

Chapter 3

On Academic Bildung in Higher Education - a Scandinavian Approach

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"And he has never lived/who wise became/on things he didn't love"
N.F.S. Grundtvig, (1783-1872)¹

Introduction

Are there specific qualities or traits of a Scandinavian concept of Academic Bildung to be found in higher education in the Scandinavian countries today? If there are, can and should we expect to find such traits in students going through net-based education?

In this chapter we discuss what Academic Bildung is and should be in general, and what it is or has a potential to be, in higher education institutions. Bildung is a pedagogical concept which dates back to the Greek antiquity, and it points to personal development processes that the individual engage in when meeting the physical and cultural reality. We explain how we see Bildung relating to specific Scandinavian conceptions of education, which is to say welfare state conceptions of education, as well as adult education, People's Enlightenment, and Enlightenment for life. Through this, we hope to identify some more specific capacities of a Scandinavian concept of Academic Bildung, a concept that will be relevant to higher education in general, and thus also to net-based higher education.

We present and argue for a 'double-tracked' Bildung-concept and Bildung-pedagogy which has a dimension of critical, emancipatory and society-oriented reflection as well as a dimension of ethical-existential and being-oriented reflection. We will elaborate on the notion of Academic Bildung as a concept which captures the human strive and longing for both

¹ Grundtvig, and the movement of folk high schools that he inspired, had a noticeable influence on Nordic educational ideas on adult education as such. The People's Enlightenment tradition from Grundtvig moreover influenced a democratic and egalitarian educational policy in the Nordic Countries on a general basis, and an educational policy that at its best also held the existential and life-quality oriented dimensions in view.

autonomy² and authenticity³, a will to master and rational take control of one's life as well as a recognition of the meaningfulness and existential values in life as such., which cannot be constructed and mastered in a discursive and rational way but are rather experiences of meaningfulness to be immersed in. Our aim is to provide the theoretical background necessary for understanding the overall question of this book: *“How can we educate students through net-based education and at the same time facilitate Academic Bildung?”*

We assume that there are challenges and opportunities concerning Academic Bildung that are specific for net-based education. This might imply that there are specific forms of didactics that can be applied for achieving Academic Bildung in net-based courses. This is connected to the particular conditions for communication available, even if all forms of teaching can be seen as a form of intentional communication that aims to bring about change, as argued in Chapter 2 of this book. What do we – from the view on Academic Bildung here laid out – tentatively assume can be done in order to teach in a way that facilitates development of Academic Bildung in net-based courses?

In this chapter we are not going to elaborate on *how* this Scandinavian concept on Academic Bildung may be fleshed out in concrete practices and perspectives in net-based learning in higher education. However, the case studies in Part II present aspects of the everyday reality in Scandinavian net-based higher education, and they all look for Bildung dimensions in the courses and programs under scrutiny. While the present chapter lays out the theoretical and normative foundations for a general Scandinavian concept of Academic Bildung, the case studies give descriptions of the empirical net-based reality with this concept as the authors'

² See page 19 in this chapter for a more nuanced introduction to the notion of autonomy.

³ Our specific understanding of authenticity will be elaborated throughout our description of Ronald Barnett's concept of authenticity as well through our also critical comments to Barnett's existentialist view on authenticity in paragraph 2 and 3.

point of orientation. The researchers and educational developers, who are the authors of the case studies, reflect on cases in which they have been, or even still are, involved. This means that the answer to what Scandinavian Academic Bildung *is* can probably be found somewhere in the dialogue between the theoretical and the empirical reality. Furthermore, Chapter 10 analyses how, and to what extent, net-based higher education, judging from the case studies, seems to enable or block development of Academic Bildung in students. Some reflections on the consequences of the empirical investigations, for a relevant and updated Scandinavian concept of Academic Bildung, and thus for a theory of Bildung, are also provided in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 points out how we as teachers and facilitators can use the opportunities in net-based learning environments and overcome the difficulties in the strive for supporting the net-based students development of Academic Bildung. Hopefully, this will give a basis for further thinking about and working with Academic Bildung for both researchers and practitioners.

A Digital World with a Human Face?

The Swiss novelist Max Frisch wrote in his novel *Homo Faber* (1994 [1957]): “Technology is the knack of arranging the world so we need not experiencing it.” A basic question in line with this view is often raised when talking about Bildung in connection with net-based learning and ICT today. Is there a risk that the use of ICT and net-based learning in higher education to some degree can eliminate what seems to be one of the unique human conditions? We think of the existence and freedom of ‘the living word’ and the ‘living dialogue’ as it emerges, and maybe can only emerge, in the physical and not technologically mediated presence of the other, that is, when the students and teacher are present in a real time situation at the same place in a face-to-face-relation? What is lost if this is true, and what part, if any, of the Academic Bildung will then disappear in net-based courses in higher education? And does it matter? If so, how can we as educational researchers and practitioners then find

ways to supplement the ‘lack’ of this mysterious and very difficult comprehensible ‘human presence’ and I-Thou-relation (Buber 2004 [1923])? Can we learn from the tradition of Bildung in order better to work with this dialogical and relational ‘being-dimension’ and what could we in practice do? How do we describe and understand and give voice to this tacit experience and saturated being-dimension that might slip away or be reduced in a too technological- and net-based learning situation? Moreover, are there practices and structures in face-to-face education at the physical campuses that are impossible to recreate and remediate in net-based education? Or, are there structures within the use of ICT and digital media in net-based higher education that are giving new opportunities for widening and further developing the human condition and experience of presence and authenticity in the learning situation? Can this be done in ways that can expand the possibilities for development of Academic Bildung for our students?

Neil Postman writes in his famous book *Technopolis: The surrender of Culture to Technology* (1993):

“New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things, we think *about*. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think *with*. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develops.” (Postman 1993, p. 20)

We are not sure whether the Danish philosopher, poet and founder of the Nordic tradition of People’s Enlightenment (Folkeopplysning), N.F.S. Grundtvig, or Max Frisch would look upon the new communication technology and its entry into higher education as a threat and as cultural decay. On the contrary, they might – open and imaginative as they were – indeed have welcomed the new technology and the unknown possibilities of learning and dialogues and insights that it might bring with it. The tragic story of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* that

became a servant of the technology and not the other way around might not be the case here. At least not if we are cautious about what these information and communication technologies might change in what we are, on an imperceptible level, forced or encouraged to think about, think with, and think from in the settings of higher education of today, and what we no longer think about, with and from.⁴

In the following we also unfold some new and prospering ideas in higher education research developed by the British professor of higher education research, Ronald Barnett (Barnett 2004) (Barnett 2007) (Barnett 2011) who offers us a framework and a language to consider, what we would describe as the overlooked being-dimension in higher education theory and research. We see the aims of facilitation of Academic Bildung as close to Barnett's thoughts on student development and learning. We will however point to some limitations we find in his view, and this will prepare the way for why and how we see the relevance and importance of rethinking the concept of Academic Bildung in higher education and why the Scandinavian approach to Academic Bildung might have something fruitful to offer with its double-tracked understanding of Bildung. The discussion of Barnett's thinking will hopefully also help in introducing the non-Scandinavian and non-German reader to the Scandinavian-German understanding of Academic Bildung, as a counterpart to the British understanding of the phenomenon of Bildung, and for the same reason we will briefly touch on the Anglo-American tradition of Liberal Education.

What is Bildung and Why the Concept of Academic Bildung?

However, before we go into Barnett's thinking, let us give a short introduction to the concept of Bildung and the reasons why we see a need for keeping it as a core concept of higher

⁴ See Solberg (2011) for a discussion of how the technology of synchronous web meetings can give good opportunities for facilitating Bildung processes between teachers and students in net-based studies.

education. Bildung, or in Danish and Norwegian “dannelse”, in Swedish “bildning”, (in English often translated into formation, education or cultivation)⁵ is a concept that has been stretched in quite a few different directions over time. In general, the concept of Bildung describes a personal development processes that a person is going through when he or she meets the world. In our understanding it is not only describing a process of socialisation, as socialisation can be passive. Bildung is thus more correctly seen as a reciprocal process of formation between the individual as a self and the world, where the individual meets the world actively. In pedagogy and in formal education the concept of Bildung is a basic concept, and thus on the same level as the concept of learning and the concept of education.⁶ In higher education there is a specific form of Bildung that we expect to occur in the student related to formal and informal learning. This is what we call Academic Bildung. The world the student meets here is that of the thoughts and practices, and the particular take on a part of reality, existent in a discipline or profession. Unlike the concept of socialisation and the concept of learning, the concept of Bildung is normative. The concept is not neutral because some specific values and attitudes are always connected to it when used in concrete situations. Furthermore, it is a concept describing a developmental process toward something better - a tacit or explicit normative ideal, value or vision of ethical, existential, aesthetic or spiritual quality - in an educational setting. It is connected to critical thinking, society-oriented reflection and autonomy on the one hand, and it is to ethical dimensions of human formation and self-formation, existential- and being-oriented reflection and authenticity on the other hand. The concept thus has one foot in enlightenment thinking and one foot in the romantic tradition in the history of ideas. The concept of Bildung has always been about culture and

⁵ Richard Rorty has been somewhat more inventive, with the introduction of the notion of “edification”. (1979, see chapter viii)

⁶ However, Bildung is not exclusively a concept of formal education. Reinhart Koselleck, in his *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, presents Bildung as “...neither formal education (Ausbildung) nor imagination (Einbildung). [...] Bildung can neither be reduced to its institutional presuppositions – the mere result of formal education; nor can Bildung be dissolved into the terms of a psychological or ideological critique – the mere imagination of those who take themselves for educated (Gebildet).” (Koselleck 2002, pp. 170)

education, and the combination of these, where the individual's development as a human is not only concerning knowledge but also cultural sensibility. It has been about development of the individual's wider potential through education. While there may be a loose relation between education and one's personality, there is an intrinsic relation between Bildung and personality.

Within Scandinavian higher education the concept has been revived repeatedly, and different hyphenated concepts of Bildung have been put to use in the everyday language of academia. Instead of talking about the concept of Bildung, one could rather nowadays speak of a multitude of concepts of Bildung, to some extent overlapping each other in content.⁷ Many of the new ways of using the concept, for instance the use of "digital dannelse" can seem to be far from the concept such as it was conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt. The Norwegian educator Lars Løvlie has introduced the somewhat wider notion of "teknokulturell danning" (In English "techno-cultural Bildung") in order to describe what Bildung can be in a postmodern technological society, where he sees Bildung as analogously to the notion of interface. The meeting between subject and world is in focus in both concepts. In net-based education this is an unquestionable condition. In a report released in 2011 by The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, *Dannelsesaspekter i utdanning. Rapport fra en arbeidsgruppe nedsatt av UHRs utdanningsutvalg*, we find seven different concepts of Bildung. The question then is: why not abandon the concept? Why not just talk about academic skills, thinking skills, or graduate attributes? Or, as Jørgen Fosslund pose the question:

⁷ This situation, that there exist several different conceptions of Bildung is, in a sense, of course not new. There have been a number of conceptions and theories about Bildung around, for a very long time. A theory of particular interest in a didactic connection like ours is the German educator Wolfgang Klafki's theory of categorial Bildung. Unfortunately, we could not find room for a comparison with our theory in this chapter.

“Why insist on using a concept that in addition to the bourgeois intellectual snobbery and dusty philology is also reminiscent of the darkest chapter in European history? Is it not better to reformulate the valuable aspects of the German tradition of formation without simultaneously waving the flag for ideals with the stressful inscription of Bildung?” (Fossland 2012, p. 168, our translation)

The reasons why we do not want to leave the concept behind are many. One of the reasons is that in student centred pedagogy, Bildung is more relevant, not less. Bildung is about becoming a subject, in the meeting with a physical and cultural reality. In order to speak and think from within the student’s perspective, and not only from the needs of e.g. the labour market, other concepts than graduate attributes and specific skills are called for. And it is in particular the existential value of acquisition and production of new knowledge, the satisfaction of inquiring into culture, nature and society that is being put out of sight when Bildung is left behind. Another reason is that we want to be in dialogue with our history and traditions. We want to be able to describe and discuss the existential, ethical, societal, cultural, and material foundations for Academic Bildung, and in order to do so we need to be able to see and refer to the way in which changes in the basic conditions of the educational systems and society at large and the varying ways and places and social strata for mediation of the phenomenon influence the concept. The concept has been a lens through which to look at education for a very long time, even if both the concept itself and the basic conditions for education have changed on the way to the present situation.⁸

Another reason for not only talking about academic skills is that there is an attitudinal side to Bildung that is lacking when we only focus on knowledge, skills, and competence, and

⁸ For an introduction to a history of the philosophy of Bildung see Straume (ed.) 2013. We recommend in particular the first introductory chapter by the editor.

moreover there a content-oriented side to Bildung that will turn invisible. The attitudinal side deals with formation of identity, thus both the ethical and the existential sides of education. This means that there is a normative side to the concept of Bildung that we do not necessarily catch in if we confine ourselves to talking about academic skills or graduate attributes. The content-side of Bildung deals with the kinds of cultural content, in a wide sense, the students meet in their education. Throughout history there have been different kinds of content that have been recommended as particularly relevant or essential for the good process of Bildung to take place. This has generally either taken the form of a canon, i.e. classical readings etc., that have been regarded as eminent and time transcendent, or it has taken form as encyclopaedic, thus as a wide an encounter with cultural expressions as possible. When considering this content intrinsically to the concept, we have what we would call a substantial concept of Bildung, as opposed to a formal concept of Bildung, where no specific content is considered to be intrinsic to the concept itself. If we confined ourselves to academic skills, we would not see the need for a connectedness to a specific content, albeit not a predefined or prescribed content. So, we stick with a concept some might see as stale, recovering and modernising it for our time, rather than severing the roots.

Before turning to Barnett and his “ontological turn”, let us take a brief look at an Anglo-American counterpart to the Scandinavian-German tradition of Bildung, Liberal Education.⁹ At the core of standard conceptions of Liberal Education there are many valuable traits and abilities connected to what we reasonably could call Bildung, such as analytic abilities, creativity, plurality of perspectives, and independence. However, we often miss a focus on the critical and emancipatory dimensions of Bildung. Academic Bildung without critical thinking and potential for resistance can soon come to fall on the side of “adaptation” rather

⁹ For a more thorough introduction to the differences between these two traditions, we recommend Lars Løvlie and Paul Standish’s “Introduction: Bildung and the idea of a liberal education” in Løvlie, L et al. (eds) 2003..

than on the “Bildung” side of socialisation, referring to the Norwegian philosopher Jon Hellesnes’ seminal distinction of what he sees as two different forms of socialisation (Hellesnes 1992 [1969]). We also miss a focus on wonder, which is not to be confused with the phenomenon of curiosity and interest, and a focus on existential reflection. As we will see, the concepts of “wonder” and “existential reflection” can have different meanings whether these are used in an existentialistic approach or in a life and existence philosophical approach.

We also think, when working with the Liberal Arts and Liberal Education tradition, that it would be wise to distinguish between at least three different forms of liberal learning:

1. a pragmatic approach to liberal learning where the main goal of Academic Bildung is to create free democratic citizens (Dewey 2008 [1916]) and self-creating ‘liberal ironist’ or social constructivist (Rorty 1989) (Rorty 1991).
2. a conservative high culture approach to liberal learning where the main goal of Academic Bildung is to consecrate the students into higher ‘fine culture’ and to learn the tradition and ‘wisdom’ from the Great Literature, Philosophy and Arts (MacIntyre 1981, Bloom 1987).
3. a Socratic critical and existential approach to liberal learning where the meeting and continuing conversation with the Great Literature, Philosophy and Arts of humanity is encouraged in order to keep the human spirit open through engaging with the eternal questions (Arcilla 1995, Nussbaum 1997, Mackler 2009).

Our concept of Academic Bildung is closest to the third kind of liberal learning, although we do of course appreciate both democracy as well as learning from the tradition of the sublime art and literature. And we do acknowledge, with the second kind of liberal learning, that the

content of the culture, tradition, or knowledge that students meet are of vital importance to the kinds of Bildung that can emerge in this meeting.

The Ontological Turn in Higher Education

Ronald Barnett (2004) (2007) and (2011) has noticed an important change in the thinking of higher education research during the last two decades that seems to announce a kind of ‘ontological turn in higher education’. We see an increasing focus on ‘knowledge production’ in relation to the demand and request of scientific ‘evidence-based’ knowledge. This widespread tendency at modern universities also means that the question of meaning (values, beliefs, and ethics) is increasingly relegated to a secondary status in higher education because, as also Stephanie Mackler (2009) notice, it cannot be tested and verified methodically. *“The university shifted its focus from meaning to knowledge, and liberal learning fell by the wayside.”* (Mackler 2009, p. 6)

So, this seems in fact to indicate an ‘epistemological turn’ in higher education, in the sense that “knowledge” came to occupy the place that previously was held by “meaning”. However, because of this heavily epistemological and knowledge-oriented research approach and a university teaching that trains students to reflect on empirical facts, information gathering, and systematic knowledge analysis, it has also become still more overt that ‘something’ is missing in the academic education of the students. Notice that the British poet T.S. Eliot’s question: ‘Where is the wisdom we lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we lost in information’ was the key theme on an international conference in higher education research in England in 2011. Critics of the knowledge producing and still more specialised and fragmented (and utilitarianised) universities of today complain in words like:

“One no longer hears administrators giving talks on ‘wisdom’, an old-fashioned word meaning seeing things in their widest context, including our ultimate concerns.”(Sommerville 2006, p. 9)

and

“Intellectual production in the university is understood in a way which denies the full range of human transcendence and meaning-making... The need to make some kind of sense of the world and of our place within it is about as crude and strong as our need to eat and seek shelter.”(Wilshire 1990, p. 124)

Ethical, aesthetical and existential questions like: What is this knowledge good for? What is the deeper meaning of creating these methods and tools? Why is this kind of technology helping us to live a more profound and wiser life? What do we mean by strengthening ‘life quality’ and ‘better life’? What does ‘human flourishing’ mean? What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? And why do some people and not others, think that life becomes more meaningful, and more beautiful, and learning becomes deeper, through these new technological innovations we see in for instance net-based learning? And so on. All these questions seem to live a shadow existence in the rush to find still more effective methods to ‘produce’ more candidates and types of knowledge and skills that can satisfy the need of the financial, administrative and political interests, needs and systems.

But right in the middle of this dystopian vision of the ‘decline and moral collapse’ (Bloom 1987, Readings 1996, Kronman 2007) of modern university society we do also see other signs. Precisely because of the contemporary politicians, university leaders, and broadly speaking society’s growing interest in how we can create new universities and ways of teaching that will make us more creative and innovative in the global competition, we see a

growing acceptance and understanding of alternative ways of teaching and thinking. If we want to be more creative and innovative¹⁰ might we not then learn from artists, for example, or from other alternative ways of thinking which can bring us out into ‘the open and unknown’? Ronald Barnett talks from this last position when he describe ‘the ontological turn in higher education’:

“Learning for an unknown future calls, in short, for an ontological turn (...)A pedagogy of this kind will be a pedagogy that engages students as persons, not merely as knowers.”(Barnett 2004 p. 247)

and:

“...instead of knowing the world, being-in-the-world has to take primary place in the conceptualization that informs university teaching.” (Barnett 2005, p. 795)

In his book *A Will to Learn. Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty* (2007) he elaborates on this position in higher education pedagogy by making a distinction between *“the voice of knowing”* as the epistemological dimension, *“the voice of doing”* as the technological and methodological dimension, and *“the voice of being”* as the existential and ontological dimension. Barnett calls for a higher education pedagogy and an understanding in higher education research, which to a greater extent involves or reflects the ontological dimension. This can be done, he says, if the students learn to be more clear and conscious about who and where they themselves are in what they think, say, write, and do at the university.

Barnett has no interest in or intention of bringing a psychological or therapeutic approach into higher education pedagogy. Instead he speaks up for a concept of ‘authentic learning’, which involves the person’s more existential (and *not* purely idiosyncratic) reflections about why this subject and discipline, and this education and profession, seem meaningful to them. Thus,

¹⁰ See for example C.O. Scharmer (2007) and Hansen (2013) for a more existential and ‘Being-oriented approach to the development of creativity and innovation in higher education and professional development.

what Barnett is talking about is a 'self-creation' learning process, rather than only a process of knowledge acquisition, skill learning, or competence development. In this 'self-creation' learning process, focus is put on the student's own 'being-in-the-world' and personal life philosophy. Without an awareness and reflection upon the students' *existential* relations to the subject, profession, and their life as such, the students and teachers will never, Barnett claims, get into a dialogue with the engagement and the intellectual curiosity that has to be present in order to foster deeper processes of understanding and inquiries in higher education.

Barnett also makes a distinction between two other 'voices', which the student and the teacher must learn to have an ear for: '*the pedagogical voice*' and '*the educational voice*'. The pedagogical voice is the voice that the students hear when a given subject or knowledge of a discipline, its standards, and norms are presented to them. This voice is connected to the methodological and epistemological level, that is, to the "voices of doing and knowing". The "educational voice" has to do with the student's own personal experiences of 'being-in-the-world' and with the construction of meaning, which the student individually can experience when engaging in his or her education or profession. This voice is connected to the existential and ontological level of higher education. As Barnett writes: "*Here, the student becomes herself. If the pedagogical voice is realized through autonomy, the educational voice is realized through authenticity.*" (Barnett 2007, p. 91-92) The way in which the teacher enables the students to get into a more deep and authentic learning process, says Barnett, is when both the teacher and the students constantly try to put themselves into play and at risk, by placing themselves in the open and uncertain. Barnett talks about authentic learning as a kind of shared journey of discovery, where a fusion between the teachers' and students' engagements, passions, critical reflections, wonderments, and learning happens. Barnett emphasises that if *teachers* do not, in the concrete teaching or educational counselling session, experience

themselves as on a real journey of discovery and in a process where they really learn something new, they will be talking only with the ‘pedagogical voice’ and not the ‘educational voice’. Barnett quotes a university teacher, who won the local teaching award at a university, when this teacher said:

”To me, teaching is engaging with young people who are visionaries and dreamers in vibrant spaces that resonate with the collective energies of intellectuals enriched with a wealth of prior knowledge. Teaching is a passion and a commitment that is a constant joy in my life ... The simple and yet complex concepts of honesty, integrity and respect are fundamental in all my professional and personal interactions with students. The value I place on my teaching and research contributes to the passion I bring to teaching and ultimately to the successful learning by students.” (ibid)

According to Barnett one of the most important tasks of university teachers is to create (and themselves be a living example of) a room and a way of being, that inspires the students and the teachers themselves to think and act from a fundamental state of uncertainty (‘high risk’-situations), and yet flourish with this uncertainty and encounter with the unknown and unfamiliar. The subtitle of his book *A Will to Learn* (2007) is ”*Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty*” and by saying that, he does not only aim at teaching the students how to navigate in a hyper complex society and to become change-oriented, flexible, etc. What Barnett aim at is for higher education to become higher education *for* uncertainty, *for* the experience of what it is like to live and act and think *without* already defined learning targets, methods, ‘best practices’ and well-defined problems and concepts. How, he asks, can we create new creative and innovative universities that encourage students to seek the unknown and ‘impossible’, the not-yet-thought-idea and the ability to stand in the openness from out of larger kind of ‘inner steering’ and sense of what the future seems to call at?

We are not going to go further into Barnett's thoughtful and fascinating descriptions of a possible didactics of learning for the unknown future. However, we must make a critical remark on his thinking. When zooming in on precisely what he means by 'the ontological' and 'authenticity' as related to the 'educational voice' and 'the voice of being' compared to 'the voice of knowing' and 'voice of doing', one will discover, that Barnett's concept of ontology, authenticity, education, and being is strongly influenced by the existentialists; that is, Jean Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) notion of the 'self-creating human being'. As Barnett writes:

”...In the end, authentic persons have only their own resources with which to tell their own story. (...) Ultimately, the authentic person is her own author; what authority she gains come from herself, not from those who have gone before her.” (2007 p. 45)

However, our question would be: Is the important 'voice of being', which Barnett help us to discover and reflect into higher education research and practices, only to be understood as a strive for 'a will to learn' through more personal and idiosyncratic preferences and activities of self-creation and meaning-construction? Is the 'authentic person' or the authentic action and way of being only to be understood as a fundamentally self-creating act, where the person essentially becomes his or her own author and resource for meaning-construction? Or may authenticity and the authentic person, and perhaps also 'the voice of being', be understood in a fundamentally different way?

We think the latter, that we can and must think about 'the voice of being' in another and more nuanced way. This other way will have to be a way where Sartre's and Barnett's individual

and self-creating person is also enabled and conditioned by the world in a specific way. In order to justify our critique we turn to the Scandinavian concept of Bildung and later to the German – or more specifically the philosophers Immanuel Kant’s and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s – understanding of Academic Bildung.

People’s Enlightenment and Enlightenment for Life – a Scandinavian Concept of Bildung

To say that there is only *one* Scandinavian concept of Bildung would of course be wrong. There are today and have for a century been a lively and multifaceted discussion around this concept (see for example Hagtvet and Ognjenovic 2011, Steinsholt and Dobson 2011, Slagstad, Korsgaard and Løvlie 2003, Johansen 2002, Gustavsson 1996). We adhere to this concept - as opposed to concepts like *learning, knowledge, competence, skills, self-development or personal growth* – because Bildung, *dannelse* or *bildning* points beyond those concepts, and because it is a normative concept. We want to unfold a very specific notion of Bildung, which is grounded in a unique Scandinavian educational tradition and educational philosophy called *Folkeoplysning* (People’s Enlightenment) and *Livsoplysning* (Enlightenment for Life).¹¹

This form of education is nowadays still a very strong and progressive educational movement in Scandinavia that finds its practices especially in what is called *Folkehøjskoler* (Folk High Schools or Residential Colleges). These Residential Colleges are mostly for young people between 18-25 years, and they represent non-mandatory post high-school education, but it is still not part of higher education. However, in order to find the source for a specifically Scandinavian understanding of the purpose of education and for Bildung in general, we need to look in this direction. Even though they were coined more than 150 years ago by Grundtvig

¹¹ For an Anglo-American view on and good introduction to the Nordic concepts of People’s Enlightenment and Enlightenment for Life, see Stephen M. Borish (1991, p. 164-178).

and other Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish educators and reformers, the ideas of People's Enlightenment and Life Enlightenment are still apparent in children's and adult education in today's Scandinavia.¹²

The reason why this educational idea and school culture has survived for so many years is probably that behind the concept of People's Enlightenment as well as Life Enlightenment lies a fundamental egalitarian view on education and human life as such, which in many ways has paved the Nordic road to democracy, the Welfare State, and its democratic educations. People's Enlightenment focuses either on people as *ethnos* (where the aim is to enlighten people about the national culture, which was the prime concern in the 19th century), or on people as *demos* (where the aim is to enlighten people and let them enlighten themselves about how to develop a democracy and to live as democratic citizens, which was the prime concern in the last half of the 20th century).¹³ But now the question seems to be how we can create coherence in this new pluralistic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan society and not hinder but qualify the individualisation as a strive for authenticity.¹⁴ In a report from the Association for Folk High School to the Danish Ministry in 2004 the authors emphasised the fact that the new situation, that is, the multicultural situation, challenges the Residential Colleges and the idea of People's Enlightenment to not just understand itself through the idea of a people but more through the idea of humanity. Moreover, it was stressed that in this cosmopolitan world we must also reinforce the fact that we no longer live on isolated monocultural islands, but in a global and geo-ecological unified whole. In fact, the founder of the *Residential Colleges*, N.S.F. Grundtvig, had these ideas in mind already in the 19th Century

¹² For an inspiring description of what a Folk High School is, and the main educational ideas behind the Folk High School, please see: http://danishfolkhighschools.com/media/247068/the-danish-folkeh_kskole-web.pdf

¹³ For elaborated descriptions and discussion of these two understandings of Folkeoplysning, see Korsgaard (1997, 2004).

¹⁴ For the qualification of the concept of individualisation see Taylor (1992) and for coherence and democracy in a pluralistic and cosmopolitan world see Nussbaum (1997) Villa (2001).

when he talked about a universal view on mankind and the need for Life Enlightenment that is, an enlightenment about the world and life we all have in common despite our social, political and cultural differences. Therefore, one of the conclusions in the report is that the overall aim of Residential Colleges should not in the future be guided by the idea of People's Enlightenment alone, but also by the idea of Enlightenment for Life. As they write:

“Enlightenment for life is a more comprehensive and broader concept than people's enlightenment, encompassing universal and existential ways of presenting different problems. It is about the life relations that nobody can escape, and that make everyone equal when faced with the big questions in life. Behind the concept lies the experience that values come from life, ordinary human life, as everyone knows it through his or her own experiences (...). There is a need to accentuate the existential character of the task of the *folkehøjskole*, which builds on the individual *højskole*'s self-chosen basis of values.” (*Rapport fra Højskoleudvalget*, December 2004, s. 27 (our translation))

Behind the concept of Life Enlightenment lies a fundamental existential and life philosophical view on education and human life as such that in a sense keeps the door open for more ontological, spiritual or metaphysical questions and experiences (experiences of transcendence or seeing life and human beings as wonderful and ungraspable mysteries – as wonders) without necessarily becoming religious or metaphysical or ideological in a more rigid way by giving well defined answers to those Big Questions.

In fact, by insisting on the fundamentally enigmatic nature of human life and human phenomenon (such as for example the lived experience of love, playfulness, humour, beauty or freedom) as deep mysteries in ordinary lives of ordinary people that we cannot get a clear rational and scientific answer to, we also make room for a basic equal dignity between human

beings. “*The mysteries make us all equal*”, as the head of one school put it. Before the mystery of existence we are all “*equally wise, equally ignorant— whether old or young, unskilled or highly trained, teacher or pupil.*”(Carlsen 2013, p. 12)

So we see that also in the concept of Enlightenment for Life do we find this egalitarian aspect, which seems so important for the Scandinavian concept of Bildung. But we also find in the Scandinavian concept of Enlightenment for Life a *life philosophical* dimension, which is pointing towards the importance of being in an ontological relation with the world and oneself in a way that is marked by a deeply wondrously, receptive, ‘meaning-receiving’ and dialogical way of being. A way of being that is not to be confused with Sartre’s *existentialism* (or social constructivism for that matter) and his view upon the human condition as a curious, pro-active, meaning-making and self-creating way of being.

The Elitist Aspects of the Concept of Bildung

The concept of Bildung is, as many will know, rooted in the Greek concept of *Paideia* and the Christian concept of Bild from Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260 – ca. 1327). These roots can also be traced back to the male aristocracy of ancient Greece, and to the Christian esoteric Mystics in the Middle Age, and later to the higher social-cultural strata of the so-called *Bildungsbürgertum* in mid-18th century German. Jørgen Fosslund (2012) points to parts of the history of Nazi-Germany, and thus to dangerous and elitists aspects or developments in the conceptions of Bildung. But because we see in history that some have taken the word and notion of Bildung in an elitist way, does not, in our view, make an argument for not using it today. We only have to be very conscious and critical reflective about how we use it and where and why we want to connect to this concept.

So there is definitely a normative dimension connected to the concept of *Bildung*.¹⁵ We become reflective and aware of the ethical, existential and value-based dimensions in life when we are in a *Bildung*-process. But one thing is to be aware of these more fundamentally ethical, existential, aesthetic and normative questions and dimensions of life, another thing is to give finite answers and develop systems, ideologies, dogmas, rules and norms based on answers to these existential questions. As we will later argue for, with Kant and Gadamer and certainly also with the Scandinavian approach to People's Enlightenment and Enlightenment for Life, it is not an elitist conception of *Bildung* that is the issue here.¹⁶

To sum up: Within the Nordic folk high school tradition and their views on *Bildung*¹⁷, we find a focus not only on *autonomy* (self-determination/self-expression), which is line with the more political-democratic concept of People's Enlightenment and more critical emancipatory pedagogy, but also *authenticity* (devotion/self-forgetfulness). It is, within this tradition, a *balance* between the strive for autonomy and authenticity that must be sought if we are not to end up becoming 'spiritless'. A leading folk high school principal and historian of ideas, Jørgen Carlsen, associates (with Grundtvig and Kierkegaard) *Bildung* or *dannelse* to the ability to find *joy* and to *love* something:

“If one lacks the ability to rejoice over something, one is spiritless. One is spiritless if one, in short, is not present in one's own life. The lack of spirit is the total lack of personal formation - a spiritual phantom mode, a single liquidation sale, where all shelves are empty.” (Carlsen, 1999, p. 16-17, our translation)

¹⁵ This insight is the basis for the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim's (1926-1999) seminal article from 1976 "Eit grunnproblem i pedagogisk filosofi" (1996), a major influence in Scandinavian pedagogy.

¹⁶ For a Late moderne elaboration of how the concept of authenticity is important for the development of a non-elitist democracy and society, see Jensen & Lübker (2006) and especially Hansen (2006).

¹⁷ For a further description and elaboration of the educational philosophy behind the Nordic folk high school see Rosendahl 1961, Slumstrup et al. 1983, Zøllner 1993, Korsgaard 1997, Hansen 2000 (2. Part), Hansen 2002, Hansen 2008, Hansen 2010, Vodsgaard 2003.

Another folk high school manager, Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard writes:

“A folk high school must, according to this tradition also open students' eyes, or rather minds for life sources, which makes it extra vivid and real. The folk high school is not just about autonomy (professional or disciplinary training or state bourgeois formation), but also about authenticity (enlivening and life-disclosure).” (Vodsgaard, 2003, p. 54)

It is precisely this balance between on the one hand a strive for autonomy, and on the other hand a strive for authenticity, that we find to be characteristic for a relevant and updated notion of Academic Bildung. According to this public education and enlightenment tradition, which is rooted in a layman's movement also consisting of adult education associations, it is particularly intellectuals and professionals (the elite) who have a tendency to become spiritless. An Academic Bildung in net-based learning inspired by the Scandinavian concept of People's Enlightenment and Enlightenment for Life will therefore be looking for a 'spirited' kind of learning and self-transformation processes where the academic teacher and the students meet in a living and lively dialogue and exchange of lived experiences and ideas that really matters to them personally as well as professionally. As such, both critical-emancipatory reflection and ethical-existential reflection constitute crucial components in this kind of Academic Bildung.

Academic Bildung – Learning from the German tradition

Now, in order to relate this 'double-tracked' concept of Academic Bildung to the idea of the university as a research institution and the unique educational culture that follows teaching lead by 'real-time' researchers, we have found it necessary to take a closer look at the concept of Enlightenment and Bildung offered by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in the 18th

Century; a thinking which has had a particularly strong influence on the critical, progressive, and emancipatory pedagogy in modern times. But this is, as we have shown, only half of the story. If we are to include the other part, that is a more existence philosophical approach in doing research and pedagogy, we also need to listen to another great philosopher of the 20th Century, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

What is Academic Bildung According to a Kantian Based Understanding of the Concept?

Having the courage to use your own intellect is one of the basic requirements for Bildung, as well as it being a hallmark of Bildung in itself. This idea goes back to Kant and his article “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”

“Enlightenment is the human being’s emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but rather in a lack of resolve and courage to make use of one’s intellect without the direction of another. “Sapere aude!”¹⁸ Have the courage to make use of your own intellect!” is hence the motto of the enlightenment.” (Kant 2006 [1784], p. 17)

According to Kant, all human beings are equally equipped for using their own intellect. This provides an egalitarian basis for a concept of Bildung. To make use of one’s own intellect means, according to Kant, to think for yourself. However, a notion of self-thinking built on Kant is not subjective. A Kantian notion of self-thinking should be based on his idea of *sensus communis*, and this is put in the following words in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790):

¹⁸ “Sapere aude” means, more directly translated into English; “dare to know”, and the phrase is said to stem from Horace.

"..we must take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense shared, i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order as it were to compare our own judgment with human reason in general... Now we do this as follows: we compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else..." (Kant 1987 [1790], p. 160)

Sensus communis is here seen as a general faculty for judgment that all humans have, and the main point is that we relate our own thinking to the potential thinking of others. Thus, according to a Kantian based notion of *Bildung*, one must actively engage one's own intellect without the direction of others (i.e. autonomously), and one must include the possible judgment of others, in one's own judgment.¹⁹ In order to make this into a habit one must practice, together with others. This is the basis for being a skilled thinker. In order to truly think for yourself, as a student at a university, you cannot start from own intellect alone. You must think on basis of the well-established knowledge in your discipline, and thus you need to be acquainted with this knowledge base. You must further be able to train your thinking skills in conjunction with your peers and the previous and present authorities in your field. This means that self-thinking requires a community. The lack of *Bildung* thus will show as lack of active and independent use of one's intellect and a lack of inclusion of the possible judgment of others.

The concept of *Bildung* that we can extract from Kant's thinking is formal in the sense that it does not say anything about the contents of thinking or the culture in which thinking takes place. The Scandinavian universities have perhaps first and foremost been research

¹⁹ See Solberg (2010) for a development of a Kantian notion of *Bildung*, based on an elaboration of Kant's *sensus communis* and his principle of enlightenment, and Søndena and Solberg (2013) for application of this notion in a setting of tutoring in teacher education.

institutions, and the core value of the education is that it should be research based. This implies that the cultures within the institutions (to various degrees) will be research cultures and also different professional cultures.²⁰ The core values of Academic Bildung will, if this is plausible, be the values of different research cultures. Or, what in general terms can be called academic values, or perhaps researcher virtues. This means that the content of the concept of Academic Bildung could be said to have common academic values at the core, and also that it needs to be seen in relation to the different research cultures actually existent in actual universities. In order for a student to be academically “dannet”, he or she will have to be initiated or socialised into a specific research community. The values and necessary academic skills will be different according to the content of the research discipline, and they will not always be conscious and explicit. We can see that this concept of Academic Bildung in some of its dimensions comes close to the concept of generic competences.

It may not be quite as easy to draw a distinction between formal requirements and contents as we have done here: even though self-thinking is a formal requirement, it is also a virtue for a successful researcher. In this Kantian based concept of Academic Bildung the student who succeeds in his or her process will be able to develop and think his or hers own rational and autonomous voice into an academic community of voices. The notion of autonomy at play in Kant’s thinking is a concept of self-rule, where the individual act from his or her own reasons (or moral law, as Kant holds), as opposed to heteronomy, where one’s actions are influenced by a force outside the individual. Kant’s concept is more of a moral concept than the everyday modern use of the concept, which is more psychologically oriented, but it is in any case about individual independence and self-determination.

²⁰ See for instance Mangseth (2010) and Slagstad (2003), p. 253.

What is Academic Bildung According to a Gadamerian Based Understanding of the Concept?

Where Kant's notion of *Bildung* as critical self-determination makes the rational self-reflective consciousness into the centre of the *Bildung*-process (*Verstand*-driven), Gadamer (2006 [1960]) relates to 'thinking' and the *Bildung*-process as a more intuitive and existential way of opening up for the sensual and phenomenological 'Being-dimension' of our life worlds. We have to transcend the 'common sense', and even the 'scientific reflection', in order to get in contact and dialogue with the subject matter itself (*den Sachen Selbst*). Something is overlooked or missed, Gadamer claims, if we only look and reflect through our rational intellect and through evidence-based, epistemological and methodological approaches, that is, the approach the natural and social sciences are based on. To be a truth-seeking researcher is also to be able to see and think *beyond* what can be grasped and explained through an empirical ('evidence-based') and analytical science. Or as Gadamer writes at the very first page in the introduction to *Truth and Method*:

“They [the following investigations in *Truth and Method*, MS & FTH] are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy. Hence the human sciences [Geist Wissenschaft, MS & FTH] are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experience of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experiences in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.”(Gadamer, 2006 [1960], p. xxi)

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the existential phenomenology and philosophy the philosophical hermeneutics is grounded in, can be seen as an increasingly developed and

unfolded description of what we can understand with intuition (or phenomenological sensitivity and hermeneutical awareness) and it especially has to do with ‘that’, which has made a deep impression on us and which we now through words and concepts and other forms of artefacts try to find expressions for.

But the existential and hermeneutical point of Gadamer is that when it comes to matters of ethical, aesthetical and existential or metaphysical/spiritual concern, we human beings must accept the *finitude* of human rationality and discursive reflection and scientific knowledge as such. What goes on in our daily human relations – where ethical, aesthetical and existential aspects and dimensions are always at play – cannot be sufficiently described empirically, or systematically analysed and categorised in general terms and concepts and precise and well-defined methods, which are of course the tools of empirical and analytical science (e.g. psychology, sociology, semiotics, anthropology, etc.). There are subject matters and life phenomena and human experiences of meaningfulness and actions that seem too enigmatic and too saturated with meaning to be captured by the scientific language (van Manen 1990) (van Manen 2002) (van Manen 2014). *Bildung* in the way Gadamer understands it and links it to the history of *Bildung* from Meister Eckhart to Wilhelm Von Humboldt and modern age has to do with an experience of transcendence and a ‘speculative dimension in language’, that is, a longing or quest *in* language itself to reach out for ‘that’ which it cannot grasp and communicate in direct words and statements but under which it is deeply influenced.

“That is the positive implication of the ‘indigence of language’ inherent in philosophy from its beginning. At very special moments and under very special circumstances that are not to be found in Plato or Aristotle, Meister Eckhart or Nicholas of Cusa, Fichte or Hegel, but perhaps in Aquinas, Hume, and Kant, this linguistic indigence is

concealed under the smooth surface of a conceptual system, and it emerges only – but then of necessity – when we thoughtfully follow the movement of thought.”(*Truth and Method*, 2006 [1989], p. 566)

It is this ‘indigence of language’, which demands a special reluctant, dwelling, listening and wondrous way of being in order to hear, what life or the phenomena in *this* concrete and *this* singular case is saying as a *Thou* to you as a listener. This is the form of existential and Being-oriented *Bildung*, which Gadamer talks about and which, at least in our view, best frames what we understand with the authenticity dimension of Academic *Bildung* in this article.

A last word is to be said about this kind of Academic *Bildung*. It is a ‘movement of thought’, which is not, as we have already indicated, only made of a rational and conceptual form and telos. The movement of this kind of thinking is rather existential but not in a Sartrean ‘meaning-making’ sense, where we see the self-reflective consciousness at the centre of the world. By ‘existential’ Gadamer means our ability or musicality to be tuned in to ‘that’ which *calls* us to respond. It is rather to be understood in a ‘meaning-receiving’ sense, and it ‘happens *with* us’ when we engage fully in our own lives and follow what we experience as the most valuable in our human lives together. These existential moments, the existential philosopher would say, is in a way the ethical, aesthetical and existential ‘GPS’ of our actions and judgments (the *phronesis of the practitioner and the Sophia of the thinker*). It is not based on ‘common sense’ or scientific knowledge or not even political and rational decisions made in the public sphere (*polis*), when decision is primarily based on utilitarian means-end-rationality.

This more intuitive sense of the normative dimension in life is neither not to be confused with the moral and norms and ethical procedures, which modern philosophers such as Rawls (1971) and Habermas (1984) is talking about. It is rather to be understood along the lines of Charles Taylor (1992) when he talks about the ‘Ethics of Authenticity’ and how authenticity presupposes a resonance with ‘something’ (*cosmos* or existence or life as such), which is larger than ourselves and our wanting and doing in the public sphere, and which is embedded in the ontological being-dimension, that constitutes our value structures and qualitative and normative distinctions (Taylor 1989, Raffnsøe-Møller 2007).

In this Gadamerian based conception of Academic Bildung, the student who succeeds in his or her Bildung process will be able not only to develop and think his or hers own voice into an academic community of voices in a more rational and critical way – he or she will also find his or her own intuitive and existential voice (from a kind of listening from the heart) *but only* in and through the dialogue with the voice of Being or the phenomena itself (*den Sachen Selbst*). Academic Bildung in a Gadamerian sense can therefore be described as a kind of ‘tactfulness’ constituted by on the one hand a phenomenological sensitivity and intuitions for the phenomenon itself, and on the other hand a hermeneutic and Socratic awareness of the limitations of the intuitions and pre-understandings that are embedded in those sensitivities and intuitions (Hansen 2013).

The Fourth Voice When Talking About the Ontological Dimension in Higher Education

Going back to Ronald Barnett’s concept of ‘the voice of being’, in short,²¹ what is missing in Barnett’s model of the three voices of university teaching is a fourth voice: ‘the Voice of the Phenomenon or Subject matter itself’ (*die Sache Selbst*). This is why Gadamer from the very

²¹ For further development of this argument please read (Hansen 2010a) (Hansen 2011) (Hansen 2013).

start of *Truth and Method* emphasises that: “*My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing*” (Gadamer, 2006 [1989], xvi)

So one could say that we must – if we want to take in the ontological and existence philosophical points on authenticity and ontology from Gadamer mentioned before – make a distinction between what Sartre and Barnett relate to ‘the Voice of being’ and what Gadamer would call ‘the Voice of Being’ with a capital B.²² The later way of being-in-the-world is a way of being where you are not in a ‘meaning-making’ and self-creation approach towards the world and yourself and others. Rather, you are in a ‘meaning-receiving’ and loving and ‘taken’ mode or mood, and you experience meaningfulness during self-forgetting immersion in for instance playing, painting, having a profound dialogue, or getting engaged in a caring and loving relation with what is, at a particular moment, calling for your deep awareness and anticipation. In those existential moments and ontological living relations (or I-Thou-relations) with the world or ‘the other’ we are not in a state of intentional willing, wanting and doing but rather in a devotional, receptive, listening, admiring, vulnerable, contemplative and wondrous way of being-in-and-with-the-world. These are moments that Gadamer and other existential oriented innovation and design and creativity researchers (Scharmer 2007, Shotter 2010, Verganti and Öberg 2013) connect to the more intuitive, inspirational, evocative, and wonderment-arising moments in a researcher’s work and aspirations, and therefore also attitudes and a way of being-in-and-with-the-word’ that our students should at least hear about and hopefully also work with.²³

²² This is comparable with the distinction that Late Heidegger makes between *Dasein* and *Sein* (Heidegger 2004 [1954]), and with Arendt (1978) and Marcel (1950).

²³ For an elaboration of a higher education pedagogy, which is led by this kind of wonder-based and ‘4-voiced Bildung Pedagogy’ please read Hansen (2008c) (2014). See also Chapter 9 and 11 of this book for employment of the “4-voiced Bildung Pedagogy”.

Discussion and clarifications

We want to clear up some misconceptions regarding the use of the concept of *Bildung* in contemporary higher education research. In current higher education research the concept of *Bildung* is often connected to the Humboldtian idea of a university (Kristensen et al. 2007). This idea is very often interpreted as a bit outdated and conservative and too theoretical and anti-utilitarian in its understanding of what constitutes good academic education and *Bildung* at a university (Käufer and Scharmer 2000). The critics of the Humboldtian tradition argue that this way of understanding higher education is locked into a ‘mode 1’ approach to research, which is to say that the researcher becomes a solitary and narrow-minded specialist occupied only with his own exotic theoretical studies and proportional knowledge. Modern ‘mode 2’ researchers (See Gibbons et al. 2004) are working in collective research environments in close contact with the world outside the university and with the practical knowledge and problems and utilitarian needs of the society. This ‘mode 2’ research is in other words a more practice and problem based and applied science, and the researcher would describe him- or herself as part of a scientific ‘knowledge production community’ and a living interchange with ‘real life problems’. We are not going to discuss this distinction between ‘mode 1’ and ‘mode 2’ research, or even if there could be a ‘mode 3’-research (Hansen 2011) (Hansen 2014). However, we do want to make a point saying that the Humboldtian idea and ideal of *Bildung* is, in our view, neither this unworldly specialist nor this pragmatic and problem-solving innovator.

We would say that Humboldt’s idea of *Bildung* both has an autonomy- and an authenticity dimension, as well as a more general understanding of *Bildung* as *canon and content oriented*²⁴. The teachers of Humboldt’s university were not supposed to teach about certain

²⁴ For a profound introduction to the thoughts of Wilhelm Von Humboldt and his view on education and *Bildung* see: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wilhelm-humboldt/>

canonical books and thinkers and artist *in order* for the students to find the ‘right answers’. But reading these classical texts, that stand out as excellent readings for the students and teachers because of their admirable power to raise the Big Questions, might bring them into a more open-minded, original, and self-thinking mode. Humboldt (1988 [1841]) followed Kant when Kant talked about *Bildung* as a path to self-determination through the use of one’s own rationality, but he insisted that this ‘self-determination’ should be followed and qualified by not only a rational and critical and systematic reflection and consciousness, but also by a simultaneous cultivation of man’s sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*). So Humboldt was very keen on bringing in an *aesthetical cultivation* of the young student so that rational thinking was balanced by an aesthetic sensibility and creative imagination to form a vital unity (his notion of *Geist/Spirit*). This free development of the individual and the self-cultivation and self-realisation, which was an expression and result of the *Bildung* process, could not, Humboldt claimed (Humboldt 1988 [1841]), be done in isolation from the world and surrounding society and politics. Humans can, Humboldt argued, realise their potential as individuals and persons only in society.

Humboldt’s successor, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers’ expression “the wings of philosophising” can serve as an illustrative picture of how Humboldt saw *Bildung* as a two-sided process - as a creation of the student’s existential unity of thinking and action:

“There are, so to speak, two wings that beat in this thinking [existential kind of thinking – “Existential elucidation”, MS and FTH], and it will succeed only if both really beat, possible Existenz as well as generalized thinking. If one wing fails, the soaring elucidation will plummet to the ground. It is in this elucidation that the

universal and I myself coincide as the wings of philosophizing.” (Jaspers 1971 [1932], p. 12)

In other words, the balance between the autonomy dimension and authenticity dimension of Bildung has to do both with a generalised conceptual and critical and Socratic thinking as well as an opening towards Being or ‘possible Existenz’ itself, which is often described as an intuition or ‘lyrical sense’ of ‘that’ which speaks to me. The autonomy side of Academic Bildung is characterised by its formal orientation towards common human cognitive abilities, while the authenticity side of Academic Bildung is characterised by its substantial orientation towards the meaningfulness in the life of each individual person. The substantiality is not, as one might easily think, connected to a rigid description of a specific content and Answers to the Big Questions. But the content level (the meeting with the Grand Literature, Art and Philosophy of Humanity where all their open-ended existential topics and questions) is important in order to have a medium through which the Big Questions can be raised and dwelled upon. This might lead to a high culture and elitist approach to the understanding of Bildung, but not necessarily.

In our view, neither the Kantian nor the Gadamerian way of understanding Bildung can be seen as elitist or as an education for a social stratum in line with a Bildungsbürgertum, although Gadamer certainly would be critical to the current widespread and comprehensive tendency in modern society and higher education to become increasingly utilitarian.²⁵ But we do not see, as Jørgen Fosslund seems to have been indicating, that a critical scepticism towards utilitarianism will necessary lead to an aristocratic elitism and anti-humanistic or anti-democratic world-view (2012). On the contrary, this means that neither of the two

²⁵ See Solberg, M and Fosslund, T (2013) for a further discussion of elitism and Academic Bildung.

concepts requires *specific* forms of content. However, at the same time we say – in line with Humboldt – that working with art, philosophy and literature that raise the Big Questions (but do not necessarily give Big Answers to them) can be a good way of keeping the student (and teachers) alert and ‘in shape’ in their own critical and existential reflections and Socratic dialogues.

Academic Bildung is a Question of Moving beyond Learning – A Conclusion

If we now, as a final and concluding remark, turn to our notions of an autonomy- and an authenticity-oriented concept of Academic Bildung, we would say that the knowledge-oriented thinking is more connected to the autonomy dimension of the concept of Academic Bildung. Here we are working with Academic Bildung in different, but indeed important and necessary, ways, in an epistemological and learning-oriented ‘grip’ of the world and our lives, in order better to master our lives. But as we have discussed in this article, through Gadamer’s notion of Bildung, the Nordic Folk High School tradition and its view on Bildung and through Barnett’s description of the ‘ontological turn in higher education’ – there is also another important ‘second wing’ (cf. Karl Jaspers) in the notion of Academic Bildung, which is concerned with the ethical-existential and ontological being-dimension of the Bildung-process and concept. And this has to do with the Academic Bildung ideal of authenticity.

To be in a knowing-position and to be in a wondrous and fundamental ‘not-knowing position’ (to be in the field of ‘that, which I do not know, that I do not know – but that I am or I am becoming to be’) are of course two different positions, that at the same time are necessarily interwoven. It is like the Socratic dictum: The only thing I know is that I do not know. It is this kind of Socratic ‘*docta ignorantia*’ (scholarly not-knowing wonderment) and the openness and humbleness that follows from this dictum that is indeed a part of what we would

describe as good Academic Bildung or deed. In these ‘fields of wonder’ we move beyond learning and touch upon an ontological dimension in higher education which requires another subtle attitude of *not* being in an pro-acting, coping, constructing, and mastering attitude but rather in a receptive, listening, reluctant, devoted and open wondrously attitude towards the calling of the phenomenon we wish to understand better. Our concept of Academic Bildung, as we have developed it in this chapter, is indeed two-dimensional. If one dimension is lacking, we would say that it is no longer a Scandinavian conception of Academic Bildung.

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