

# *Phronesis* and Transformative Learning: A Joint Challenge for Moral Philosophy and Educational Theory

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Strengthening moral learning may become available to us by bringing *phronesis* and transformative learning in a common theoretical space. For both Aristotle and Mezirow, the exercise of morality, or rising to the standard of moral choice, decision, and action, is not the result of an intuitive achievement or a sudden understanding of a morally demanding situation but a lifelong affair. Our strategy here addresses three aims: Firstly, to invoke and reclaim the endemic bond between education in the broader sense of *paideia* and the significant role that needs to be re-ascribed to moral education. This allows a turn towards qualitative features and makes room for an inclusion of moral education, or values education, within education. Secondly, to portray the exercise of autonomy, choice, and judgment as a result of paideutic development; both theories share the assumption that moral learning rests on constant reflection upon past experiences and the *zetesis* of future goals. Thirdly, to focus on the way one reclaims the right to exercise judgment, whenever this is required. A joint study of the two theories may enlighten the content of this lifelong reflective procedure.

*Keywords:* phronesis, moral (lifelong) education, transformative learning

## 1. Introduction

Theories of modern moral education explicitly foster the principle of individual autonomous reflection and encourage the exercise of individual judgment. They also embrace a strong conception of individuality as this is premised on the ineliminable right to erect oneself into a judge of the most intricate as well as the most important questions that can occupy the human intellect. The principles of individual reflection and autonomy describe and explain the profound need of all modern individuals to shape their present and future life in a self-willing and self-determining manner. On this basis, moral learning needs to be seen as the purposeful transformation of the individual into a reflective thinker and a capable judge with a strong sense of character, an unshakeable will and conscience.

Our age faces a peculiar paradox between the emphasis upon the institutionalization of education and the indifference to the preconditions of human learning, autonomy and moral integrity. The concept of education rests on the idea of learning to acquire all forms of knowledge and learning, which surpass the current shortsighted focus on profitable skills and fashionable qualifications. It also rests on the assumption that it is not exhausted in what is countable and assessable by any measuring tape. The conviction that humans are

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beings with profound learning abilities and needs to be exercised and fulfilled in a complete lifespan is a very old idea. The connection between education and self-completion is evident. The consequences of this connection are not. The paradox under discussion is intensified when we consider the unfortunate lack of cultivation of individual critical abilities, which misrecognizes the need for moral learning and education. Broad is the disappointment due to the modern crisis in education, educational policy and culture. We suggest that a crisis cannot be overcome, if education continues to be pursued without reclaiming the legitimacy of subjectivity, with no focus upon critical reflection, capable judgment, and informed citizenship. In an attempt to debunk this current predicament, our aim is to invoke and reclaim the endemic bond between education in the broader sense of *paideia* and the significant role that needs to be re-ascribed to moral education. This allows a turn towards qualitative features and makes room for an inclusion of moral education, or values education, within education. This, lastly, constitutes a rejuvenation of education as a whole.

Evidently, this is a joint challenge for education and moral philosophy. Our contention is that the Aristotelian theory of *phronesis* can play a significant role in responding to this challenge; we should be willing to place it in the setting of a modern educational tradition, such as that of the theory of transformative learning. On the one hand, modern education needs to recapture the depth and richness of *paideia* by focusing on the self-formative, self-transformative, and self-actualizing endeavors of a capable, mindful subject<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand, moral philosophy and moral education need also to recapture the depth and richness of *phronesis* in a transformative fashion. Taking up the moral standpoint needs to be seen as the emergence of the capable individual to “the plateau of judgment.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Education in Crisis

In 1935 Edmund Husserl delivered a lecture at the University of Prague under the provocative and prophetic title “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man.” Out of this lecture, originally intended as an “independent introduction” to phenomenology,<sup>3</sup> grew a new conception about the crisis of European culture and the European sciences which gave in to a rampant naturalism and objectivism that invaded all method and research. Husserl describes this as a deep and prolonged “situation of distress” (*Notlage*) that thrives upon the arbitrary dualisms of modern science, “a danger of dangers” to be overcome only by a “heroism of reason.” Unfortunately, several developments on the fronts of education and culture have affirmed Husserl’s fears and added to the sense of distress an overwhelming sense of disappointment. Decades later, Hannah Arendt refers to a pernicious crisis in her essay on *The Crisis in Education*.<sup>4</sup> Arendt argues that, if we compare the problems of education to other kind of problems (for example, wars, violence, and the infliction of human suffering), it is difficult to credit them with any urgency or priority. Much more recently, in her latest thought provoking book *Not for Profit*, Martha Nussbaum depicts a rather grave picture of modern education arguing in favour of resisting all those erosive forces which prevent education from preparing and producing critical minds and democratic citizens. In the first chapter entitled as “The Silent Crisis,” she writes: “We are in the midst of a crisis of massive proportions and grave and global significance. ... I mean a crisis that goes largely unnoticed, like a cancer; a crisis that is likely to be, in the long run, far more damaging to the future of democratic self-government: a world-wide crisis in education” (Nussbaum 2010, 1).<sup>5</sup>

The challenge to cultivate subjectivity and the training of judgment in order to respond to the crisis in resourceful and imaginative ways remains intact and more compelling than ever before. A brief look into the etymological origins of the term might be useful here. In both ancient and modern Greek, the term “crisis,”

originating from the verb “κρίνω” (“to judge”), refers to the exercise and cultivation of our judging abilities and is equivalent to the English “judgment” and the German “*Urteilkraft*.” This is a positive meaning of the term. It is not the meaning Husserl had in mind, when he castigated the collapse of European culture; but it is the meaning Arendt wished to ascribe by playfully converting a “crisis” (in the sense of disaster) into a “crisis” in the sense of making ourselves the most capable judges on important practical issues that occupy the human intellect. Any discussion about the variety of meanings adds to the conceptual elasticity of the term. Koselleck speaks of “an enormous quantitative expansion”<sup>6</sup> that has dominated bibliography and Milstein observes that “...there is comparatively little discussion about crisis as such” (Milstein 2015, 141-2),<sup>7</sup> i.e., as a prominent feature of social and political reality. Seen either as a danger or an opportunity, a crisis is inextricably linked to local and global changes in conceptions and perspectives, practices and institutions, values, behaviors, and the economy. One of its central features is that it is “an inherently reflexive concept, native to modernity,” which presupposes not only the urgent need for an effective response but also “a capacity for crisis consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, it depends on crisis-conscious actors capable of making judgments about their relationship to the world. To say this, it means that human subjects retain their relationship to the world and have escaped alienating themselves from any of its significant objective dimensions. It also means that crisis-conscious subjects play a constitutive role in what a crisis (or a crisis experience) actually is and how it should be overcome.

There are cases in which a crisis indicates a fragmentation between society and its crisis-conscious members. In these cases, the effects of the crisis reflect the exclusion and disempowerment of all those incapable of assuming a response to the ongoing crisis. This pernicious and alienating aspect of “crisis” may be witnessed in the “fortunes” of education, as we have the opportunity to consider below. It seems possible to suggest that a “crisis” in its positive sense (as a relic of the modern culture of reflexivity and subjectivity) may offer opportunities through the exercise of individual judgment. But in its negative sense, a “crisis” gives rise to an endless spiral of subjective alienation and loss of cognitive and valuational orientation. As a result, the subject experiences “a secondary crisis,” the severest form of alienation from the community of the crisis-conscious subjects. As all members of such a community are already constrained by the structures of the world, they stand in a doubly disadvantageous threshold to make any contribution to how the crisis should be overcome.<sup>9</sup> In regard to education, we may witness the same pernicious and alienating aspect of “crisis.” On the turn of the century, Gustavsson warned us of the effects the new dominant economic culture may have on central educational concepts and called for their “radical redefinition.”<sup>10</sup> Today, conceptual re-definition is, perhaps, not enough and broad links should be drawn with the spheres of policy and political culture.<sup>11</sup>

The dominant negative features of this crisis are the following three: (a) In regard to theory, the absence of grand narrative descriptions of education and culture. In consequence, the dominant banking conception treats education as a means to measurable ends, a commercial product external to the goods of knowledge, morality and practical reasoning. (b) In regard to educational research, a strong quantifying and de-personifying empiricism which seals all research results. The new dominant educational ethos encourages the proliferation of the culture of standardization, excellence, and quality. Any reference to subjectivity and its experiences is neglected and the use of qualitative criteria is avoided. Being critical is not an imperative; being instead neutral and indifferent is consonant with quantification and amalgamation. The picture that has been entitled as “education in crisis” finds completion in the analogous changes in the content of curricula, in teaching and learning methods and, of course, in the implementation of actual educational policies. As the latter are hugely

influenced by what happens on the front of educational research, they contribute to a vicious circularity and reinforce the ongoing crisis. (c) In regard to policy and political culture, the robust blend of economics, technocracy, and business promotes the profile of consumptive subjectivities and policies that disregard the democratic deficits they involve.<sup>12</sup> In other words, this blend affects education, democratic self-government, and human *entelecheia*. The capacity of human beings to complete themselves through a self-ascribed and characteristic of their own nature purposive activity, as Aristotle argued,<sup>13</sup> is rarely reclaimed, recommended or rewarded. As Robin Usher eloquently put it, we all are “consumers of learning.”<sup>14</sup> In this light, not only is the “crisis” pernicious; most profoundly, our naivety bears a pernicious effect in that we view education as a self-liberating and self-authenticating process, whilst it is sealed by highly anti-paideutic forces.

### 3. *Phronesis* as a Response to the Educational Crisis

As we have already indicated in the Introduction, the first step we need to take in order to surpass the crisis is to re-establish the endemic bond of education with *paideia* in a modern setting. We do have a historical precedent, where the connection among education, character building, and political virtue was strong; but, apparently, this connection needs to be redefined through modern theoretical lenses. In ancient Greece this connection appeared as the highest of goods. In the *Politics* Aristotle thought that it leads to the fulfillment of the definition of man, of how man *spoudaios*, i.e., virtuous and respectable (1332b 10-11). The educational content and the organization of *paideia* were provided by the polis, the broader public sphere for the instantiation and exercise of citizenship. Good and virtuous (*καλός καγαθός*) was the man who had reached high levels of *paideia* or fulfilled the definition of man by utilizing powerful weapons, i.e., philosophy and rhetoric, critical thinking and argumentation, public deliberation and political participation. In fact, in all subsequent attempts, education had been entrusted with this end (*τέλος*), i.e., the provision of the appropriate means for human beings to complete themselves by realizing all epistemological and practical forms of self-characterization. In this spirit, education as *paideia* was seen as the realization of human *entelecheia*. Equally pervasive is the more recent Enlightenment conception. For example, *Bildung* in Kant’s famous essay *An Answer to the Question: “What Is Enlightenment?”* is the imperative of the new age incorporating all meanings of culture, education, and humanity.<sup>15</sup> The same trend continues in Hegel’s writings from the early *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the mature *Philosophy of Right*: *Bildung* constitutes an educative process, “but it is also related to the sharing and clustering of social values, that goes beyond the limits of a particular educational achievement” (Karavakou 2002, 73).<sup>16</sup>

It seems that it is not impossible to embrace both the anthropological and political elements as crucial to a concept of *paideia* that is viable in modern conditions. On this basis, we would benefit enormously, if we regarded, as Richard Peters does, *paideia* as the true goal of education.<sup>17</sup> This would be an excellent opportunity to re-shape modern education, absolve it from its post-modern picture as a product of consumption, and re-conceive it in terms of a process capable of accomplishing *paideia*. By doing so, it may be argued, one also addresses the sense of passivity involved in the term “education” in the sense of formal schooling. Irrespective of its particular orientation, which currently speaks the idiom of inclusive ideals, fair opportunities and interculturalism, modern education is widely accepted to serve a social mobility role satisfying the demands of the modern economic world. Indeed, although this is the case, it seems to have also worked under the assumption that individual subjects become (*via* schooling) increasingly strong to constitute themselves as the self-legislating authors of their lives. In contrast, the suggested use of the term *paideia* serves precisely this

purpose, i.e., to rejuvenate education in a self-formative and self-encompassing manner that respects the activity of individual subjectivity. This may prove to be quite stimulating in times of crisis, when education assumes a managerial orientation. In such times, *paideia* assumes the creative and dynamic role of generating science, art, politics, and every aspect of human life to the extent that it moulds the realm of consciousness itself and constitutes the social space.

The second step to be taken is to re-consider the place of moral education within education. In the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, given the dire picture that we have just been drawing, it is plausible to ask: What is the state of moral education? What are its position, role, and significance within modern education? Of course, there is a longstanding philosophical tradition with prominent exponents in different and even incompatible pathways, always in the background of our modern theoretical formulations, our practices, our educational programs and policies. A fair portrayal of the modern predicament should not neglect to mention two points: firstly, the pernicious blend of moralization that has harmed morality and moral education<sup>18</sup> and, secondly, the exceptional robustness that has been preserved in the case of a particular moral strand, i.e., deontology from Kant till Rawls and Habermas. Richard Bagnal has plausibly pointed out that modern theories have almost led morality and moral thinking to extinction by encouraging rule-governed behavior and the fear that, in the absence of moral rules, human morality runs the risk of falling into animal primitivism. This had led, in turn, to the proliferation of a deontological rule-governed culture.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the point in this critique is not to question the deontological importance or sacredness of individuality but the emphasis on blind rule-following that underplays the role of judgment.

Recognition of this need stresses the educational value of Aristotle's emphasis upon the exercise of *phronesis*. For Aristotle individual autonomy does not provide the individual learner with some kind of an a priori immunity from the need to reflect, reconsider, unlearn, and re-learn, be critical and thoughtful, pronounce judgments, though not at all necessarily in a judgmental way. Achieving *phronesis* is rather an issue of learning to be *phronimos*, of assuming a paideutic task to be completed in the course of a lifetime. Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis* in his *Nicomachean Ethics* constitutes the first systematic account of practical wisdom or critical reflection. It requires certain sensitivity to a particular mode of the human existence, one that can be attained through experience and is exemplified in the exercise of judgment. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *phronesis* is the intellectual component of the practical science, the capacity that directs action and discerns human goods.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle distinguished the theoretical from practical and productive sciences. Practical sciences (especially education, ethics, and politics) seem to allow for more diversity than the two other kinds. Our educational culture seems to have embraced this idea. But, whilst for Aristotle all kinds of sciences have an almost equal claim in being universal, we have wrongly assumed that practical sciences, because of their link to cultural diversity, amount to a malign cultural and moral relativism. In educational terms, we have compensated for the loss in universality by enthroning the economic or countable figures on a privileged educational standing point and by throwing the practical ability of *phronesis* out of the educational equation. Modern culture embraces economic globalism on grounds of its alleged universalisability and rejects practical reasoning on grounds of its multiculturalism and subsequent relativism. It seems that the post-modern conception of lifelong education places enormous emphasis upon an economically changing world that itself must be articulated in terms of what is called "organizational culture" and predetermines those kinds and methods of learning that are worthy of achievement.

This ill-founded argumentative strategy rests on the following wrong assumption that an appeal to universality and credibility can ever be made, if the principles to which we appeal are significantly removed from the contextual axiological horizon of every action, program, reform, and policy, as if a complete bifurcation between the space of empirical facts and the space of reasons can ever be made; as if such a bifurcation, were it possible, would not concern our deeply engraved belongingness to both the world of facts and the world of values. What is also paradoxical about all this, is the fact that the current trend of formal education rightly assumes that learners might know what is on offer to be learnt, what is the best way of achieving goals, which are the right goals to be chosen. But do they really know all these? It is plausible to expect the verification of this assumption, if we think of learners as capable of exercising context-sensitive judgments, because they are self-conscious judges and choosers and not containers deterministically filled with the “appropriate” information. Of course, learning can quickly generate profit-making strategies, but it would be wrong and naive to expect that: (a) these strategies could be successfully implemented by useful machines and not by open, critical minds and (b) these strategies are the only worthy to be implemented. So the critical question, at this point, is whether the notion of the practically wise capable man can be universally sustained. But why should we think otherwise? And what would it mean, should we think otherwise? The practical capacity for critical reflection, i.e., the capacity to engage our reasoning in the assessment of means and ends, in the choice of the right means and the right ends, the determination to respond and act in various contexts, is a capacity that concerns us as the kind of beings we are, not the privilege of certain social groups, certain cultural traditions, certain type of learners. Why should we think that this calculative or problem-solving capacity is not beneficial to everyone who activates and exercises it? Or, why should we think that not everyone is in principle capable of exercising this capacity? To think otherwise is at least highly suspicious.

Of course, there might be a conflict between some universal notion of practical wisdom and the practical wisdom that is exercised according to the standards of a particular culture. Aristotle considers this possibility, when he discusses the difference between the good person and the good citizen.<sup>21</sup> There are countless historical paradigms of persons that exemplified *phronesis* according to the imperatives of a dominant culture. Hence, a Nazi sympathizer could be a *phronimos* citizen according to the political principles of Nazi ideology. (Let us remind ourselves of how Eichmann presented himself during his trial in Jerusalem, as an obedient, decent, and prudent citizen that followed the orders of the state.<sup>22</sup>) But this certainly does not make him a good man, nor is such an act of obedience tantamount to the exercise of *phronesis*. In any case, this and other similar examples prove only the undeniable fact that a culture (like the one considered earlier) may be decadent, hypocritical, perverse, and undemocratic. It does not prove that the practice of practical wisdom is inadequate or wrong. It also does not prove that there cannot be any universal principles of the right action. That there might be such an unacceptable context does not make this context the final norm individuals and societies should endorse.

On this basis it is plausible to conclude that: (a) One cannot reject the possibility of the universality of a principle on the basis that all principles are culturally specific either in origin or in acceptance. (b) There is indeed no need to assume an absolute standpoint in order for universality to be achieved. We may accept universality in a modest sense according to which principles are universal in so far as they have application across all cultural boundaries.<sup>23</sup> (c) The multiculturalist-relativist argument itself presupposes, if it is to be conceptually coherent, the viability of transcultural or universal normative reach. In other words, we should embrace both relative and universal principles of action. (d) Finally, when a culture shows no or little gap between the universal notion of practical wisdom and its culturally specific instantiation (i.e., when its citizens

are also good persons), then, the exercise of *phronesis* proves to be a sign of genuine education. Given that values or axiological principles play a huge role in the education of both individuals and culture, the task for modern education is to teach humans to learn to recognize their shared values and aims as more important than their disagreements and modern education should settle, rather than avoid, the question of the compatibility of universal and cultural principles by teaching the virtues of modesty, toleration, and reciprocal recognition.

How does *phronesis* bear upon all these? *Phronesis* plays here an important role. It grants genuine respect to what is different from our own perspective. But all those diverse forms of life should gain our respect and recognition to the extent that they are viable and do not harm others by endorsing uncritical forms of devotion to unexamined principles. Neutrality stands for mutual respect among only those people committed to basic values that are by no means neutral. In the words of Susan Mendus, our culture justifies toleration only toward “those diverse forms of life which themselves value autonomy and thus makes toleration a pragmatic devise” (Mendus 1989, 108).<sup>24</sup> Our analysis does not offer an exegetical account of the Aristotelian theory of *phronesis*. Instead, we focus on those characteristics that are important for our reading of modern education.

Firstly, *phronesis* is a particular way of practical thinking, a kind of knowledge that is based on activity and experience. This means that cognition derives from practice and experience and not the other way around. It is the prolonged experience of the world of practice that strengthens the road to practical wisdom. For Sternberg this means that the desired prolonged experience is not the kind of explicit formal knowledge taught in schools or “...measured on tests of academic abilities and achievements... Rather it is the analysis of real-world dilemmas where clean and neat abstractions often give way to messy and disorderly concrete interests” (Sternberg 2003, 157).<sup>25</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explains that *phronesis* includes both factual and procedural knowledge. This means that *phronesis* has a purpose to express itself in the form of a judgment. On this basis it is a judgment-making capacity that is exercised, formed, and transformed by the benefits of practice and experience. The judgment is what manages to bridge the gap between ideality and feasibility, theory and practice, knowledge and application, the general theoretical rules and the particular, specific, contextual elements. Secondly, *phronesis* is activated by individual learners rather than by teachers, trainers, and mentors. The Aristotelian account focuses on the personal forces of learning, i.e., the learner as a being capable of using reason and producing meaning. Thirdly, practical coping or *phronesis* cannot be made fully explicit in the sense that it cannot be adequately explicated theoretically. It cannot also be understood as blind rule-following or as simply giving in to the power of habit. Although *phronesis* is not codifiable, it is universalizable and also contextually dependent. It always arises in a local context despite its global applicability. Many centuries after Aristotle, John Dewey praises the contextuality of learning when he says:

No hard and fast rules ... can be given. It all comes back, as we say, to the good judgement, the good sense, of the one judging. To be a good judge is to have a sense of the relative indicative or signifying values of the various features of the perplexing situation: to know what to let go of as of no account: what to eliminate as irrelevant: what to retain as conducive to the outcome: what to emphasise as a clue to the difficulty. (Dewey 1933, 123)

Fourthly, the practice of *phronesis* is a crucial part of all kinds and styles of learning, most importantly of informal learning. *Phronesis* cannot and should not be restricted to the context of formal education. It underlines the need for ongoing learning, especially in a rapidly changing social world. And finally, *phronesis* involves cognitive, affective, and emotional involvement on the part of the learner. Consequently, every old-fashioned myth about the dualism between a cultivated reason and a conceptually primitive or corrupt

nature should be rejected. Desires, emotions, and other natural constituents are informed and educated as they are enlightened by the voice of reason and the accumulating baggage of experience and educative growth. Is there any reason, besides theoretical obstinacy, to insist on treating human nature as being incapable of listening to reason? MacIntyre is a modern philosopher who follows the steps of both Aristotle and Dewey when he says characteristically:

At any particular time, I have some range of projects, of goals and of desires. ... In so evaluating my desires I stand back from them. ... Most of the time deliberation does proceed and must proceed without bringing this question to mind. And if this question were raised too often and too consistently, it would paralyse us as agents. But without the ability to raise it we cannot function as practical reasoners. (MacIntyre 1999, 69)

In conclusion, the exercise of *phronesis* proves to be an important constituent of all forms of learning and education, in all types of social and cultural backgrounds that afford humanity the rights of dignity and autonomy. It is a lifelong process that needs, particularly in the present ever changing world, to be incorporated into the context of moral education.

#### **4. *Phronesis* and Transformative Learning**

In 1978 Jack Mezirow introduced the concept of transformative learning, which was perhaps critical for placing his theory in the pantheon of adult learning theories. The theory of transformational learning belongs to a broader horizon of constructivist theories, all putting enormous emphasis upon the autonomous activity of a learning individual subject. One of the central tenets of the theory is that the way learners interpret their experiences bears profound significance on how they construct meaning.<sup>26</sup> The theory comprises two kinds of learning: instrumental learning which is addressed mainly on problem solving and communicative learning which concerns the way learners communicate their needs, desires, feelings, and emotions to one another. The individual interpretation of experience is influenced by the meaning schemes or meaning perspectives as “constellations of concepts, beliefs, judgments and feelings” (Mezirow 1994, 223),<sup>27</sup> as they are all dependent on the individual critical or reflective ability. In other words, we are to assume here that this ability precedes everything else and is being reclaimed in a way that influences both self- and other- understanding. This gives us the unique sense of autonomy, of being the sole authors, directors, and legislators of our lives. We should also assume that education acknowledges the significance of this sense and encourages its experiential roots.

Modern moral education could benefit enormously from embracing the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* together with Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. Since first introduced by Jack Mezirow, the concept of transformative learning has assumed a key-role of ever growing significance in the field of education. Autonomy is a value granted with unanimous acceptance given that it constitutes (a) the defining feature of individual reflection in the post-Enlightenment era and (b) the foundational ingredient of education. For both Aristotle and Mezirow the exercise of morality falls within the space of moral learning. Learning to be a moral subject is not an issue of an instantaneous grasp of the demands of reason and morality. This is an achievement of the overall paideutic process that makes our active participation in the moral space a conceptually possible and practically meaningful task. The results of the practice of *phronesis* are enhanced on the basis of a criticism of any pre-given or crystallized views, which brings the desired self-transformation about. To put it differently, one becomes *phronimos*, when one has learned to criticize all previous contentions. This process strengthens the sense of individual autonomy and self-empowerment. Our bringing *phronesis* and transformative learning together work on the following assumptions:



(a) Firstly, individual autonomy is not understood as a formal schema, but a real option with developmental and contextual presuppositions. Common to both theories is the underlying assumption that moral learning is a process of reflection upon past and present experiences by which one's character is greatly shaped and through which one learns to recognise morally demanding situations. Following Kant, it is important to understand the individual as a being of self-authenticating and self-legislating powers. But following Aristotle and Mezirow, it is equally important to describe and explain these powers as part of a lifelong moral inquiry. Unless such an assumption is made, individual autonomy is deprived of all content and determinations, moral conscience appears as ambiguous and insincere, moral education exhausts itself to the wandering from one error to the other, and moral life is inevitably reduced to the experience of anxiety and restlessness.

(b) Secondly, this move enables us to develop an understanding of the right to exercise individual judgment as the individual's capacity to abstract oneself from one's particular experiences, one's social situation and from a given social system of what is right/good and enter into a reflective relationship with it. We regard this act of "stepping back" of profound significance for both achieving full knowledge of one's qualities, limits, and purposes, for assuming full responsibility for one's actions and, finally, for re-evaluating one's stand in relation to what one regards as right or good. In the Aristotelian framework this act of "stepping back" was of no particular importance, as the culture of that age did not suffer from cognitive and valuational disorientation. In most cases, culture provided the content of *phronesis*. Our culture provides no content at all. In that culture, moral intelligibility and truth was not an issue. In our age, it is a burning issue. Our age grants us with the right of judgment and it is useful to ask what we do with it, when we need to deliberate. A joint study of *phronesis* and transformative learning enables us, we argue, to come up with the most important points the individual needs to consider in their deliberations. *Phronesis* is understood as a constructive teaching weapon the extensive use of which enables the individual to discern the moral relevance and significance of a certain situation and respond to it appropriately. It is a process that involves all our mental, emotional, and volitional powers. It may also procure an increasing sense of responsibility, with greater awareness of our obligations and a greater ability to recognise the universal significance of certain things.

All these are factors that should be considered and weighed up in the context of moral deliberation. The modern individual achieves this in the modern fashion of "stepping back," of re-considering the given and the sacred, the familiar and the unquestionable, the habitual and the customary. All conceptual schemes pass through the painful thorough investigation of modern individuality. The result of this continuous self-reflection is a self-transformative result. The given and the sacred, the familiar and the unquestionable, the habitual and the customary may be accepted; if so, it will be on fully conscious and self-reflective terms. But it may also not be so. The given and the sacred, the familiar and the unquestionable, the habitual and the customary may be despised, revised, or even dismissed. *Phronesis* results always in a transformation. Its extension and intensity cannot be known a priori. It can only be anticipated and it should not be hindered.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Considerable discussion has been generated recently concerning the modern understanding of education. Do we really need a kind of a "Copernican revolution," as Hager and Halliday suggest,<sup>28</sup> both within and without educational institutions? Many theorists and philosophers like to think that we urgently need one. We have argued for an integral and more inclusive and pluralistic account of education. We suggested that this

endeavour could be substantially supported by moral education, as the latter bears an inalienable relationship with the element of critical reflection that has been so evidently overshadowed by the modern single account of formal education and economic wellbeing. We highlighted the fact that this has resulted in an undesirable imbalance between education as a constitutive part of self-completion and education as an aspect of economic professionalism. Whilst we can easily detect an unwarranted neglect of the former, we discover an equally unwarranted focus on the latter. This trend remains currently dominant and its legitimacy rests considerably on the measurability of inputs and outputs. Powerful institutions all over the globe have submitted to this excessive economic determinism and encouraged, therefore, in the programs they have been funding any theory that treats education in terms of the “mind as container” metaphor. The suggestion was put forward that the modern learner needs to nurture, develop, and exercise a capacity in an attempt to qualify as a candidate capable of responding to the huge challenges on all fronts of learning, knowledge, and culture. We have argued that the Aristotelian theory of practical wisdom and Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning grant us with such a developing capacity to make context-sensitive judgments, informed choices, and knowledgeable assessments in a manner that transforms us and our world.

There remains a final question: Why is this a project upon which moral education should embark? Putting it differently, why does this project rest on the shoulders of moral education? The answer is simply because the demand to re-introduce critical reflection and informed choice into what has been entitled as the modern “empire of education”<sup>29</sup> is a moral demand. Today, the majority of educational policies and institutions over-emphasize those conclusions about learning which are uncritically derived through the various stages of formal education. As a result, a huge part of learning goes largely unnoticed and is barely understood. Most of this part concerns the individual learner’s own critical ability to describe, explain, and value what is on offer. Hence, this ability has been marginalized, treated as something mysterious and invisible, despite the fact that we possess it on grounds of being the kind of organisms that we are, not on grounds of educational policies and institutions.

Of course, one should rejoice, if other disciplines joined in this task. Our concern was to emphasize that moral education is one of those areas that still resist the growing formalization of learning, treating it as a product and testing it ad infinitum. Moral education supports the integrity of human beings and takes account of their cultural conditions as well as of their fundamental desire to stand as self-authenticating agents and autonomous learners. “The current ethos suggests that arriving at a destination is the appropriate way to think about learning. You pay for goods, they are delivered and the contract is completed. Economic rationalist and ‘user pays’ policies suggest to students that learning is about finalizing the delivery of goods” (Hager & Halliday 2007, 241).<sup>30</sup> We raised the question about how we can change these impressions and answered that the exercise of *phronesis* makes substantial room for viewing education as an ongoing process of critical transformation.

## Notes

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1. Karavakou, V., 2002; 2009.
  2. We borrow the expression from Kelly, G. A., 1969, p. 342.
  3. Husserl, E., 1965, p. 185.
  4. Arendt, H., 1968, pp. 173-4.

5. Nussbaum, M., 2010, p. 1.
6. Koselleck, R., 2006, p. 397.
7. Milstein, B., 2015, pp. 141-2.
8. Ibid., p. 147.
9. Ibid., p. 154.
10. Gustavsson, B., 2002, p. 14.
11. Antoniou, K., & Karavakou, V., 2017.
12. Apple, M. W., 1992, pp. 783-4.
13. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Θ.6 1048 a25.
14. Usher, R., 2007, p. 221.
15. Kant, I., 1980.
16. Karavakou, V., 2002, p. 73.
17. Peters, R., 1966.
18. Grayling, A., 2003.
19. Bagnal, R., 1999, p. 318.
20. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140 b20-21. Of course, we must also never lose sight of the fact that Aristotle's conception presupposes that these goods bear an integral relationship to the ultimate human good, i.e., *eudaimonia*. Soon, we discover that this may be quite problematic in our era, since we have shrunk dramatically the all round *telos* of human *eudaimonia* to the relegated notion of its hedonistic descendant, i.e., modern happiness.
21. Aristotle, *Politics*, III, 4.
22. Arendt, H., "Eichmann in Jerusalem," 1961.
23. Karavakou, V., 2008.
24. Mendus, S., 1989, p. 108.
25. Sternberg, 2003, p. 157.
26. Mezirow, J., 1978; 1991; 1994; 2000.
27. Mezirow, J., 1994, p. 223.
28. Hager, P., & Halliday, J., 2007, p. 234.
29. Duke, C., 2001, p. 509.
30. Hager, P., & Halliday, J., 2007, p. 241.

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