Heidegger, Ethics and Ontological Education: A Critical Response to Nobuhiko Itani's Paper 'Beyond the Self'

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nobuhiko Itani's paper '"Beyond The Self" as a Goal of Education' (given at a conference held at the Institute of Education, London) marks an attempt to analyse previous theories of what the author calls 'ontological education' and, in so doing, clear the way for a new conception of ontological education that is more attuned to Heidegger's philosophy. During this process Itani makes some strong claims which, in part, derive from his attempt to locate a common ground that links previous Heideggerian contributions to the philosophy of education—he questions the validity of assumptions that make up that common ground. According to Itani such contributions are engaged in the 'deconstruction of education as utility' and 'share the concept of openness to Being itself'. It is not so much that Itani disagrees with these aims, but feels that earlier studies suffer by dint of failing to address their 'naïve ethical evaluations'. For Itani, a true ontological education can only take place before/after ethics.

   This paper represents an attempt to critically respond to Itani's arguments by (1) questioning whether the factors that supposedly link previous studies of ontological education are fairly portrayed; (2) considering whether Itani's attempt to move beyond ethics represents a plausible goal and; (3) discussing the extent to which the term 'ontological education' (a term that is unproblematically employed throughout Itani's paper) is actually all that helpful when considering the contribution that Heidegger's philosophy might play when rethinking current educational theory and practice.

II. FINDING COMMON GROUND

One of Itani's objectives in his paper is to find a commonality that links previous studies of ontological education. He looks at the work of a number of writers and notes that one theme that the authors share is the 'deconstruction of education as utilization' (Itani, 2008). What Itani means by this, is that the respective writers in this field show how the technological understanding of being (diagnosed by Heidegger) manifests itself in education before going on to criticize this tendency. Hubert Dreyfuss provides a useful illustration of what Heidegger's account of the technological understanding of being (in its most 'developed' state) amounts to:

> We don't even seek truth anymore but simply efficiency. For us everything is to be made as flexible as possible so as to be used as efficiently as possible. If I had a Styrofoam cup here, it would be a very good example. A Styrofoam cup is a perfect sort of object, given our understanding of being, namely it keeps hot things hot, and cold things cold, and you can dispose of it when you are done with it. It efficiently and flexibly satisfies are desires. It's utterly different from, say, a Japanese tea teacup, which is delicate, traditional, and socialises people. It doesn't keep the tea hot for long, and probably doesn't satisfy anybody's desires, but that's not important (Dreyfuss, 1987, p. 273).

The writers Itani refers to (Wada, Ballauff, Kato, Standish and Thomson) are therefore critical of how education is treated in terms of 'utility'. Modern educationalists will value efficiency over everything else—who could doubt the superiority of the Styrofoam cup? Who could question the importance of targets in maximising student potential? This explains the treatment of people as 'human resources' and the preoccupation with notions of 'excellence' and 'what works' at the expense of richer possibilities for thinking about what education might be/become. Now, the fact these authors are critical of thinking about education in terms of utility is perhaps clear, yet whether this has anything to do with deconstruction is another matter. In one sense, taking Itani to task over the use of the term 'deconstruction' might seem pedantic. After all, these days, the term is often used simply as a synonym for critique. However, issues pertaining to 'deconstruction' are particularly relevant in the case of Heidegger because (in a sense) he coined the term. Indeed, Heidegger's treatment of the term deconstruction features in his attempt to find the way out of metaphysics. This entails going back to the origin of metaphysics (this origin should not be thought of as an historical moment but a structural possibility). To do this involves 'destruction—a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed (kritischer Abbau) down to the sources from which they were drawn' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 22-3). Here we imagine a gradual distillation of the various ways we have of understanding the world down to some primordial absence. It should be noted that although the technological understanding of being has reached its most intensive manifestation in contemporary times, the 'structures' Heidegger refers to would include the methods of understanding that pertain to various sciences and disciplines including philosophy. We cannot help but employ these structures in the first instance (they are all we have) but eventually such ledges or gripping points will slip from our fingers as other ways of seeing become available to us.

Of course Derrida, whose work is heavily influenced by Heidegger is the philosopher most famously associated with 'deconstruction'. Like Heidegger, Derrida wishes to challenge metaphysical assumptions regarding the philosophy of presence. However, Derrida is suspicious of Heidegger's notion of 'deconstructing down' as this implies the distillation down to a primordial essence that brings metaphysics into being. Derrida cannot follow Heidegger down this path, yet of course this is the path that Heidegger takes in his critique of the 'technological understanding of Being'. For Heidegger, the time of the early Greeks provides a model of the gathering of beings under Being. The technological understanding of Being marks the development of a metaphysics that departed from this primordial space. Whether or not Itani's 'previous authors' adhere to a Heideggerian form of deconstruction is questionable. This

is certainly not the case with Standish whose general output does not conform to discourses of nostalgia pertaining to lost origins. Indeed, as will hopefully become clear when we look at Itani's approach to ethics and ontology, it might appear that what marks previous ontological approaches to ethics is that they do not engage in deconstructive (in the Heideggerian sense) strategies and that this is actually what Itani is critical of. We will develop issues pertaining to metaphysics at a later point in the paper.

Unease with Itani's search for commonality amongst earlier and more recent studies is compounded by his claim that 'previous studies share the concept of openness to the Being itself' (Itani, 2008). Itani does not state this explicitly, but we might take him to mean that for the writers he alludes to, going beyond the self involves an openness to things as they 'are' and that this marks a departure from the egoistic 'self's' attempt to control meaning within the limited structural possibilities of knowledge acquisition. This kind of control is coterminous with the technological understanding of being and must be avoided. Although 'openness' is clearly characteristic of previous studies, it is perhaps questionable as to whether or not the different contributors treat the terms 'openness' and 'Being' in the same way. For example, there is a great deal of difference between the kind of receptiveness to things and suspicion of mastery that Standish describes and the kinds of 'authentic experience' that characterise some of the other approaches described by Itani. Shortly, we shall see how Itani, when writing about ethics and ontology, introduces problems pertaining to authenticity.

III. ETHICS AND ONTOLOGY

A significant part of Itani's analysis focuses on ethical questions. For Itani, previous theories of ontological education suffer from bringing what he calls 'naïve ethical evaluations' into the picture. He argues that writers in the field have apparently replaced 'the contents of the ontological experience with other concepts such as selflessness, responsibility, patience and humility' (Itani, 2008). This assertion raises a few questions. Firstly, what were the 'contents' of the ontological experience prior to their being replaced? Also, it is hard to imagine how such an experience might be thinkable without a commitment to 'selflessness, responsibility, patience and humility'. Indeed, if openness to Being is somehow possible, surely such characteristics are prerequisites for its possibility.

Perhaps we get a clearer picture of Itani's perspective on ethics and ontology when he takes the interesting step of citing Adorno's critique of the 'ethical implication in ontology'. Following Adorno, Itani appears to be suggesting that putting an ethics of openness into ontology leads to submission. The vacuum created by the vague notion of openness to Being creates passivity to something beyond the self and that this could be anything depending on the political arrangements of time and place. For Adorno, Nazism represents an instance of blending ethics into ontology.

Having cited Adorno, it is surprising that Itani chooses not to focus on Heidegger's 'unfortunate' involvement with Nazism. It might therefore be helpful to introduce Tubbs's powerful treatment of this issue in his discussion surrounding the role of the teacher. Indeed, there are some parallels between what Itani is after and Tubbs' argument. Tubbs

straightforwardly asks: How is it that Heidegger ends up being a member of the Nazi party? How does it come about that someone who writes about the necessity of the teacher to contain his own withdrawal goes on to say that: 'knowledge means: to be master of the situation into which we are placed?' (Heidegger in Tubbs, 2005, p. 316)

Tubbs argues that Heidegger grounds 'spirit' or struggle (as regards power) in Nazism. When Tubbs talks about spirit, he is referring to the third partner in the relationship between authority (*Das Man*) and freedom. The third partner is the struggle between these two things. Tubbs argues that Heidegger simply replaces this struggle with 'the mastery of the properly educated will of the German people' (Tubbs, 2005, p. 317). Heidegger maintains that: 'asking questions is always marching ahead, sounding the future' (Heidegger in Tubbs, 2005, p. 317). So it would appear that, in some sense, for Heidegger, the future is already known—we are not open to it. Heidegger argues that education should represent the spiritual will to serve whereby the self is sacrificed for a genuine understanding of Being that is manifested in the destiny of the *Volk* and the National Socialist revolution.

For Tubbs, the relationship between teacher and student is always problematised by the struggle regarding power and freedom. The teacher who teaches for doubt and questioning is not only concerned with the negation of certainty in theory and principle but knows he knows he must bring it about in practice. In this process, the teacher can influence the student but in doing so is, in some sense, no longer the teacher because the teacher cannot remain the same after the work as before it. The work is his education, a work that requires the learning of both teacher and student.

Tubbs maintains that Heidegger's description of the student-teacher relationship differs from this, as it is the teacher who calls the student to self-examination and questioning—to his own Dasein. Heidegger describes how Being withdraws from the question leaving only its trace as 'possibility', and this is the same for the teacher, who withdraws from the truth of his teaching to be present as the trace of its possibility. Tubbs maintains that the withdrawal of the teacher is simply a rhetorical ploy. The teacher withdraws from what is already known in advance. In doing this he denies the student her own work and protects himself from the negative implications of that work. Heidegger says that the difficulty of the teacher is 'to let learn' but really he is talking about the dissemblance of the teacher who is and remains master. Tubbs argues that it is in the risk of the relation to the other, not in the withdrawal from that relation that the truly philosophical teacher represents the truth of that dilemma and opposition that constitute his work. Heidegger does not risk the difficulty and struggles that will not stand being owned by any individual or race.

Philosophy of withdrawal becomes the philosophy of mastery. As mentioned earlier, there are some similarities between what Tubbs and Itani are attempting to do. What Tubbs criticises in Heidegger, Itani criticizes in his followers—namely filling in a space made room for by a philosophy that masquerades as the champion of passivity. Itani argues that bringing ethical weight to ontology can result in the kind of control that characterizes the technological understanding of being—the ontological experience becomes a 'means' for 'getting a good personality, which is to be evaluated in the well-worn perspective of the ethics'. Here, Itani appears to be critical of the aforementioned championing of 'authenticity'. However, it is open to question as to whether or not Heidegger's account of authenticity is at odds with the use that

his followers in education have made of it (Itani would seem to think that it is) and whether it is so detached from moral issues. Authenticity involves the recognition that what we do has no basis in some essential reality—existence precedes essence. Our sense that there is no grounding to how things are produces anxiety and we can either flee back to the safety of conformity or hold on to that anxiety. As Dreyfuss puts it: 'If you choose to do that—and, in anxiety, your normal unreflective possibilities have broken down, so you do have to make a reflective choice—you will be thrown into an entirely different way of being human' (Dreyfuss, 1987, p. 267). If Dreyfuss's depiction of Heidegger's approach to authenticity is accurate, then one might see that holding on to our anxiety is bound up with 'getting a good personality' and that this is invariably an ethical matter.

Regardless of whether or not Heidegger's view of authenticity matches up with the work of writers that Itani criticises Attempts to achieve authenticity do not transcend the technological understanding of being, but reinforce it. Consequently, 'openness' if treated in a particular way can (paradoxically) become a means of getting control—of bettering oneself. This seems close to what Tubbs says about the paradox in Heidegger's thought where openness and standing back can result in problematic power relations. However, this is perhaps as far as the comparison goes. As noted earlier, Itani is suspicious of tendencies within the field of ontological education to naively incorporate notions such as responsibility into their thinking, yet taking responsibility is exactly what is lacking in Heidegger's account of teaching and learning and this is Tubbs' point. It is this absence of responsibility that allows for openness to a destiny that is already known. In Tubbs' account, neither the student's 'otherness' nor the teacher's otherness to herself—the way in which the teacher is both teacher and student—is accounted for by Heidegger's philosophy.

Rather than trying to deal with the figure of the 'other' that calls us to responsibility Itani tries to distance himself from ethical questions and their 'worldly aspects': 'In fact . . . the previous students of ontological education have never forgotten our everyday life. Rather ontological education itself is still arrested in the materialized world' (2008). Here, talking about ethics, Itani is following Heidegger's backward look to the Ancient Greeks when (according to the latter) thinking had yet to be compartmentalised/materialized into distinct spheres. Here is Heidegger: 'The tragedies of Sophocles—provided such a comparison is at all permissible— preserve the *ethos* in their sagas more primordially than Aristotle's lectures on ethics' (Heidegger, 1982, pp. 22–3). Heidegger is arguing that thinking about ethics (as many philosophers do) in terms of virtues or principles impoverishes and limits our understanding of what is valuable. Following this line of thought, which involves the distillation of metaphysics down to its origins (to the original absence that makes metaphysics possible), Itani argues that 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 (Itani, 2008).

Here, Itani is replicating Heidegger's desire to move beyond metaphysics and 'ethics'. It is not 'authenticity' that Itani finds problematic in the work of writers on ontology, but their inauthentic treatment of authenticity—their failure to make the journey back to the origin of metaphysics and beyond. In some respects, Itani's critique sounds persuasive—the only way to escape the limits imposed by metaphysics, ethics and the technological understanding of being is to wipe the slate clean. However, such a move jars with Heidegger's famous unseating of the Cartesian subject, the figure that stands apart from the world and tries to master it. Such a figure is wrenched from history and is not in and of the world. Heidegger's account of Dasein is an attempt to think of human life as immersed in the world and it is therefore strange that at certain moments (moments central to Itani's paper) Heidegger should make these attempts to flee that world and the metaphysics of presence that ascribes value to things. Indeed, we might say that Heidegger's philosophy is often extremely moral—terms like 'authenticity' are loaded with ethical significance. It should also be noted that Heidegger does not manage to avoid taking a moral stance in regard to the technological understanding of Being. If he did not think there was something wrong with it, then he would not spend so much time and effort in trying to think outside/beyond it.

It may be useful at this point to reintroduce Derrida to the discussion. Derrida has regularly demonstrated the impossibility of moving beyond metaphysics—the very attempt to move beyond it sets up a binary opposition of inside/outside that is integral to metaphysics. Derrida shows the importance that the metaphysics of presence has for the moral life. Although we should not succumb to the lure of foundationalism (presence), the conjuration of presence is what allows us to take responsibility for anything—the fact that presence appears in the form of the 'trace' is what allows us to take a stand on things.

Problems do not arise by taking a stand in regards to a particular issue. Rather, they emerge when that stand is conceived of in absolutist or foundationalist terms—when we think we've found the correct solution to a problem and fail to acknowledge that problem's undecidable aspect. From this perspective, the absence of foundations is what makes taking responsibility meaningful. What sense does it make to take responsibility for something when the correct solution is carved in stone? It is this approach to responsibility that we find in Tubbs' critique of Heidegger in which the latter is accused of reneging on taking responsibility. The fact that teaching must always be a struggle between power and freedom—a struggle that cannot be resolved—does not mean that the teacher (and student) are exempt from attempting to get things right.

It might be helpful to provide a more detailed explanation of why Itani's apparent aim of making education anew by starting from scratch is unworkable/unthinkable. I recall a paper given several years ago discussing the role of education in creating an ungendered society. The speaker was working on the assumption that 'gender' is a kind of social construction that is in no way 'essentially' linked to a person's sex. We might therefore work towards the creation of a society that dispensed with the disabling construction of gender (which tends to favour men) and ultimately succeed in that goal. What made the subsequent discussion so interesting was that nobody disagreed with the notion that gender was unrelated to biology. However, by the same token, none of the participants believed that the ungendering of society was feasible. At one stage somebody introduced the question of colour—what would such a society look like? Of

course, we might dress baby girls in blue and boys in pink therefore reversing the common 'western' trend, yet we have not ungendered society—the norm still both haunts and allows for the reversal. At one point, a participant suggested that in trying to imagine a gendered society everything appeared white, yet quickly realised that white had connotations with virginity which, for example, could be observed in the traditional bridal dress. Ultimately, the group concluded that an ungendered society was not simply an impractical goal, but was in fact 'unimaginable'. However, that is not to say that anybody felt that the fact that such a society was unimaginable meant that gender norms should be left unquestioned. It is at this point that the aforementioned issues pertaining to responsibility and vulnerability enter the picture. Such issues are this worldly.

The problem with trying to start things afresh/return to some primal absence is that it invariably involves trying to stand before or outside the world that we belong to and ultimately reiterates the egoism that characterises the Cartesian subject. This is perhaps the trap that Itani and Heidegger (in his more nostalgic moments) fall into. Though Itani is right to show how the jargon of authenticity can easily fall prey to a kind of narcissism, the project that he sets himself (an education emanating from a primordial absence) is open to the same charge.

It is perhaps indicative of the problems identified above that Itani does not describe what the new (or extremely old) form of ontological education would look like. To be fair to Itani, he makes it clear that there is no space left in his paper to begin to establish such a description. However, one might imagine that the problems he will encounter will be comparable to those that befall attempts to imagine a genderless society and education's place in helping to build such a society. In the last paragraph of his paper, Itani constructs a list of all the things his vision of ontological education should 'not' involve, but such negativity may simply represent the kind of reneging on responsibility that Tubbs identifies in Heidegger's writing about education. Of course, to say what you don't want from an 'ontological education' is not to stand outside metaphysics or take a value-free standpoint. Rather, it represents a meaningful 'withdrawal' and as both Tubbs and Itani remind us, withdrawal can have dangerous consequences.

IV. QUESTIONING THE NOTION OF 'AN' ONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Without wanting to dismiss the importance of Heideggerian 'ontology' to education, perhaps the term 'ontological education' is unhelpful. What would such a thing look like? We might imagine it as an alternative to a liberal education, which, in the work of philosophers such as Peters and Hirst, tends to focus on the development of rationality. Indeed, distinctions made between autonomy and authenticity in education made by writers such as Michael Bonnett might lead us down this path. However, this path takes us into the realm of favouring the individual's relationship to knowledge over every other concern and runs the risk of succumbing to the kinds of narcissism that Itani rightly finds so problematic—it simply reiterates the sense of mastery that accompanies the technological understanding of being. Then again, as argued earlier, a solution that wishes to begin with some primordial absence runs exactly the same risk. Perhaps, we can steer clear of some of these problems if absence is thought of not in primordial terms (Heidegger at his worst?) but in terms of that which remains concealed by the technological

understanding of being. This would draw us away from the absolutist form of cleansing that appears to accompany the notion of 'an' ontological education and lead us toward something more modest that draws upon possibilities that are currently concealed from educational discourse.

Let us consider how poetry is taught in English secondary schools. Considering the intensification of the technological understanding of being and the instrumentalising thrust of contemporary education it is perhaps surprising that something as esoteric as poetry still remains on the curriculum. In many respects, teaching poetry (in contemporary Britain) involves the passing on of ontical knowledge that pertains to the discipline (or 'science' if we abide by the more general use of that concept found in the German term gewissenschaft) of literary criticism. Students will learn to uncover the poem's meaning and consider the effects of poetic devices such as onomatopoeia and assonance. They will be made aware of the importance of meter and the significance of the poem's general structure. For students studying poetry, poems become objects of analysis—they are present-at-hand.

Consequently, we might consider whether or not it is possible to approach a poem without necessarily analysing it in terms of the categories imposed by the limiting ontical dimensions of literary criticism? A scene from the film 'The History Boys' helps to see what is at stake here. The film is set in a school near Sheffield and dramatises the progress of a group of schoolboys who are attempting to get into Oxbridge to study history. A teacher known as Hector (his nickname) has the task of teaching the boys 'general studies' which includes the study of poetry. Let us consider this section of the film:

> Hector: And now for some poetry of a more traditional sort.
> Timms: Oh, God!
> Hector: Er, Timms, w-w-what is this?
> Timms: Sir, I don't always understand poetry.
> Hector: You don't always understand it? Timms, I never understand it. But learn it now, know it now, and you will understand it, whenever.
> Timms: I don't see how we can understand it. Most of the stuff poetry's about hasn't happened to us yet.
> Hector: But it will Timms, it will. And when it does, you'll have the antidote ready. Grief, happiness, even when you're dying. We're making your deathbeds here, boys.

On face value, Hector's response might appear to fall victim to the criticisms levelled by Itani of an ontological education that is only really concerned with the acquisition of a 'better self' —'you'll have the antidote ready'. Indeed, the notion of making 'deathbeds' sounds very much like the ultimate 'authentic experience' that Heidegger associates with confronting one's death. For Heidegger, facing up to our deaths is what ultimately gives meaning to our lives. Of course, this is not easy and will cause great anxiety—the more comfortable option is to simply immerse ourselves in our everyday practical concerns—but to do this is to succumb to a form of sleepwalking. The recognition of the limit imposed by our future death is what spurs us on to make what we do matter. Also, as Heidegger points out, nobody else can die my death and therefore my confrontation with death is the ultimate 'authentic' experience.

What makes Heidegger's account of death and authenticity somewhat troubling is that it depicts a kind of conclusion where things have been neatly wrapped up[1]—authenticity has been achieved. Hector with his talk of antidotes and deathbeds might seem to follow Heidegger down a route that ends in a comfortable resolution—the feeling of 'being at home' with culture. Even if this is the case (and in a moment I shall suggest that it is not) we are clearly in a very different place to contemporary education's obsession with learning objectives. Hector's lesson exposes the limited nature of such practices. Of course, an objective might be cited—to make 'deathbeds', but this is a very different sort of objective to the kind of statement that might be placed on the corner of the whiteboard to help students focus on the purpose of the lesson. Such an 'authentic' approach to learning might not escape the confines of 'education as utility', but it is a much richer and broader conception of what education might achieve.

If we are too hasty we might simply stop our reading of the scene from 'The History Boys' and view it as example of an 'authentic' approach to teaching and learning. However, things are perhaps not quite as straightforward as this. We should take seriously the paradoxical force of Hector's point that he does not understand poems, but in time, the students will understand them. Hector obviously cannot mean that the students will have greater access to understanding the poems than he has. Nor should we take his words as indicative of false modesty in which Hector is simply the old sage assisting in the linear development from innocence to experience or from ignorance to knowledge. Hector's words force us to reconsider the relationship between knowledge and ignorance. Due to processes of unconcealment in which the poem will appear to us in different aspects, return to us when we least expect it to offering something new, this will never be the end of the story; we will never master the poem or 'understand it' in some grand moment of enlightenment. The tone of Hector's remarks about 'deathbeds' and 'antidotes' is also worthy of note as it is humorous and flippant, but also serious and 'meant'. The humorous tone undermines the 'heroic' aspects of what Hector has to say without dissipating that heroic streak entirely. This achieves a delicate balance that means Hector may still take responsibility for what he has to say without assuming the role of master. Indeed, he is not teaching for mastery, but for a kind of revealing that is bound up with the lived life.

Hector's remarks to his students reflect an attitude to learning and a way of communicating with students that involves a richer experience than imparting knowledge, or developing analytical skills. However, it might be helpful to consider how this attitude can manifest itself in 'practice'. That is not to discount the fact that the way in which teachers speak to students is a thoroughly practical affair, a point that is nowadays often ignored. Throughout 'The History Boys' the students recall quotations from poems and philosophical extracts that they have learnt off by heart in Hector's lessons. What is notable about such an activity (learning quotations off by heart) is that it does not involve studying poems or sections of prose for meaning or taking them apart in terms of their individual structural components.

Within the field of contemporary education, activities such as memorising poems are regarded as pointless and anachronistic (unless, of course, the students are not allowed access to the texts during the exam). This kind of 'learning' is seen in negative terms—the kinds of 'skill' it involves seem limited. Of course, certain 'thinking skills' could be manipulated for the purposes of memorising the poem and one can quite easily imagine a lesson, the objective of which, is to memorise a poem using those skills.

Treating poems as objects for testing memory skills represents an extreme manifestation of the technological understanding of being. It draws us away from the 'singularity' of the poem—the poem could effectively be replaced by anything. Memorising poetry involves receptiveness to the poem that is quite at odds with traditional attempts to master it. As we rehearse the lines, committing them to memory, the poem will start to show things to us and we may bring our own experiences to bear on the poem. Also, our experiences with the poem may come to shape how we lead our lives. However, this is not to say that our experiences with the poem are necessarily therapeutic, contributing to a happier (or in Itani's terms) a 'better self'. Just because the poem is 'ready-to-hand' does not mean we are at home with it. The poem may come to us in ways that militate against our previous dealings with it exposing a radical alterity that means we will never understand 'it' as 'it' changes—'I never understand it'. Therefore we do not so much 'dwell' with the poem as suffer awakenings to the poem's otherness.

Could we describe Hector's teaching as representative of 'ontological' education? This would perhaps be accurate, but seeing it as a template for 'an' ontological education would somehow miss the point. Hector's approach to learning poetry off by heart could not possibly make up the whole of his teaching. He would be obliged to introduce students to the 'scientific' knowledge applicable to the study of English literature, and there is no reason to suppose that this would be any bad thing. For Heidegger, the development of scientific disciplines marks a move towards ontical knowledge that reflects the natural urge to understand things in their Being. He is therefore not against science, but shows how the fences that are then drawn around such forms of study limit our access to other ways of approaching those things that have become the 'objects' of study.

It would be wrong to assume that the practice of literary criticism, though it might have the potential for limiting our understanding of the world, might not also be enabling. We might say that limits are enabling in the sense that they show themselves to be limits and therefore provide vantage points from which to recognise other ways of thinking and being. By the same token, learning poems off by heart, may serve to bring about a richer form of analysis that departs from a mechanistic approach to literature and draws from life as it is lived. From this perspective, memorising poems should not be thought of as particular mode of teaching that might help to comprise 'an' ontological education. Nor should it be considered a discrete activity that may be placed in a list of teaching methods. To think in this way would conform to kind of limited approach displayed by Irwin (Hector's colleague in the film). Irwin is delighted to discover that the boys know so many quotations because he believes that they can be utilized as material to give the students the 'edge' in their exams. He refers to quotations as 'gobbets'—sections of texts that can be utilized for instrumental purposes. This of course misses the point entirely. Hector sums up the problem when one of the students introduces a quotation from Wittgenstein so as to make a 'clever' point. Here is Hector: Wittgenstein didn't screw it out of his very guts in order for you to turn it into a dinky formula. To learn poems off by heart is simply an 'instance' of the kind of approach to learning that is open to broader modes of revealing than can be accounted for by 'dinky' formulas.

V. CONCLUSION

One obvious criticism of Itani's stated project is to say is that is simply naïve. The technologization of education is so firmly entrenched in educational practice that it is impossible to seriously contemplate its complete demise at the hands of a new form of 'ontological education'. However, this is not exactly the problem that this paper has attempted to address, because to think in these terms is to assume that in a 'better' (more ethical?) world, it would be possible to wipe the slate clean. Itani's suspicion of 'naïve' approaches to ethics and ontology (which often involve the conjuration of an authentic space) is well founded. However, the thrust of his argument moves towards a primal authenticity that is not realisable—there is no way of going beyond metaphysics. Following Tubbs and Derrida, perhaps what is needed is the recognition of the ethical problems that accompany Heideggerian approaches to education so that they might be tentatively addressed. This would not involve the evocation of a primal space but a form of action that acknowledges the importance of taking responsibility in a world where there are no guarantees. Such taking responsibility would be framed by an understanding of 'spirit' as struggle and the ensuing vulnerability this entails.

During the course of this paper, I have attempted to portray Heidegger's writing as sometimes at odds with itself. We have a more moderate Heidegger as described by writers such as Dreyfuss and the more extreme Heidegger championed by Itani. This is more a matter of selection than interpretation—one can easily find evidence in Heidegger's writing for both versions. Whereas Itani favours the more extreme aspects of Heidegger's writing to critique the softer interpretations of his work, I attempt in this paper to move in the opposite direction to Itani's thinking. I have tried to show that both Heideggers and the respective forms of authenticity that they represent are differently problematic. Indeed, one might say that any notion of 'an ontological education' is coterminous with one or another version of authenticity and, consequently, speaking of 'an ontological education' is therefore rather unhelpful. That is not to suggest that Heidegger's philosophy has nothing to say to educational debate. Instead, we might say that his writing, when approached critically, offers a starting point for broadening and enriching the educational experience that does not necessitate a complete overhaul of the system.

NOTE

1. In Chapter 6 of *The Therapy of Education*, Smeyers, Smith and Standish devote a considerable amount of space to a discussion of death and authenticity. Briefly put, their argument throws suspicion on the notion that facing up to one's death does not result in a comfortable conclusion in which everything is neatly wrapped up. In trying to face up to our deaths, we find ways of coping with it so as to soften the blow and therefore turn away from the otherness of the experience. The approach to authenticity displayed in this paper is generally in keeping with the spirit of this chapter.

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