

Ulrich Binder  
Switzerland

## The Subject of Philosophy, the Subject of Pedagogy, the Pedagogues' Subject

### Abstract

Whoever reflects upon the development and reasoning of pedagogical thoughts and actions faces the problematic subject. 'The' subject seems to figure as the basis of it all. Whilst all other key terms and categories are constantly open to negotiation, the 'subject' presents itself as self-evident rather than as an entity to be argued at length. Yet, some questions remain unanswered. Why is this the case? Furthermore, what kind of subject do we refer to?

In this article the central issues concerning 'The Subject and Pedagogy'<sup>1)</sup> as well as first findings of this ongoing research by the author are being discussed. The main focus is not on the results. What is of crucial importance with regard to the following text are the allusions to the apories which accompany any paradigm of the subject. This holds true of every single stage: the subject of philosophy, the subject of pedagogy and the pedagogues' subject.

**Key words:** *Subject, Philosophy, Pedagogy, Maturity, Autonomy, Pedagogical Paradox*

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<sup>1)</sup> The working-title is: The Subject of Pedagogy – The Pedagogy of the Subject. In this chiasm lies already the main thesis of my exploratory study, namely the one, according to which a certain understanding of the subject of pedagogy (*the subject of pedagogy*) exists, and according to which pedagogy is centered around the subject: understands and justifies itself via the paradigm of the subject (*the pedagogy of the subject*). A few short remarks about my research methods: for my Post-Doc-thesis I intend to 'spell out' the views on the subject as understood by the German-speaking pedagogy over a period of the last 35 years. First of all, I want to trace back the *references* regarding the different theorists' understanding of the subject and analyse

## **Introduction**

In a 1986 article, Marian Heitger voiced his concern about the danger of current Pedagogy losing its subject – written against a background of postmodern attempts at deconstructing the subject. Dieter Lenzen on the other hand discussed the crisis of the subject and the inaptitude of pedagogical subject thinking in 1994. Heitger and Lenzen merely figure as examples for the following: *The Subject of Pedagogy* is a subject matter. This has not only been the case recently, in the context of long, usually philosophical, debates in the current of Poststructuralism. Pedagogical German ‘classics’ (such as Schleiermacher, Herbart, also Humboldt, and later Petzelt, Nohl et al.), to whom many refer back, clearly tackle the problematic subject. In Pedagogy, however, ‘the subject’ is not always *explicitly* dealt with. Yet, signatures of this ‘subject’ can be traced: maturity, autonomy, self-assertion in many forms, identity, emancipation, comprehensiveness and others – all of which can be understood as aspirations towards successful subjectivity. They are in such high demand with regard to communication among pedagogues that they require the declaration: ‘subject’ is *the* basic category of Pedagogy throughout the German-speaking cultures. On the whole, it would seem that the axiom ‘subject’ has become so much part of Pedagogy that it hardly requires to be identified, specified, analysed or probed.

### **1. The Subject of Philosophy**

At first glance the «subject» as part of pedagogical discussions may appear to be established de facto as a self-evident entity, which ought not to be challenged, but it is equally well known that this does not apply to other discourses. Therefore, room shall be given to this statement first, by surveying both the current state of

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them. Then there emerges an additional field of analysis, so as to complement and enrich – this is the assumption – the former: the field of ‘practical pedagogy’, ‘the view by the professionals’. I juxtapose the practitioners’ positions with the complexity of the academic figures regarding ‘subject’ reasoning, so as to establish, which among them find their way into (and are received by) the practical pedagogy, and which not, since practical pedagogy develops/needs to develop its ‘own’ view of the subject – in order to enable itself to act upon it. In conclusion: I enter the territory of the academic-pedagogical subject, in order to highlight the *sources* of references, in particular concerning the philosophical-theoretical kind (in the broadest sense), thereafter the specific kinds of *references* as accommodated by the pedagogy, and then I include the practical-pedagogical discourse, in order to draw a comprehensive picture of *the subject of pedagogy – the pedagogy of the subject*.

affairs and the consequences of these discussions. The opposing groups, which form through «the argument about the subject», and their manifold effects are being treated. Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach as a way forward through the problems of the subject is suggested. In addition, the peculiar difficulties, which arise, because the researching subject is in turn subjected to its own involvement in the subject research, are also an issue.

One can observe a cyclic inflation of the subject matter, yet strangely enough the 'argument about the subject' seems somewhat deflated at the same time. When contemplating 'the subject', one treads on a treacherous ground of irritation. The alleged disappearance of the subject and its dissolution into a transsubjective, cultural sign system on one hand ... is confronted by the fact of its stubbornly asserted existence on the other hand (Hagenbüchle, 1998, p.2). Anything from the declared omnipotence/-presence of the subject to its allegedly negligible nature or at least its contingent fragility regarding the (in)ability of cognition and actions are within the scope of the subject matter. Or to put it mildly: Research (not even necessarily results) tends to position itself either on the side of 'the absolutely autonomous subject, which cannot bear any heteronomies, or on the side of the strictly heteronomous determinism, where there is no room for any free actions by the subjects ...' (Deines, 2003, p. 64). 'Subject' therefore prompts either partisanship or resistance, and overall the positions in discussions are well established – as they have always been. Mostly, the discussions center around the 'pros and cons', followed by an exclusive 'either or', or by a weak 'the golden mean', rarely by an 'it depends', and hardly by a 'neither nor' or by an 'as well as' respectively. The rigid partisanship in the argument about 'the subject', which might include polemic, hard and occasionally denouncing facets within their arguments, reveal the inherent meaning of the subject matter in question. The comprehensive research, which highlights the many aspects of 'the subject', confirms its significance. What is at stake here is nothing less than the human beings wondering about themselves. The modern view of subjectivity embraces the epoch-making human self-image, which ought to be the epitome of humanity and freedom. Thus, the whole culture of the Occident appears to be focussed onto the paradigm of the subject, therefore 'the project of modernism' at large is based upon the reasoning on the subject.

Even so, there is no evidence of a theoretically clarified 'subject'. The opposing parties of the argument have just continued to work without further consideration of the unresolved matter, let alone an agreement about it. Given the nature of the 'subject problem' it is, however, hard to imagine that a definite consensus could ever be reached, since it is both theoretically and practically far too indefinable and provisional, ambiguous and vague. Furthermore, its imprecise use in receptions of all kinds makes it clear that such debates *cannot* be truly concluded. Problems arise

because 'the subject' as the bone of contention lacks a clear 'definition.' What one refers to, once 'the subject' is either invented or abandoned, is vague, *not least of all* due to the practised division of labour in the sciences. Given its broad range of meanings, 'the subject' is of interest to many scientific disciplines such as Philosophy, Psychology, Historical Research, Pedagogy, Sociology, Research into Religions, Theology, Literature, Semiotics, Political Science, Law, Neurobiology and others, and within each field 'the signifier subject' carries differing meanings. All the scientific disciplines, which have 'the subject' for an object of research, have exclusively defined their respective object territories (Zima, 2001, p. 1). Therefore the thesis is being advocated that 'the problem of the subject can only be substantially comprehended in an interdisciplinary context where Philosophy, Sociology, Semiotics, Psychology and Literature join forces' (ibid., p. 3). The crucial point revealed here: the interdisciplinary approach does not 'mediate' an emphasis on the radically heterogeneous 'subject', the way it presents itself in various contexts, in order to discuss the open and inconclusive nature of the subject thereby. 'Subject' is not seen as a positively empty space, which can be 'filled' in different ways with a specific content according to the specialist context. Instead such an interdisciplinary approach seeks to 'level' the 'ambiguity of a notion', whose profound meaning 'increased immensely' (ibid., IX).

The interdisciplinary approach to the problem of the subject plus the different investigation methods which go with it are, at any rate, only the tip of the iceberg, when considering the problem of the subject. In other words, this does not automatically guarantee any answers to the basic questions about human self-image and understanding. Whilst the question about the subject should embrace a meaningful, socio-cultural framework of a certain epoch/context and the actions within it, the 'problem situation' cannot be reduced to such an analytical framework. The topic is more complex. The question regarding 'the changing self-image of human beings and their attempts at reassuring themselves in changed circumstances anew, is a process, which cannot in principle be concluded' (Hagenbüchle, 1998, p. 9). Against such a background of understanding, the fixed dualistic positions, which the research into the subject tends to provoke, make wonder. Instead of integrating the discussions about the subject and its 'polemic polarity' as 'blending' position with negation, as a reciprocal connection, which formulates – reciprocally(!) – indispensable moments of both a changed and changing self-description' (Ricken, 1999, p. 21), the research into the subject remains too often in rigid blocks of partisanship. Something it can almost not avoid doing, since the classical avenues of research into the problem of the subject are paved with basic assumptions. It is difficult to escape them with the help of conventional subject-object-structures. Therefore the question about 'the subject', if taken as a

classic object of research, is not actually treated as a truly open question. When dealing with the problem of the subject, the fact tends to get ignored – not least of all within an interdisciplinary approach – that the hermeneutic-critical perspective as generally advocated (refer to Hagenbüchle, 1998, especially to 9f.) is strangely accompanied by an inherent 'existential circle', which causes very different difficulties. 'Whoever delves into the problem, is inextricably confronted by one's own self-image of one's own life, without an escape route via any scientific meta-reflection. The 'argument about the subject' demands self-involvement and thereby prevents the observing overview from a distance' (Ricken, 1999, p. 23)<sup>2</sup>. It is this constituting self-reference which various parties suppress with regard to the basic definition of the subject. This prompts the problem that the subject, which investigates the subject, is not seen in a context of experience moulded by a certain epoch, and therefore creates a similar concept of subject accordingly. The consequences are manifold, including the typical idea of the 'subject' as a universal and ahistorical entity.

### **About the Conflict Structure of "the Subject"**

'Subject' is a comparatively young 'self-interpretation of human beings ladden with implications and complications alike' (Ricken, 1999, p. 28). What is meant by 'subject', the one so fraught with a conflict structure that triggers the above mentioned polarity in any discussions? When not questioned and challenged, the title of the subject corresponds with a completely changed understanding of human beings. Whilst human beings have (still) been part of a system ruled by destiny in the traditional metaphysical line of thinking, they are now supposed to rise above it, and to go even further by actually (re)arranging the world itself. What is expressed herewith is that human beings do not want to see themselves (any longer) or indeed ought not to comprehend themselves in relation to 'a great authority of a hereafter from without', but should instead seek their 'standing' within themselves. To assume their own existence, to go beyond it, thus enabling the human beings to grasp and define their self, is roughly the underlying structure of reasoning about the subject – according to the Age of Enlightenment. Implied in the philo-

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the narcissistically hurt, defiant *assertions* of the subject against postmodern decentralisations ('since what must not be, cannot be') just as the fashionable-cynical *denials* of the subject (which in turn remain caught in a dichotomy, when juxtaposing the classic-modern position of necessity with the declaration of impossibility) are less 'objective' prototypes than they sometimes pretend to be.

sophical tradition are three constituting characteristics: self-consciousness (as awareness of and relationship with oneself), freedom (as determining for oneself, living by one's own rules, shaping and creating one's own life, acting on one's own accord, and as realising one's full potential), and dignity (as self-assertion and self-esteem). What appears so plausible and worthwhile at first glance, reveals its ambivalence when following the train of thoughts below. (At least) *prerequisite* for *self-realization* is a certain *unfamiliarity* with the self (if not also a permanent consequence of it). In other words, all the idealistic descriptions of subject are related to a conflict structure with a two-, sometimes even threefold polarity, according to what we are 'faced with': I – the other(s), soul – body, reason – sensuality, intellect – nature etc.<sup>3</sup> Right from the beginning there is an inherent bipolarity: between the subject as 'the basis' and as 'the subjected'. This could even demonstrate on its own that such reasoning about the subject demands quite naturally for an emphasis – for 'taking sides'. This would help to clarify the matter at least slightly. Thus one could assume that autonomy is hard to gain from amongst heteronomies and sacrifice, but can be ultimately reached or ought to be reached without contradictions. Or one could reason that 'the other (the human being; death; god)' is the essentially defining dimension of human existence.<sup>4</sup> Or one could indeed advocate that a balance between the two needs to be found, for instance with regard to an inter-personal, socially reciprocal balancing act of identity.

The big questions seem to constitute the conflict structure of the 'subject'. Whilst empirically and for everyday use 'freedom' is a familiar problem and thus one tries to handle it accordingly, it is difficult to grasp 'freedom' in its theoretical dimension of the subject, 'more difficult than the lack of freedom in animals or the absolute freedom of God' (Schulz, 1979, p. 19). Freedom can be described as it is put into practice, but its nature, the way it has, no doubt, be defined by the 'subject' in modern times – the human subjectivity ... is determined by freedom due to the ego' (ibid.) – remains deeply ambivalent. Either the absolute is sought after through transcending and crossing over, i.e. leaving the world *behind*, or else 'the subject'

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Wadenfels (1986, pp. 115) recalls 'a strong subject's' constituting 'moments of becoming' – active authorship, self-confident ownership, autonomous legislation, which could be thought stable – only by exclusion of their opposing moments – passivity, unfamiliarity, otherness, heteronomy. Johanna Hopfner (1999, p. 15) also advocates the thesis that many theories of authorities regarding the subject are valued thanks to the will for such validation.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Lèvinas, for example, understands 'subiectum' as a subject subjected by *others*. With this, he distances himself from the egological approaches, from the 'I think' origin of all appraisal (compare, for instance, with Otto Speck and Jörg Zirfas for pedagogy, who absorb such thoughts (differently)).

is meant to be understandable *thanks to* and *from within* the world. 'Freedom' thus acquires a double meaning, as it implies on one hand freedom *'from and beyond'* the world, and on the other hand freedom *'because of and through'* the world.

The conflict structure of 'the paradoxical subject' is not the only dichotomy, the human beings' 'other side', as has been highlighted, is another. All concepts of the subject, runs the argument, are flawed with the particularity, the contingency, the chance, the dream, the finiteness, and other unavoidable shadows clouding the sovereignty of the intellect. Any kind of subject creation thus needs to confront the natural contingency. The work of the subject upon itself turns negative in many theories (refer to the earlier writing by Lacan; refer also particularly to Freud): by way of reducing self-deceptions, of integrating the contingent finiteness, the self-revelation of the subject comes to the fore. The crux is that the subject often grows ultimately stronger through these processes, and thereby aspires to the self-transparent subject in turn (even though different from other theories). In the shape of this cycle, which is obviously hard to escape, the 'classic' dilemma of the subject knocks on the door all over again.

This sketch outlines the potential for conflict, which finally sparks off the debates. It is recognisable in principle that 'the subject', which is positioned in-between being unequivocal, ambiguous, changing meanings, and meaning nothing, proves to be such a problematic enterprise.

### **The Subject of the German-Speaking Academic Pedagogy**

As mentioned above, 'the subject' interests many scientific disciplines because of its inherently programmatic and multidimensional meaning – 'the subject' as *the* modern paradigm with regard to both the theoretical and practical self-knowledge of the human beings. This holds particularly true of pedagogy for a number of reasons. When one recalls the basic concepts within pedagogy over the last decades, then one distinct characteristic emerges: the human being as 'a subject', entangled closely with the idea of education, is distinguished by the principle of able self-determination and by unity in diversity – as 'coherence'. Wolfgang Klafki (1994, p. 19), for instance, demonstrates, via reference to the 'classic' theories of education, that learning ought to be understood as 'enabling sensible self-determination', which requires or includes 'emancipation from determination by others'. This implies a view of 'the subject' as capable of autonomy. This autonomy is realised through education. Pedagogy does not just imagine a subject (such as 'the Philosophy does with a subject of reasoning and acting), write Adalbert and Britta Rang (1985, p. 30), 'it also believes to be both *competent* and *responsible* for it.'

Whilst philosophy tends to discuss an ideal state of the 'being' dimension, pedagogy is faced with the problem of the 'becoming' dimension. Yet how, for example, 'become autonomous' – notably brought about by heteronomy, if this requires autonomy as a condition? 'How is it possible ... that an only potentially reasonable being becomes a truly sensible being, who defines itself as an intelligent being, if one does not want to presuppose the act, which contradicts the reasoning conditions of the 'subject' concept regarding reason and freedom?' (Winkler, 1989, p. 119). Several questions arise here with regard to inherent paradox, antinomy and apories. 'The basic problem of any pedagogy ... is its theory of the subject ...' (Oelkers, 1991, p. 12).

Whoever wants to develop and to explain pedagogical reasoning and acting, faces the problem of the subject – not least of all given the tradition of pedagogy. *That* the subject is a distinctive feature of pedagogical discourse, shall be recalled by the following reference. Human beings became 'anthropologised' in modern philosophy. The guiding principle influencing a human being's course of life lies no longer in a given order, rather it is to be found within himself/herself as sign posts hinting at the direction of shaping his/her life. The human being as an end in itself. With the (seeming) abandonment of (pre)supposed systems the so far common ends-means-relations in pedagogy is left behind almost entirely. As a result, the possibilities to deduce anything from a meta-level onto the human beings were missing, and education served as an answer to a *pre-existing* pedagogical problem. Modern-classic pedagogical reasoning became anchored in the human beings themselves. This is nothing else but the intention of the pedagogically orientated enlightenment of the human beings regarding themselves. Michael Winkler, too, argues that 'a common understanding' of pedagogy views subjectivity as a criterion for pedagogical reasoning and acting. Ever since philosophy took up the idea of educating mankind, 'the problems of pedagogy have been reflected in the philosophical semantics and only through these they have become thinkable at all as pedagogical ones' (Winkler, 1989, p. 118). Michael Winkler's quotation has an important attachment: '... pedagogy reassures itself only with the help of the 'subject' concept, which the bourgeois philosophy has developed' (ibid., p. 120).

This contains an essential thought, namely that pedagogy tries to justify *itself* with reference to the concept of subject. The idea of subject makes education appear necessary for the following important reasons. The alleged certainty inherent in the reasoning about the subject guides pedagogy, which thus knows what needs to be done. Dualistic concepts of the subject therefore reassure pedagogy within itself, and at the same time they signal to the sphere without, the world is to be viewed – and ruled – as what we construct it. Through education the status of a subject ought to be attained. Subjectivity lies in circumstances created by the



self, and pedagogy sees itself as necessary in letting the human beings become educated under the given circumstances to the subject itself. Once more, with the help of pedagogy the human being ought to become a human being, but that is possible only because s/he has already been a human being from the start. – Hence pedagogy takes on the role of the midwife. Classic-modern-oriented pedagogy views itself as the authority, says Marian Heitger, which, contrary to the philosophy inquiring into the *value*, needs to be the one to *effect* this value (refer also to Nohl, Petzelt et al. on this). I repeat, whilst philosophy tends to explore the ideal state of the 'being' dimension, pedagogy is faced with the problem of the 'becoming' dimension. This might seem like a trivial insight, which becomes more intriguing, when one realises what exactly happens within a thus imagined dimension of 'becoming'. In a classic-pedagogical manner it deals with the transition from a 'not yet' into 'but then' (refer to Ricken, who discusses this in detail, 1999). This would not pose a further problem, if it were not for such major definitions as maturity (grown out of former immaturity – and this is not meant in a legal sense), autonomy (out of earlier heteronomy – and is the latter, once the pedagogical aim of autonomy is reached, just gone with the wind, out of the lives of the autonomous people?) or identity (out of former non-identity or an insufficient one ...?). Finally the human being ought to be compact.

With the help of this outlined thinking inclined towards differences, among other things, pedagogy establishes itself on the basis of the 'enlightenment' subject as an indispensable necessity. It thus legitimizes its existence. The legitimacy is, however, most paradoxical. 'The cult production of paradox', which Dieter Lenzen discusses, and which is constantly part of Jürgen Oelker's works, is what shows pedagogy, which is based on a reasoning about the subject, to be necessary. – Pedagogy can be explained only paradoxically – at best – within a subject orientation. Pedagogical reasoning based on the classic 'subject' concept produces antinomies at first, which subsequently need to be worked on by pedagogy.

### **The Pedagogical Practitioners' Subject**

How does the pedagogical practice cope with all this? First analyses give the following picture: the classic-modern paradigm of the subject is presented just as unquestioned and unchallenged as the basis of pedagogical action in the pedagogical journals for professionals. Academic «insights» about «the subject» get courageously received at times, without discussing them in depth, let alone challenge them. That is, the signatures of «the subject», autonomy, maturity, emancipation, identity, wholeness etc. are made the idealised basis of it all, without defining

them specifically, just as within the *academic*-pedagogical field.<sup>5)</sup> The multiple dilemmas of determination by the self versus the other, of freedom versus conformity, of personalisation versus socialisation hang in the room unaddressed.

When ‘negotiating’ all this, practitioners often rely on models of gradual development towards ‘the autonomous subject’. In a dichotomous manner ‘the personality’ (‘the subject’), the environment and the social (‘the world’) are distinguished in a clear-cut way. Via the classic ‘structure levels of the human image’ (Piaget, Kohlberg et al.) it is emphasized on the one hand that the human being is a self-effective actor every step of the way – really the subject of the classic-enlightened forming – and on the other hand such models suggest a development towards a higher level, in other words, becoming truly human, as a logical result. The basis often consists of a theory of knowledge (= Erkenntnistheorie), which radicalizes ‘the subjectivity’: the constructivism. This school of reasoning is largely based on that strong subject. It does test the systems of orientation for their usefulness in the context of communicating and interacting with *other* human beings/the world. Yet, the subject is finally, once again, ‘the author of the world’, the centre, which deduces the world from itself self-transparently and thereafter self-confidently and self-consciously.

A somewhat different apory regarding the practitioners’ ‘subject’ reasoning becomes apparent in the emphasis on the subject’s capacity to *act*. ‘The competence to act’ as an expression of ‘the autonomous subject’ comes to the fore in the practice. In the practice, this seems to be the common tenor, pedagogy can indeed have an influence, since the human being can be guided towards independent and responsible action via the passing on of knowledge and skills. Yet again, ‘the strong subject’ is the basis and the aim respectively. This becomes clear, when for example ‘autonomy’ and ‘identity’ accumulate in the might of action within the individual: ‘plans of action are not imposed upon the individual in a deterministic manner ... by norms of the society or by expectations regarding roles, rather it can autonomously choose ... between different plans’ (Tillmann, 1980, p. 959). What is behind all this: in ‘classic’ socialisation ‘there is no room for an unmistakable ‘I’ ... the identity and the individuality of the subject get lost’ (ibid., p. 957).

In the practical pedagogy the action-theoretical idea of the subject (= handlungstheoretischer Begriff) is usually thought to be able to overcome the criticised sociologicistic reductions. Thereby, the classic polarity of the ‘I and the world’ is re-established, and whereby especially ‘the acting subject’ appears to be presiding over the world. Here the one-sided rationality of the ‘autonomy’ concept asserts

<sup>5)</sup> Refer to Käte Meyer-Drawe (2000; i.O. 1990), who sheds some light on the problematic ‘autonomy’, and to Markus Rieger-Ladich (2002) regarding ‘maturity’.

itself. The determinations by others, which threaten this autonomy and which need to be averted, are the result of configurations of the social existence, against which the subject needs to prevail in the end. The strenuous emphasis of autonomy in this context can perceive 'outside' only ever as a threat. In pedagogy this view (social versus individual) has long been noticeable as a commonly used polarity. Education in its social function is regarded as reproduction, reduced to integration into the status quo, whilst education in its individual function is defined – latently exaggerated – as 'bringing forth the bringing forth of the self'. In other words, the social side becomes the necessary and the individual the disturbing consequence (typical for instance Herwig Blankertz) (Ricken, 1999, p. 330).

What remains, is the dichotomous determination by the self versus by the other. And strangely enough, pedagogy sides with the self-determination, which it wants to achieve via determination by the other. Thus, the pedagogical paradox traps the pedagogical practitioners' side of the argument, too. This is one facet, which shows itself, after yet sparse analysis of the reasoning about the subject within the pedagogical practice.

Pedagogical practitioners classically presuppose the self-determined 'becoming of the self' by the individual. This reasoning appears internalised on their banners. Besides this, however, an intriguing dimension opens up, which I am going to pursue further in the context of my research. There are also approaches, which place, instead of the pedagogical attempt to encourage 'the becoming of *self*' (in the sense of identical 'subject of unity'), 'the becoming of *other/different*' at the centre of their interest. They do not teleologically presuppose the final subject, but instead emphasize a permanent change in the human being. 'A subject in process, in progress' perhaps? One, where pedagogical beginnings might be found, which might be both more modest and pragmatic, possibly also more effective? And more honest?

Translation by  
Marianne Junger, MA, CH-Bern

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