

‘Beyond the Self’ as a Goal of Education: Heidegger’s Philosophy and Education in the West and in Japan

NOBUHIKO ITANI

Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University

The influence of Heidegger’s philosophy on education cannot be ignored either in the West or in Japan. This presentation is to try to compare some previous studies of ontological education or educational theories based on Heidegger’s ontology in several countries and to reveal the common theme among them. On the basis of Heidegger’s philosophy, ontological education tries to overcome the anthropocentric view of the world and insists that we should be open to the Being by getting rid of self-centered intentions. According to Paul Standish, this is the task of going ‘beyond the self’. However, ontological education which regards the concept of ‘beyond the self’ as its own goal tends to bring a naive ethical evaluation into the ontological perspective, and to veil the danger of such an evaluation in ontological thought, the danger which has been shown in Heidegger’s participation in National Socialism.

The influence of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy on education cannot be ignored either in the West or in Japan. The main purpose of this presentation is to compare some previous studies of ontological education or educational theories based on Heidegger’s ontology in several countries and reveal a common theme among them. Since there has been extensive research that refers to Heidegger’s thought, it is impossible here to explain all of them. There are also many studies which interpret Heidegger’s philosophy as a kind of anthropology. Some of them merely borrow Heidegger’s concepts, and others only cite a few parts of his works. They seldom refer to the ontological aspect of Heidegger’s thought. Such studies are not explored in this presentation.

I. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF ONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

This section presents a survey of some previous studies of ontological education.

Nihilism as Oblivion of the Being (S. Wada, Japan)

According to Heidegger, modern nihilism means our oblivion of the Being itself, which results in a widespread tendency to evaluate all entities in terms of their utility.

People in modern society are inclined to regard the whole world as full of useful or useless instruments for human life. We rarely respect things as they are (Heidegger 1996-1997). On the basis of this argument, Japanese student Shuji Wada asserts that it is an urgent task of post-war education to overcome the nihilism which brings about such severe human alienation. He insists that we must change our conventional way of thinking which depends on a subject-object dichotomy in modern science, and reflect the Being itself (Wada 1959).

Selflessness against Utilization in Education (Th. Ballauff, Germany)

German philosopher of education Theodor Ballauff has stated that Heidegger's argument about nihilism is also applicable to the field of education. The traditional theory of education tends to regard the whole world as a storehouse of valuable materials for human development. Whole surroundings and all experiences of children are also considered to be good teaching materials. Against this tendency, Ballauff insists that we must get rid of such an anthropocentric idea of human development and acquire selflessness in the thought of the Being itself. He asserts that we can deal with the world sincerely only when we lose ourselves and are opened to the Being (Ballauff 1962).

Dignity of the Being in Human Resource Factory (K. Kato, Japan)

In his later work, *Die Frage nach der Technik (The Question Concerning Technology)*, Heidegger characterizes the essence of modern technology as *Ge-stell* (enframing): gathering for construction (Heidegger 2000). Things are gathered and stocked as useful materials for endless construction. Moreover, we ourselves are also expected to be efficient human resources for social development. Japanese philosopher Kiyoshi Kato insists that modern education is also involved in technology and is ready to take part in the excessive materialization of the world. Schools tend to manufacture pupils into stocks of efficient workers who are better able to gain more benefit from the world. Kato asserts that we human beings cannot be dignified through utilitarian evaluation but only through the Being itself. He concludes that each of us must be cared for and responded to as a precious being, and shine within inestimable dignity of the Being (Kato 1983).

Modern Technology or Technique of the Craftsman (P. Standish, U.K.)

Paul Standish argues that the utilitarian character of modern education is ingrained most deeply in further education. As the result of this utilitarianism in technical or vocational education, what is taught has been arranged as information, those who teach have become staff resources, and those who are taught have been targeted and identified by marketing. To overcome the commercialism in further education, Standish proposes the recovery of the essence of craft, referring specifically to Heidegger's interpretation of Greek word 'techne', which is the origin of 'technology'. He points out the poietic (creative) character of technique of the craftsman, and insists that we must restore answerability for the Being of materials to technology that is embodied in the craftsman's work (Standish 1997).

Escape from Plato's Cave as a Materialized World (I. Thomson, U.S.A.)

Heidegger himself also discusses education, especially pointing out the problem of serious division of academic fields in higher education (Heidegger 1976). On the basis of Heidegger's argument, American philosopher Iain Thomson calls the place of higher education today '*uni-versity-in-name-only*'. The central problem here is again the utilization and materialization in education. Thomson asserts that all disciplines in university today present themselves in terms of their instrumental use-value, and that students also regard higher education as ways and means to receive more future income. He refers to Plato's allegory of the cave to assert that we must be liberated from the cave as from a materialized world that reflects our own utilitarian way of thinking. According to Thomson, the escape from the cave means openness to the Being itself. He insists that we must learn to approach all entities with care, humility, patience, gratitude, and even awe in the light of the Being (Thomson 2005).

II. BEYOND EDUCATION AS UTILIZATION

Now we can presume that a common theme among previous studies of ontological education is deconstruction of education as utilization. Furthermore, previous studies share the concept of openness to the Being itself as the purpose or ideal of education, which they believe can counter utilitarianism in education. They all insist that we become able to deal with the world sincerely only when we are opened to the Being itself by getting rid of the modern concept of egoistic self. Therefore, borrowing the title of the book written by Standish in 1992, we can sum up the main concern of previous ontological education with the concept of going '*beyond the self*' (Standish 1992).

Several studies of ontological education began in the middle of the twentieth century in Germany and in Japan. They already regarded the concept of openness to the Being as the highest goal of education. They gradually declined, however, in the late twentieth century partly because of their mysticism and obscurity of the concept of the Being. Apparently, they were replaced by Bollnow's theory of education, which interpreted Heidegger's philosophy as existential philosophy and applied it to the field of education. Indeed, Bollnow's theory was also based on Heidegger's philosophy, but he completely denied the possibility of ontology. He insisted that Heidegger's philosophy had ignored the importance of our everyday life involved in the materialized world (Bollnow 1955).

Hence, it is surprising to see a revival of ontological education recently in English-speaking countries, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. Realistically, however, new studies of ontological education seem to do nothing but repeat the same arguments of the old ones. They rarely, if ever, refer to studies completed in Germany or in Japan. The concept of openness to the Being itself has remained as the supreme ideal of human life. Yet they have their own significance, of course, for they show the necessity of ontological way of thinking today in the twenty-first century. The problem of education as utilization has remained unsolved. In point of fact, it is now rapidly becoming increasingly serious and difficult to address.

III. LIMITS OF PREVIOUS ONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The previous theories of ontological education, whether the former or the latter, however, only slightly recognize their own serious limits. They cannot explain what the experience of openness to the Being demands of people without replacing the contents of the ontological experience with other concepts such as selflessness, responsibility, patience, and humility. The experience of being open to the Being is itself always left mystic and ambiguous. The students of ontological education often emphasize the specialty of the ontological experience, but they seldom describe what the quest for the Being in Heidegger means. Apparently, they do not know what to do with the concept of the Being itself in Heidegger, although they want to adopt Heidegger's criticism about the materialized world.

What is the problem? The previous studies of ontological education fail to appreciate the quest for the Being in Heidegger, as disclosed in the fact that they still use the *Be-verb* witlessly even in the ontological perspective. The most serious problem here is that they cannot avoid bringing a naive ethical evaluation into ontological perspective, as long as they replace the explanation of ontological experience with some idealized concepts described above. The danger of ethical implication in ontology has been already revealed by Theodor Adorno. He argues that people have fanatically given incendiary meanings to the jargon of authenticity, which is introduced by Heidegger as the sign of those who have openness to the Being. Actually, agitation through the ethical evaluation of authenticity led people to National Socialism (Adorno 1964).

The witlessly idealized concepts of selflessness, responsibility, patience, and humility can be readily adopted for general mobilization to totalitarianism. These ideals can implant the duty into the minds of people to bend their knees before something beyond the self such as the Being, the God, the Race, the Nation, or the Leader. The concept of going beyond the self can contribute to materializing people through slogans of self-sacrifice or self-devotion. Indeed it does not immediately mean that previous ontological education is absolutely dreadful totalitarianism, but that we can never expect that the ethical ideals of previous ontological education alone are able to fill the role of the antitheses of modern utilitarianism, as long as the essence of the ontological thinking remains disregarded. Bringing such an ethical perspective into ontology, the previous studies of ontological education are themselves entwined by the utilitarian ideology. They materialize the ontological experience as ways and means to get a good personality, which is to be evaluated in the well-worn perspective of the ethics. In fact, therefore, the previous students of ontological education have never forgotten our everyday life. Rather ontological education itself is still arrested in the materialized world.

IV. EDUCATION BEFORE/AFTER ETHICS

Hence, even if the criticism related to education as utilization has great importance for our society today, we must reconsider the possibility of ontological education by returning to its origin. According to Heidegger, the ontological experience is an experience of nothing. The quest for the Being compels us to confront the absolute unfathomableness of the whole world and even of ourselves. Our life loses all importance, as the Being loses its self-evident meanings. No criteria exist that enable us to evaluate the world in terms of its utility. Even ethical evaluation is deprived of its significance (Heidegger 1977). The naive ethics which has been imported by previous

ontological education is therefore strange to the ontological experience. Heidegger completely denies any interpretations of his thought as ethics or morality. Therefore, the new possibility of ontological education must be presented as education which is liberated from such a naive ethical evaluation. We must develop a theory of education before/ after ethics based on ontological thought in order to overcome the tendency of utilization and materialization in previous education. Details of this new possibility of ontological education cannot be discussed here because of serious limitations of time. This presentation simply provides the basis and a beginning point for investigation into the new possibility of ontological education.

REFERENCE

- Adorno, Th. W. (1964) *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp).
- Ballauff, Th. (1962) *Systematische Pädagogik; eine Grundlegung* (Heidelberg, Quelle & Meyer).
- Bollnow, O. F. (1955) *Neue Geborgenheit. Das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus* (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer).
- Heidegger, M. (1976) *Gesamtausgabe, Band9: Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosterman).
- Heidegger, M. (1977) *Gesamtausgabe, Band2: Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosterman).
- Heidegger, M. (1996) *Gesamtausgabe, Band6.1: Nietzsche I* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosterman).
- Heidegger, M. (1997) *Gesamtausgabe, Band6.2: Nietzsche II* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosterman).
- Heidegger, M. (2000) *Gesamtausgabe, Band7: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosterman).
- Kato, K. (1983) *Atarashii Kyōiku Tetsugaku -Sonzai karano Approach- (A New Philosophy of Education -Approach from the Being-)* (Tokyo, Keiso Syobo).
- Standish, P. (1997) Heidegger and the Technology of Further Education, in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol.31-3.
- Standish, P. (1992) *Beyond the Self: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the limits of language* (Brookfield, Avebury).
- Thomson, I. D. (2005) *Heidegger On Ontotheology: Technology And The Politics Of Education* (New York, Cambridge University Press).
- Wada, S. (1959): Nihilism to Shikou no Tenkai -Kyōyūkusekai no Sonzaironteki Kōsatsu heno Josetsu- (Nihilism and a Turn of Thinking -An Introduction to Ontological Consideration Concerning the World of Education-) in: *Kyoto Daigaku Kyōiku Gakubu Kiyō (Kyoto University Research Studies in Education)*, vol.5.

