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Preface

I.

It is certainly a strange situation that at a time when we are undergoing the third great revolution in mnemotechnology, that is, in how we store, communicate and dispense information (from papyrus to print to the chip via the electromagnetic field)—a time when our technology is so 'innovative' and forms of knowledge so accessible–that education in America is falling to desperate levels. How is it that what the digital, post-Fordist industrial world calls 'computer literacy' is turning out to be an oxymoronic syntagme—that in real space we are becoming illiterate in direct, but inverse proportion, to being online? And do we really need statistical studies and more evidence as was the case with cigarette smoke and is now the case with climate change? The issue is best expressed by Heidegger:

MOST THOUGHT PROVOKING IN A THOUGHT PROVOKING TIME IS THAT WE ARE STILL NOT THINKING.[1]

1
Martin Heidegger: *What Is Called Thinking* (Harper Torchbooks. NY, SF, London: 1968) pg. 6

But how can this be? How can this great thinker say we are not thinking when we are inundated with bits of information, blocks of statistical studies, and have solved so many interesting problems? Is it simply because we have not, and possibly cannot "process" all this data? And is it indeed a fact that human understanding can be, or even should be, modeled on an input-output problem solving process? Perhaps we should be more concerned with the differences between information retrieval and wisdom, or with the important distinction between being "smart" and becoming "intelligent." Why, for instance, do we prefer to organize our thoughts in terms of mechanics, quantification and verifiability, instead of being a bit more concerned with what is vitalistic, qualitative and authentic? And when we do attempt to create something of qualitative value—something which may affect our internal lives,—why do we do so by way of "how to" handbooks? Why, since Galileo, do we continue to equate thinking "only" with the ability to control and manipulate things? Have we exhausted our thought about an object when its movement has been calculated and its essence categorized and brought under our domination? Or, is there something here, which remains unthought?

But ironically this line of questioning is precisely the kind of fundamental thinking to which we have turned a deaf ear and blind eye. Why is this so? Are these kinds of questions—philosophical questions—too impractical to be of concern, or do they touch in an uncomfortable way that which lies closest to heart? And why do we continue to try and cure the issue in question by prescribing more of the same medicine—more information, more data, more studies? Do we really think that statistics and logistics can bring about the change of heart and mind necessary for an enlightened and just civilization, or, are we now in danger of using these tools to mask a profound thoughtlessness?

We are certainly born with the capacity to walk, talk, and think, but not with a guarantee for their completion and perfection. Although it has traditionally been the task of education to help refine, bring forth, and actualize these potentialities, this ideal has recently been abandoned in favor of the far easier task of teaching specific techniques and newly found "methods" and "means" which help us to attain "ends" which remain unjustified. But as we obtain our just rewards and accumulate more "know how," we are falling into deeper despair—a kind of despair which remains suspiciously unaware of itself, but is, nevertheless, expressed in the numbness, passivity, and the outbreaks of violence symptomatic of a whole generation. And how is it that at a time when access to information and "computer literacy" is at an all time high, and climbing, the international educational rankings of our country are precipitously falling? Is it possible that we have learned certain modes of thinking without proper concern for what desperately needs to be thought? What needs to be thought, according to Heidegger, is the nature of thinking and its relation to what is thought-provoking. How, then, are we to learn this way of thinking?—and to whom should we turn?

As with all true learning, we will naturally turn to those who have mastered their particular art; and only one branch of knowledge has taken on the task of thinking about the nature of thought itself—this is philosophy! When Plato was asked about philosophical thinking, he replied:

> "[PHILOSOPHY] DOES NOT ADMIT OF EXPOSITION LIKE OTHER BRANCHES OF KNOWLEDGE; BUT AFTER MUCH CONVERSE ABOUT THE MATTER ITSELF AND A LIFE LIVED TOGETHER SUDDENLY A LIGHT, AS IT WERE, IS KINDLED IN ONE SOUL BY A FLAME THAT LEAPS TO IT FROM ANOTHER, AND THEREAFTER SUSTAINS ITSELF.[2]

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Cf. Plato, The Seventh Letter

So before we proceed to the study of philosophy, which is the art of thinking about that which always remains to be thought, we should understand that it cannot be reduced to a mere technique intended to accomplish a set task, but must, like all art forms, first be inspired and desired for its own sake.

II.

Today we all too often think of philosophy as an opinion, or larger point of view as in—"What's your philosophy?",—or as one amongst many disciplines to be bartered and sold (equivalent courses, etc) in the academic agora. If there is a great demand and many customers, the management team designates a particular course to be 'successful,' that is, if the customer has a minimal blood pressure reading and at least a passing grade. This evaluation is, of course, in keeping with the highest standards of objectivity and quantitative (operational) data retrieval (spread sheets, pie charts, numerical formulas…and so forth, and so on). But the beginning of education, in the secular sense and as we understand it, which is now in the position of a global hegemony, is synonymous with the birth of philosophy in the Mediterranean world (600 BC). There is as Deleuze would say, a plane of consistency and immanence which goes from the Presocratics, through Plato and Aristotle, to Hume and Kant, Hegel and Marx, WWII, and to Einstein's cosmological revolution concerning in space/time—a direct line of reference from Democritus (atomic theory) to quantum mechanics. Einstein comments:

> HUME SAW CLEARLY THAT CERTAIN CONCEPTS, AS FOR EXAMPLE THAT OF CAUSALITY, CANNOT BE DEDUCED FROM THE MATERIAL OF EXPERIENCE BY LOGICAL METHODS. KANT THROUGHLY CONVINCED OF THE INDISPENSABILITY OF CERTAIN CONCEPTS[...] AND DIFFERENTIATED THEM FROM CONCEPTS OF EMPIRICAL ORIGIN. [3]

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See: Albert Einstein, *Philosopher Scientist*, Ed Paul Arthur Schilpp (The Library of Living Philosophy Volume VII, p. 13

Needless to say that this is the thinking process of a well educated man! But what makes it so? We have pickled his brain, but avoid hearing what he has to say. First, he is able to recognize and take part in the history of ideas to which he belongs; he doesn't take earlier and authoritative (not authoritarian) work to be final, but engages in respectful conversation and critical analysis. One could say that his education was crucial to his awareness of a larger historical depth of field what is called in psychology the problem of 'focal' and 'field' awareness (could it be that screenomatic and 'focal' awareness is a beingpresent without full 'presence' to the world?…a constricted way of being which understands the past to be dead and gone but able to be stored as information that can be accessed at will?) But, phenomenologically, that is, as we experience the past, it is always in a state of ingression, asWhitehead would say, into the present; it is already there as 'fringe data' or a kind of haunting which remains virtual until actualized; but, unfortunately, it is often through a rupture in our everyday situations that the fundamental questions, and wider context of reality, come into view–usually from something incoherent, paradoxical, or problematic in the situation something becomes questionable! The kinds of questions Socrates asked concerned the proper education (paideia) of the psyche for a virtuous life and justice in the larger whole (polis).

But the question I would like to ask concerns the nature of a question itself. What is a question? And have you ever really experienced one? I say experienced, because all true learning and thinking is predicated upon a vital question—not one you merely ask, but one you live through. Such questions are not abstract, that is, they are not asked in order to predict something, elicit a right or wrong answer, nor calculated to gain information, or prove what one has already decided upon; they are put forth in order to open up a new region in which "to be" and "think." With vital questions, "thinking" and "being" are the same! And these kinds of questions can only be asked if we ourselves are first put in question, that is, if we ourselves have become questionable in our very being. To become questionable in one's being means to lose the rut and track that guides our everyday actions and grounds our existence. Only when we become ungrounded and unsure of our own position, can we become ready for the possibility of learning something else, that is, of not only seeing another point of view, but also becoming something else. This being-ready-for and turning-towards that which is to be learned makes possible the space of dialogue in which thinking and learning take place.

A vital question requires a vital answer, and so must always be asked in the context of dialogue. And this is so even if the interlocator—as in the famous case of Socrates—is one's own inner voice (daimonion) It is in dialogue that we risk our position by confronting an alternate way to think and be. It is always through the silent gaze of the other that our own thinking and being is brought into question. In monologue we risk nothing; the questions we ask are abstract and calculated to conform to our own assumptions. When we confront an object as to its weight, color or composition, the answers we receive have nothing to do with who or what we are. Things do not answer back! They do not cause us to reflect upon ourselves. All too often we face each other in monologue, where from behind our well-armed bulwark of prejudice, presupposition, and hearsay, we shoot our arrows of factual information at the defended fortress of the other. A monologue assumes that all has been learned—that there is nothing left to say! But a vital question—a question on which our lives depend—must by its nature remain problematic. In this way the question stays in keeping with the growth and becoming of life itself by staying responsive and on the move. The concept of "justice," for instance, must continually be brought into question and kept alive by each of us in each successive and changing generation. Vital questions—those concerning what Whitehead called "matters of importance" (not merely "matters of fact," but what tells us what to do with the facts or how to evaluate them)—find their proper place in the open-ended space of dialogue, which of its nature always presents another point of view. This will insure that the notion of "justice" does not calcify into a dead concept. A living answer is gained in struggle and must forever remain questionable and open to the changes and unforeseen dangers which life presents.

III.

We hope that this short introduction concerning the role of philosophy and education will raise some further questions about how we theorize education. Technology (techne)—its mode of thinking (operational) and its extensions and products—is simply the objectification and materialization of a certain comportment and way of being-toward-the-world (Heidegger). One could say that educational issues—as misguided as they are without philosophy, that is, without understanding their source, destiny and unfolding in terms of the Greek Logos—are caught up in a putatively non-problematic digital data-driven delirium. To think of ourselves as more progressive fails to understand the fundamental questions which belong to the human qua human—qualitative questions concerning the essence of the 'good life,' or the proper 'care of the psyche,' or the 'just order' of the political domain,…and so on. Thus requires that education drop its business model with its objectification of students as consumers and teachers as facilitators and salespersons—drop its search for the right (PC) methods and return to the incipient moment of its birth, not for answers, but rejuvenation in the quest for wisdom.

Endnotes

1
Martin Heidegger: *What Is Called Thinking*
(Harper Torchbooks. NY, SF, London: 1968) pg. 6

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Cf. Plato, The Seventh Letter

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See: Albert Einstein, Philosopher Scientist,
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