

Plato's Cave: A Tale of Coercion and Obedience

Untangling the Knot between Education, Constriction and Truth¹

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In this paper, I attempt to offer an interpretation of one of the milestones of Western philosophy, namely, Plato's allegory of the cave. Specifically, I wish to pay attention to a rather underestimated aspect of Plato's narrative, namely, the severely coercive aspect of the educational landscape established by Plato. I wish to argue that, when carefully analyzed, the language and structure of the allegory clearly displays a process grounded in coercion and obedience, namely, a process whereby the subject being educated, unable to understand the world, the others and even her own experience, must strictly obey to philosopher's dictate. Outside of such a dictate there is just incapability, deceit, and humiliation. In the second part of the paper, I attempt to outline an alternative picture of education and teaching. Drawing from the Heideggerian account of possibility and projecting, I argue that education and teaching stand upon the unpredictable terrain of possibility. Students, on this understanding, are bearers of ethical and ontological possibilities, responsible towards themselves and their peers while bounded to the open territory of the not-yet.

Keywords: Plato, Violence, Coercion, Heidegger, Emancipation

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La caverna di Platone: una storia di coercizione e obbedienza. Distrarre il nodo tra educazione, costrizione e verità

In questo lavoro viene offerta un'analisi del mito della caverna platonico. In particolare ciò che si proverà ad analizzare e porre in evidenza è l'aspetto decisamente coercitivo del processo educativo così come ci viene descritto da Platone, un processo nel quale il soggetto in formazione, incapace di comprendere il mondo, gli altri e persino se stesso, deve rigorosamente obbedire alle indicazioni fornite dal filosofo. Fuori dall'insegnamento del maestro c'è solo oscurità e confusione. Nella seconda parte del lavoro, partendo dai lavori di Heidegger, provo ad offrire un'immagine diversa del processo educativo, processo nel quale i soggetti in formazione si confrontano con lo spazio aperto della possibilità.

Parole-chiave: Platone, Violenza, Coercizione, Heidegger, Emancipazione

Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to offer an interpretation of one of the milestones of Western philosophy, namely, Plato's allegory of the cave. The value of Plato's myth is, of course, inestimable and, consequently, interpretations of such a topic are innumerable. However, in my paper I wish to pay attention to what I see as a rather underestimated aspect of Plato's allegory, namely, the severely coercive aspect of the educational landscape established by Plato.

In reading Plato's allegory, I shall draw from Heidegger's interpretation. According to Heidegger, "the 'allegory' not only illustrates the essence of education but at the same time opens our eyes to a transformation in the essence of 'truth.'" (Heidegger, 1998/1931-32 – 1942, p. 168) However, when interpreting Plato's narrative, I shall follow a slightly different path. It is my contention that the vision of education displayed by Plato is caught in, and subservient to a mechanism that, as a matter of fact, ends in dispossessing the subject of her agency: the capacity to autonomously set one's aims and means while sharing one's truth and knowledge with others is bracketed and, in a sense, erased by the process that the subject being educated must undergo in Plato's narrative. Otherwise stated, while Heidegger illuminates the transformation in the essence of truth accomplished by Plato, who puts "truth as unhiddenness [...] under the yoke of the *idea*" (Heidegger,

1998/1931-32 – 1942, *passim* p. 178), he underestimates the link between coercion, education and truth which grounds such a transformation—a transformation still haunting actual representation of education, teaching and learning. Along the way, we will come to see that, when carefully analyzed, the language and structure of the allegory clearly displays a process grounded in coercion and obedience: a process whereby the subject, unable to understand the world, the others and even her own experience, must strictly obey to philosopher’s dictate. Outside of such a dictate there is just incapability, deceit and humiliation. The contribution is framed into two sections. In the first one, I recall Plato’s allegory as it is presented in the *The Republic* (1991/390-360 a.C.). In the second, drawing from the Heideggerian account of possibility and projecting, I attempt to outline an alternative picture of education and teaching than that emerging from Plato’s allegory. I begin with analysing Plato’s allegory.

Plato’s allegory: a closed loop

All of us are familiar with Plato’s allegory of the cave. Students in Secondary School usually meet this account at the beginning of any Philosophy class, learning to frame thinking and philosophy in Plato’s term. However, there is an aspect of Plato’s narrative that, despite its patency, more often than not gets lost. This aspect has to do with the severe coercive aspect of Plato’s allegory, an aspect framing both the cave-dwellings’ condition and their process of liberation. I acknowledge that Plato’s *Republic*, in being both a foundational work of our culture, and one of the milestones of Western philosophy, is much broader than the understanding I wish to propose—in a sense, we all speak and think within the horizon established by Plato. However, my hope is that the analysis I am proposing might elucidate some aspects of current educational processes, ones grounded in Plato’s perspective. Particularly, what Säfström labels as the “non-human and non-relational conception of teaching” emerging from “‘humanistic’ discourses on teaching” (2003, p. 23) are clearly located within Plato’s understanding of knowledge, truth and education.

As we all know, the allegory is part of Plato’s *Republic* and is written as a dialogue between Plato’s brother, Glaucon, and his mentor, Socrates. The allegory is narrated by Socrates and, throughout the narration, Glauco

limits himself to accepting Socrates' narration in all of its details, promptly agreeing to Socrates' questions and remarks. To make my point, it is worth quoting Plato at length. At the beginning of the *Book VII* of his *Republic*, Plato describes human—educational—condition as follows:

‘Next, then,’ I said, ‘make an image of our nature in its education and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following kind. See human beings as though they were in an underground cavelike dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners here is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets’ (*Republic* Book VII, p. 194)

Here, through Plato's words, we learn that cave-dwellings are caught in the cave since childhood, “shackled by the legs and neck”. Moreover: prisoners' legs and necks are “in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around.” Prisoners, in Plato's narrative, are also subjected to the deprivation of light: “Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners here is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets” (*ibidem*).

Then, when conceiving of this condition outside of both Plato's work, and what we actually associate with Plato's figure and thought, one can even conceive of cave-dwellings' condition as a kind of torture. The term, I believe, is not unfounded. Let me say from the outset that I do not wish to deny that our conception of knowledge, ethics and politics sinks its roots in Plato's—and Greek—thought. Even our post-modern link between freedom, knowledge and education is, in a sense, a legacy of Plato's thought. Nonetheless, let us imagine human beings locked up in a cave “in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around”, in an almost complete darkness. No doubt, it is an utterly cruel condition. Bearing in mind that the deprivation of light, freedom and movement are sadly known forms of torture, we

begin to see how the term is apt to describe the cave-dwellings' condition. Nonetheless, we have accepted such a condition to stand for the human condition before—the right—knowledge and education come to unleash such boundaries, freeing oneself from the chains of darkness. Here, we begin to see that the link between knowledge, truth and education represented in Plato's allegory stands on a cruel and even violent metaphor. Then, in order to understand our present educational condition, the roots of such link have to be questioned from their very start.

Of course, one may object that such a brutal condition characterizes human beings *before* truth and education came to free them, thus liberating human inherent capability and potential from the chains of ignorance. First to argue that a similar coercion also characterizes the process of liberation, I wish to highlight that the question remains: why should we put human beings in chains and darkness in the first place? Why should we conceive of human condition as so utterly characterized by pain, brutality and even humiliation? Such questions, I believe, may also be helpful in illuminating that kind of “transcendental violence” that, according to much of the postmodern philosophy, knowledge, truth and education may exert (Derrida, 1978/1967; Biesta and Stams, 2001; Todd, 2001).

Now, let us consider the process of freeing and emancipation of the prisoners:

‘Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?’ (*Republic* Book VII, p. 194).

As a first consideration, it should be highlighted that if the cave-dwellings are “strange prisoners”, the liberation process, too, is a strange kind of liberation. This is so for, immediately after the liberation, the prisoner is “suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and

look up toward the light”. Otherwise stated, the one who is set free must—again—promptly obey. This is so for, according to Plato, she would be unable to understand her previous silly condition and likewise unable to take the—supposed—right path.

Such a gesture also frames the next passage of Plato’s text:

‘And if, I said, ‘someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough, steep, upward way and didn’t let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn’t he be distressed and annoyed at being so dragged? And when he came to the light, wouldn’t he have his eyes full of its beam and be unable to see even one of the things now said to be true?’” (*ibidem*).

That is, the one who is liberated is “dragged [...] away [...] by force” (*ibidem*) and his guardian—if I am allowed to call the narrator’s voice this way—should not “let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun”. A light, however, that has the effect of momentarily rendering the one who is taught “unable to see even one of the things now said to be true” (*ibidem*). Only after several passages the former prisoners would be able to take the right path, making out the nature and the source of truth, thus refuting their previous condition of ignorance and blindness. In this way, the third step is accomplished—that is, the subject is effectively taught. However, even when able to understand the truth, it is worth noting that such a subject is unable to share the truth without the intervention of the teacher/philosopher. This inability is the focus of the fourth stage, the one in which the subject comes back to the cave.

In order to fulfil the whole process, in fact, the former prisoner must return to the cave, thus illustrating to her past fellow prisoners the truth she had the privilege to see.² However, this final step too is framed in terms of inability. The former prisoner, in fact, must “compete with those perpetual prisoners in forming judgments about those shadows” (*ivi*, pp. 195-196) thus becoming a “source of laughter” for the prisoners. To close the loop, as a final step Socrates asks: “And if they [the prisoners] were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up wouldn’t they kill him?” (*ivi*, p. 196). Glauco, consistently to his previous

² For more on the relationship between objectivity, truth and coercion in Plato, see Irwin (1986).

interlocutions, responds: “No doubt about it” (*ibidem*). Here, the allegory ends, and Socrates’s discourse comes to be focused on the meaning of such an allegory.

At this point, it may be useful to schematize the path cave-dwellers undertake. Such a path moves in a circle which, starting with coercion and incapability (stage one), proceeds through impotence and obedience (stage two), thus arriving at ridicule and humiliation (stage three), in order to finally return to coercion and incapability (stage four).

Stage one. Coercion and incapability

Human beings are initially put in a cave and subjected to immobility and deprivation of light. They are “shackled by the legs and neck”; they are “in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around.” The world, for them, “is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things” (*ivi*, 194).

Stage two. Impotence and obedience

Here, liberation starts. The one who is liberated is “suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light” (*ibidem*). Moreover: the one who is liberated is “in pain and, [...] dazzled, and is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before.” Even when coming to light she will be “unable to see even one of the things now said to be true” (*ibidem*).

Stage three. Derision and humiliation

At this point, the former prisoner returns to the cave, attempting to share her vision with cave-dwellings. However, she must “compete with those perpetual prisoners in forming judgments about those shadows” (*ivi*, pp. 195-196). When fulfilling her task, however, she becomes a “source of laughter” for the prisoners. Otherwise stated, in being unable to share the truth gained, the former prisoner is exposed to ridicule.

Stage four. Incapability and coercion

As a final step, Socrates asks: “And if they [the prisoners] were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up wouldn’t they kill him?” Glauco responds: “No doubt about it” (*ivi*, p. 196). Even when understanding the truth, the subject is unable to share it,

and, as a consequence, she is at the mercy of her former fellow prisoners who end up killing their potential liberator.

At this point, some educational considerations are due. If, consistently to Plato's narrative, one conceives of the cave's landscape as an educational space, which kind of educational setting Plato builds, and which transformation the subjects being educated undergo? How are such subjects thought of by the teacher/educator, and which is the quality of their becoming when conceived through the lens of the—forced—process of imprisonment/liberation/return to the cave put forth by Plato? Which is the role and image of the teacher/educator entailed in Plato's narrative? Which is the picture of education arising from Plato's allegory and what does it mean to frame educational relationships, particularly teacher-student relationships, through Plato's allegory?

As a first remark, I wish to highlight that through Plato's allegory teachers and educators learn a model in which there is no room for the other's becoming in its own right. All happens too early in Plato's model of education, and all happens within the boundaries established by the philosopher, who dictates what has to be learned, and even how, when and why it has to be learned. Even what one has to do with such learning is determined by the philosopher. Remarkably, as shown above, such an obedience does not guarantee the subject being taught from the violence of her fellows: in Plato's allegory even when the subject has learned the lesson, she is still in need of philosopher's help, who is the one—and only—that may guarantee her survival. All is managed and maneuvered from above: the educational landscape created by Plato is one heavily characterized by obedience, and there is no room for change or alternative possibilities outside of the dictate of the teacher-philosopher.

Thus, one problem with Plato's model is that in the cave there is no dynamic at all, dynamic being understood as a process of exchange. Within the four stages of the allegory, the subject goes from one constriction to another, and all happens in a closed loop under the strict control of the teacher-philosopher. In the process Plato describes there are no uncertainties, no surprises or fissures; no hesitation or doubt on the side of the teacher/philosopher, no blind spots or lack of understanding—except those affecting cave-dwellers' condition. The educational experience is fully captured by the all-knowing teacher's eye, an eye able to predict all of the features of the educational process. Cave-dwellings' behaviour,

sensations, emotions, and even their mental processes—if I may use such term regarding Plato’s allegory—are all known in advance, without residues or uncertainties. Outside of teacher’s dictate there is just chaos, mistake, and impotence. Of course, one may object that such a cruel condition pertains to the human condition prior to the conquer of truth. However, it is my argument that such an initial condition unavoidably frames the whole educational process, grounding its findings and results, whatever such findings and results come to be. Additionally, as argued above, both the way in which truth is gained, and the subjects being educated are freed undergo the same mechanism of coercion and obedience put in place at the beginning of the allegory.

Thus, which is the quality of relationality suggested by Plato’s allegory? With respect to this, it is worth noting that the educational setting created by Plato only allows a one-to-one relationship, namely, that between the teacher-philosopher and the cave-dwellings. That is, no meaningful relationship is even possible amongst cave-dwellers. Translating this allegory to a classroom space, it is as if students were not allowed to have any relation with each other, only waiting for the teacher’s voice to lighten the scene. It is worth noting that in Plato’s model the limits of teacher’s/philosopher’s understanding inevitably determine the limits of students’ knowledge and education. Of course, one could well argue that in any educational process the limits of the teacher inevitably affect the limits and the nature of the process. However, here another mechanism seems at play, namely, a mechanism of strict determination of such limits: both the perception of the environment, and students’ self-understanding are determined by the philosopher, who is in control of the educational situation in any and each moment—and it should be highlighted that such a control is neither possible nor desirable. Even the transformation which cave-dwellings undergo is totally under the control of the philosopher’s eye, which always knows in advance what awaits. Otherwise stated, transformation, certainly a pivotal educational category, is not occasioned, suggested or provoked by teacher-students’ encounter; rather, such a transformation is forcefully determined by the teacher’s intervention, which carries cave-dwellings/students from one stage to another, “compell[ing them] to stand up” (*ibidem*), and “dragg[ing] them away [...] by force” (*ibidem, passim*). In such a process little or nothing is left to students’ intentionality, judgment and agency. And, if the capacity to autonomously judge is certainly an aim worth to pursue in education, one

may ask when and how such a capacity may appear in Plato's cave. This is for one condition for a capacity to appear is its ongoing use and exercise.

Reframing Todd's insightful analysis of Socratic teaching, here it is not so much that the teaching process works through "bringing out of the I that which it already contains" (Todd, 2003, p. 30). Rather, the I is forcefully constituted by the teacher/philosopher intervention. Otherwise stated, the I of the subject being taught is already contained in the teacher/philosopher mind, who masters its transformation and becoming.

Thus, Plato's allegory implicitly and powerfully suggests a model of teaching framed by rigidity of roles and repetitiveness: the subject being taught just has to obey, and the teacher just has to teach—first to enter in such a process of obedience, students' knowledge, according to Plato's words, is limited to "silly nothings" (*Republic* Book VII, p. 194).

This leads us to another feature of such a model, that is, the lack of acknowledgement of the knowledge brought by students in the educational process: the prisoners/students, in Plato's model, first to be effectively taught, learn just silly and fake things; even their capacities for learning are compromised by the permanence in their environment.

Dwelling in the not-yet

Thus far, I have attempted to unravel the kind of educational setting created by Plato in his allegory of the cave, particularly with respect to teacher-students' relationships. In this section, I wish to suggest an alternative picture of education than that underlying Plato's narrative. I shall make my point by drawing from Heideggerian questions of possibility and projecting, as they are presented in three Heideggerian masterpieces written between 1927 and 1930: *Being and Time*, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. What I wish to offer in my analysis is a hint of what educational spaces and relationships may become when one understands such processes in the light of these two notions (Standish, 1992, 1997; Gennari, 1997; Bonnett, 2002; Gur-Ze'ev, 2002; Cambi, 2006; Sola, 2008; Riley, 2011)

I start by analyzing the role that possibility assumes in *Being and Time*. When analyzing the relationship between Dasein and possibility, Heidegger repeatedly points out that to construe possibilities as that which Dasein *has*

is mistaken. It is not the case that we must think of possibilities as simply available to Dasein to be realized, something, thus, that can or cannot belong to Dasein, something that Dasein must encounter externally. On the contrary, Dasein always already stands upon the ground of possibility, regardless of Dasein's decisions or actions. As Heidegger explains,

Da-sein *is* always its possibility. It does not 'have' that possibility only as a mere attribute of something objectively present. And because Da-sein is always essentially its possibility, it *can* 'choose' itself in its being." (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 40)³

This passage does not represent a unique assertion in Heidegger's philosophy. First to commence the analysis of being-towards-death, Heidegger insists that "Da-sein always already exists in such a way that its not-yet *belongs* to it. [...] Correspondingly, Da-sein, too, *is always already its not-yet* as long as it is" (*passim* pp. 226-227). Thinking of Dasein is thinking of possibility. As Heidegger states, "Da-sein is a being-possible entrusted to itself, *thrown possibility* throughout. Da-sein is the possibility of being free *for* its ownmost potentiality of being" (*ibidem*).

Such an understanding powerfully conveys that from the very beginning humans are thrown into the "not-yet", delivered to such an uncertain and open condition; in a sense, we are the condition of being something undetermined, something that, at any time, can either realize or nullify itself. Being one's own possibility entails being ungrounded and open to surprise at any time, entails being vulnerable (Vlieghe, 2010) and exposed (Biesta, 2011).

Educationally speaking, such an account frames educational spaces and encounters as open terrains, for having possibilities and being possibility throughout are completely different conditions. This is so for the former condition refers to a subject standing over and mastering the world as if the world were at one's disposal—exactly the model challenged by Heidegger throughout his entire career. Conversely, the latter condition, puts possibility, along with openness and uncertainty, at the heart of the subject itself, as its own terrain. All metaphors aside, students—and teachers as well—are thrown in the open and uncertain space of possibility and not-yet, a space which is lived and experienced, felt in one's own body rather

³ Emphasis hasn't been added to any citation.

than mastered. A space, it should be highlighted, experienced while being-together in classrooms, in open engagement with ideas, projects, contents, feelings, activities. Otherwise stated, we do not relate to possibility in the same way we relate to this or that object; we relate to possibility as our own space. We dwell in possibility, rather than mastering possibility.

Moreover: bearing in mind that in Heideggerian understanding “being-with-others belongs to the being of Da-sein, [...for] Da-sein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of others” (Heidegger, 1996/1927, *passim* pp. 115-116), we may put the dimension of relatedness and in-betweenness centre stage, thus giving full weight to the classroom’s life. Human beings, as thoroughly beings-in-the-world, are always-already being-with, in such a way that the existence of the others comes to ground one’s own existence. Educationally speaking, students learn not just in one-to-one relationships with the teacher, detached from their peers, as Plato’s allegory seems to suggest. Rather, students dwell in a world while depending upon the presence of others. Their being is a “being-by” (Heidegger, 1992/1928, p. 134) where “that authentic being-with-one-another” (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 274) may ground classroom’s life, thus amplifying students’ possibilities. Thus, if ontological possibility “is less than reality and necessity” (*ivi*, p. 135), then existential possibility “is the most primordial and the ultimate positive ontological determination of Da-sein” (*ibidem*).

What strikes me in Heidegger’s account of possibility is that, in the end, not one definition of what Dasein is and entails is given: Dasein is “thrown possibility throughout”, that is, pure potentiality of being. Such an understanding of possibility clearly works to debunk any pre-established account of what the subject being educated should accomplish, know, learn, strive for. This, I wish to make clear, is not a call for ‘anything goes’ in the sense of the “liberty of indifference” (*ivi*, p. 135). Quite the opposite: the process of becoming is described by Heidegger in terms that suggest struggle and striving, hence an endless task, to which we attend our entire life. A task, however, in which we have neither guarantee nor a pre-established track; a task grounding a process open in all of its features.

The possibility that Dasein is, brings to the fore the question of projecting. As “*thrown possibility* throughout”, Dasein projects itself upon possibilities. Importantly, in Heideggerian understanding Dasein cannot escape the conditions of being-possibility and thrown-project; that is, we can choose which possibility to be and thus, which project to pursue, yet we cannot

escape the condition of projecting. Hence, in pursuing educational projects and choices, we might declare that we are already thrown into education and cannot escape from the condition of enacting education, as from the beginning, we are educational beings all the way down. In one respect, Heidegger forces us to see our ripping and paradoxical condition, embracing our being-thrown-as-possibility and ongoing projecting.

This is clearly expressed in a passage we find in *Being and Time*. When speaking about projection Heidegger states that,

Projection is the existential constitution of being in the realm of the factual potentiality of being. And, as thrown, Dasein is thrown into the mode of being of projecting. [...] Furthermore, the projected character of understanding means that understanding does not thematically grasp that upon which it projects, the possibilities themselves. Such a grasp precisely takes its character of possibility away from what is projected; it degrades it to the level of a given, intended content, whereas in projecting, the project throws possibility before itself as a possibility, and as such, lets it *be*. As projecting, understanding is the mode of being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities (*ivi, passim* p. 136).

Here, Heidegger emphasizes, on the one hand, that Dasein is always-already projecting. Dasein, in fact, “is thrown into the mode of being of projecting”—otherwise stated, although projecting is the way in which potentiality is enacted, projecting is not a choice for Dasein. On the other hand, projecting is an open and even indeterminate condition because projecting is—as highlighted in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*—a “can-be, a possibility *as* possibility”. (Heidegger, 1982/1927, p. 277) This twofold feature places Dasein in a divided and even ripping condition, one that brings to the fore both responsibility and openness. On the one hand, in fact, Dasein must always bear the responsibility of being thrown “into the mode of being of projecting”, and the condition of projecting always dominates whatever Dasein thinks or does. On the other hand, this condition is open, and by projecting, Dasein “*is* its possibilities as possibilities”. As I understand it, Heidegger makes an existential point here: whatever Dasein concretely is and whatever it chooses, it is nonetheless always-already placed in the open field of possibilities because projecting allows the possibility to exist. Using Lewis’ well-chosen expression, Dasein “experience[s] the possibility for new possibilities”. Dasein, in a sense, cannot escape from the condition of radical

freedom that characterizes its being while bearing the responsibility for this freedom. And, as I wish to argue further, it is exactly such a twofold condition of radical freedom and radical responsibility that is highly significant for education.

The sense of radical opening that characterizes projecting is apparent in a passage from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Here, projection is conceived of in terms of “expanded breadth” and “opening”.

Every projection raises us away into the possible, and in so doing, brings us back into the expanded breadth of whatever has been made possible by it. The projection and projecting in themselves carry us away to the possibilities of binding and are binding and expansive in the sense of holding a whole before us within which this or that actual thing can actualize itself as what is actual in something possible that has been projected. This expansion that raises us away and binds us—something that occurs simultaneously in the projection—also shows, however, its intrinsic character of opening (Heidegger, 1992/1929-1930, p. 364).

In this passage, there is a sense of openness and clarity that is not prevalent in Heidegger’s works. We are pitched in an airy space, where the territory of possibility on which Dasein is based is conceived in its positivity. Here, “the possible” is not haunted by the undercutting presence of loss and nothingness that Heidegger learned from Kierkegaard. The possible is an “expanded breadth” and an “opening” in which we are carried away; in this opening, things “can actualize” themselves. Through this twofold root of both openness and concreteness, the passage elucidates the phenomenon of projecting. In fact, we observe that the expansion that is generated by projecting has a twofold function: it “binds us” and carries us away “into the expanded breadth of whatever has been made possible by it.” That is, the projection is, on the one hand, a production of bindings by which we concretely engage with the environment, thus allowing for the actualization of possibilities. On the other hand, this production does not erase its own source, and the “expanded breadth” of the possible always remains open for new bindings.

This passage strikes me as highly significant to education by both indicating the necessity of binding and actualizing the possibilities that are generated by projecting and in looking back at the open territory in which this binding appears. Educationally, it is not that teachers and educators

should not define and establish boundaries and concrete objectives in educational practices, which would transform educational settings into “a free-floating potentiality of being in the sense of the ‘liberty of indifference’” (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 135). Rather, in establishing both frameworks and contents of educational settings and situations, educationalists must also continually consider the open space where these concrete and necessary boundaries appear.

This is so for the loss of bindings simply involves the loss of responsibility and even the loss of education itself, for education is a concrete action that occurs in a concrete environment. In contrast, the loss of “the expanded breadth of whatever has been made possible” may create a scenario in which, more often than not, teachers and educators are required to apply pre-established techniques and protocols by which students are supposed to achieve likewise pre-established competencies, skills and knowledge. What is possible, in fact, has a twofold function; it is not only the space in which the possibilities lie but also a permanent reminder that educational choices are choices made by someone—a single person or an institution—and are directed at achieving something (Biesta, 2010).

In this sense, the Heideggerian account may better elucidate the situatedness of our educational choices and even their ethico-political origin. To the extent that we cannot “reduce pedagogical/educational theory and thought to neutral observation from outside” (Masschelein and Ricken, 2003, p. 151), we also need a theoretical framework that allows us to indicate something different. The Heideggerian account, then, may work to dislocate any given position—including our own position—while “bring[ing] us back into the expanded breadth” of the possible. When conceived through such a lens, the teacher-student relationship holds in itself the possibility of the new and unexpected, without indulging to any kind of lack of responsibility.

Then, in Heideggerian understanding we come to see that students are not confined to the narrow space of their ignorance, enchained at their impotence while learning “silly nothing”, thus waiting for teacher’s all-encompassing voice in order to learn and follow the right track. The logic displayed by Plato’s allegory, in fact, presupposes an authoritarian notion of education, one in which students, in order to gain the truth, have to obey and execute. That is, one truth, one track. Through Heideggerian analysis students, rather, are bound to the open territory of the not-yet, responsible

towards themselves and their peers, bearers of ethical and ontological possibilities. In the event of education, we cannot know in advance what we will learn and find. Moreover: to define such an event in advance runs the risk of narrowing down both the concept and the practice of education. In this sense, education belongs to the not-yet.

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