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Review of

Retuning Education: Bildung and Exemplarity Beyond the Logic of Progress

Morten T. Korsgaard, New York, NY: Routledge, 2024

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There is widespread agreement among scholars of education that current policies and practices tend to reduce teaching and learning to mere technical matters, to be made as efficient as possible in order to serve rather narrow economic interests that continue to exacerbate environmental issues and conflicts globally. This is the uncontroversial starting point of Morten Korsgaard's new book, *Retuning Education* (2024). Very quickly, however, Korsgaard surprises in arguing that the solution is not to advocate for student-centered education, nor is it to harness education to attain one or another sociopolitical aim. Rather, education should invite young people to enter a common space of reflection and study that allows them to foster a new relation to the world around them. Korsgaard wants to take us beyond what he calls "the logic of progress" (p. 6). His main allies in this ambitious project are Hannah Arendt and a set of German thinkers writing in the Pädagogik tradition. Two of the book's ten chapters have previously appeared as journal articles, while another three contain sections from already published material—all from 2019-2020. Korsgaard's book will be of interest to a wide range of education scholars, particularly those in the Anglophone world who are less familiar with the German Pädagogik tradition.

Korsgaard takes issue, at a fundamental level, with all accounts of education that reduce it to a mere function, means, or instrument for some other end, some form of "progress," whether economic or political. Hannah Arendt (2006) famously questioned this kind of instrumentalization of education, arguing that it might rob the rising generation of its chance to begin something new. A set of German Pädagogik scholars, including Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (2013), and Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski (2019), are also mobilized to assist in this regard. Though the projects of these thinkers differ, they are all trying to articulate an account of education as a kind of *sui generis* space or time or activity—one that should not be collapsed into something else. For Korsgaard, education is an "act of revealing the commonness of the world to the young generation" (p. 32)—commonness in the sense of 'shared.' This emphasis leads to a "flatter ontology of education" (p. 32), where "education can never be student-centred, teacher-centred, nor world-centred. It is only in the coming together of these that education unfolds as a particular – and peculiar – undertaking" (p. 1). So often a particular theory or practice will end up over-emphasizing one or two corners of the so-called pedagogical triangle, leading to the reification of unnecessary dichotomies and confusions. Korsgaard keeps all three in view.

Korsgaard coins the term "educational commoning" (p. 52) to describe what should take place in educational settings. He transposes the concept of 'commons'—a word designating areas of land that are not privately owned and on which people can, for example, forage or let their animals graze—into an educational context in an attempt to defend this space (e.g., the classroom) from commercial interests.

In addition, as teachers bring various elements of the world to the attention of students, they can be described as 'commoning' these elements—bringing them into this common space, showing the students that we hold these elements in common. In this context, we are not concerned with producing anything, nor with considering the use-value of the element in question; we are only paying attention, to learn, to study, and to develop new relations in common.

Several chapters of the book are dedicated to reworking our conception of the student and the process of education and development, or *Bildung*. This latter term has spilled much ink in philosophy of education. Korsgaard seeks to temper the ideal of the autonomous man—often in the eyes of the *Bildung* tradition—by emphasizing the concepts of relationality and attention. We become who we are in large part due to our relations with those around us and the direction in which we turn our gaze and focus our attention. Students need to encounter people and things beyond themselves in order to be pushed beyond themselves. Rather than self-insight, Korsgaard suggests, students should seek what he calls "self-outsight" (p. 81)—to engage in 'outrospection' rather than introspection. This leads to a benign form of self-alienation, which helps us develop "meaningful and resonant relations to the world and those around us" (p. 95). Korsgaard's critical review of various accounts of alienation is helpful in tempering our culture's unalloyed adulation of authenticity and absolute freedom.

The second half of the book turns to the 'how' of educational commoning. A key metaphor that runs through the account is that of "pearl diving" (p. 101). The teacher dives into the ocean of their discipline and seeks out 'pearls'—elements that catch our attention, illuminate reality, and offer openings to new possibilities—to offer their students. Korsgaard suggests that this is also an effective metaphor for educational theorizing itself. Another key idea that is mobilized in this part of the book is "exemplarity" (p. 118), about which much has been written, especially in moral education. Korsgaard agrees that "exemplars" are needed in education; however, he nuances dominant accounts of exemplarism by pointing out that pedagogical exemplarity "is always already at play in education, in ways we are not able to control" (p. 147), and that the existence of exemplars does not obviate the need to cultivate judgment—an account of which he borrows again from Arendt. The relational and collective dimensions of judgment are emphasized here. Another way in which the concept of 'exemplarity' enters the discussion is in the context of selecting examples of 'things' to show students, e.g., in trying to introduce students to the plant life of their region, what 'examples' do I show them, what elements would be 'exemplary'? This, Korsgaard claims, is not a process that can be centralized—a Ministry of Education cannot create a catalogue of 'exemplary' educational content. Teachers need to be experimental pearl divers, paying close attention to their students and the world.

The book closes with reflections on the concepts of resonance and attunement. "The question of *why* we educate can be tentatively answered by the effort to establish meaningful – resonant – relations between the young and the world they inhabit" (p. 177). We hope that the "pearls" we bring to the attention of our students "offer experiences of resonance and attunement" (p. 178). These experiences take us beyond ourselves while at the same time helping us feel at home in the world.

There is much that is of value in this book. I have already mentioned that it keeps the student, teacher, and content in view—not an easy feat in a discourse that constantly puts them in opposition to one another in different ways. Korsgaard's resistance to student-centred discourse is particularly admirable. I especially enjoyed a section that shows how, despite an explicit commitment to constructivism and associated child-centred ideas, many institutions, in the way they formulate learning objectives and so on, reveal "a behaviourist ideal of conformity in behaviour and a desire to be able to predict and predetermine the behaviour of students" (p. 73). His critique of the ideal of authenticity, as it is typically articulated in Western culture, is also excellent. The volume of ideas and material covered is in general impressive.

I want to conclude with some questions and thoughts that may help push Korsgaard's project further. First, one can imagine a version of 'liberal education' that avoids most if not all of Korsgaard's concerns and embodies what he wants to see. Liberal educators are among the chief voices against the instrumentalization of education, after all. In its best forms, it does bring us into relation with the past

and the present, helping us go beyond ourselves. Arendt herself benefitted from such an education. One can imagine a passionate teacher of the liberal arts as a kind of 'pearl diver.' While some of the defenders of the liberal arts are fanatical about a specific canon, many are no longer so inclined and are eager to bring to the attention of their students whatever pearls they find. And again, while some approaches to liberal education have a narrow conception of rationality and autonomy and so on, a more profound engagement with those 'Great Books' usually broadens these conceptions considerably. Would Korsgaard wish to distinguish his approach from such a version of liberal education? I would be curious to hear his thoughts on this question.

Second, after reading so much about resonance and attunement, I found myself wanting to hear more about the very nature of this world with which we are meant to enter into relation. It seems to me that it is, at the very least, not the disenchanted world of Max Weber. Most of Korsgaard's sources lean towards the post-metaphysical, but I wonder if metaphysics can be passed over if we are in the business of seeking 'meaning'-ful relations. Is meaning merely projected by us, or does it inhabit the world? I pose the question in this stark, binary way just to bring out its stakes for the student. The answer to this question (or an effort to reframe the question) matters, and I would like to see Korsgaard tackle it more directly. It seems to me that his account cannot survive in a disenchanted world (so much for the disenchanted world, I would argue).

Third, while I very much resonate with Korsgaard's efforts to de-instrumentalize education and take it entirely beyond the so-called logic of progress, I am somewhat doubtful that this surgery can or even should be carried out entirely. As he mentions himself, his own account of education's purpose "can of course be seen as instrumental in a very wide sense" (p. 24). I am reminded of a statement by Degenhardt (1982), who argues that some knowledge "is valuable neither as a means to an end, nor as an end in itself, but because it helps us to determine our ends" (p. 81, as cited in Farid-Arbab, 2016, p. 225). 'Progress,' I would add, does not belong to the neoliberals. Would not moving education away from economic instrumentalization count as progress? While we should be careful not to collapse education into some other sphere (economics, politics, etc.), it seems to me impossible to sever it entirely from the lifeworld. This is not what Korsgaard is suggesting, if I am reading him correctly, but we may need a better account of education's relationship to society. Being concerned more with beginnings than the precise shape of the future makes sense. But the young will certainly surprise us no matter how we organize education. The question is, will they repeat the mistakes of previous generations, or will they take responsibility for the world and strive to improve it?

This is a good segue to my final point. I am sure Korsgaard applies some of his ideas in his own teaching. One of the best ways to further articulate his vision for education, at this point, might be to find a group of educators who are willing to commit to putting it into practice, and refining it gradually with their assistance. As his theory encounters 'the world,' it will be tested in various ways. Of course, it is not a matter of determining whether 'it works,' but rather to see what insights emerge over time. I look forward to reading more from Korsgaard's excellent work.

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