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The Cultivation of Conversation The IIH International Summer Schools in Philosophy and Education

Viel hat von Morgen an,
Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander,
Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang.
Friedrich Hölderlin, *Friedensfeier*

Whilst the causes and the effects, the entire range of ramifications cannot be exhaustively elucidated – or, at least, adequately apprehended – during the still rampant pandemic, which since the beginning of the year holds (all) the – dwellers of the – world hostage, the exigence of which has been leading individuals as well as communities alike to various private or public responses – often, alas, conflicting with the solidary care for the well-being of the other(s) – the occurrence of the (already all-encompassing) COVID-19 crisis, through the local outbreaks and through the global outspreading, through the (more or less successfully implemented, more or less meticulously observed) measures pro-claimed – by authorities and by governments – for the containment of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), has profoundly challenged (and will doubtlessly continue to challenge) – this, nonetheless, preliminarily allows to be ascertained – not only the heterogenous streams of the quotidian course of ordinary existence, but (perhaps) also some – if not most

– of the fundamental dimensions of the human(e) being-in-the-world. Numerous, even innumerable matters of inter-personal sociality, previously taken for granted, are now being constantly radically called into question by the postulate of wearing facemasks and of sanitizing hands, by the regarding, the guarding of physical distance, by the pre-requisite re-recommendation of self-isolation: by the overwhelming imposition of the epidemic threat. Despite the tools of technology – for the moment, the problem of their potential contribution to the situation wherein we find and lose ourselves today must be left aside – promising to bring about proximity missing between people, to re-gain – the (n)ever non-existent – (virtual) presence through re-covering (the actual, the bodily) absence, as being amongst the ardently afflicted faculties – as a (mere?) re-presentation of further capacities and disparate capabilities that determine humanity – the obvious self-evidence of communication should be considered: that of – the art(istry) of – (a)conversation.

Although it might, at first glance, seem that the agency of philosophers – as well as of the majority of scholars working in the different fields of the humanities, in general – primarily requires the embrace of creative solitude, not only with regard to the diligent study of the writings of predecessors and contemporaries, but also in the case of a reflective deliberation on the multi-spectrality – the history, the present, and the future (?) – of reality, no theoretical contemplation is void of the processuality of practice, especially and explicitly when the labor of research crosses (through) pedagogical inter-mediation. The logos of philosophical and humanist thought is conversational by its very effectuation, by its very essence: before becoming an “inner” monologue, it had been begun as an “outer” dialogue: both – the “inner” and the “outer,” the monological and the dialogical (of its manifold poly-phonic facets) – are necessarily, by nascence, inter-subjectively inter-related. Therefore, the organization of expert and scientific meetings, of symposia and conferences, which has been – as countless cultural gatherings, as everything – stricken by the circumstances of the current health and humanitarian crisis, cannot be considered as an entirely trivial addition to the internal autonomy of meditation, as an instance and an instantiation of an external – purportedly “free” – market of ex-changing ideas, but, despite often almost arbitrary occasionality, belongs – as with-in it circumscribed co-incident-heteronomy – to the (notable) “building blocks” of its (coming-to-) being.

Since 2013, the International Institute for Hermeneutics Institut international d’herméneutique (IIH), founded and presided by Prof. Dr. Dr. Andrzej Wierciński, has been – in collaboration with several esteemed and renowned academic institutions from across the globe – predominantly in Poland, but at times likewise elsewhere, organizing week-long International Summer Schools in Philosophy and Education,

the intention of which is to join the participants together in a meaningful and stimulating conversation on the discussed central topic.

The realization of the IHH schools, usually, follows an established, precisely and prudently determined, yet simultaneously open schedule that proffers the elementary groundwork, the formal frame for a comprehensive concentration dedicated to convergent contents and divergent aspects of debated issues. Whereas during the first (two or three) days the presentations of contributions composed specifically for the event give rise to frequently fervent, but chiefly fruitful, collective considerations regarding the thematic at stake, after the customary day of rest, of re-composure, spent either in solitary absorption or – rather – in convivial companionship, devoted ordinarily to discovering the cultural sights and natural curiosities of surrounding environments, the concluding sessions of the final day take place in the manner of round tables allowing the participants at once to recall and recapitulate principal insights, impressions, and experiences accumulated in the course of the week, as well as to submit to co-attendants their critical observations and constructive proposals for the upcoming, the planned summer schools.

Insofar as the summer schools of the IHH do not entail only passively received lectures delivered by teachers with acquired academic positions, but, on the contrary, invite the (graduate and PhD) students to actively and equally participate, to present and to defend the projects engaging them before their well-versed seniors, the supportive – however asymmetrical – reciprocity in the conversations shared between the teachers and (their) students, between the students and (their) teachers enables the development of a sincere and cordial inter-generational communication that – as its in-corporate(d) correlate – cor-responds with the weekly cohabitation. Accordingly, the schools, on the one hand, render possible the transmission of knowledge exceeding the constraints of solely scholarly concerns from the proficiently and professionally fully formulated intellectual personalities to the evolving members of junior research generations, yet, on the other hand, also provide the latter with the opportunity to put their notions to the initial test, maybe thereby making a debut amidst (younger) peers and (older) colleagues in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. The distinguishing uniqueness of the concept(ualization) of discussions, moderated tirelessly by Wierciński with hermeneutic honesty, phenomenological prowess, and pedagogical patience, transforms the IHH summer schools into veritably heuristic, authentically experimental workshops of teaching through learning and of learning through teaching: of thinking.

Thus, the cultivation of conversation rooted in respect for and before the other – (of) the self, too – bears witness to the basic hermeneutic experience of the inter-(en)action of singular individuality and of communal universality of thought, which can – under fortuitous conditions

– lead to the phenomenally warranted mutuality of human comprehension and – by (its) extension – of humane coexistence. During the summer schools, during the debates and the sojourns thereat, not only partnerships for potential joint projects between separate participants or between affiliated institutions have been occasioned, which are of vital importance for the execution of inter-nationally acclaimed interdisciplinary research, but also (philosophical) friendships formed with-standing (with) the chasms of space and time.

However: if it may – due to defective description – (mistakenly) appear that the amiable ambiance of the IIH schools merely re-serves (as) a sheltered place of retreat from the world, from the assaults of its habitual demands and duties, a kind of “an ivory tower” of recluse, the function of which would be fulfilled through the exclusive pursuit of a purely scholastic striving for an interpretational analysis of a text or of an author of relevance for the realms of philosophy and education, it must, nonetheless, be emphasized that precisely such a (temporarily and locally) secluded separation – a (pro-visional, pro-visionary) stepping aside – from the occupying day-to-day (livelihood and university) concerns (also) pro-cures the clear(er) horizons of a broad, even panoramic over-view, a/the momentary, the/a momentous becoming-aware and making-sense of the world, of our being, facilitated through the – toward understanding directed – communication about (“subject/ive” and “object/ive”) matters, about affairs affecting us all. Although the schools – in harmony with the focal orientation of the IIH – take particular topic inspiration from (the works of) philosophers of the hermeneutic (and the appurtenant phenomenological) tradition, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, the thematic scope of addressed issues sur-passes (through) the perilous pitfalls of self-sufficiently intellectual(istic) disputations over – the rights and the wrongs of – an appropriate reading, and reaches, bridging – through the present – the precipice between the past and the future, (toward) the pressing problems of – being in – the contemporary world. A superficial, the briefest of glimpses at the – indirectly inter-connected – opulence of hitherto discussed phenomena, ranging from the notion of secularization, through the dilemmas of politics, of memory, of hospitality, and of tolerance, to the exposition of the fragility of existence itself, confirms that the summer schools of the IIH testify not only to the theoretically abstract relevance of hermeneutics for the consideration of philosophical and pedagogical questions, but – first and foremost – to its practical, ethical, and political significance for the confrontation with concrete challenges of the post-modern society and the world as a whole.

In the face of miscellaneous implications of the COVID-19 crisis, which has, through cancellations and through postponements, through the con-(un)founded ab-normality of general existential uncertainty,

fatefully influenced the organization of international academic events, it will perhaps become necessary to re-consider the cardinal pre-suppositions of today's globalized civilization anew, if we should, indeed, despite the pandemic, through its experience, once – as Hölderlin's poem ex-claims – re-sound (as) singing – the song of humanity? – by embracing the dialogicality that pulsates as and at the heart of hermeneutics, by listening to the conversation that we are. Unavoidably arduous work awaits us all, and to it – of this I am sure – an in-valuable contribution can and will be offered also by the IHH International Summer Schools in Philosophy and Education.