

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

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*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, that is to say educational theories based on Heidegger’s ontology, in several countries and to reveal a common theme among them. Since there are enormous educational researches which make mention of Heidegger’s thought, it is impossible here to explain all of them. There are, for example, many studies which interpret Heidegger’s philosophy as a kind of anthropology or existential philosophy. 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 mentioned 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 become able to 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 poetic (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 (J. 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 to 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 the revival of ontological education recently in English-speaking countries, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. To tell the truth, 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 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 opened 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, for 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. Nothingness of Nothing arises as the Being itself in the darkness of anxiety (Heidegger 1977). This is why the naive ethics which has been imported by previous ontological education is strange to the ontological experience. Heidegger completely denies any interpretations of his thought as an ethics or moral. Therefore, the new possibility of ontological education must be presented as education which is liberated from such a naive ethical evaluation. It is only education before/after ethics that can fulfil the demand of ontological thinking and overcome the utilization and materialization in education.

Indeed, we cannot think of education without any moral and ethics, but we must not ignore the fact that there are some 'limit situations' in education in which normal ethics and values are deprived of its function. Such situations are the very place where ontological education can happen. It is education after ethics, for the previously predominant ethics and values have been replaced with the absolute unfathomableness of the Being in such situations. Only the reverberation of the ethics and values continues to echo the world. And it is education before ethics, for the regeneration of ethics and values may occur in the reverberation of the old ones. The auspice of an innovated values and ethics sounds in the same world. This absence of ethics and values in ontological education cannot be evaluated, whether as good or bad thing, since the criteria of evaluation itself are absent there. The education before/after ethics is the place where the predominant ethics and values have been lost, and a new ethics and values are to arise. What is important is, therefore, not to evaluate such a situation and estimate its benefit, but to reflect how we can witness and understand the loss and regeneration of ethics and values without spoiling it into a mere opportunity of human development. Indeed, the ontological experience may be able to be an opportunity for us to acquire the selflessness, humility, or responsibility, but to evaluate it as such a chance ruins the very possibility of the acquisition. The task of ontological education is not to resolve this paradox, but to reflect how we can live with it. This is the problem of 'dwelling', as Heidegger shows. The most urgent task of education based on ontological perspective is not to show how to go merely beyond the self and beyond the materialized world, but to disclose the way in which we can learn to dwell beyond this materialized world within the materialized world itself.

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