



The Energy of Non-Simple Stories – Humanities in the Form of Pedagogy and Educational Research

Abstract: In the article, I put forward the thesis that research based on scientific assumptions (in the sense of the tendency to make the humanities and social sciences similar to natural sciences, that is: based on ontological and methodological naturalism) is marginal and only auxiliary importance in the exploration of human practices (I consider it on the example of pedagogy as the science of a subjective and communicational undertaking called education). I argue that when the scientific model of research becomes dominant – as it is nowadays – it obscures the basic subject of pedagogical research: education. As a result, the public image of education is reduced and distorted.

Keywords: humanities, scientism, pedagogy, hermeneutics, subjectivity, education

Introduction

In pedagogy – I am convinced – one does not consistently draw conclusions from the banal methodological truth that there are different ways of thinking and conducting research, corresponding to different aspects of reality, and that if it is so, the choice of a particular way is important because of the nature of the area under study. As a result, in administrative activities and research practice, pedagogy is too often equated (not very successfully) with the social science, imitating the procedures of natural sciences, and too rarely treated as full-fledged discipline of the humanities, operating in the sphere of stories crucial for human life.

British philosopher Paul Standish – referring to the typology of Michael Bonnett – distinguished two ways of thinking: (1) rational-assertive (calculative); (2) receptive-responsive (mediative). Standish illustrates his point by making an analogy to the difference between power-boating and sailing: while sailing, Standish observes, one must be much more in tune with nature (accounting for the swell, wind force, or oceanic currents); while motoring, one can override the elements; once may just go full throttle and close the window. Sailing must be respectful of external conditions and circumstances; motor-boating does not need

to be. Of course, this is a simplified picture. In practice, both sailing and power vessel masters must carefully plan their passages, taking into account the nautical conditions. Ignoring them would cost too much and could even lead to a disaster. Importantly, however, the analogy demonstrates that meditative way of thinking acknowledges the world, while the calculative way of thinking overrides it.¹ It is important that the chosen way of thinking allows one to experience the reality under study and not to steam-roll over it with a predetermined project. I put forward a bipartite thesis: research based on scientist² (positivist or post-positivist³) assumptions are of marginal, at most ancillary, importance in pedagogy; yet when they become dominant, they obscure the basic object of pedagogical research: education. Everyday academic experience suffices to acknowledge that all too many dissertations in the field of pedagogy at the undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and professorial levels rooted in naturalist assumptions and depend on related measurement procedures. The first part of my thesis, therefore, is not *empirical* in nature; rather, it is theoretically and methodologically oriented. Its second part, in turn, is a critical diagnosis concerning the inadequacy of the methodological awareness in pedagogy, practiced, as it were, for the sake of the social image of education.

The temptation to refute this thesis all-too-easily, should, however, be kept at bay. I am not interested in instigating a conflict between disciplines: this is not a text about the superiority of the humanities over natural science, nor does it intend to promote qualitative over quantitative research methods. Such dualistic polemics can be regarded as completely pointless, based on complexes,⁴ and therefore no longer valid. Furthermore, I am far from claiming that it is “not allowed” or “useless” to resort to measurements in educational research, or that scientific terminology should be exorcised from pedagogy. It is obvious that the choice of research strategy and of methods depends on the subject of research and the goal we set: such a choice is the function of what we want to capture and what we

1. See Paul Standish, *Beyond the Self. Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Limits of Language* (Aldershot–Brookfield, USA–Hong Kong–Singapore–Sydney: Avebury, 1992), 19.

2. Scientism is a very broad notion. It is worth remembering that scientism may also derive from non-positivist traditions. To avoid misunderstandings, I wish to explain that in my text I use the term “scientism” to refer to the tendency to make the humanities and social sciences similar to the natural sciences on the grounds of ontological naturalism (the belief that spiritual phenomena are forms of biological processes) and methodological naturalism (the directive that all phenomena should be studied by using empirical methods).

3. See Paweł Bytniewski, *Francuska filozofia nauk. Szkice epistemologiczne* [The French Philosophy of Science. Epistemological Sketches] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2017).

4. See Leszek Kołakowski, “Wielkie i małe kompleksy humanistów” [The Great and the Small Complexes of the Humanists], in Leszek Kołakowski, *Kultura i fetysze. Eseje* [Culture and Fetishes. Essays] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000).

intend to do with the collected material. Therefore, it is clear that in some cases the deployment of scientific conceptualization and related measurement techniques will be necessary. I have no doubts that the discipline of thought promoted by scientism is a lasting achievement of the scientific culture, offering us protection against doctrinaires and charlatans. It is obvious that reading Karl R. Popper or Gaston Bachelard – although neither of them based their philosophy of science on the humanities – can be most inspiring for the methodological development of pedagogy, and it leaves no doubt that shifting categories (including those developed in the field of natural science) between diverse areas of study and testing them in new contexts often proves to be a fertile hermeneutic strategy. Apparently – and significantly – contemporary humanities are rediscovering their relationship with natural sciences.⁵ I do realize that the self-awareness of natural sciences has changed, that it is much more complex today than it was in the 19th century, and that it corresponds to the findings of modern hermeneutics – as in the case of Ferdinand Gonseth’s “dialectics,”⁶ or in the case of the historical perspective of Thomas Kuhn, who points to the cultural background of our knowledge about nature.⁷ Likewise, I find it indubitable that the Gregory-Bateson-style systemic naturalism, taking into account feedback, meta-communication, and irreducible differences in the levels of phenomena, counteracts many simplifications of classical scientism and contributes to building ecological humanities.⁸ However, I do argue that naturalistic methodological assumptions and measurement procedures should be marginalized in pedagogy and that insights based on the above should be treated as auxiliary research. It should be so, because when they dominate, then – like the motorboat from Standish’s example, heedless of nature – they override the essential dimension of education: that which is *pedagogical* is no longer visible, and as a consequence, public perceptions of school and education are distorted.

I argue this thesis in two steps. Firstly, I justify why the scientific viewpoint fails to correspond to the uniqueness of pedagogical research, and why pedagogy should be located in the hermeneutical-critical, methodological field. Secondly,

5. See Przemysław Czaplinski, Ryszard Nycz, Dominik Antonik, Joanna Bednarek, Agnieszka Dauksza, and Jakub Misun, eds., *Nowa humanistyka. Zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii* [New Humanities. Taking Positions, Negotiating Autonomies] (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2017).

6. See Lech Witkowski, *Filozofia nauki Ferdynanda Gonsetha (na tle problemów współczesnego racjonalizmu)* [Ferdinand Gonseth’s Philosophy of Science (in the Context of the Problems of Contemporary Rationalism)] (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1983), 70–71.

7. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Road Since “Structure.” Philosophical Essays, 1970–1993, with an Autobiographical Interview* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 216–223.

8. See Monika Jaworska-Witkowska and Lech Witkowski, eds., *Humanistyczne wyzwania ekologii umysłu: Gregory Bateson w Polsce* [Humanist Challenges of the Ecology of Mind: Gregory Bateson in Poland] (Warszawa: Fundacja na Rzecz Myślenia im. Barbary Skargi, 2016).

from the conclusions drawn from step one, I derive the idea of the humanities as a space of constructing and interpreting narratives – and I attempt to briefly explain why I believe that such an approach cannot be confused with the approval for the irresponsible “saying whatever one wishes.”

Pedagogy as Critical Hermeneutics

We owe a convincing critique of modeling the social sciences and humanities on the patterns of natural science to such thinkers as Charles Taylor. The Canadian philosopher questions the naturalistic approach to human life and activity. He does not, however, question the logic of perceiving man as part of nature (which angle is probably accepted by everyone); instead, he criticizes positions that recommend the avoidance of what he calls “anthropocentric properties” of things – even in the description of the human world. According to the proponents of such positions, we should understand the human in terms that do not differ from the notions of natural sciences: we should abandon the emphasis on the meanings that things have for people. And if we do study meanings and values, we study them only as objectified entities, so that all qualitative distinctions are discarded. As a result, all human goals can be seen as based on the same foundation, and amenable to the same kind of calculation. Such a starting point, Taylor claims, makes human self-interpretation invisible, and therefore, in the field of human science, alike position is completely abortive. The human subject does not only *understand himself or herself* to a greater or lesser extent, but is partially *constituted* by this understanding. In addition, self-understanding includes perceiving oneself against the background of *strong evaluation*, that is, against the background of the distinction between things that we consider to be categorical, unconditional, or simply of higher importance and value, and those that are of lesser importance. Naturalism, assuming that we can do without qualitative distinctions, mistakenly views our conceptual framework as a collection of unnecessary human constructs, rather than as inalienable landmarks of subjectivity, without which identity falls into a radical crisis:

A being who exists only in self-interpretation cannot be understood absolutely; and one who can only be understood against the background of distinctions of worth cannot be captured by a scientific language which essentially aspires to neutrality. Our personhood cannot be treated scientifically in exactly the same way we approach our organic being⁹.

9. Charles Taylor, “Introduction,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3; See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22–23, 30.

It is impossible to understand who a given person (e.g., a teacher, or a student) is, or what their actions are about, without referring to their goals, desires, and feelings – that is, without taking their self-interpretation into account. It has to be done hermeneutically, in terms of their meanings. Of course, this point of view is not based on the assumption that these goals, desires, and feelings are transparent to the subject, and hence do not necessarily lead to the naive acceptance of human narratives.

A scientific approach to educational research by definition excludes language creativity and reflective agency, without which it is impossible to understand symbolic and interactive educational practices. This is perfectly demonstrated by Gert Biesta in his criticism of the logic of causality that has gripped contemporary discourse and pedagogical research. Biesta observes that the assumption underlying many discussions about education is that education operates on an axis of determination: on the one hand, we have input variables (teaching, curriculum, assessment, material resources, learners' abilities, etc.) and learning outcomes on the other. The general tendency is that if we do more research, we will be able to identify the determinants of learning outcomes (we will discover "what works"). But the problem with such causal assumptions is that they do not allow for the reflexive agency of actors involved in education – teachers and students who can *think* and *act* on their own ideas, judgments, and decisions. This agency must be considered ecologically, that is: in connection with the socio-cultural environment. Despite many links and conditions, one cannot eliminate the very agency from the image of a human being and, consequently, one cannot think of the teacher as a "factor" of education.¹⁰

Moreover, the concept of education as a production process consisting of input, throughput, and output would make sense only under strictly defined conditions – such that we can only find in closed systems (free from external influences). The educational system, of course, does not work like that – it is an open system (actors move in many environments), semiotic (interactions between teachers and students are not based on physical influences but on communication and interpretation), and recursive (the system is based on feedback – the actions of the actors constantly change the arrangement of elements, and thus the initial situation). Education is not the field of stimulus-responsive machines, but the domain of relationships of thinking and feeling beings who choose their course of action from a broad (and never completely identifiable) spectrum of possibilities. People act on the basis of interpretations of their situations. In the field of human actions, cause and effect explanations are illusory. Even if we identify

10. See Mark Priestley, Gert Biesta, and Sarah Robinson, *Teacher Agency. An Ecological Approach* (London–New Delhi–New York–Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015).

a correlation, we do not know what it means. If we see the task of improving education in terms of a quasi-causal understanding of the educational process, we are, in a sense, resorting to the concept of “the black box” of education – we assume a relationship between the input and the output, but we have no idea how this connection has come into existence. Therefore, correlational studies without a proper basic theory of process dynamics are of limited use – they neither provide us with an understanding of how the correlation has occurred, nor offer an understanding of the potential driving forces of educational change. Therefore, it is wiser to consider that the main work in education is done by reflexive agents rather than by mysterious quasi-causal forces.¹¹

I have provided examples of two critics of the scientific (naturalistic) approach in the humanities and social sciences – Charles Taylor and Gert Biesta (where the latter focuses on the subjective character of education). The qualitative difference of the insight into the world which is brought by the humanities seems to be indispensable, and is represented in the culture much more broadly. There are more examples to confirm the observation above, and these could not be further from any extravagance on the fringes of scientific thought: they represent a well-established tradition. Wilhelm Dilthey, for instance, not only makes a classical distinction between the methodological procedures of understanding (grasping the meaning) and explaining (establishing cause-and-effect laws), but he also acknowledges the ontological difference between cultural products and natural entities: it is in the former that the human spirit is objectified (ideas, goals, values, etc.), and, in research, it is this spiritual factor that is subject to reading.¹² Ernst Cassirer distinguishes natural notions (defining objects with countable properties) from cultural notions (not so much defining a specific feature, but, by connoting various sets of features, participating in a certain spirit: for example, the “Renaissance man” has no unambiguous empirical reference).¹³ And it is (among others) to Cassirer that Ryszard Nycz refers when he explains that the natural sciences deal with natural objects that “only are,” while the humanities deal with cultural objects that “not only are, but also mean.”¹⁴

11. See Gert Biesta, *Educational Research. An Unorthodox Introduction* (London–New York–Oxford–New Delhi–Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 37–40.

12. See also Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, trans. Rudolf A. Makkreel, John Scanlon, and William H. Oman (Princeton–Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 140–141.

13. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Humanities*, trans. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 135–140.

14. Ryszard Nycz, *Kultura jako czasownik. Sondowanie nowej humanistyki* [Culture as a Verb. Sounding the New Humanities] (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2017), 55.

Peter Winch, in turn, points out that human activity is more complex than other behaviors in space of nature. Furthermore, he emphasizes the generic difference between these two, which consists in the fact that the human conduct relies upon rule-based practices. Therefore, the concepts we use to describe human reactions have a different logical status than natural concepts.¹⁵ Theodor Adorno accuses positivist sociology, which objectifies society, first, of annihilating human experience, and, second, of eliminating subjectivity – the agent of objectification, which makes it possible to explain anything – from the image of the world. And this is, after all, the key stake in critical theory. The sense and ethics of the entire cognitive endeavor are undermined if subjectivity is not taken into account: “The objectivating acts of science eliminate that in society by means of which it is not only an object, and the shadow of this falls upon all scientific objectivity.”¹⁶ In turn, the critical arguments against scientific approaches born on the basis of anthropology are revisited by Wojciech Kruszelnicki. The scientist’s observance of rigid methodological rules results in the silencing or distortion of the usual, spontaneous, behavior of the people taking part in the survey, by forcing them into categories defined by a given research project. Objectification procedures lead to rifts between the researcher and the informant. The anthropology modeled on the natural sciences attempts to treat research objects as devoid of subjectivity, and thus pretends that the researcher/observer’s subjectivity has no influence on the awareness and reactions of the individuals participating in his or her research. The scientist’s observance of rigid methodological rules results in the silencing or the distortion of the usual and spontaneous behavior of the people taking part in the survey, forcing them into categories defined by a given research project. Objectification procedures lead to rifts between the researcher and the informant, and, consequently, on the results of the inquiry.¹⁷

Finally, Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in one of the most important philosophical books of the twentieth century that philosophical experience and art offer a warning: scientific consciousness should acknowledge its limits.¹⁸ The thinker refers to scientific consciousness, which has largely dominated the self-reflection

15. See Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 72.

16. Theodor W. Adorno, “Introduction,” in Theodor W. Adorno, Hans Albert, Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot, and Karl R. Popper, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977), 34.

17. See Wojciech Kruszelnicki, *Zwrot refleksyjny w antropologii kulturowej* [A Reflexive Turn in Cultural Anthropology] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, 2012), 203–205.

18. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London–New Delhi–New York–Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), xxi.

of the humanities and social sciences reducing the disciplines to the model of natural sciences. At the same time, the source of the generativity of humanities and social sciences lies, in fact, in the tradition of Romanticism: “The fruitfulness of humanistic cognition seems to be more closely related to the artist’s intuition than to the spirit of methodical research.”¹⁹ Of course, in the humanities we also employ methods, but we do it with regard to gathering material rather than drawing conclusions. Therefore, in the humanities, schemes of scientific conduct are auxiliary, and always involve the risk that the researcher will miss out something important in his or her description of the world. In the humanities, understanding is essentially a function of time, which means that what we understand (i.e., texts) we understand differently each time. This situational, historical, subjective aspect of reality is excluded at the starting point when we try to make the knowledge of the human world similar to the knowledge of the natural world. Paweł Dybel puts it this way:

Gadamer’s critique of the scientific orientations in the humanities boils down to the statement that they are all particularist by nature. This is due to the fact that the theories and methods used within science have been developed with a different type of object in mind than is the case with the humanities. Therefore, within humanities, such methods and theories are a kind of a foreign body, a “transplant” forcibly built into their organism, without any reflection as to what negative outcomes, apart from intended positive effects, such a gesture might bring.²⁰

From the pedagogical point of view, it is crucial to recognize that in education subjectivity cannot be ignored. Historically, the above thesis finds its confirmation in Jan Fryderyk Herbart’s work, who introduces the concept of “educability” (*Bildsamkeit*). The category is one of the most important historical pillars of academic pedagogy. As Dietrich Brenner explains, “educability” involves the conviction that the human vocation is not fatalistically determined by genetic or environmental factors and that it is possible to shape it by praxis. In other words, an individual cooperates in the process of his or her own becoming.²¹ The latter is also the foundation of the *Bildung* idea, based on the assumption all learning is essentially self-formation. Biesta, in turn, focuses on teleological issues. What

19. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften,” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993).

20. Paweł Dybel, *Granice rozumienia i interpretacji. O hermeneutyce Hansa-Georga Gadamera* [The Limits of Understanding and Interpretation. On Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutics] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), 100.

21. See Dietrich Benner, *Allgemeine Pädagogik: Eine systematisch-problemgeschichtliche Einführung in die Grundstruktur pädagogischen Denkens und Handelns* (München: Juventa-Verlag, 2001).

is essentially pedagogical in nature is always related to evaluation. The “educational question” is never about *how to do things*, but always involves judgment about *what is to be done*? Therefore, the educational questions is the question of educational desirability.²²

Proponents of scientism try to deal with these “peculiarities” of pedagogy (or, more broadly: the humanities) by treating the meanings involved in human actions as mere facts about the object that can be measured and verified on the basis of whether respondents agree with certain formulations (in tests or opinion polls). However, we encounter a fundamental problem here, as explained by Taylor: we can present the respondent with a questionnaire and ask him or her to indicate whether or not they agree with a certain number of proposals expressing possible beliefs, assessments, and goals. Yet, the real problem is reflected in the question of how we have designed the questionnaire. Phrasing our propositions for inclusion in the form, we have most probably relied upon our understanding of these possible beliefs, values, and aspirations. However, the meaning we generated may be questioned, and thus the significance of the results obtained may be undermined. Based on our assumptions and our tacit knowledge, the outcomes of our research may turn out to be irrelevant for the purpose of the understanding of the agents of particular actions.²³

As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, when studying a person, we always look for signs and attempting to read their meaning:

The human sciences are sciences about man and his specific nature, and not about a voiceless thing or natural phenomenon. Man in his specific human nature always expresses himself (speaks), that is, he creates a text (if only potential). When man is studied outside of text and independent of it, the science is no longer one of the human sciences (human anatomy, physiology and so forth).²⁴

Education is a human practice: it involves reflective entities (biologically and socially conditioned, but capable of producing texts and evaluating things, and therefore irreducible to natural objects). This practice never runs in a closed system. Education is an open, semiotic, and recursive area. Therefore, pedagogy – based on the logic of its research field – is a humanistic and social discipline, and, as

22. See Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Boulder–London: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), 8.

23. See Charles Taylor, “Interpretation,” 29–30.

24. Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 107.

such, it is indeed *hermeneutic* and *critical* (not: *social* in the scientific sense). At stake is the scientific and public image of education. There is – writes Andrzej Wierciński – an urgent need for an interpretative approach to the discourse on education in academic, professional, and public life in order to counteract the fragmentation and instrumentalization of education.²⁵ Today we no longer perceive school and education through the lens of the most valuable traditions and the most insightful interpretations, but in the perspective of what can be relatively easily measured, which is “convenient” for policymakers, ruling bodies, and the mass, undemanding, audience.

Humanities as the Space of Narration

If we cannot eliminate self-interpretation (strong valuation, generative function of language, the history of experience, etc.) from human practices (such as education, which is under the threat of losing what is constitutive for it), and if understanding, rather than being aware of subjective reality means co-creating it, the study of such practices must, at least in the most important areas of the field,²⁶ take the narrative form.

I use the term “narrative form,” to refer, first of all, to the art of composing plots and only secondarily to the (subsidiary) structuralist studies of the story patterns.²⁷ Our life experience, unlike narratives, is non-coherent: although sometimes we may perceive it as a stream of sequential and connected events, more often than not, we feel it as a polyphonic aggregate of episodes or a flood of incomprehensible occurrences. In order to understand something about existence, one needs to express the “dark stream of life” in a narrative that emphasizes what is important in the deluge of happenings. The narrative does not describe reality directly, but constructs it from various pre-texts (traces left by beings operating in language), on the basis of pre-assumptions, whether those adopted in the hermeneutic act, or those tacit, already embedded in man. In his *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur writes: “I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience. [...] In the capacity of poetic composition to re-figure this

25. See Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics of Education. Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2019), 7.

26. After all, there are also preparatory activities, auxiliary, and contextual research.

27. See Michał Głowiński, ed. *Narratologia* [Narratology] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004).

temporal experience [...] resides the referential function of the plot.”²⁸ In this perspective, the humanities, as Michał Paweł Markowski aptly expressed it, may be understood as “mindfulness towards existential experience, which finds its appropriate linguistic expression.”²⁹

One of the best-known examples of analyzing the humanities by means of narratives is Odo Marquard’s theory of compensation. According to the German thinker, the humanities – construed as the remedy for the deficits in human cultural rootedness (and the accompanying desires for a meaningful life) caused by the modernization process and the hegemony of natural sciences – tell stories:

Denn die Menschen: das sind ihre Geschichten. Geschichten aber muß man erzählen. Das tun die Geisteswissenschaften: sie kompensieren Modernisierungsschäden, indem sie erzählen; und je mehr versachlicht wird, desto mehr-kompensatorisch – muß erzählt werden: sonst sterben die Menschen an narrativer Atrophie. Das unterstreicht und präzisiert meine Grundthese: Je moderner die moderne Welt wird, desto unvermeidlicher werden die Geisteswissenschaften, nämlich als erzählende Wissenschaften.³⁰

[People are their stories. And stories need to be told. The humanities do this: by telling stories, they compensate for the damage caused by modernization; and the larger area subject to reification, the more – as compensation – need to be told: otherwise people will die of narrative atrophy. That emphasizes and specifies my general thesis: the more modern the modern world becomes, the more indispensable the humanities become, namely as sciences that tell stories.]

The humanities, Marquard explains, construct sensitizing stories (*Sensibilisierungsgeschichten*) to aesthetically save the colorfulness of the world in which we live. They tell preserving stories (*Bewahrungsgeschichten*) to let people retain the sense of being at home in the world historically and ecologically. Finally, they tell orienting stories (*Orientierungsgeschichten*) to philosophically and ethically counteract the evaporation of meaning. Furthermore, it can be said that sensitizing people to non-obvious and subtle dimensions of reality, creative preservation of what is worth preserving, and searching for meaning in cultural products and

28. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), xi.

29. Michał Paweł Markowski, “Humanistyka, literatura, egzystencja” [Humanities, literature, existence], in *Teoria – literatura – życie. Praktykowanie teorii w humanistyce współczesnej* [Theory – Literature – Life. Practising Theory in Contemporary Humanities], ed. Anna Legeżyńska and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012), 19.

30. Odo Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2001), 105.

human communication, are the basic pedagogical practices in which the subject emerges and gains form. Marquard, reflection, albeit indirectly, touches upon the key goals of education. He writes about the human sciences as follows: “Sie helfen bei der Emigration aus der nur noch versachlichteten oder nur noch fortschrittsgeschichtlichen Welt; und weil sie das machen, haben die Geisteswissenschaften mit Bildung zu tun: denn Bildung ist die Sicherung der Emigrationsfähigkeit.”³¹ [They help us emigrate from this world that is only reified or only progressive. And because they do this, the humanities have something in common with education: education is a guarantee of the ability to emigrate.]

This is where a problematic tendency arises, which I am trying to challenge in this text. The (naturalistic) theory of science, Marquard argues, tends to criticize the humanities for the uncertainty of results and recommends that it undergoes a “plastic surgery” to rid itself of the narrative (the German philosopher ironically presents this point of view as a suggestion that the humanities should get rid of the humanities). Stories reduce the level of unambiguity warranted by measurement and definitional accuracy, and thus undermine the scientific status of the humanities. Marquard counters this argument as follows: first, the naturalist theory of science (the science of science), which prescribes the correction of the narrative nature of the humanities, tells the story itself, which fact basically settles the issue of whether science can be narrative; second, in interpretative sciences (with the exception of auxiliary operations, such as the critique of sources, dating, etc.) non-ambiguity is not the prerequisite of the research model, but, on the contrary – it paves the path towards totalitarianism. It is already the experience of the European religious wars that teaches us that such a peril should be avoided at all costs:

Dabei [...] ist Skepsis im Spiel bei den Geisteswissenschaften; denn Skepsis ist der Sinn für Gewaltenteilung: vom Zweifel als Teilung jener Gewalten, die die Überzeugungen sind, über die politische Gewaltenteilung bis hin zur Teilung jener Gewalten, die die Geschichten und Bücher und Deutungen sind. Diese Gewaltenteilung – der Sinn für die geschichtliche Vielfältigkeit und Vieldeutigkeit: für die Freiheitswirkung der allgemeinen Buntheit der Lebenswirklichkeit – wird also gerade modern, gegen die Gefahr der nur noch eindeutigen Alleingeschichte [...].³²

[Skepticism by humanities comes into play here; Skepticism is a sense of the division of powers: from doubt as a division of those powers, which are beliefs, through the division of political powers, to the division of those powers, which are stories, books,

31. Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen Philosophische Studien*, 110.

32. Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen Philosophische Studien*, 110.

and interpretations. This division of powers – as the sense of historical complexity and ambiguity: the liberation effect of the universal diversity of life reality – becomes modern, protecting against the danger of a single and unambiguous history [...].

Marquard's concept is not unproblematic, and it has been criticized for many reasons. The German philosopher is accused of having a poor grounding in the theory of compensation, of making the humanities dependent on the circumstances arising in the course of the modernization process, and of an overly narrow understanding of the humanities, which leaves him blind to its valuable achievements. He is blamed for socio-cultural conservatism as well. In the context of storytelling, Ernst Tugendhat's observations are particularly important, as he points out that, contrary to Marquard's view, humanistic research is not tantamount to the transmission of tradition, but to its objectification. Such research assumes a break with the naive attitude with respect to heritage, and thus opens ways toward emancipation. The humanities are not able to recreate the pre-Enlightenment state of human relationship to the world (disenchantment with the world), because departure from familiarity and careful preservation of the sense are the elements of the humanities' objectifying confrontation with traditions (– modernity does not find its compensation in the humanities; in fact, it is in the humanities that it finds its ultimate fulfillment). Humanities serve the task of objectifying the message of the past: it is supposed to ask questions concerning the limits of individual loyalty to the legacy of particular historical enunciations. Marquard himself does not agree with the critics' objections: compensation, he claims, is always also a correction; as such, it generates solutions and may induce changes.³³

On this point, I share Marquard's position. I do not think that the sensitizing, preserving, and orientating invocation of traditions (on the one hand), and a critical approach and reform – or sometimes even social or theoretical reformation (on the other), must inevitably exclude one another. Conversely, building a modern distance with respect to messages that lose their para-religious status does not necessarily mean that we also lose respect and humility towards a significant experience that is worth facing. If not understood in a schematic, or simplified way, hermeneutics is a critical enterprise that expands the imagination.³⁴ It can be said that critical

33. See Stanisław Czerniak, *Wybrane koncepcje wiedzy i nauki we współczesnej filozofii niemieckiej* [Selected Concepts of Knowledge and Science in Contemporary German Philosophy] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2017), 97–119.

34. The limitations of space disallow me to consider all the arguments critical of hermeneutics. In principle, I agree with Paweł Dybel, who demonstrates that many such critiques were based on reductionist visions of hermeneutics, alien to its most eminent representatives. See Paweł Dybel, *Oblicza hermeneutyki* [Faces of Hermeneutics] (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 64–68. Contrary, for

reflection is a moment of understanding, not something to the contrary. One's awareness of preconditions and prejudices is never complete, and the change of context (allowing a critical comparison) does not generate – or legitimize – any unconditional point of view. One can always illuminate something differently (recall a frame of reference, recall a wider context) and thus build a distance with respect to the achieved outcome of the process of interpretation. Eventually, the fact that it is impossible to hermeneutically establish an unequivocal result (reach a conclusive agreement) is not a defect of the humanities, but their advantage: an expression of the diversity and temporality of human experiences and interests.

The stories we tell in the humanities are by no means simple: they are neither naïve attempts to talk existential anxiety away, nor are they tantamount to enlightenment that liberates people from the yoke of the past. Narratives are a field of tension between compensation and emancipation, therapy and cognition,³⁵ between what is familiar and what is different, between the question and the answer, assumption and interpretation.

Closure

Pedagogy often seeks to legitimize its scientific status in areas where such a goal is impossible to attain. Because of the nature of its object of research (involving communicative subjectivity and interpretive practice of education), such a validation never comes without detrimental effects to the discipline itself. Today, as Biesta aptly observes, we struggle with an abundance of information concerning student's learning outcomes, social groups, schools, and even education systems. The tasks we face are a result of the rapid development of the global measurement industry. Importantly, however, even when everything gets measured with precision and statistical refinement, the question as to whether we are closer to the understanding of the value of the very practices that are being measured continues to loom large. Does the all-encompassing measurement policy allow us to understand what makes education good and not just

example, to allegations that hermeneutics is unable to distance itself from the traditions under consideration, that it condemns us to the relativism of interpretation, or that it distances us from reality by textualizing the world, many knowledgeable authors treat hermeneutics as a critical undertaking that can be applied not only to symbolic texts but also to texts of human experience. See Andrzej Przyłębski, *Hermeneutyka. Od sztuki interpretacji do teorii i filozofii rozumienia* [Hermeneutics. From the Art of Interpretation to Theory and Philosophy of Understanding] (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, 2019), 110; Lorenzo C. Simpson, *Hermeneutics As Critique. Science, Politics, Race, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

35. See Maria Janion, *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia* [Humanities: Cognition and Therapy] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982).

efficient at least a little more? Do we measure what we value or do we value what is measurable?³⁶ I am afraid that we do not even perceive the difference anymore, identifying one with the other.

Contrary to contemporary methodological orthodoxy, which recommends quantitative-qualitative triangulation in educational research, and orthodoxy convinced of the advantages of combining methods that seem equivalent and complementary (quasi-natural and interpretative), I am not a sympathizer of the symmetry of this kind. One has to balance between the poles, taking into account the center of gravity. Let me reiterate: each type of research, including insights involving measurement or based on non-narrative studies, can be fruitfully employed in pedagogy (needless to say, some of the organizational issues related to education oftentimes require a measurable diagnosis or causal explanation). Nevertheless, the reality under study poses an obligation. One can understand education superficially and socially harmfully merely as the implementation of the curriculum for students who would then obtain the highest possible results in tests. However, one may understand education in terms of subjectivity formation. If the latter is the case, then “pedagogy” must be “humanities,” and thereby it also must be “hermeneutics.” At stake here is, among others, the social image of education. The measurement culture favors the vision of education as an endeavor aimed at reproducing the social and educational *status quo* by obedient objects, while we should rather be concerned with introducing new subjects to the world – people who have never been its insiders, who are different from us, and who have been called to change reality for the better. As Biesta points out, we do not need a pedagogy of causes and effects (predetermined learning outcomes), but the pedagogy of event.³⁷

The event, on the other hand, is constituted by the reciprocity of what is unpredictable in life and the sense-making plot – the story. D. C. Phillips, an Australian-American thinker defending post-positivist scientism in educational research, admits that interpretations are, in essence, literary, but believes that their significance is judged solely by what they tell us about reality and that their quality as stories is epistemically irrelevant.³⁸ Because language has a generative function (i.e., it co-creates the world in which we live), it is impossible to agree with Phillips’s claim. After all, scientific narratives that emerge ultimately define the subject of research as acts of argumentation.³⁹ What we research in education largely

36. See Biesta, *Educational Research*, 100–101.

37. See Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk*, 140.

38. See D. C. Phillips and Nicholas C. Burbules, *Postpositivism and Educational Research* (Lanham–Boulder–New York–Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 80.

39. See Odo Marquard, *Glück im Unglück. Philosophische Überlegungen* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1986), 110; Georg Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

depends on how we talk about it. I find a similar intuition in Lech Witkowski's seminal work on authority: "The history of philosophy, owing to the importance of its texts [...], cannot be narrated, unless, on this occasion, a great, riveting text is created so that the presented content is not perceived as dead, artificial, or merely formal. This, perhaps, applies to the entire space of the humanities [...]."⁴⁰ In the same way, in pedagogy, stories cannot be treated merely as "rhetorical froth": a story is a research tool on which what we will see in education heavily depends.

The central postulate that emerges from these remarks I would phrase as follows: one should treat the subject of educational research seriously and renew the methodological self-knowledge of pedagogy. One must understand pedagogy as a full-scale humanistic discipline (what should be reflected in research, academic literature, scientific ethos, organizational structures, administrative classifications, etc.). It is necessary for the sake of the public image of education. The theoretical background of the methodology of pedagogy and the principles of organizing educational research affect what we can see and consider important. The educational – a communication and interpretative human practice – from a scientific perspective disappears from our sight. It is, therefore, necessary to reverse the current proportions in the study of education – one has to consider valid a scientific perspective based on the principle of causality and the criteria of effectiveness of means ("what works") about technical and organizational issues, but only auxiliary in the study of essential questions of education. The latter one cannot separate from the category of subjectivity, language (including its generativity and polysemy), and the historicity of insight. Only in the perspective of evaluating goals (axiological and existential commitment), imagination and meaning (text) and temporality (historical context of insight) can truly educational stakes come to the fore and thus become part of the public discourse.

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40. Lech Witkowski, *Wyzwania autorytetu w praktyce społecznej i kulturze symbolicznej (przechadzki krytyczne w poszukiwaniu dyskursu dla teorii)* [The Challenges to/of Authority in the Social Practice and in Symbolic Culture (Critical Wanderings in Search of Discourse for Theory)] (Kraków: Impuls, 2009), 151.

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