want to live well and survive as a species and as a planet all together. Finally, another contribution we can take into account is the work developed by social movements like *Vía Campesina Internacional*, the *Chiapas Caracoles*, the *Movimiento Sin Tierra* and the several other Native Peoples, and rural-urban coalitions that have been implementing what Zibechi (2007) has called *educación en movimiento*, referring to both an education that is constructed by social movements, but also to a learning process that occurs when groups establish, move in the territory and recuperate land.

Further research would be needed to understand more fully the relationship between Indigenous North and South American epistemologies (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Betasamosake Simpson, 2014),

urban-rural coalitions and their contribution to understanding what counts as knowledge, education, learning and pedagogy, and how these perspectives can truly inform us, as humans and Earth Others, on how to continually undertake a deep change in our societies. We all want to live well, and I take here the notion of living well as it has been used in community economies research (Gibson-Graham, 2006), conceiving the economy as a matter that all of us should care about, and thus be distributive and communal by definition, taking as equally important the needs of all living and non-living organisms on Earth.

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Knowledge-Building, Communities of Practice, and Individuation: Heinz Joachim Heydorn’s Philosophy of Education in Relation to an Adult Learning Scientific Program in Kenya

Julia Bello-Bravo & Anne Namatsi Lutomia

1 Abstract

Engaging with Heinz Joachim Heydorn’s (1974/2024) “Survival Through Bildung”, we adapt and apply his insights on Bildung to a case study of informal adult education in Africa: specifically, to a WhatsApp network in Kenya convened for sharing and redistributing life-improving knowledge to rural areas and farmers. The goal of this chapter is neither to vindicate the case study itself nor to only engage Heydorn’s insights theoretically. Rather, we explore the interactive ‘edge’—of a WhatsApp virtual space, knowledge-building processes in a virtual community of practice, and a decade of empirically grounded, practical educational efforts in Africa—to witness how this opens new or hidden pathways toward Heydorn’s ‘good life’ for network members. Results from the analysis include: (1) the emergence of uncommon forms of leadership and initiative-taking, (2) empowered network member learning, and (3) realisations of personhood (identity) previously foreclosed as a possibility. These insights frame Heydorn’s Bildung as a decolonising and empowering process whereby individuation and transhuman/virtual-space realisations of human-nonhuman hybridity can intersect and disclose pathways to the good life despite the “revolutionary path in the classical sense [being] blocked” (page 26 in this anthology).

2 Engaging “Survival Through Bildung”

This anthology offers to re-establish or connect insights in Heinz Joachim Heydorn’s (1974/2024) “Survival Through Bildung” to the contemporaneous impasse many currently find themselves in—namely, “the conditions of a highly industrialised region under a capitalist constitution” (page

15 in this anthology) where any “revolutionary path in the classical sense is blocked” (page 26 in this anthology). Education still plays a critical role in this because (despite its capacity for liberation), it has since become a major obstacle to liberation, becoming

the most developed instrument to close off the knowledge of one’s own possibility to humanity. The generality of Bildung thus contains a double necessity: to equip humankind for the revolution of the productive forces and to prevent the revolution of one’s consciousness. (page 24 in this anthology)

In this chapter, we engage with Heydorn’s “Survival Through Bildung” to enlarge and adapt it to a context outside of its industrialised (European) origins—specifically, for a case study of informal education in Kenya designed to empower people’s and communities’ movement towards the good life. In this first subchapter, we lengthily anchor Heydorn’s notion of the good life in its necessity and its contrasting antitheses (despair and humiliation). This engagement reconfigures Bildung as a process of (1) sharpening a decolonising and empowering capacity in people for (2) discerning or creating alternative pathways to the good life not only (3) under the conditions where we currently find ourselves blocked but also (4) through realisations of better worlds and the possibilities of the human for all people. We then apply Bildung to our case study.

2.1 The Necessity of the Good Life

Before yielding to the temptation to debate what the good life *is* (or might look like), we first reemphasise Heydorn’s insistence on its *necessity* as the proper measure of human existence. That is, arguments taking something other than the good life as the goal or purpose of human existence will ultimately not suffice; thus, Heydorn insists, “humankind cannot bear a dehumanised survival” (page 33 in this anthology). This necessity echoes Tillich’s (1966) ‘good place’ of utopia: “neither historical consciousness nor action can be meaningful unless utopia is envisaged both at the beginning and the end of history” (p. 296). Consequently, “all utopias strive to negate the negative itself in human existence which makes the idea of utopia necessary” (p. 296). Acknowledging this necessity does not guarantee its realisation, of course; human eventfulness always falls short of utopian outcomes. Thus, Tillich, paraphrased in Lopez (1998), contrasts a truth, fruitfulness, and potency of utopia with its

untruth that “forgets the finitude and estrangement of man ... that man under the conditions of existence is always estranged from his true or essential being” (299), its *unfruitfulness* in that Utopia “describes impossibilities as real possibilities—and fails to see them

for what they are, impossibilities” (300), and its *impotence*, which results in disillusionment, as an “inevitable consequence of confusing the ambiguous preliminary [nature of Utopia] with the unambiguous ultimate” (301), and—in actualized utopias—in terror, since “disillusionment is staved off through the political effects of terror” (301). (p. 1)

Against these sustaining visions of Heydorn’s good life and Tillich’s good place is the criticism that their always imperfect realisation is so disheartening that we might do better without them (Ulam, 1966). But what are the alternatives? Shall the purpose of human life be only to pass on genetic material, not for your sake but for the sake of the species? If so, shall we say that those who (for whatever reason) fail at this task have lived useless or purposeless lives (Eagleton, 1989; see also the fate of the ‘ngozi’ among the Dande people of Zimbabwe in Lan, 1985)?¹ Or is life by definition purposeless, an inherently meaningless play of forces against a backdrop of equally accidental cosmos? If so, were the survivors Frankl (1946) noted in Nazi concentration camps deluding themselves and merely fabricating a felt sense of meaning, choice, and (often limited) agency?

If it is then meaningless to insist “life is meaningless” or impersonal, is the purpose of life under modernist industrialization to be “nothing but” a cog (cognizant or not) in a vast machinery serving the wealthier at the expense of the made poor? Are the lives of workers truly reducible only to their alienated labouring (Soffia et al., 2021) or to an exclusive *definition* of their labour by those who built the machine and placed them in it? Or is the purpose of life a mysterious and unforeknowable spiritual test with its answer-key locked in the coffin or cremation urn? Must the lives of the created (even under the theodicy of an assumed omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence of a Creator) be reducible only to the fiat of a predetermined and predestined selfhood imposed by the one who built Creation and placed people in it? Is the purpose of a child’s life always and only what its parents declare it to be?

These ostensible alternatives to the good life (as the necessary measure of human existence) have in common a ‘consolation’ that the good life is impossible. Indeed, life can be unmanageably overwhelming and beyond one’s control; we might therefore blunt that experience by saying, “this

1 “A *ngozi* is a stranger, either an unknown body dumped in the bush or an ancestor with no descendants to remember her or him. It is what is left of a person who has failed in one of the crucial experiences of human existence. A *ngozi* is unmarried or childless, unburied or done to death. For such a person, death is not an enhancement but a degradation [emphasis added]. She or he is not welcomed but feared. As a *mudzimu* [a welcomed spirit] expresses order, fertility, and concern, the *ngozi* represents the violent consequences of lack of fulfillment: distress and despair” (Lan, 1985, p. 35).

doesn't matter", or "it's in someone else's hands", or even "life sucks". Where a self-desired will to realise purpose is frustrated, such consolations can negate that experience and provide the very feint by which existential paralysis is overcome and the possibility of a life of meaningful work opens up. Though the "good life" seems impossible (or utopian), a "good enough" life may stand in its stead.

But if we can find (bitter or peaceful) consolation through understanding the purpose of life in these less ideal or reduced terms, how are such consolations not already the closest approximations to the ideal good life that a person or community might manage or imagine? Isn't the "good enough" life, or a life that is "not bad" or "the best I could manage", an authentic form of the good life already? Recalling the unfruitfulness of Utopia, which "describes impossibilities as real possibilities—and fails to see them for what they are, impossibilities" (Tillich, 1966, p. 300), we can see how unfruitful idealisations of the good life impose a double suffering—first, by burdening us with unreasonable and gratuitous disappointments about the agonisingly unrealisable perfection of an ideally good life, and second (and more destructively) by blinding us to the genuine forms of the good life as they can and do arise imperfectly around us. Notwithstanding our human ability to always imagine something more ideal than the actual—which Heydorn and Tillich (and we) assert is a necessary and salutary habit—the helpful adage "don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good" further transforms into "don't let the better be the enemy of the good either".²

This reminds us that the *better* is a real possibility (if sometimes only as a relatively better life than a currently miserable one). This possibility of the better reminds us to pause and take stock of our actual conditions

- 2 This in no way reprises the theodicy of Leibniz about the "best of all possible worlds", which claims the world's actuality and status quo are neither possible to better nor require betterment in the first place. This is grotesque. However, the adage "don't make the perfect or the better the enemy of the good" is also not an argument to 'settle' or even less to 'assent' to a patently inadequate and unjust status quo. Rather, it is a reminder that every and any good life that manifests in the world must *always* fall short of any imaginably better or more perfect world (whether realised in a mystical vision or onstage as utopian theatre or other media). It is tempting to say that the real world can never *actually* be perfect but only *ideally imperfect*, but the adage only reminds us not to succumb to the temptation to throw out every actual good life in the name of some ostensibly better or perfect life, which by definition is impossible to realise. The foremen of our "highly industrialised region under a capitalist constitution" (p. 15 in this anthology) have taken up the seduction of this false cry ("new and improved!") as a strategy for perpetuating a social order psychologically, sociologically, and environmentally disadvantageous even for its rulers. In the present (European) conditions, opposition to the better of *progress* because it isn't *perfect* is often a form of reaction and one of the visible ways that the "revolutionary path in the classical sense is blocked" (p. 26 in this anthology).

before insisting on the impossibility of a better life or sinking into one of the above ‘consolations’. But we must also immediately acknowledge, especially on behalf of people and places in the world where basic survival itself is not already well-assured, that it will not always be psychologically or sociologically practicable to pause and reflect. Social and personal suffering—whether physical, psycho-emotional, spiritual, or economic—can erase or make invisible both existing and possible pathways to a better life. However, even in such dire circumstances, Schiller’s (1801) *On the Sublime* offers a pathway by which overwhelming oppression and humiliation can be overcome: if a person

is no longer able to oppose physical force by his relatively weaker physical force, then the only thing that remains to him, if he is not to suffer violence, is *to eliminate utterly and completely* [emphasis in original] a relationship that is so disadvantageous to him, and to destroy the very concept of a force to which he must in fact succumb. To destroy the very concept of a force means simply to submit to it voluntarily. (para. 5)

“You can’t fire me, I quit” is a present-day example of Schiller’s radical “I choose this”.³ Such an assertion utterly destroys the very concept of a disadvantageous and humiliating relationship and the imposition of a force that someone might otherwise be incapable of overcoming: “*you* can’t fire me. *I* quit”. Thus, we sense links between Schiller’s characteristic emphasis on freedom and human dignity—as an elimination of violence, oppression, coercion, and humiliating relationships with others—and Heydorn’s notion of the good life; specifically, its prerequisite elimination of unnecessary evils as preparation of the ground for *Bildung* to discern or create pathways to the good life. This again discloses the necessity of the good life as the proper measure of human existence, whether in its utopian ideal, a necessarily imperfect realisation of those ideals, or Schiller’s radically assertive “I choose this!” when all else fails.

3 The *self*-willed quality of this voluntary submission, made despite a maximal constraint on choice, is absolutely necessary both in Schiller and here. As a gesture, it annuls the impersonal meaningless or ‘purpose’ of nature and the humiliating condition of servitude as someone else’s labour, Creation, or child. Even the ostensibly absolute determinism of a material-only existence that predestines stating “I choose this” is annihilated by “I choose this”; the felt human sense of meaning under existence is the evidence of this, no matter how blunted or obscured. To be sure, one may also usefully interrogate whether the consciousness that makes such a declaration is not false, but both Schiller’s aesthetic education, Heydorn’s proposed *Bildung*, and vast swaths of ‘Eastern’ literature exhibit both the possibility and the means of abolishing such false consciousness and ignorance.

2.2 Who Decides the Good Life

With the necessity of the good life established, the task of determining what the good life would look like immediately raises objections about *who decides* the question. Just as immediately, a chorus answers, “It’s up to each person, individually, to decide”.

The unregenerate insistence of this chapter will be that this is *not* an adequate answer on its own. Corporate personhood and the world’s rich have very deliberately decided to spin, obfuscate, and spend billions fabricating disinformation about how their good lives have *not* brought everyone else’s to the brink of climate extinction (Brulle, 2018; Farrell, 2019; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2014). Heydorn similarly diagnoses: the “collective neurosis that late capitalist constitution produces is a form of potential suicide” (page 16 in this anthology). Whether ‘blame’ for this sociocide falls more on individual (corporate) producers or (individual) consumers (Borst, 2022; Griffin, 2017), the problematic term in both cases involves Individualism.

This now dominating doxa of Individualism, as a key part of the conditions in which we find ourselves, imposes a “basic (nominalist) assumption that only individuals (entities with aims) exist, not social wholes (societies and social institutions) ... *All versions of individualism share the denial that societies have aims or destinies* [emphasis added]” (Agassi, 2017, p. 1). Carl Gustav Jung (1921) more bluntly describes such extreme Individualism as “*pathologisch und durchaus lebenswidrig*” [pathological and inimical to life] (Jung, 1971, p. 761). Corporate personhood has similarly been diagnosed as psychopathic (Achbar & Abbott, 2003; Bakan, 2003).

The pathological aspect of this arises from an individual’s imposition of their worldview on everyone else as an obligation; specifically, “A real conflict with the collective norm arises only when an individual way is raised to a norm, which is the actual aim of extreme individualism” (Jung, 1971, p. 761). The extent to which Enlightenment Individualism seeks to raise an individual way to a norm is well-captured in the hyperbolic definition of property advanced by the famed English jurist William Blackstone, writing at a critical historical juncture (1765–1769) when industrial modernity and the ideology of Individualism were coagulating into their now-familiar forms: property is “that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in *total*

exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe [emphasis added]” (as cited in Rose, 1986, p. 1, fn 1).⁴

Jung (1921) rejects (pathological) Individualism and (fascistic) Collectivism to formulate individuation as a third way to ground identity; Heydorn similarly notes that the “finding of a human identity” requires “Bildung of assistance” (page 28 in this anthology). This is Bildung in one of its arguably ‘core’ senses. As Liedman (2001) notes, “the backbone of the concept of Bildung, both in Humboldt’s version and later ... is the notion that knowledge, or at least some knowledge, fundamentally changes and develops a human being” (cited in and translated by Sjöström et al., 2017). Accordingly, although Jung’s formulation of individuated personhood—paraphrased as *a personal expression of a collective norm made with maximal freedom of choice*—was aspirational when he wrote it, that maximal freedom of choice has since been realised and documented in one online/offline community (PanopticonsRus, 2020; Plante et al., 2016).⁵ Thus, an impossibility is disclosed as a possibility.

However, it is critical to stress differences between African and European culture if insights from Heydorn are to be fairly and accurately applied cross-culturally to the African scene, which is the goal of our chapter. While *individualistic* cultures are psychopathic to the degree that they refuse to adequately acknowledge any culturally collective norms, *collectivist* cultures are fascistic to the degree that they refuse to adequately recognise or allow personal expressions of collective norms in the first place. Contrasting these situations, *individuated* cultures exhibit relative degrees of freedom of choice (from maximal to minimal) around the personal expressions of collective norms recognised by the community—where the community is an entity with a destiny itself distinct from the destinies of the people who inhabit it.

- 4 We recognise that “the concept of ‘individuality’ in nineteenth-century German culture began to become clearly defined with romanticism” (Farris, 2013, p. 48). This proposed an “ethical individualism” rooted in “uniqueness, originality, self-realization (...) in contrast to the rational, universal and uniform standards of the Enlightenment” (Lukes, 1973, p. 1)—a proposal intended explicitly to distinguish itself from the extreme Individualism first formulated and denounced in French thinking (Oliveira, 2010, p. 26). Hence, Jung’s sense of individuation reflects Germanic individualism’s tendency to positively assume an “organic unity of the individual and society” (Lukes, 1973, p. 22). Not surprisingly, then, individuation has been linked to Bildung (Riese & Hilt, 2021). English thinking prefers to avoid the term *individualism* generally, invoking *liberalism* instead (Oliveira, 2010).
- 5 Notably, this online/offline community also shares our case study’s emphasis on virtual interaction, habitually learning about specific knowledge areas of interest, and deep appreciation for the community itself (Plante et al., 2016).

This change of framework to individuation is critical because binary individualistic vs. collectivist contrasts have been used to disadvantageously *Other* non-industrialised cultures (whether agrarian, pre-agrarian, indigenous, or emergent industrial) (Chen, 2022; Grishina, 2011; Oikawa, 2021). Mistaking an *individuating* African scene through an incorrect lens as collectivist or emergent-individualistic is not simply a methodological error but has also resulted in social erosion due to poorly fitting impositions of (pathologically individualistic) notions of democracy, entrepreneurship, LGBT+ rights, and existentialism generally (Desai, 2017; Lutomia et al., 2016; Madela, 2020; Sanya & Lutomia, 2015). Accordingly, understanding cultures in terms of their *relative individuation*, rather than a binary categorization as individualistic or collectivist, will be generally more accurate and illuminating, especially for Africa. Consequently, any implicit individualistic/collectivist doxa in Heydorn, including even in his forms of resistance to it, might risk wrongly interpreting his ideas when applied to individuated contexts. This is probably the most important caveat to keep in mind when translating Heydorn's insights to spaces outside of the conditions he mainly addressed.

2.3 Despair and Humiliation

This paradigmatic shift—from an unproductive binary of (psychopathic) Individualism vs. (fascistic) Collectivism to a more explanatorily robust framework of (humanistic) individuation—affords one step toward an adequate view of the good life. Another step is to look at qualities of life patently antithetical to a good one; namely, despair and humiliation.

Heydorn correctly notes that humans can want “to die, and may pursue their own destruction” (p. 15 in this anthology). Notwithstanding triumphant or defiant suicides who make Schiller's choice (to remain) into a choice (to depart), these lived experiences of suicidal *despair* are antithetical to notions of a good life. Nevertheless, *when* people make this choice varies significantly by continent. Statistically, 6 of the 54 African nations (Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique) were reported in the top-ten prevalence for suicide by the World Health Organization (Global Health Observatory, 2019), compared with 0 of the 44 European nations. Moreover, most African suicides involve people typically much younger than age 50 compared to age 50+ suicides in Europe. Qualitatively, this is a vast difference—with the latter looking back, perhaps despondently, over the actual worth or meagre accomplishments of a life lived with not much life left to go, and the former looking forward, quite hopelessly, at the impossibility of realising any life at all for decades to come.

Heydorn also invokes Freud's psychological death-instinct as a socio-logical premise: "[by] the decay of productive consciousness which is directed towards the fulfilment of the future, death gains a new power. It becomes a seduction" (p. 16 in this anthology). Consequently, the "self-destruction inherent in human society as an expression of its unrevoked contradiction gains an extraordinary power with the decay of a historical structure" (p. 16 in this anthology). While Africa is certainly experiencing a decay of its historical structure, is this truly a "self-destruction inherent in human society" (p. 16 in this anthology) or rather a murder-instinct and "expression of [an] unrevoked contradiction" (p. 16 in this anthology) imposed by the zombie of coloniality, post-colonial structural adjustments, advancing globalization, and the raising of Individualism's industrialised way of life to an obligatory norm for everyone on the continent? Clearly, African and European despair should not be conflated.

With 'despair' understood as a moratorium on the adequacy of the consolations that life is meaningless, then the notion of 'humiliation' links to the experiences of alienated existence and foreclosures on the possibility of personhood, whether as labour done solely for the benefit of another or the imposition of a god or parent Creator's alien norms onto the life of the Created. Indeed, Heydorn's extensive analysis of changes needed to eliminate disadvantageous relations in labour—e.g., the "economic autonomy of the working masses is the precondition for their all-round intellectual development" (p. 27 in this anthology)—clearly calls for less humiliating work conditions as part of the good life. In contrast, a legitimate core of "late bourgeois *Bildung* thus develops the individual towards their imagined form of development, seeks universality in them, and thus establishes their *unique dignity* [emphasis added]" (p. 19 in this anthology). It seems non-accidental that Schiller's complete and utter elimination of the disadvantageous relationships of violence and humiliation for the sake of *freedom* and *dignity* under a good life appears obliquely in Heydorn's paraphrase of Skinner's (1971) *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*:

Human dignity based on consciousness and freedom produces chaos, it prevents survival. That requires total adjustment, the ideals of human ascent are irrelevant. The utopia of the Enlightenment, which refers to overcoming contradictions, appears here as a farce. Humankind is liberated by being freed from its consciousness. The contradiction now becomes helpless, self-destruction without consequences, their object is withdrawn. The antithesis can no longer feed in the body of the thesis, and it becomes part of the thesis' agony. (p. 23 in this anthology)

While Heydorn immediately admits, "the conclusion still needs to be clarified" (p. 23 in this anthology), to reject human dignity based on con-

sciousness and freedom because it produces chaos still implies a requirement to identify *some* presumably other more desirable or stable ground for human dignity. Human dignity thus remains an indispensable and necessary quality of the good life.

2.4 Education

Insisting on a prerequisite *survival*—understood, at least minimally, as an elimination of the unnecessary evils of plague, war, famine, and the social deaths of oppression, humiliation, and meaningless existence—Heydorn advocates for an educative *Bildung* that can discern or create pathways to the good life, understood, at least minimally, as accessibility to the necessary goods of health, peace, plenty, and a social life of freedom, dignity, and happiness. But then how does *Bildung* avoid co-optation by hegemonic social forces opposed to the self-realisation of personhood? Heydorn proposes an equally necessary shedding of the false consciousness imposed by education's forestalling of such self-realisation. Moreover, while "survival refers, first of all, to a biological process ... this is also true to only a limited extent" (page 15 in this anthology). Self-awareness under human existence makes biology dependent on culture; thus, "changes that decisively determine history take place as real changes in people" (page 24 in this anthology). *Bildung* avoids biological reduction because it "is detached from any original natural relationship and denotes an exclusively human quality" (p. 17 in this anthology) or, again, "*Bildung* presupposes the departure of humankind from a direct relationship to nature" (page 18 in this anthology).⁶

2.4.1 *Nature vs. Everything*

The relatively recent modernist transformation of European societies from an agricultural to an industrial base reconfigures the *problématique* of *nature* as an often tendentious contrast between civilization and nature. Accordingly, Shakespeare's pre-Enlightenment injunction that Art should hold "as 'twere a mirror up to nature" (n.d., 3.2.23–24) becomes incomprehensible or anathema to an Enlightenment (or Romantic) notion of Art. In the shadow of the Industrial Revolution, nature is the very condition education must rectify (Schiller, 1794/1985). As Heydorn puts it, "in the enlightened process of creation, the concept of *Bildung* is linked to

6 Jung (1971) also refers to individuation as "individual differentiation, whose isolated character removes it from the realm of general biological phenomena" (p. 88).

humankind's subjugation of nature" (page 18 in this anthology). Later, however, the bosom of nature returns—especially in its more Orientalised forms (Said, 1978)—as a source of solace and relief from altogether too much artificiality and deadening by civilization. The fetishisation of Africa in this context is symptomatic (Holmes, 2016).

However, this problématique is an entirely time-bound manifestation of a much more ubiquitous and arguably universal human distinction between the time and space of human habitation, variously called the "village" or a pastoralist "encampment", and "everything else", referred to as "wilderness", "bush", "outback", "beyond the pale", or those places "beyond the black stump" (Bello-Bravo, 2019). This distinction generally encodes what is real or not—whether as the pure or the impure, the sacred or the profane, the cooked or the raw (Douglas, 1966; Eliade, 1959; Lévi-Strauss, 1969)—and generated a vast array of magical and ritual technologies, especially around fire and cooking, for conceptually and physically translating a culturally incomprehensible "out there" into a culturally recognised "in here". This translation includes those myriad preparations, usually ritual purifications, for physically moving from "in here" to "out there" and back again.⁷ These translations also involve whether or not one is obligated to extend reality and moral status to an *Other*, be they human or nonhuman, living, dead, animals, and gods (Mangena, 2013). Raymond Williams (1973) captures this in the modern industrialist notion of class:

Neighbours in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less than nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What [Austen] sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable. (p. 166)

This translation of objects and the Other—as instrumentally useful 'artefacts' rather than non-instrumental existences-in-themselves (Krippendorff, 2007)—occurs ubiquitously in both colonising and non-colonised

7 Remnants of these rituals may still be discerned, i.e., when the actor slips into the headspace before stepping onstage, when the athlete hypes themselves up to begin a contest, or when steeling oneself to survive another holiday encounter with relatives. Architecturally, modern bridges can still include herms—stone columns dedicated to the god of travellers, Hermes, at each end, which travellers once touched for protection when entering and crossing over the dangerous and liminal space spanned by the bridge.

contexts. Above all, children in every culture initially appear as incomprehensible Others,⁸ which all cultures immediately begin to translate and transform through the social reproduction of pedagogic acculturation into culturally recognisable beings and ultimately adults, if they survive (Achebe, 1980; Eliade, 1958). Thus, for Heydorn, “the process of *Bildung* is included in the process of how humankind copes with nature, the tool-like-utilitarian reference of this process remains a continuous moment” (page 22 in this anthology).

2.4.2 *Bildung vs. Education*

Reiterating that an instrumental purpose of life—whether to labour, to a god, to one’s parents, or even to oneself—falls short of the good life’s necessity, when Jung (1934) notes a *psychologically* traumatic fragmentation of the self due to the “apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one’s nature” (p. 204), this precisely diagnoses how the child is obliged under the pedagogic acculturation surrounding it to deny some part of itself and be or become something other than itself. Accordingly, Heydorn can note *sociologically* how “the human being who was experienced in one’s history now appears fragmentary, unfinished, at the mercy of foreign forces” (page 18 in this anthology)—a point even more broadly applicable to the literal fragmentation of traditional African life-ways under the artificial borders of nation-states, its interrupted historical destiny imposed by (post)colonialism, an on-going socio-political dependence self-inflicted or not (Emeh, 2013; Frank, 1967), and thus above all an apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of its historical nature.

For Heydorn, the mastery of nature under an Enlightenment concept of education “meant that the organisation of society as a class society was inevitable; it has a historical justification. This justification has now disappeared” (page 23 in this anthology), along with the justifications for its forms of education (Fay, 1972; Glass, 1970; Kerber, 1972). Half a century ago, Toffler (1970) had already insisted, “what passes for education today,

8 When children are recognised as or assumed to be reborn ancestors—or when notions of karma argue that one never meets a genuine stranger but always someone already known and in relationship with from previous lives—this affords new-borns more inherent personhood than that granted by modernist cultures, where genetic or instinctual affinity with the parents might be the only ‘personhood’ ascribed to an otherwise assumed *tabula rasa*. In both scenarios, the ‘narrative’ spun by the existing adult culture imposes itself immediately upon the unprecedented uniqueness of the new-born (Achebe, 1980; Maturana & Varela, 1987) and inaugurates from the very first instant of life, if not earlier while still in the womb, an educative ‘translation’ of an otherwise incomprehensible Other not even recognised as such into something instrumentally and culturally recognisable.

even in our ‘best’ schools and colleges, is a hopeless anachronism” (p. 398). However, this problem is in principle more general still. In both modern industrialist and traditional cultures, through a “historical relationship of domination, *Bildung* now becomes “the most developed instrument [for closing] off the knowledge of [a child’s] own possibility to humankind” (page 24 in this anthology). The degree of this closing off will vary by the relative individuation of a culture, but this factor also changes the ways that any “revolutionary path in the classical sense is blocked” (page 26 in this anthology) in traditional or industrialised settings. It links a “need for physical survival, which is collectively threatened, ... [with] interest in maintaining existing systems of domination” (page 25 in this anthology). Heydorn positions *Bildung* as a potential way out of this situation by recommending a shucking off of such education.

2.5 Decolonisation and Empowerment

Towards a “revolutionising of the work process” (page 28 in this anthology), Heydorn effusively evokes the “unlimited empowerment of humankind” (page 24 in this anthology) that education can have, affording a participation within that “tradition of *Bildung* of history with which [bourgeois] humankind understood itself as the future” (page 28 in this anthology) and the processes “by which society is ultimately brought to collapse [for the better] from within” (page 29 in this anthology). Currently, these are only potentials within education that need recovering—not simply from bourgeois education as “the most developed instrument to close off the knowledge of one’s own possibility to humankind” (page 24 in this anthology) but also as the arguably universal habit of culture to forestall an unlimited development of personhood in people by imposing its visions of itself on everyone.

Decolonisation offers one way to undo that imposition, in part because of its acute analyses of the oppressive and humiliating imposition of colonial norms as an obligation on everyone colonised. Illustrating the co-implications of race and coloniality, Hardt and Negri (2009) also underscore how wanting to *have* (and possess) *an identity* is Individualism’s most fundamental piece of *property*—as a “sole and despotic dominion ... over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe” (as cited in Rose, 1986, p. 1, fn 1). Under this regime, *having property* becomes the main or only acknowledged pathway to the good life, despite evidence to the contrary (DeLeire & Kalil, 2010; Dunkeld, 2014; Kalil & DeLeire, 2013; Kasser et al., 2004; Oprea et al., 2012).

Decolonisation is to cease to be someone else's property (Fanon, 1961) while not using property to oppress, colonise, or enslave others. It moves toward living in the commons of Life with *all* living beings, human and nonhuman (Kimmerer, 2017). The animism of this involves "a form of socialization that creates a lasting set of behaviours between generations, [where] the cohesion of individuals occurs based on their awareness of belonging to the same common ancestor (Diakhaté, p. 5)" (Balonon-Rosen, 2013, p. 8). This echoes other African insights about living a good life with others in humanistic notions such as Ubuntu, nite, ma'at, and related ways of life among other indigenous people the world over (Diagne & Herman, 2022; Gathogo, 2008; Graness, 2016; Lutomia et al., 2017; Muhonja, 2019).⁹

2.6 Bildung for Survival

This African humanism—as Ubuntu's sense of "I am because others are" (Gathogo, 2008) and the Wolof proverb that "the remedy of the human is to become human" (Diagne & Herman, 2022)—arguably connects to "Survival Through Bildung" through Heydorn's proposal to shed a false

9 African philosophies, such as *Ubuntu*, the Wolof *nite*, and the ancient Egyptian social principle of *ma'at* reflect the character of good life in Africa. **Ubuntu** is rooted in the Xhosa expression *Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu*, which means that each person's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others; the word Ubuntu can be translated as "I am because others are" (Gathogo, 2008). Though stated differently by various Bantu peoples in Africa (in the terms *untu*, *umuntu*, *umundu* etc.), *ubuntu* expresses a foundational ontological and epistemological acknowledgment and provides a hallmark for how members of a community can exist and see themselves as one. Metz (2018) and Gathogo (2008) both point to the cohesion and collaborative association that ubuntu advances in the forming of a community. **Nite**: Senegalese and Wolof indigenous societies have historically lived in harmony despite cultural and religious differences (Diagne & Herman, 2022; Muhonja, 2019). This cohesion can be traced to nonexclusive ways of knowing, being, and doing grounded in performances of humanness, *nite*. Nite expresses that which makes a human being human, especially in the proverb *nit nitay garabam*: "the remedy for humans is to become (to manifest as) human" (Diagne & Herman, 2022). Muhonja (2019) writes, "This indigenous philosophy of Senegalese societies, which encapsulates the performance of humanness, informed values and practices of acceptance and respect at all levels of society. It helped characterize communities as all-embracing, except in the face of negative transgression. However, even with such contravention, the presence of processes of restorative justice allowed for re-entry into the field" (p. 294). **Ma'at**: Graness (2016) refers to ma'at, a concept and goddess that can be traced to ancient Egyptian concepts of truth, balance, order, harmony, peace, love, unity, law, morality and justice. The opposite of ma'at is *isfet*, which refers to concepts such as injustice, chaos, violence or to do evil (Graness, 2016). Ma'at represents the oldest completely preserved wisdom doctrine according to Graness (2016). In order to fulfill their obligations, ma'at enables people to link and connect with one another by creating reliable and trustworthy relationships (Graness, 2016).

consciousness imposed by education that forecloses on the possibility of realising the wholeness of one's nature; hence again, the "Bildung of assistance that must be provided is the finding of a human identity" (page 28 in this anthology). Through communal experiment and play not alone but with others, the conditions of individuated personhood to emerge from those interactions afford refinements to one's capacity to discern and create new or previously non-existent pathways to the good life for communities. In other words, this decolonising and empowering informal education (as in Schiller, Heydorn, and others) denotes a Bildung, whose capacities have a potential to open unseen and new trajectories toward a better life as understood locally.

As a power that potentially unblocks revolutionary pathways to better good lives and undoes the channelling of intergenerational trajectories into already existing social identities that primarily serve existing power regimes, we apply this sense of Bildung to the following case study of an informal adult educational project in Africa. Specifically, we explore the knowledge-building, communities of practice, and individuation process and structures of a predominantly online WhatsApp group in Kenya, convened for delivering life-improving information to people and communities. Throughout, we continue to reference and apply insights from "Survival Through Bildung".

3 Case Study:

Bildung Through a Mobile Phone App Network in Kenya

The following case study reports on the use of an African WhatsApp group to disseminate an improved bean storage educational video supportive of greater food security, resilience, and sovereignty. In particular, we demonstrate the ability of information and communication technologies (ICTs, especially educational videos on mobile phones) to dramatically increase people's access to this knowledge while *decreasing* the up-scaling costs of extending the video's reach (Bello-Bravo et al., 2022).

By allowing sharing of better agricultural practices for food security and resilience, WhatsApp groups can, with good leadership, supply farmers information, access to sharing and learning from one another and, guidance via interactions with other people in the network. When further organised and structured as a *learning system*, empowerment becomes possible as people learn to learn collaboratively in new ways and experience transformations of identity. This applies to those providing the educational content as well.

3.1 Survival Through Food Security, Resilience, and Sovereignty

Heydorn predicates *Bildung* toward the good life on assuring the conditions of survival, as a world freed from the unnecessary evils of hunger, war, plague, and the social deaths of oppression, humiliation, and meaningless existence. In the language of international development, one aspect of this goal relevant to our case study is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (“Zero Hunger” globally) as the second-highest priority after the elimination of poverty (United Nations, 2016). For agriculture and agriculturally based societies generally, conceptual metrics for meeting SDG 2 include *food security* and *food resilience*. While both of these terms have an unmanageable number of proposed definitions, and conceptual and practical objections that arise from attempting to operationalize them, at root, they describe (1) a stable availability of healthy and nutritious food production adequate for meeting present and future societal needs (*food security*) and (2) built-in or adaptive capacities in food production systems to recover quickly from unexpected or unexpectedly severe shocks to those systems (*food resilience*) (Agarwal, 2018; Béné, 2020). More recently, the notion of *food sovereignty* has amplified these goals; as a farmer in Uruguay articulates it:

Food sovereignty goes beyond food security. Our goal is not to just fill bellies but to have citizens that have the agency to create their own sustainable food systems and have the knowledge to question where their food comes from and how it was produced. (quoted in Bryan-Silva, 2022, p. 86).

As the most agriculture-based region in the world, Africa’s food security and resilience have been devastated by COVID-19 (Moseley & Battersby, 2020). Further, climate change’s impacts on agriculture due to industrialization and the continent’s on-going precarity of food production make proposals to industrialise it along European or Chinese lines likely to worsen rather than improve the African scene (Corn tassel, 2008; Nasser et al., 2020; Qobo & le Pere, 2018). While a different more sustainable path to assured survival and the good life is needed, mitigating already worsening climate change effects on African food production is required now (Bello-Bravo et al., 2022). These impacts on food security and resilience involve (1) environmental degradation (e.g., desertification, soil degradation, worsening droughts) (Ntinyari & Gweyi-Onyango, 2021), (2) increased crop predation by insect pests (including newly invasive ones likely due to climate change) (Akeme et al., 2021; Bello-Bravo et al., 2018), (3) successful but insufficiently scaled-up crop improvements that show promise but are likely too expensive, not extensible enough, or remain in their prototype/development phases (Abegunde & Obi, 2022; Barasa et

al., 2021; Kuyah et al., 2021; Mizik, 2021), and (4) poorly executed or unsuitable technological interventions or crop conversions of land that have actually left areas worse off than before the intervention. As Corntassel (2008) notes, “Unfortunately, what is considered sustainable practice by states comes at a high price for indigenous communities, often leading to the further degradation of their homelands and natural resources” (p. 108).

Exacerbating these technical problems for food security and resilience are inadequately addressed social problems especially around intersecting gender and poverty. This partly involves the incorrect notion that technology, as the *sine qua non* of technocratic civilizations, is ‘gender neutral’ (Porter et al., 2020; Williams, 2014). By definition, cultural norms mark *all* cultural behaviour, including technology, especially with respect to gender (Dodson et al., 2013; Hall & Bucholtz, 1995). Framing technology as use-neutral across gender is not supported by practice (Bello-Bravo et al., 2017, 2019; Hafkin, 2003; Huyer et al., 2005; Tata & McNamara, 2016). The illusion of technology as gender-neutral arises from the fact that although men and women might both *use* a technology, *how* they use that technology can vary significantly.

Ignoring this use-difference seriously impacts food security and food resilience efforts, including but not limited to (1) failing to reach essential populations (i.e., homes and women) who would most benefit from and widely share an intervention’s benefit to the community (Ashby et al., 2009), (2) reproducing or even worsening existing social inequalities (Jentsch & Pilley, 2003; Medendorp et al., 2022), and (3) missing educational opportunities because most women and girls in Africa have decreased or no access to education, including agricultural extension education for improved food security and resilience (Gumucio et al., 2020; Hertz et al., 2008; Van Mele et al., 2005). These are not new problems. While Sustainable Development Goal 5 centres gender, Agarwal (2018) argues that this emphasis does adequately result in policy implementation and practice. Interventions that are not available and culturally usable by all genders will always fall short of the mark.

3.2 A Digital WhatsApp Community of Practice in Kenya

In 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) tapped Scientific Animations Without Borders (SAWBO)¹⁰ as

10 Founded in 2011, SAWBO is a learning-systems approach for freely sharing scientifically based best practices and knowledge on topics in agriculture, health, and women’s empowerment to the broadest demographic possible using animated informal educational videos. Empirically, these

part of its Feed the Future SAWBO Responsive-Adaptive-Participatory Information Dissemination Scaling Program (SAWBO *RAPID*) project. The project's first step involved translating select SAWBO educational animations from its online content library into ~100 additional languages for dissemination through pathways in four countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Bangladesh). These included YouTube ad-pushes, Nigerian television, and a Kenyan WhatsApp network,¹¹ with the video content ultimately reaching ~10 million viewers and estimated preliminary adoption rates of the video's contents around 40-60%, approximately 4-5 million people. Our case study here focuses exclusively on the WhatsApp network in Kenya.

3.2.1 *Learning as Empowerment*

The availability of discussion spaces around agricultural food security and resilience in the Kenyan WhatsApp network provided increases in network participants' knowledge and sensitivity around discerning, selecting,

videos combined (1) generic animated imagery, (2) audio-translation of information placed in recipients' most comfortably spoken local dialects, and (3) technologically small formats sharable on video-enabled mobile phones; they have resulted in high solution adoption, knowledge retention, and learning gains (compared to traditional forms of extension education) regardless of participant age, gender, educational or technological literacy, and geographic isolation. This empirically validated capacity bears on the present case study simply as a prerequisite for effective informal education (Bello-Bravo, Abbott, Mocumbe, Mazur et al., 2020; Bello-Bravo, Abbott, Mocumbe, & Pittendrigh, 2020; Medendorp et al., 2022). But SAWBO's broader systems approach also leverages (1) the affordances of multimedia formats, (2) properly configured adult education, (3) a non-authoritarian 'stance' for sharing information as part of informal learning, and (4) an organisationally adaptive, flexible, and resilient learning ecology with feedback (Bello-Bravo & Pittendrigh, 2018; Daré et al., 2014; see Murphy & Fleming, 2006 for Habermas' contribution to adult learning).

- 11 At the time of writing, the Kenyan WhatsApp network has reached all 47 counties in Kenya, with 250+ members disseminating curated and self-selected SAWBO animated educational content to their communities, learning from and forming online and offline relationships with one another, and asking questions, sharing experiences, and sharpening their knowledge and skills. We also acknowledge that WhatsApp, like any other technology, is not immune to criticism. Owned by Meta Platforms, formerly Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2010), many of the concerns, security issues, and social problems associated with that platform were brought over to WhatsApp (Frew, 2022; Udavant, 2021). Although detailed more in subchapter 4.1, here we only note that the use of WhatsApp was motivated by the practical need to widely disseminate and allow sharing of educational material for the project; nothing else in Kenya (and many African contexts) better serves those practical needs. Here is a case of not making the better an enemy of the good; we would enthusiastically advocate for freely available access to (digital) information for all people that was neither beholden to ad-driven values nor privacy violations, especially in Africa, where the costs of data plans or digital access are the highest in the world by percentage of income (Monks, 2019).

and creating new knowledge from available and shared knowledge. As an example of *empowerment*—i.e., “an expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices, in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437)—this involves that aesthetic sharpening of one’s sensibilities though *Bildung* toward becoming able to discern otherwise invisible or blocked possibilities. One network participant—who originally failed to support her family and food resilience by taking up farming—joined the WhatsApp network, developed better farming knowledge from network peers and available videos, and now successfully practices agriculture. She also continues to learn in the network and now shares agricultural videos with others online and offline. “I hope to be able to start farming commercially, especially when it comes to my vegetables”, she says (Scientific Animations Without Borders, 2020), indicating not only hope for a better life but also a transformative self-realisation of her identity as a larger-scale farmer previously thought impossible.

3.2.2 *Learning as Leadership and Knowledge Management*

The WhatsApp group’s knowledge manager (defined below) is a native Kenyan and founder of Kataru Concepts, a “content development, management and dissemination entity” in Kenya (Kataru Concepts, 2022, para. 1). Working as SAWBO’s representative, his tasks included (1) leading and moderating the network (including inviting, removing, and mediating conflicts between members), (2) selecting and disseminating animations (including those later selected or suggested by members for sharing), (3) visiting and teaching farmers offline, (4) responding to questions, suggestions, and mediating forum conversations, (5) producing blogs documenting processes, and (5) training new WhatsApp knowledge manager-representatives (to date, in Malawi, Lesotho, and Liberia).

A knowledge manager generally combines the roles of *librarian* (e.g., an information archivist and the accompanying digital technical competencies), *publicist* (e.g., an information dissemination specialist and its accompanying strategic and innovating decision-making), and—especially in the present case—*leader* (not only taking point and responsibility for outcomes but also inspiring and modelling interactions within the group) (Bedford, 2013; Roknuzzaman & Umemoto, 2008). This leadership role largely resembles the role of a group or forum moderator (Perry et al., 2022; Squirrell, 2019), where a moderator aims at “mediating trust and establishing a paradigm for constructive discourse”, which nevertheless meets “unpredictable and unforeseen”, often unproductive and trolling, user responses from members (Squirrell, 2019, p. 1910).

Importantly, at the intersection of leadership and publicist, the case study's knowledge manager made decisions about what educational information to publicize (both member-suggested and not), moderated information flows and content (including initiating, amplifying, closing, or deleting threads), and implemented or declined to implement information requests and suggestions by members. Constraints on the dynamics of these 'non-democratic' processes (consistent with online forum moderation) are discussed in §4.1 below. Here, we note that while the knowledge manager had very few constraints on managing the network outside of the criterion of helping the project toward SAWBO-*RAPID*'s goals, we also witnessed members in the network taking initiative and a 'horizontal' sharing of power by and with the knowledge manager. While we acknowledge this observation of an emergent dynamic is anecdotal, at least one study echoes how public visibility of institutional information in a WhatsApp network can mediate how leadership conducts itself (Chesoli et al., 2020); that is, the *public* visibility of the network interactions generated a sense of leadership accountability resembling the 'horizontal' power-sharing we witnessed. Future research could further explore this phenomenon, but the development is already intriguing, especially as such spontaneous and unmediated power-sharing, initiative-taking, and responsibility is unusual in online hierarchies.

3.2.3 *Learning in the Community*

Educational video content initially focused on COVID-19 mitigation videos and a simple, 8-step method for improved postharvest bean storage that had been previously focus-grouped, prototyped, proved in concept, practiced by focus group members, and then taught to 314 farmers in northern Mozambique using a SAWBO-produced video depicting the 8-step protocol (Mocumbe, 2016). A follow-up two years later measured 93% knowledge retention and an 89% solution-adoption rate of the improved bean storage method among the original farmers (Bello-Bravo, Abbott, Mocumbe, Mazur, et al., 2020), and two significant deviations from the 8-step protocol that nevertheless resulted in no losses of stored beans (Bello-Bravo, Abbott, Mocumbe, & Pittendrigh, 2020). This is one of the SAWBO-*RAPID* videos estimated to have been content-adopted by 4+ million (40-60% of the) people who viewed the disseminated video.

This emphasis on outcomes is solely to underscore that it met the educational goal to empower adult learners towards better survival, thus movement toward the good life. Part of the success of these efforts stems from Mocumbe's (2016) front-end work. In that first phase, farmers collectively pinpointed an issue critically affecting their livelihoods and col-

laborated with global experts to identify a cost-effective solution. This solution aimed at enhancing food security and resilience while facilitating easy information re-sharing. The out-come's success is evident in the empowerment of network participant learning, as farmers adopted or adapted the postharvest loss information (Bello-Bravo, 2022, pp. 29–30). Indirectly, farmers further enriched their knowledge by exploring other videos shared online or in the WhatsApp network. These videos reflected content that farmers deemed relevant to their own or their communities' needs (Kataru, 2022).

3.2.4 Case Summary

The processes described in this case study—from an initial exploration of farmer problems to a widespread dissemination of a solution through a WhatsApp network in Kenya—demonstrates informal education's capacity to contribute directly to a greater assurance of survival as improved food security and resilience. However, the capacity of this collaborative learning to sharpen network members' ability to discern new solutions and self-realise possibilities of personhood previously blocked also contributes directly to empowerment, and thus aligns with Heydorn's *Bildung*, which “places its trust in the unlimited empowerment of humankind” (page 28 in this anthology).

This suggests that *Bildung* affords both a decolonising shedding of the false consciousness imposed by education and empowering “expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices, in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437), even when revolutionary pathways in the classical sense are blocked. As an image of learning to learn in a new way, these findings redirect insights on Heydorn's “Survival Through *Bildung*” from our African scene back as insights for non-African scenes as well—a redirection that echoes the insistence that non-indigenous peoples can learn much from still-extant indigenous lifeways (Kimmerer, 2013; TED, 2012; Waller & Reo, 2018).

Accordingly, the following discussion explores three key themes from our analysis of the case study: the (1) *spaces* afforded by a virtual WhatsApp network for exploring changes of behaviour and individuated identity, (2) *processes* of knowledge-building communities of practice that supported such explorations and changes, and (3) the *intersection* of those spaces and processes toward an arguably African *Bildung*, as an adaptation of Heydorn's framing of *Bildung* generally. The most concrete result of those interacting elements is an empowerment of WhatsApp network participants by which they opened pathways to better lives for themselves: as increased food sovereignty, more leisure time and wellbeing, increased hope for the future, and transformations of previously blocked or limited

human identity—from a failed smallholder to a potentially successful commercial farmer. These examples of African Bildung for better life are not just ‘good’ for Africans but potentially for our own conditions that we find ourselves in as well.

4 Discussion

4.1 The Space of WhatsApp Groups

COVID-19 skyrocketed the use of digital ICTs for connecting people, organisations, and work under various curfews and movement restrictions. While Zoom moved from a niche platform to a regular feature for millions of people in the United States, WhatsApp was already a leading App for digital messaging globally, especially in Africa (Ajene, 2020). In 2021, new downloads of WhatsApp (395 million) were second only to Facebook (416 million), with Telegram (329 million) also expanding tremendously (Koetsier, 2021).

The features of a digital technology (e.g., text messaging, face-time, video or picture sharing, and other features) will initially influence its intended use (Dixon et al., 2014; Rojas-Alfaro & Chen, 2019). However, people can then adapt it to meet a broader variety of situations, which will impact how readily that technology may be taken up or diffused (Bello-Bravo, Abbott, Mocumbe, & Pittendrigh, 2020). For informal learning—as one component of Bildung (Sørensen, 2015)—people’s ability to *adapt* digital technologies to learning tasks they wish to accomplish can significantly increase the reach, impact, and even the empowerment achieved by informal education efforts. Although Sutikno et al. (2016) compared WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram to see which App was the “best” instant messaging platform, technology users do not necessarily limit themselves to only one (Ajene, 2020; Ling & Lai, 2016). More precisely, Ajene (2020) points out:

Unlike in the West where it’s common to use a mix of multiple social platforms, *e.g., Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, and SMS*, for large swathes of the population in sub-Saharan Africa (where internet connections are less reliable and more dear) WhatsApp is the *de facto* and sole social media/communications tool.

For this chapter, we acknowledge that WhatsApp was the most technologically feasible App in Africa for our case study (Ajene, 2020). Part of this is due to the App’s small data-use footprint; compared to Europe, digital access costs in Africa are among the world’s highest by percentage

of income (Monks, 2019). Accordingly, the affordability, adaptability, familiarity, and ease of use made WhatsApp a feasible channel for cost-effectively and dramatically up-scaling the reach and user access to educational information.

Like many platforms, WhatsApp affords the creation of moderated groups comprised of invited members, who can then invite others (Matassi et al., 2019). While moderator leadership is important—here including traditions rooted in and inflecting through modern iterations of African chieftaincy (Matsumoto, 2021; Mawuko-Yevugah & Attipoe, 2021; Prempeh, 2022)—other Kenya-specific factors contributed to the group's success. For example, Kenyans have a documented tendency for higher technological adoption compared to other African countries (Arnon, 1981; Lowe, 1986). Farmer et al. (2016) highlight young Kenyans' embrace of WhatsApp, and Ajene (2020) notes that Kenya is the only African country where downloads of "both TikTok and TikTok Lite appear in the top 20. And along with Viusasa, Vskit, and Showmax, Kenya has the most video-oriented apps in the top 20". Kenya is also in the lowest third of African countries for Internet access costs (Benhaddou, 2021), making participation more possible on average than most countries with higher access costs.

Beyond these technological elements, online leadership strategies play a critical role (Correa et al., 2010; Huffaker, 2010; Zhu et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, "online leaders influence others through high communication activity, credibility, network centrality, and the use of affective, assertive, and linguistic diversity in their online messages" (Huffaker, 2010, p. 593). Notwithstanding recent European and global politics, Big Man politicking often runs afoul of the bourgeois insistence on civility (Eagleton, 2016), which unreasonably problematizes African leadership traditions informed by chieftaincy (Capps, 2016; Ray & van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1996). Without idealising these traditions, their structures, or their overly entangled distortions due to coloniality (Matsumoto, 2021; Mawuko-Yevugah & Attipoe, 2021; Prempeh, 2022), we can justly observe that all structures of power distribute advantages and disadvantages to its inhabitants (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Foucault, 1977; Rawls, 1971), which in turn elicit culturally cooperative, resistant, compliant, and subversive behaviours. As part of African chieftaincy, a chief's speaking authority provides culturally specific rights and responsibilities for imparting information and framing the 'state of knowledge' prevailing within a space in both dictatorial and productive forms. As Asante and Blewushie (2021) note,

Despite the entrenchment of constitutional rule and the expansion of state powers, the chieftaincy institution continues to enjoy enormous support from the populace. Chieftaincy embodies the

preservation of culture, traditions, customs and values of the African people, while also representing the early forms of societal organization and governance. (p. 623)

As everywhere, whether people accept or reject a leader's speech will have its own local forms of naïve or informed trust and justified or spurious scepticism (Akrivoulis, 2017). Whatever the methods used by this case study's knowledge manager to establish, maintain, finesse, and share their credibility and authority, those techniques were already largely familiar to network members culturally versed in those settings. This will include strategies for amplifying and mediating gestures of control over the flow of information as well.¹²

In such settings, communities of practice (discussed in §4.2 below) become a conceptual centrepiece for movement towards the good life. However, because communities of practice can be framed as non-formal educational projects themselves (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002), this again brings to the foreground the role of the leader or chieftain as a knowledge disseminator, educator, and intellectual in the best sense (Suttner, 2005). Indeed, researchers have framed knowledge-building capacities under joint responsibility as a critical educational component (Lai & Campbell, 2018; Scardamalia, 2002). Besides making learners active and group-oriented contributors to the process, rather than passive or only individual ones (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Slotta et al., 2013), this specifically fosters *epistemic agency* and *sustained knowledge improvement*; hence, "Learners take individual and collective charge of their knowledge-building journey and are responsible for setting plans, planning goals, and evaluating their progress in knowledge creation" (Bryan-Silva, 2022, p. 29). While these knowledge-building components are not always adequately operationalized under formal or informal learning, communities of practice, group epistemic agency, responsibility, and intellectual leadership all contribute to "the advancement of the human condition" (Bryan-Silva, 2022, p. 28). This seems resonant with the goal of *Bildung* towards the good life.

Such knowledge-building in communities of practice depends on a heterogeneity of practices (Rosebery et al., 2010; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010) drawn from both the nonhuman and human world (Bryan-Silva, 2022, p. 39). It is precisely the diverse *personal* expressions of a collective

12 If this seems a tortured apologetics for authoritarian or 'non-democratic' processes in the networks' dynamics, we would want to add how difficult it can be for those who live "where we find ourselves" to take at face value the genuine sense of responsibility and obligation to care that is expressed at times by village chiefs towards those they are charged with leading (Bello-Bravo & Ainoa-Mensa, 2019).

norm that afford such heterogeneity, which Jung (1921) insisted resulted in healthier communities. The startling ‘horizontality’ of power-sharing and initiative-taking in the Kenyan WhatsApp network noted above may reflect this diversity. More broadly, these individuating knowledge-building components of epistemic agency and sustained knowledge improvement invite learners to “articulate what is of importance to their immediate local lives and build upon ideas that may offer useful solutions to their communities” (Bryan-Silva, 2022, p. 30). This again seems resonant with Heydorn’s sense of *Bildung*.

4.2 The Processes of Knowledge-Building Communities of Practice

The learning ecology of the Kenyan WhatsApp network afforded members (1) direct or observed modelling around browsing available educational videos and (2) opportunities to choose videos they recognised as relevant to issues they wanted to address. This opportunity to *learn to learn* in a new way is not a solitary practice but a concerted and uniquely individuated one shared with others through an on-going *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice involve people not simply interacting but having similar motivations around exploring a practice, sharing insights about it, and making such learning of learning habitual. In this way, communities of practice are social structures that support this exploration and habituation (Abiodun et al., 2020; Muwanga-Zake & Herselman, 2017; Pacholek et al., 2021).

The case study’s WhatsApp network exhibits these qualities in its operations when members interacted virtually to learn, practice, share, and support one another’s learning for more reliable food sourcing. Per Lave and Wenger (1991), such distribution of best-practices information benefits the community, as an entity with a destiny distinct from its inhabitants, while supporting a better good life for people as locally understood. As agricultural practices improved, this meant greater food security, resilience, and even sovereignty.

But community of practice members also discussed their activities’ meaning in the WhatsApp and created new identities through reciprocal and interrelated forms of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such learning opens access to the insider information, knowledge, and skills needed to transform into a *practitioner* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This change of identity explicitly involves knowledge-building’s epistemic agency and sustained idea improvement (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006), which itself aims to improve the human condition and thus the character and possibilities for the good life.

Although knowledge-building is often technologically mediated, Bryan-Silva (2022) reminds us that ‘technology’ includes analogue and social forms as well, not only electronic or digital ones. Indeed, communities of practice are more often an offline social technology, but COVID-19 led to the proliferation of online groups due to shelter-in-place and movement restrictions. Like offline communities of practice, virtual ones enable problem-solving, information sharing, and mutual guidance between members. Intersections between this case study’s WhatsApp network and a virtual community of practice afford integration of others who would have otherwise been overlooked (Abiodun et al., 2020). For this reason, Macharia et al. (2021) advocate for designated leaders and use-guidelines that keep participants on track and communicating messages that advance the group’s objectives.

4.3 The Edge of Self-Realisation

The productiveness and creativity of activity seen in the interaction of the *spaces* of a WhatsApp network and the *processes* of a virtual community of practice illustrate permaculture’s notion of an ‘edge’ (Mollison, 1991). ‘Edges’ arise dynamically from overlapping domains—e.g., a shore between the land and the sea, an estuary where fresh- and saltwater mingle, a porch where an interior private world interacts with the public outside world, and even the temporal edge of adolescence with its overlapping domains of childhood and adulthood. Edges are literal, not metaphorical, zones of maximal creativity (LeVasseur, 2014) that generate unpredictable new forms of life, objects, space, behaviour, experiences, and identities not reducible or explicable in terms of the intersecting domains taken separately (Bello-Bravo, 2020; LeVasseur, 2014). This capacity for creating unanticipated new forms of behaviour, interaction, and identity echoes the potential of Bildung to open pathways to possibilities otherwise blocked or unrecognisable under current conditions.

By virtualising offline edges—where people would otherwise have to interact face-to-face in a concrete and physical social presence—online potentials open up additional possibilities for interaction and individuation not possible or otherwise much more difficult to realise offline. This is not only that people can choose to self-represent themselves differently online but also the opportunity to *not* be perceived by others in typically stigmatising ways; for example, women in a WhatsApp network might verbally participate more in the absence of real or perceived constraints imposed by gender roles to remain silent. For people who are stigmatised, marginalised, or otherwise discouraged from participating, virtual spaces can bypass social and educationally blocked barriers to participation. But they

can also afford a realisation of otherwise impossible or utopian realities, where a falsely imposed consciousness of psychologically traumatic fragmentations of self are negated; where the “apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one’s nature” (Jung, 1934, p. 204) is shown as possible after all. For people seeking to sever the disadvantageous relationship of stigmatisation due to race, gender, age, tribe, accent, ability, health, or other publicly visible traits, digital settings can become sites where Heydorn’s decolonisation and empowerment through *Bildung* are realisable.

Importantly, attempts to exactly align online and offline presentations of self are always precluded and mediated by the digital interface’s interposition. As such, virtual spaces are inherently sites of identity-play with others whether acknowledged or not. In them, identity does not have to operate as a piece of property, imposed at the expense of all others in the universe, but can become multiple pieces composed in the public sphere as performances of an individuated personal expression of a collective norm made with relatively greater freedom of choice.¹³ Thus, when Lave and Wenger (1991) describe communities of practice as opportunities for people to become *practitioners*, they describe not only learning and empowerment but also a change of identity potentially impossible before.¹⁴ Future research should explore the contribution of these individuating effects on *Bildung*, especially around shedding the false consciousness of stigmatising, hegemonic social norms including, but not limited to, age, gender, appearance, and accent imposed by acculturation.

13 This does not mean that people never try to maintain a consistent self-identity or reputation online or always agree to ‘play’ with who they present as online (Attrill-Smith, 2018). Nevertheless, the potential anonymity and potential for anonymity online remain available for those who say, “I choose this”.

14 The unexpected ‘horizontal’ of power-sharing and initiative-taking observed in this case study may be explicable as an instance of an ‘edge’—a new form of leadership emergent through interactions of virtual community of practice processes with a WhatsApp network space. Under Ubuntu’s recognition of “I am because others are”, power-sharing does not necessarily threaten a dilution of the leader’s prestige but can be an enlargement of it, as a reflection of the leader, accompanied by an obligation for the one taking initiative not to make the boss look bad. But Foucault (1977) also underscores that all regimes of management, power, and control afford certain de-grees and types of permitted ‘illegalities’ against them. Whether the ‘horizontal’ power-taking was allowed, disallowed, strategically welcomed, or merely suffered is indeterminate at present. Equally, it is qualitatively unclear whether the resultant power dynamics had a consensus approval or disapproval among network members. Indubitably, the beneficial traits of virtual settings also afford the harmful traits of incivility, bullying, humiliation, and even violence unlikely dared face-to-face. But we are not concerned here with centring how old, familiar abuses can find new ways to reproduce themselves virtually. Rather, we highlight the social affordances of potentially new forms of *Bildung*, as possibilities for the self-realizations of personhoods better aligned with discovering or creating pathways toward the good life.

4.4 The Transhuman and the Traditional

The foregoing illustrates how occupying a virtual space always unavoidably doubles a person through the simultaneity of their online self and their self on the digital interface through which it appears. This opens an exploration of possible self-realisations of online personhood not limited only to counter-hegemonic or subversive social alternatives along the conventional axes of sex, gender, sexuality, accent, tribe, age, and appearance but even unconventional and/or combinations of impossible axes, e.g., imaginary, fictional, transhuman, nonhuman, multiple, non-stable, fluid, or even non-existent forms of personhoods, whatever that might mean.¹⁵

Paralleling this profusion of seemingly futuristic and transhuman alternatives online, the situation also echoes the much older traditional precedent of indigenous traditions recognising a person's complementary non-human membership in a totem-like or similar social structure. This recognition reflects a profound insight that being human-only is not enough; thus, the Wolof proverb asserts, “*nit nitay garabam*” [the remedy for humans is to become (to manifest as) humans] (Diagne & Herman, 2022). Stated more sharply, a human existence that fails to recognise a need for a human and more-than-human hybridity of identity imposes a dehumanising diminution on existence; hence again Heydorn's remarks, “humankind cannot bear a dehumanised survival” (page 33 in this anthology).¹⁶ Such hybridity of the nonhuman and the human signals a counterfactual to the Enlightenment's severance of humanity from nature. Indeed, while the ‘natural’ itself is always already ‘cultural’, the Enlightenment's overenthusiasm for holding nature apart from, rather than a part of, humankind has arguably brought all life to the brink of a climate situation that precludes everything

15 Against criticism that such possibilities are too absurd to consider, we must stress that women's opportunities online to act contrary to oppressively enforced gender norms are already one of these ‘absurdities’ in many cultural spaces. Women in and beyond Africa can often feel disempowered, unwelcome, or prohibited outright from participating; virtual settings can circumvent such prohibitions (Qushua, 2020). Moreover, realising that the apparently impossible is actually possible is central to overcoming trauma, is the very essence of empowerment, and thus proves central to a decolonising Bildung toward a better life.

16 Interestingly, a documented religious/cultural tolerance and an embrace of differences and diversity, including around sexuality, are shared in common between indigenous Senegalese and the online/offline community culture noted earlier (Balonon-Rosen, 2013; Coly, 2019; Muhonja, 2019; Plante et al., 2016). Not coincidentally, both cultures have analogues of totem-like ‘primary groups’ (Griaule, 1949), by which people's awareness of these group memberships elicit a “solidarity that ... encourages a cooperation to create objectives that will benefit the entire community, and discourages, and in some cases nullifies, individualism” (Balonon-Rosen, 2013, p. 13–14).

except the most abominable and dehumanised forms of survival—the worst of all possible worlds.

5 Conclusion

Contrary to the tribalism that President Barack Obama warned against and Hilary Clinton's shameless co-optation of the African village that it takes to raise a child, the originally African recognition that an adequate understanding of the human necessarily requires the nonhuman is where trans-human and indigenous realities can cross paths. In that edge, they collaborate to realise a better world where all life has moral status. This decolonising correction to the Enlightenment's subjugation of nature is not just the starting point for *Bildung* but also a necessity for ensuring a future.

Following Heydorn's call for the necessity of a revolution in work and a more humanised economics—"the revolutionization of human labour thus becomes the first condition" (page 27 in this anthology) to be achieved while "cultural development requires economic development as a precondition: without simultaneous cultural development, the economic content remains separate from its human content" (page 27 in this anthology)—these facts not only look different when viewed through an individuated rather than an individualistic or collectivist framework but are also already being realised in more individuated settings, including WhatsApp groups in Kenya and an online/offline community. Such individuating settings exhibit better-realised member interactions around power-sharing and a greater sense of positive community in which personal expressions of a collective norm are made with greater freedom of choice. These situations afford pathways to the good life alternative to the blocked conditions we often find ourselves in. They reintroduce the possibility of a genuinely decolonising *Bildung* in Heydorn's even utopian sense. This makes visible a possible realisation of personhoods currently hidden or foreclosed by present conditions—hence the insight of the Wolf proverb, that the remedy of the human is to become more human.

Pointing to the future, this also links back to the millennia of indigenous human sociability that more capaciously acknowledged and extended moral status to the more-than-human and the nonhuman. As knowledge-building communities of practice aimed at the betterment of the human condition and a good life, these movements afford potentially revolutionary alternatives to where we find ourselves, with the classical pathways to revolution otherwise blocked.

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List of Authors

JULIA BELLO-BRAVO is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication at Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana, USA) and a co-founder and co-director of Scientific Animations Without Borders (SAWBO). Her research interests lie at the intersection of effective communication, learning, and systems research for making scientifically grounded and culturally competent innovation-solutions accessible to the demographics most in need of them. Practically, this has involved more than a decade researching, developing, and deploying informal educational and communication systems that surmount or solve the “last-mile” problem for securing solution-adoption especially for and by the world’s poor, its 800 million low- or non-literate learners, and people (including indigenous people and women) who are marginalized, overlooked, or blocked from participating in the social goods of those solutions. At its core, this work is inspired by insights arising from personal, anecdotal, and formal investigations into the experiences of migration that disclose themes around the theory and practice of “last-mile” research and efforts not usually emphasized or taken into account. Above all, these themes include the influence of identity and knowledge-practices (especially indigenous) on solution adoption or buy-in among intended recipients of a solution-innovation.

NORM FRIESEN is Professor in the College of Education, Boise State University. Dr. Friesen has written over 100 articles in journals ranging from *C-Theory* to AERA’s *Educational Researcher* and has published 10 books. Dr. Friesen translated Klaus Mollenhauer’s *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing* (Routledge, 2014) and authored *The Textbook and the Lecture: Education in the Age of new Media* (Johns Hopkins). Dr. Friesen is active in philosophy of education, qualitative research and educational technology.

ANA INÉS HERAS is a Principal Researcher in the National Scientific Research Council of Argentina (CONICET) and also a University Professor at the National University of San Martín. She also acts as President at the Instituto para la Inclusión Social y el Desarrollo Humano (an organization devoted to academic and community teaching and research) and is a Board Member of the International Institute of Community Economies. She publishes regularly in English

and Spanish in international journals, and also has published book chapters and books. She has specialized in the study of learning processes in cooperative and social-solidarian organizations from a combined perspective in interactional sociolinguistics and ethnography.

HELGE KMINER has studied Education (diploma – equivalent to a master's degree) and the subjects Philosophy, Ethics and Politics and Economics for the state examination for the teaching profession at grammar schools. From October 2013 to March 2024, he was a research assistant at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main's Department of Education. In his dissertation, he reconstructed philosophy teaching at secondary schools. Since his dissertation, his work and research focus has been on Education for Sustainable Development. He also works on reconstructive school and classroom research, Professionalisation and Didactics of Philosophy. Since April 2024, he is a Senior Scientist at University Klagenfurt.

ANNE NAMATSI LUTOMIA is an interdisciplinary postdoctoral researcher in the Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication and Entomology departments at Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana, USA). She holds a doctorate in Human Resource Development with two minors in gender studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation examined successes and challenges in north-south (US/Benin) scientific collaboration. Her current research interests encompass scientific international collaboration (including north-south collaborative projects), international development projects, project management, organizational leadership, and resilience. Her focus also extends to adult learning, specifically virtual communities of practice, the design of learning tools, curriculum activities, technologies, and the creation of new opportunities for utilizing multimodal technology. Furthermore, her research pertains to agriculture and the Sustainable Development Goals. She has authored or co-authored several journal articles, book chapters, and an in-print book *Gender, Digitalization, and Resilience in International Development: Failing Forward*.

FERNANDO MURILLO is Director of Teacher Education at Universidad Autónoma de Chile. He is also General Secretariat at Sociedad Chilena de Historia y Geografía, and a Member of Division 39 (Psychoanalysis) at the American Psychological Association. Dr. Murillo is author of *A Lacanian Theory of Curriculum in Higher Education: The Unfinished Symptom*, and translator of Wilhelm von Humboldt's

Theory of Bildung into Spanish (Universidad de Chile). Dr. Murillo's current work focuses on educational theory from the perspectives of phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

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The central reference point of the volume is Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's essay „Survival Through Education - Outline of a prospect“ (1974), which was translated into English and subsequently made available to a broad public for the first time. Despite the time gap of almost 50 years, Heydorn's text is fascinating, because the survival of humanity – at least a qualitatively substantial survival of humanity – seems extremely questionable today. Researchers with different theoretical perspectives question the text on its contemporary content and put their interpretations up for discussion.

The editor:

Dr. Helge Kminek works at the Department of Education at Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany.

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