

Survival through Bildung

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Survival through Bildung

On the Topicality of Heinz-Joachim
Heydorn's Philosophy of Education

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Survival Through Bildung: Introduction to the Topic and the Contributions

Helge Kminek

The central reference point of the anthology is Heinz-Joachim Heydorn's essay "Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a Prospect" (1974/2024; original: "Überleben durch Bildung. Umriß einer Aussicht"), which was translated into English and has subsequently been made available to the wider public for the first time. Despite this 50-year gap, Heydorn's text is fascinating insofar as the survival of humanity—at least a qualitatively substantial survival—seems extremely questionable today.

Heydorn and his work polarised discourse over *Bildung*¹ at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies in Germany. Some called him a leftist renegade, others a conservative revolutionary.

These differing points of view are better understood if one considers a few biographical facts and the basic outline of his extremely demanding critical theory of Bildung. A very brief outline of Heydorn's biography and his theory of education will be given at once. As far as the biography is concerned, I mainly refer to Gernot Koneffke's (2004) explanations in the

1 Bildung has no obvious English-language substitute. It has been translated variously as education, edification, formation, learning, culture, cultivation and literacy. Bildung was given canonical definition by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999) as "the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay" (p. 58). In keeping with the breadth of this phrasing, Benner and Brüggem (2004) define Bildung as "the process of the forming [die Formung] of humans, as well as the determination [Bestimmung] of the goal and purpose of human existence" (p. 175)—further underscoring the vast, ill-defined semantic space that this term occupies in the German language. In addition, Bildung signifies the ideal of the autonomous, self-determined and self-reflected personality in its full realisation. But Bildung goes beyond this as well. Bildung cannot be completely contained by terms such as "education", "socialisation", "instruction" or "schooling". Bildung identifies a kind of "becoming human" that spans biographical, collective, institutional and historical dimensions. As such, it opens up the possibility of a generative process through which we are formed by the world, form ourselves and form the world (immediately) around us.

I would like to thank Norm Friesen for his hints, and a first text template to which I strongly attached myself (see Friesen, 2021).

first volume of the study editions. After this, I will outline central aspects of Heydorn's educational theory and his position on educational policy.²

1 About the Biography of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn

Heinz-Joachim Heydorn was born on 14th June 1916 in Altona on the Elbe (today a district of Hamburg) and died on 15th December 1974 in Frankfurt am Main.

Both his father and mother came from merchant families. For Heydorn, his relationship with his father was particularly formative. He represented the position of political liberalism, worked as a lawyer and, according to Koneffke (2004), his passions were classical studies, the classical languages and the "great early period of the European spirit" (p. 12; translated by H. K.). In the cellar of his parents' house was an extensive organic library, which Heydorn used intensively from an early age. It was the first place of "discoveries, first insights [and] the emerging self-confidence" (p. 12; translated by H. K.). Heydorn passed his school-leaving examination (Abitur) in 1935 at the humanistic grammar school Christianeum in Hamburg. In the winter semester 1935/1936, he began studying Philosophy, Chinese and English at the University of Hamburg; he resumed this after the end of the Second World War and completed in 1949 with a dissertation on Julius Bahnsen.

After the National Socialists seized power, he joined the Confessing Church, which was in itself an act of resistance. Whilst still a pupil, he also made contact with emigrated members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Furthermore, Heydorn's anonymous publications in resistance journals have been documented but have yet to be identified.

In 1938 and 1939, he took a job as a German teacher in Wales for a year. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Heydorn returned to Germany from England due to his father's terminal illness.

During the war he was drafted into the Wehrmacht, where he worked in the administration department and was plagued by remorse. Heydorn deserted in 1944 and was sentenced to death in absentia, but survived the rest of the war by hiding on a farm in France.

Immediately after the war, Heydorn co-founded the German Socialist Students' Union and became one of its first two chairmen. For the

2 Only the most important aspects are mentioned. Andreas Seiverth is currently working on an interdisciplinary biography of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn.

German Social Democratic Party, he later sat in the Hamburg parliament. Whilst still a member, he almost succeeded in obtaining a party resolution opposing the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany.

After a party decision stating that it wasn't possible to be a member of both the German Socialist Student Union and the German Social Democratic Party, Heydorn was expelled. The party leadership had thus rid itself of an internal opponent. Finally, it's important to mention Heydorn's involvement in the peace movement and in the Easter March movement, where he took an unambiguous stand against anti-Semitic tones within the wider German peace movement.

Heydorn had always decided against a career as a professional politician, even though this was a difficult decision for him. After all, this would have been a way to intervene more directly in political decisions. However, it is therefore unsurprising that he accepted offers from the university side and not pursued his political career.

In 1950, Heydorn was appointed as a lecturer at the Kiel University of Education (regional state Sleswick-Holsatia). In 1952, he moved to and was appointed to the Pedagogical Institute in Jugenheim, one of the two training centres for primary, elementary and secondary school teachers at the time in the regional state of Hesse. Finally, in 1961, Heydorn moved to Frankfurt to the "Hochschule für Erziehung" (College of Education), which was integrated into the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main in 1967 as the Department of Educational Science.

When one considers Heydorn's political position—which left little room for doubt—it appears he was a left revolutionary and not a leftist renegade or a conservative revolutionary. This becomes clear when one considers his critical theory of education and his educational policy position.

2 On Heydorn's Theory of Bildung and Educational Policy Position

At least in my view, Heydorn's theory of Bildung is characterised by three structural elements that are intertwined. For this, Heydorn draws on the philosophy of Kant; the dialectical philosophy of Bildung and history of Hegel; and, above all, the dialectical materialism of Marx. First of all, Heydorn links (i) reflections on the philosophy of Bildung with (ii) a historical and systematic analysis of natural and social power relations.

Greek antiquity with its transition from myth to logos forms a historically decisive point of reference for Heydorn. Socially, the primary focus is on the economic interest of Bildung for the purpose of mastering

nature. Ancient Greece must promote *Bildung* for and in the service of the economy. But simultaneously, through this *Bildung*, an interest in the real realisation of an emphatic freedom for human beings emerges, both as freedom from the forces of nature and from the (economic) power of human over human, on which economic relations rest and which is required for its reproduction (cf. Heydorn, 1970/2004a, p. 14).

Put differently: The forces of nature and the economic relations of production and power in Greek antiquity required the promotion of *Bildung*, even if in and through *Bildung* the economic relations of power are endangered. Power aims at a *Bildung* that directly serves its purposes.

Bildung, in turn, endangers the economic relations of power and yet at the same time depends on them. For example, an increase in productivity allows more people—and for a longer period of time—to devote themselves to *Bildung* as they are freed from the necessity of reproductive labour. In turn, *Bildung* aims at economic conditions that promote a *Bildung* which is freed from economic power. Thus, economic power and *Bildung* are opposites, which are nonetheless dependent on one another and conceptually contain one another.

According to Heydorn, the dialectical constellation just outlined came into the world in Greek antiquity. It changes historically, develops further and is annulled in higher stages, but can no longer be erased from the world until the dissolution of the dialectic and—if successful—the emphatic liberation of the human being.

(iii) To work on a positively desired form of the dissolution of the dialectic, especially as a result of the historical relapse into barbarism through National Socialism, is the third structural element of Heydorn's theory of *Bildung*. This means, above all, to oppose the decay of the *Bildung* claim.

In concrete terms, this means Heydorn opposed and vehemently argued against the introduction of the comprehensive school—the educational policy project of the political left in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. The comprehensive school was intended to abolish the tripartite school system in Germany. In this system, the *Gymnasium* is the most advanced, with the *Realschule* ranked second and the *Hauptschule* ranked third.³ At the *Gymnasium* the students are taught in a most demanding

3 The *Hauptschule* is a secondary school which offers Lower Secondary Education (Level 2), according to the International Standard Classification of Education. 1970 only 1.4% of the pupils received their school degree, the *Abitur*, from the *Gymnasium*, 10.9% from the *Realschule* and 87.7% from the *Hauptschule*. Today in Germany, there are many comprehensive schools besides the *Hauptschule* (not in all federal states), the *Realschule* and the *Gymnasium*. In 2019, 34.6% of the pupils received

manner. And only those pupils—apart from a few exceptions—who had attended the Gymnasium and passed the Abitur (the degree of the Gymnasium) were allowed to study at university in Germany. The tripartite school system was regarded—from the political left—as the ruling system of the bourgeoisie that only conservatives and reactionaries wanted to preserve.

Yet Heydorn was not against a school for everyone per se. On the contrary, Heydorn demanded the Gymnasium for everyone. And, if the Gymnasium was politically unenforceable for all pupils, then, in his view, the divided school system in Germany should have remained in place. From Heydorn's point of view, it was the Gymnasium and only the Gymnasium that could enable all individuals to consciously contribute to Bildung in the emphatic sense, towards a liberated and humane society. In addition, the unfair and unjustifiable segregation of pupils into different classes would remain in place, but was at least visible in a three-tier school system. In the comprehensive school, the segregation would remain but would be made invisible.

For Heydorn, the political conservatives, who were in favour of maintaining the divided school system and thus also keeping the Gymnasium limited to a minority of pupils, were on the side of the revolution—contrary to their own ideology. The political left, then, which voted for the comprehensive school, was on the side of reaction, also contrary to their own ideology. Against this background, it is unsurprising that Heydorn was called a leftist renegade by some and a conservative revolutionary by others.

3 Brief Overview of the Contributions of the Anthology

Heydorn's work can be regarded as a forgotten—perhaps even repressed—classic of pedagogy in Germany. This is true even though a few anthologies regarding his work have appeared in recent years (see the bibliography at the end of the anthology).

The present anthology provides the broader public with access to the last piece Heydorn ever published, a 1974 essay entitled “Survival Through Bildung – Outline of a Prospect”. His essay has been translated and printed here with the generous permission of Mirjam Heydorn. Following

this, the collection then offers contributions that examine the text from each author's perspective and questions Heydorn's article in terms of its relevance and potential for us today.

The contributors have taken up the challenge of dealing with a text and author who they had limited to no prior knowledge of. Respectively, they relate their perspectives to Heydorn's text and, above all, explore connections with their own work. This is an extremely promising approach to opening up and dealing with Heydorn's work and feeding these arguments into the international discussion of educational science.⁴

Helge Kminek's contribution opens the discussion on Heydorn's text. He asks what we can learn from Heydorn today, especially for the issue of the socio-ecological crisis, for which he uses the concept of the Anthropocene. In doing so, he attempts to reconstruct Heydorn's argumentation and, at the same time, to negotiate the question of contribution. In doing so, he also raises the question of what arguments could be made against using Heydorn's contribution today.

In the second contribution, *Norm Friesen* is also drawing a parallel between the threat to humanity in 1974, the year Heydorn's contribution was published, and today's threat to humanity in 2024, indicated by the term Anthropocene. Friesen outlines this current threat in order to analyse it from a theoretical-historical perspective. In order to reconstruct Heydorn's contribution, Friesen first analyses the role of nature in Wilhelm von Humboldt's "Theory of the Bildung" which Heydorn was undoubtedly aware of. In the course of his argument, Friesen, drawing on the work of Günther Anders, asks about Bildung and human development in the light of the Anthropocene.

In the third contribution, *Fernando Murillo* reads the text from a personalist perspective. He discusses key passages with reference to various philosophies and theories of education, and in doing so repeatedly recalls the contemporary relevance of Heydorn's contribution. His central thesis is that Heydorn's "survival through Bildung" presupposes an ethics of salvation that involves the whole human person.

The fourth contribution is by *Ana Inés Heras*. She draws on the interdisciplinary work of Enrique Pichon-Rivière and José Bleger to examine Heydorn's contribution. In doing so, she pursues the central question of

4 Besides "Survival Through Bildung" (perhaps Heydorn's third major contribution), the remaining two major, extensive and ambitious contributions have yet to be translated into English: "Über den Widerspruch von Bildung und Herrschaft" [On the Contradiction of Bildung and Authority] (1970/2004a) and "Zu einer Neufassung des Bildungsbegriffs" [Towards a Revision of the Concept of Bildung] (1972/2004b).

the possibility of comparability between the three theorists and their theories in an internationally comparative way, so to speak. In her analysis, she traces intersections, such as the collective processes of knowledge generation for the development of relations free of domination.

The anthology concludes with a contribution by *Julia Bello-Bravo* and *Anne Namatsi Lutomia*. They relate their analysis of Heydorn's contribution to a case study of informal adult education in Africa. They ask about the potential of digital communication for collective design, for example for the learning capacity of network members and for the realisation of personality (identity), which has previously been excluded as a possibility. They argue that individuation and the transhuman or virtual realisation of human-non-human hybridity respectively overlap and can point the way to a good and fulfilled life.

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Frankfurt, April 2024
Helge Kminek

Heydorns Work Edition

Heydorn, H.-J. (1994–1999). *Heinz-Joachim Heydorn Werke in neun Bänden* (I. Heydorn, H. Kappner, G. Koneffke, & E. Weick, Eds.). Topos-Verlag.

Heydorns Study Edition

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