An Authenticity Economy and the They in Education and in Philosophy of Education

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In a capitalist world where self-interested forces seek to gain power by recruiting members to their ranks and where "thinking for yourself" is the enemy of commercialism and consumerism — unless you are the one making the money — examining and clarifying opportunities for being an active thinker in the face of conformism is crucial. In "Heidegger and the Nature of Social Learning," Dan Fisherman offers such an opportunity in order to assist us in saving educational discourse from falling into idle talk and preventing students from bathing in the fake warmth of inauthenticity. Addressing the suggestion that social learning fosters the development of conformist thinking is important in providing an escape from a pessimistic view regarding the possibility of generating fresh ideas in a social setting, which is not just a strategic necessity (à la Dewey's social renewal) but also a basic pedagogical condition in order to nurture moral human beings. Diving into *Being and Time* is a challenging endeavor Fisherman bravely undertakes and from which he extracts evidence that, according to Heidegger, the choice is still in our hands. It is exciting each time to discover anew how this book from 1927 is relevant for education today. In my response, I broaden Fisherman's analysis and raise questions that examine the boundaries of the conceptual framework discussed in the essay.

Since Fisherman contrasts "social learning pedagogy" with "traditional teacher-centric pedagogy, I wonder whether he limits the danger of conformist educative discourse to formal learning in the classroom. Taking "social learning" in a broader sense, and following the offered interpretation for the puzzling notion of "ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world)" as "maintaining an attitude toward the imminent experience of an existing situation," I am curious about social interactions outside the classroom or within informal discursive learning. For example, can social learning serve as a guideline for promoting social justice within a diverse school population or for exposing or addressing the hidden curriculum, and, if so, how?

When discussing Downes's idea for personal downtime as a means for reaching existential awareness, Fisherman questions the possibility of attaining such awareness and for seeing the "existential light," as they call it. While I agree that deep existential insights require more than just isolated reflection, I wonder what role Fisherman sees for existential awareness with regard to the modification of the They, and especially in a social learning context. As Heidegger associates authenticity with "resolute anticipation," or "being-toward-death," it seems to me that not seriously facing your finitude might lead to nihilistic indifference and to falling into a They-self mentality. Of course, integrating this kind of awareness into a learning context is problematic, if not controversial, but the question remains whether true Heideggerian authenticity can be attained without attention to our mortality.

Fisherman suggests that "modification of the They" is a promising avenue for authenticity since it is "consistent with the necessity of our social embeddedness," as "the fundamentally social nature of Dasein precludes a retreat into self — doing so would require that we become something we are not." It seems that Fisherman proposes to cope with or to overcome the They not by dismissing it but rather by acknowledging its presence and working "through" it. As such, the They is both the problem and the place where a resolution is concealed. If indeed the They carries such a dual role, it seems that it will be helpful to explore how the problem of social learning can be situated within or benefit from Heidegger's analysis of Being, as Being itself seems to play a dual part as it exhibits an ontological tension between revealing and concealing, emerging and withdrawing. For example, Iain Thomson discusses our current "technological" ontotheology and concludes that instead of seeing it as an inescapable way of living, we should perform a gestalt switch by which we will see the great danger also as the promise for "other beginning": "we discover what saves us precisely by deeply experiencing what most endangers us."[1] Thomson adds that "the danger and the promise can be recognized as the two competing aspects of the same figure, aspects that work to conceal one another by standing in the same place."[2] Thus, integrating this idea with Fisherman's words, we can say that "our 'attitude' toward interpretation, the way we comport ourselves" in relation to social learning, is decisive in determining which side of the interpretative gestalt switch we will find ourselves — the conformist or the challenging. The important thing to acknowledge here, as I see it, is that the mere tension between these two poles — the obedient and the questioning — is the source for a fresh thinking that proposes a new look.

From this reading of Being as a blend of meanings, when two (or more) things can be seen as instances of the same phenomenon, I propose not to sharply separate authenticity and inauthenticity and not to completely praise the former and to condemn the latter.[3] Heidegger himself, in several places in *Being and Time*, is not clear whether he sees authenticity as entirely preferable over inauthenticity, and some statements in the text appear to be contradictory. For example, he says initially, "The *they*, which supplies the answer to the *who* of everyday Dasein, is the *nobody* to whom every Dasein has always surrendered itself, in its being-among-one-another."[4] Later, however, Heidegger claims that the alienation (*Entfremdung*) of falling prey, "which *closes off* to Dasein its authenticity and possibility … still does not surrender it to beings which it itself is not, but forces it into its inauthenticity, into a possible kind of being of *itself*."[5] Moreover, and perhaps the more complicated matter, is the verdict with regard to founding ethics on authenticity. This verdict might never be given, as Heidegger insists on statements such as "This essential being guilty is, equiprimordially, the existential condition of the possibility of the 'morally' good and evil, that is, for morality in general and its possible factical forms."[6] Indeed, it seems as if the jury in this case of Heideggerian-based ethics has left the building and that they are not coming back. Similarly, it is doubtful whether or not rejecting the "intersubjective uniformity" from the outset and always searching for your own unique voice is the safest or the most productive step to take. For example, from an

evolutionary point of view, adopting the popular view can be an efficient mechanism to save an individual's resources, and, from a sociological perspective, embracing a collective discourse might protect group identity that is so vital for rooting one's belonging. If applying an interpretive framework in accordance with "the things themselves" — or in accordance with how one is really is — would result in political persecution or other oppressive social consequences, one would have good reason to avoid authenticity and pretend to be someone she is not, or, in a social learning context, to accept (or to pretend to accept) the intersubjective uniformity.

Therefore, instead of utilizing a binary structure and taking a one-sided approach in favor of authenticity and having your own thoughts, it might be more productive to explore more complex interconnections between authenticity and inauthenticity. Applied to education and social learning, it seems to me that it is a mistake to presuppose that the prevalent discursive framework is always suspicious. In other words, taking your own thinking path should not be an end in itself, at least not all the time. Thus, not dismissing the ideas articulated by the They can allow one to use these available ideas as a springboard for new ideas, indeed becoming "existentiell modification of the 'they.'" Consequently, building on average intelligibility might serve as the needed "impetus for a dialogic interaction" that keeps both skepticism and openness to a framework established by culture.

Moreover, if *learning* is the ultimate goal of social learning, might there not be cases where authenticity would be better to be sacrificed for the sake of learning? Or, if cumulative learning is the desired result of social learning, perhaps the learners should consider selective authenticity in order to maximize group learning? Similar questions can be asked about the notion of authenticity itself: if the *collective* authenticity (if there is such a thing) is a criterion in evaluating social learning, how are we to measure it? Should be consider some kind of "authenticity economy" in social learning? If so, how are we to establish such an economy? How are we to stipulate utilitarian principles in order to evaluate the "amount" of authenticity demonstrated in such association of learners? How can we be sure, for example, that authenticity carries a win-win characteristic and that there are no cases when one's conspicuous authenticity takes over or interferes with others' authenticity, in which instances it might be better to some extent, for the overly authentic student to mitigate her authenticity in order to allow others to expose their own true selves? Reflection on these matters illuminates a host of possible implications for teaching and for the allowed leeway given for students in class.

Going back to the danger of conformism in social learning, I would like to broaden the view towards "education" (in the sense of schooling) in general and raise a similar concern regarding how we perceive this notion: Does not the They prescribe the mere understanding of "education" itself? If the They is influential in every domain, there must be an idle talk that has seen and understood everything with regard to education, whether the pedagogy is traditional teacher-centric or social learning. What is this meaning of education that is prevalent today in consequence of which "discussants falsely believe that they fully understand the objects about which they speak" when it comes to education and "focus on what is said about the

objects of discussion without ensuring that what is said actually derives from the objects themselves"?[7] In Heidegger's words, what is the "average intelligibility" about education? My suspicion is that we have come to believe the necessary instrumental function of education, as if schools are designated to function as a supply system for social forces pressing to provide graduates with required features. I think it is essential to think not just in terms of "active, agentic learners" but also in terms of active, agentic education.

Finally, as the Philosophy of Education Society conference is a social learning occasion, as each session is a social learning occasion, what is the dictatorial discourse of the They in this space? What is the prevalent conformism within philosophy of education? Are we making sure to choose the authentic attitude? What is the appropriate authenticity economy in this room? We should not ignore these questions as we continue to philosophize about education.

1. Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 207.

2. Ibid., 212.

3. I am building here on observations made by Lauren Bialystok. See Lauren Bialystok, *Being Your Self: Identity, Metaphysics, and the Search for Authenticity* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2009).

4. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 124.

5. Ibid., 171.

6. Ibid., 274.

7. Ibid., 6.