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Value and *Bildung*: On the Positive Resistance of the Objectively Valuable in Educational Experience

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Abstract

The present chapter articulates and develops some critical reflections on the meaning of resistance and otherness in the self-transformative logic of Bildung. In response to Malte Brinkmann's account of Bildung as driven exclusively by negative experience, I argue that the self-transformation of Bildung is more properly understood as response to the revelation of positive values. I make this case by drawing on the phenomenological value realism of Dietrich von Hildebrand as well as on more recent contributions from the interface between phenomenology and cognitive science. My argument is that value experience amounts to revelations of the world, which draw us into spaces in which the self's possibilities to be can unfold.

Keywords

Bildung; phenomenology of education; value realism; embodied attention.

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1. Introduction

Malte Brinkmann's excellent essay on *Bildung* and ethos not only provides a masterful exposition of the coherence across different traditions of the phenomenon of pedagogical transformation, but also offers a convincing case for the centrality of the experience of negativity in such transformative processes.¹ He describes the confrontation with negativity at both formal and material levels as experientially central to both the inner logic of knowledge acquisition and the transformative unfolding of personhood. I am convinced by Brinkmann's argument as far as it goes and have no intention of gainsaying it. What I intend to do in my own contribution is to offer some reflections on the role of positive experience as structurally necessary complement to the negativity described by Brinkmann. What I am specifically interested in is the way in which values draw out affective responses that provide the horizon against which the negative is profiled, and that nourish the transformative logic of *Bildung*.²

1 Malte Brinkmann, "Bildung—Ethos in and for the World," §2 in this volume.

2 I will use the German *Bildung* throughout, rather than English cognates such as *formation*. The reason for this is predominantly to echo Brinkmann's usage, to whose treatment of the matter this chapter is a response.

The following is largely a work of critical analysis that also draws on phenomenological thinking and method. I will begin (§2) by providing a short summary of the main points of Brinkmann's argument before moving on in part 3 to an account of value experience and value response. In this part, I will draw on the work of phenomenologist Dietrich von Hildebrand whose nonformal ethics of value provides an alternative way of understanding self-transcendence than the one espoused by Brinkmann.³ Specifically, von Hildebrand's account suggests that self-transcendence is occasioned by the revelation of positive value rather than by mere resistance. On the basis of this exposition, I will suggest, in part 4, that the material ethics of von Hildebrand offers a way of understanding the concrete practices of education as goods that stand in a noninstrumental relation to the final good of the process of *Bildung*. I will conclude by dealing with some of the implications of the argument as outlined for conceptualizations of self and other.

2. Negativity and *Bildung*

If there is one core insight that permeates Brinkmann's essay on *Bildung*, it is the role of negation or negative experience as crucial to the meaning of the transformation process that is *Bildung*. He traces the idea in its different senses and as it unfolds in different traditions of thought. Chief among these senses is the notion that *Bildung* is something negative inasmuch as it is a *no* thing. It is not a curricular program, or a set of skills, or a learning outcome. It is precisely not something that can be brought under the control of either the student or the teacher, much less the educational system. It is not a target, but denotes rather the movement of experience in which the subject is reoriented through the cultivation of a capacity to be open toward, and therefore changed in the light of, what is other than itself. It concerns the realization of a possibility to be that is realized only inasmuch as the subject gives him or herself over to the surprising impulses and revelations of the world outside of itself.

The point of this distinction is twofold. On the one hand, it eschews the tendency to think of *Bildung* in instrumental terms, as something that is aimed at in the form of predetermined outcome that might then be pursued through evidence-based practice of one kind or another. Second, it reminds us that the context of the practice of education lies ultimately outside of the institution of the school or the university and is concerned with the relationship between the subject and the world as a whole.⁴ Brinkmann's distinction between *Bildung* and education (*Erziehung*) is to the point

3 This descriptor is taken from the title of Max Scheler's magnum opus but is equally valid in capturing von Hildebrand's insistence on the centrality of material affectivity rather than Kantian formalism as the pivot of moral experience. See Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Value*, 5th ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Project, 2020).

4 This is analogous to what Gert J. J. Biesta describes as the subjectification process that gives educational practice its inner logic. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013), 128.

here. While the latter is structured and systematic, and operates within the confines of teaching institutions, the former refers to the ultimate trajectory aimed at through such structures. It refers to the process of self-transcendence, which cannot be domesticated within educational practice, because it is the “for the sake of which” that enframes such educational activity and practice. In this sense, education and *Bildung* are entwined, but not reducible to one another. Without the strictures and structures of educational practice, the project of *Bildung* would evanesce for want of the material substrate of its realization. Without a sensitivity for the project of *Bildung*, education would become nothing more than the production of instruments designed to serve the short-term interests and needs of the society.⁵

Beyond this conceptual insistence on the resistance of *Bildung* as process to any attempt to mold it as educational product, Brinkmann also draws our attention to the way in which the project of *Bildung* makes itself present in our experience precisely as negation or resistance. As Brinkmann elucidates the matter, this happens at both formal and material levels. At the formal level, *Bildung* is initiated in the movement in which I am oriented toward something outside of myself, something that is not me and that is not an emanation of my being. This otherness that breaks into the sphere of my attention, as it were, simultaneously reveals a possibility to be for me and therefore discloses me to myself as not yet what I might be. In his essay, Brinkmann argues that this structure is found in religious, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment reflections on the nature of *Bildung* as the highest good or *terminus ad quem* of human striving. Whether as the desire for communion with God (Meister Eckhart), the ideal of a humanity as fully realized rational subjectivity (Wilhelm von Humboldt), or in openness to the world as cosmos (Eugen Fink), the subject is made aware of an absence in the immediacy of its own self-presence. There is something it can be, but is not yet. These visions are quite different at the level of substance, of course. The Christian ideal concerns the possibility to make manifest one’s being as *imago Dei*, something that has been derailed by sin and the fall; the humanist ideal of von Humboldt concerns the pursuit of a possibility to be of humanity as a whole and is therefore a project that is at least as much futural as present, while Fink’s vision, in turn, calls for a reevaluation and blurring of the boundaries that separate us from and unite us to the cosmic whole. But in spite of these differences, all share the notion that the splinter in the soul that brings to mind the absence of what can be is the impetus to the movement toward the other and a possibility to be otherwise.

Brinkmann goes on to argue that while such an overarching sense of purpose is essential to the project of *Bildung*, it requires practical engagement in order to become a material reality. The transformation of the subject in relation to its motivating ideal is not something that happens in a vacuum but is facilitated and sustained in the

5 This should not be understood as a rejection of the idea that education should be relevant to life outside the classroom. To the contrary. But it is a reminder not to define the parameters of relevance too narrowly or to assume that what occupies the discourse of today’s adults should be determinative of the educational trajectory of today’s children. On this point, see also Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Middlesex: Penguin, 2007), 171–93.

smaller scale transformations that occur in specific forms of world engagement. To learn a language or a skill requires an encounter between the subject and what it at first cannot do. This encounter is characterized, as such, by an initial negativity. The skis that the child uses for the first time are experienced as unwieldy and obtrusive, and rather than aiding movement, have the effect of thwarting it. Likewise, when learning French as a nonnative speaker, the child is initially encountered by a jumble of sounds and rules that impede free expression. While the educational outcome of these encounters is—ideally, at least—the acquisition of skills or capacities (skiing, speaking French), it is not the skill acquisition as such that is central as far as the treatment of *Bildung* is concerned. It is rather, once again, the movement of experience and the encounter with the negative, that makes possible a new orientation of the subject toward some aspect or dimension of the world. The child learns to attend to something other than itself in these material engagements and thereby releases a possibility to be in their own being. In the encounter with what is other, the child realizes a concrete possibility to be otherwise.⁶

3. Phenomenology and Value Experience

I find this account of the central importance of negativity in the transformative movement of *Bildung*, as laid out by Brinkmann, convincing. I would like to suggest, however, that while his emphasis on the negative experience that characterizes *Bildung* does a good job of frustrating any attempt to domesticate *Bildung* as an output of educational initiatives, it lacks sufficient attention to more positive forms of experience—specifically value experience—as leading the subject out of the reef of self-concern and into relation to what is other.

In order to develop this point, I will draw on the work of thinkers of the Munich and Göttingen schools of phenomenology, often referred to as phenomenological realists.⁷ This group includes thinkers such as Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Roman Ingarden, Adolf Reinach, and Nicolai Hartmann, although I will draw for the most part on the thought of von Hildebrand and on his analyses of value experience and affectivity.

At the core of von Hildebrand's phenomenology of value is the idea that human freedom is not best understood as an exigency of the subject toward self-expression, but in the turn toward objective value. Von Hildebrand, like other phenomenologists of the Munich and Göttingen schools, endorses the terminology of value as central to ethics, but deliberately subverts the meaning that has accrued to this term in the Nietzschean legacy. In the modern period, it is Friedrich Nietzsche who establishes the identity between value or valuing and ethics by insisting that ethical reality must

6 In the examples mentioned, this would mean a concrete difference in the child's embodied or communicative orientation to the world.

7 Alessandro Salice, "The Phenomenology of the Munich and Göttingen Circles," In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Winter 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/phenomenology-mg/>.

be understood in terms of the act of valuing, which in its turn emanates from the subject. Similarly to economic theories of value that understand the term as meaning “that which is valued,” Nietzsche sees ethical reality in terms of a play of forces in which subjects and groups impose upon reality preferences that, over time, take on the guise of being objectively valid norms that exist independently of the process of valuing. But, this latter supposition, according to Nietzsche, is nothing other than an act of bad faith in which the subject or subjects become disconnected from their own reality-constructing evaluative agency.⁸

While our contemporary social space is by no means awash with card-carrying Nietzscheans, his assimilation of value and ethics and the expressive relation between these has shown itself to be enormously prescient with regard to ethical and moral discourse. We have grown very comfortable with the thought that ethical space is the space of values and that values are synonymous with the priorities or ethical sensibilities of individuals or groups. Values are referred to as *mine* or *ours* and we think of these as naming what we hold most dear. We are equally comfortable with the idea that there is a plurality of values as there are pluralities of individuals and groups and that these change according to historical and cultural circumstances. We might, at some level, be uncomfortable with the idea that values are *mere* preferences, but our language does little to gainsay this notion. If the value of a thing or an ideal is a function of the value ascribed to it by me and there is a plurality of valuing subjects or groups, then How else is the notion of value to be understood?

The value realists explicitly subvert this logic by insisting that value is an objectively existing dimension of reality and that what we think of as evaluative activity is better understood as value perception and response. According to this view, values are part of the fabric of reality rather than epiphenomena projected onto the world by meaning-giving subjects. They are part of what constitutes the real and need therefore to be accounted for in any account of the nature of reality.⁹ But while the assertion that values are objectively real is ontological in nature, the insight is cashed out in terms that are phenomenological rather than metaphysical. That is to say that the argument is grounded in attention to the irreducible forms and foundational structures in which ethical reality is given in lived experience.

The central pivot of von Hildebrand’s argument rests on the distinction between what he calls the “important in itself” and the “subjectively satisfying.”¹⁰ This denotes more than a hierarchization of values, in terms of higher and lower, as Scheler

8 This concern permeates Nietzsche’s oeuvre as a whole, but is perhaps most succinctly presented in the first essay of *Genealogy of Morality*, in which he argues for the derivation of normative ethical language from the self-concern and self-assertion of human agents. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “Good and Evil, Good and Bad” in *Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 11–37. See also James McGuirk, “The Sustainability of Nietzsche’s Will to Affirmation,” *ACPQ* 82 (2008): 237–63.

9 A similar point is made by Thomas Nagel in relation to the issue of the mandate of cosmological explanations. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31.

10 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 37.

had argued, but a difference of kind separating objects of esteem.¹¹ What is subjectively satisfying is pleasing to us and is therefore valued after a certain manner of speaking, but it remains indexed to the vicissitudes of our own subjectivity. Thus, I may have a preference for certain food or I may be flattered by an unearned compliment, but these are not, in the strict sense of the term, values that are discerned by me. Inasmuch as they are valued, they are so as expressions of subjective proclivities and remain therefore bound to a narrow self-relationality. The value of coconut ice cream, for example, lies not in the ice cream, but in that fact that *I* like it. In such cases, the meaning of the thing never breaks out of the gravitational orbit of my self-concern, so that they are consumed by me for my own sake. As objects of esteem, they tell more about the idiosyncrasies of my personality than about the world.

The case with what is “important in itself” is diametrically opposed to this. The encounter with what is important in itself is one in which we feel ourselves confronted by something whose value speaks from itself and for itself. Its value is not tied to our subjective preferences, but rather breaks through our self-concern as a value that demands attention and response. Thus, for example, an act of forgiveness, or courage, or care strikes us as an act whose value resides in itself rather than in our acts of subjective valuation. It speaks as a value to which we turn and listen, rather than as an act whose value is derived from us.

One might wish to object at this point that the fact that we rank certain things above others does not entail that these things actually are of objectively different orders of value. Perhaps von Hildebrand is telling us nothing more than that he happens to rank things in this way or that our culture has tended to do so, while others might and do think differently. A seeming advantage of Brinkmann’s focus on negativity over value response, here, is that it uses a more neutral term and thus avoids questions of normativity that muddy the analytical waters. While the language of value calls for an adjudication of what is valuable and what is not, the notion of resistance simply provides an analytically sound descriptor of the immediate facilitator of self-transcendence. But, von Hildebrand insists that such an objection does a bad job of explaining the phenomenology of the matter. What motivates me simply does not present itself in terms of preferences of lower and higher rank. What I prefer is understood by me as anchored in my own subjectivity. I happen to like chocolate cake and spaghetti bolognese, but I am comfortable with the idea that others may find these distasteful. I have no wish to convince others of the merits of these foods, because I implicitly understand these preferences as expressions of my subjectivity. If I inform others of these preferences, it is not to change their orientation to the world, but to communicate something about myself. What is more, the idea that my preferences can be ranked strikes me also as inoffensive. I might like eating French fries but am willing to sacrifice this in order to take a walk in the park. That one of the activities is ranked higher or lower is easy to make sense of without needing to

11 Scheler, *Formalism*, 86–87; von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 45. von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 38. In *Formalism*, Scheler describes value experience as structured hierarchically with the lower values of the sensible and the vital at the bottom, and the higher values of the spirit and of the holy at the top (Scheler, *Formalism*, 86).

refer to any intrinsic value that transcends my own concern with myself. These are forms of “valuing,”¹² if we may even use the term here, that “finally throw us back upon our own limitedness, imprisoning us within ourselves.”¹³ We remain rooted to the immanence of our own immediacy in this form of valuing.

Experiences of value along the lines of what von Hildebrand calls the “important in itself” show up in our experience, by contrast, as experiences that are simply different in kind. These are experiences that reach us as though from elsewhere and draw us toward them on their initiative. Claims about values such as equality and justice, or the beauty of Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ*, present in entirely different terms. When I speak of these as values, I do not understand myself as informing others about my own likes and dislikes, but about testifying to values that are in no way reducible to me or my preferences. I am the “dative of manifestation” of these values, rather than their source, so their value is not an outflow of my valuing activity.¹⁴ To speak of them is therefore to appeal to others to see what I see and thus I appeal to the other to turn him- or herself toward the value that I have perceived. Scheler famously referred to value experience by means of the German neologism of *Wertnehmung*, which was intended as an analogy of *Wahrnehmung* (“perception”) and with good reason. For just as my perception of a physical object may be accompanied by associations or modifications that are subjectively founded, the perception is always given as the manifestation of a transcendent object that also makes appeal to others. Thus, the cup on the table may appear fuzzy to me because of an eye infection or may remind me of a cup I owned as a child, and while I am aware that these aspects of the perception of the cup are unique to me, I must assume that the cup as object is commonly held and so is also present to you. It is reducible to neither of us. The important in itself, like the perceptual object, is given to me in experience as something that makes a claim on me rather than something that reveals something about me. It is not a preference or an expression of will-to-power but an existing reality that shows itself from itself. There is a fundamental difference in the directionality of significance in the two cases, in other words. In the first case, it is I who bestow significance on the thing, so that valuation moves from me to the object. In the second case, the value comes from the object and reveals itself to me.¹⁵ And here it is worth reminding that while such a distinction is of utmost ontological importance, it is explicated by von Hildebrand as immanent to lived experience. We simply do have experiences of value that give themselves as irreducible to our own initiatives and that present as fundamentally different to basic wants and desires.

Von Hildebrand adds a further nuance by noting that what reveals itself to me as “important in itself” does not remain at the level of a perception, but also calls for an adequate response. Not only is the direction of the meaningful from the object to

12 I am using the term *valuing* here in an ambivalent, Nietzschean sense.

13 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 39.

14 Quotation from Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65; Thomas Prufer, *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy*, SPHP 26 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

15 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 219.

me, but the value calls for a specific kind of orientation of the subject in relation to it. This might be negative as indignation or contempt, or positive in the form of joy, enthusiasm, or admiration.¹⁶ In either case, the value calls for me to do something or to *be* some way in relation to it. It calls me to be otherwise in consequence of the encounter. The value, in this sense, remakes or reorients me in relation to itself. It brings me out of the reef of my concern with and for myself and into relation to something transcendent. In a way that is resonant with Brinkmann's explication of *Bildung*, von Hildebrand describes this process as central to the formation of personality.¹⁷ In being affected by a value, the self that tends toward the immediacy of self-concern is reached by a transcendence that calls me to gather myself as a self in response to it.¹⁸ I answer this call for the sake of the value rather than for the sake of myself—although this may be secondarily at stake—but in so doing, I also bring forth capacities to be that would otherwise remain dormant.¹⁹

4. Value Experience and *Bildung*

It is at this point we can see, I hope, the relevance of von Hildebrand's value realism for the discussion of *Bildung*. Indeed, inasmuch as it would be reasonable to describe the educational process as a whole (as *Bildung* and not just *Erziehung*) as the concern with bringing values to the attention of the child and cultivating appropriate responses to these values, there is likely nothing in this account that is at odds with the thrust of Brinkmann's argument.²⁰ Where I think this line of thought offers an advance on Brinkmann's treatment of the matter is that by explicating the value dimension of such experience, it avoids the tendency toward an instrumental estimation of the material sphere of engagement as he elucidated the issue.

We recall that Brinkmann outlined three differing traditions of approach to the question of *Bildung*. These were Eckhart's emphasis on the encounter with God through which the *imago Dei*, as the true destiny of man, is cultivated. Von Humboldt conceptualized *Bildung*, by contrast, within the context of the historical process of the becoming of Spirit in which mankind gives its destiny to itself. Finally, Fink envisioned *Bildung* as the process of coming to accept the self's understanding of itself as connected to a cosmic whole with all of the uncertainty, strangeness, and provisionality that this entails.

But, in spite of the obvious differences between these positions, they share the view that *Bildung* concerns the movement of transcendence, in which the self is re-

16 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 208.

17 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 220.

18 This point reminds of Charles Taylor's account of the porous self, which in contrast to the buffered self, can be touched and transformed by value transcendences. See Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Belknap, 2007).

19 We will return to the issue of von Hildebrand's third category of importance—that of the “objectively good for me”—later in the chapter.

20 Mette Lebech, *The Philosophy of Edith Stein* (Bern: Lang, 2015), 37, <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0353-0710-8>.

oriented (*converso*) away from immediate preoccupation with itself and toward what is other. And it is through this reorientation that the capacity of the self to be itself is made possible. This often painful and difficult process was described in terms of a multivalent negativity through which the deeper truth of the human being is revealed and realized.

While the emphasis on the movement of the self out of itself toward what is other at the level of the highest good or that which resists at the level of practice is convergent with von Hildebrand's treatment of value experience, they differ in their characterization of the nature and meaning of this otherness and of the meaning of self-unfolding in relation to what is other. At stake here is precisely the meaning of what motivates the movement of transcendence at the level of practice.

In Brinkmann's account, what is other is treated as valuable in a predominantly dialectical sense, which is ultimately nested within the context of a self-relation at a higher level. That is, the self is drawn out of itself and into engagement with what is other since it is only in this process of alienation that the self can truly become itself. But, this alienation is one that ultimately orients the self back toward itself, albeit a higher, perfected self that has become what it is in the process of self-differentiation and return. In this sense, the other's value is the value of the negative. It is the value of resistance that provides the self with the material conditions it needs in order to become itself. This account wisely eschews models of *Bildung* or education that cultivate the immediacy of the ego (my goals, my plans, my ambitions, my talents) in favor of one that valorizes the passive openness of the subject to what is other, to be sure, but it ultimately struggles to name this negativity in terms that do not cleave to the subject itself. It is ultimately for the sake of itself that the self undergoes the struggle described in all three models of *Bildung*.²¹

Something else is at stake in the account of value experience and response in von Hildebrand. On his account, what is other shines forth from out of itself as a value that demands a response proportionate to what it communicates to us from itself. There is certainly negativity here, both in the sense that the value is something that is not I and in the sense that it resists any attempt to manipulate it as a project of my design. But this is an otherness that is more than mere resistance. It is also revelation. It is the revelation of something new, of which I was previously unaware, and that captures me in the effervescence of its appearance. The value at stake here can be moral, but it can equally be aesthetic, epistemological, or indeed a value connected with embodied practice.

This point can be best illustrated in relation to the individual practices that provide the material occasion for *Bildung* in Brinkmann's account. He notes that learning French, or skiing, or learning about the works of the Impressionists involves an encounter between the student and something he could neither have known nor intended beforehand. He notes further that the resistance encountered calls forth an attention and indeed a submission to the contours of the matter at hand. But, rather than a vol-

21 This is certainly the case as regards Humboldt's classical account of *Bildung*, which appears to be the interpretive lens through which Eckhart and Fink are read in Brinkmann's account.

untary submission to what is other, von Hildebrand would analyze the motivation for this attention and submission in the experience of and response to the value of these practices. What strikes us about French is not the fact that it is a negative presence or an unknown, but that it is coherent and harmonious in its structure and appearance. Its sounds and its melodies, along with its structures and forms of expression strike us as novel in a way that opens before a new modality or possibility for communication. Similarly, the practice of skiing impresses us in its fluidity of movements and its seemingly effortless engagement with the environment. In both cases, our attention is captured by the manifestation of a phenomenon that is distinct, coherent, integrated, and harmonious.

In other words, it is first as an experience of moral, cognitive, or aesthetic value that these practices seize our attention and it is this initial seizing that facilitates the secondary submissive attentiveness in which learning takes place. This is to say that we are first brought into the space of learning by an experience of the transcendent value of the practice in question. An interest in skiing will normally not be awoken by a realization that it is something we cannot do but which might activate certain capacities in us. Rather, we are first drawn to it by witnessing it being performed at a high level. The same goes for French or any of the other examples we might care to mention. It is these experiences of the radiance of the value of the practice that first capture our attention, such that they draw us in not primarily as moments of negative resistance, but of worthwhileness.

I think this is intuitively persuasive for two reasons. The first is that it does a better job with the phenomenology of learning by emphasizing the experience of positive value that motivates us into specific practices, be these bodily or cognitive. It is such experiences that are better equipped to explain why we would want to attend to and imitate what we have witnessed. The alternative is that we are motivated implicitly or explicitly by the drive toward self-perfection and that we have the maturity and understanding to see that such self-improvement will be facilitated by the voluntary submission of the mind and the will to what is other than itself. Even if this were plausible, it involves the attendant risk of understanding the value of practices in instrumental terms. This is surely not Brinkmann's intention, but inasmuch as the value of the practice is defined solely in terms of its resistance to the immediacy of my interest and its provision of opportunities for transformation, we can easily slide into a justification of practices that ignores any positive value in the practices themselves and valorizes only the affordances for self-perfection.²² This is what we referred to earlier under the auspices of the dialectical approach present in Brinkmann's account that ultimately makes sense of otherness only in terms of its role in the unfolding of the capacities of the self for the sake of the self.

Second, and by extension, the account of positive value makes better sense of our capacity to differentiate both within and across disciplines. I mean by this that while both French and skiing offer resistance and an encounter with the previously unknown, they do so in markedly different ways and therefore call for different strate-

22 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 228.

gies of attention and imitation. So, again, it is not resistance and negativity as such that calls to us, but a manifested value that first strikes us as distinctively worthwhile before drawing us into the space that structures our attention and guides our imitation. We respond to the specific fluency and beauty of French as a linguistic system or to the specific movements of the expert skier and even within these practices, we become increasingly adept through our capacity to attend to the differences between noun and verb conjugations in French or to the movements of the legs and the arms in skiing. That is to say, that the initial evaluative effervescence of the practice as a whole brings us into the space in which an analytic stance can be taken and can start to see the complexity of the component parts and their relation to each other. Again, simple resistance or negativity is not enough to make sense of dynamic multifacetedness of this process.

5. Implications of the Argument: Self-formation and the Role of the Other

I want to conclude by elaborating upon two implications of the value realist approach to *Bildung* as outlined above. These remarks have to do with the implications for how we conceptualize the meaning of self and other as a consequence of the foregoing.

As far as the first of these points goes, the reader might wonder what is to become of the self on the value-realist account. It is to be hoped that my argument for the primacy of positive manifestation over negative resistance is convincing, inasmuch as it moves the locus of the *Bildung* process from the self's concern with itself to its witness to the value of what is other. In so doing, it provides a clearer articulation of what initiates the movement of transcendence beyond the immediacy of the self's relation with itself. But if Brinkmann's account of *Bildung* as dialectical self-relation fails to do full justice to the complexity of value experience, Does the value-realist account run the counter risk of erasing the self in its movement of response toward the revelation of value? In other words, if the movement of transcendence is not just occasioned by the other, but for the sake of the other, Is there still a sense in which the formation of the self remains a meaningful aspect of the process? And if not, Can this really retain a link to the meaning of *Bildung* as understood in any of the established senses?

In fact, von Hildebrand's account of value can avoid this problem on the basis of a tripartite division in what he calls the categories of importance.²³ We recall that von Hildebrand rejects certain aspects of Scheler's value hierarchy—in which lower values give way to higher values in situations in which they come into conflict—by claiming rather that our experience of importance divides along the lines of two ir-

23 Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 36.

reducible orientations to the world.²⁴ These are the subjectively satisfying and the important in itself.

But von Hildebrand, then names a third category of importance, which is that of the objective good for the person.²⁵ This designates a concern for the person's own good that emerges in attendance to our value response to the objectively important.²⁶ He notes that "being affected has a definite intentional character and presupposes the meaningful, conscious center of the person."²⁷ In other words, while value response does involve self-abandonment in the sense that we are drawn outside the borders of our own limited boundedness by being addressed by a value that stands before (or above) us, it simultaneously unlocks certain capacities of the self to be more than it was.²⁸ As von Hildebrand says, "our capacity to conform ourselves to the important-in-itself is one of the deepest and most fundamental features of the person" by allowing us to emerge out of self-centeredness and into the space of relation with a value.²⁹ To repeat a phrase used earlier, the self is a "dative of manifestation" for the epiphany of value. On this view, the self is conceived as one who can conform him- or herself, who can respond to the worthwhileness of the valuable. In this sense, value response involves not only a movement outward toward the value, but a movement of cultivating and maintaining that within us which is of highest value. We cultivate and maintain what is best in ourselves through our capacity to be addressed by and respond to objective value.³⁰

In this way, the idea of objective value is married to a concern with self-unfolding that is perfectly congruent with the notion of *Bildung* that has been operative in this chapter and in the educational tradition as a whole, as outlined by Brinkmann. We are legitimately concerned with ourselves, but it is a concern that is anchored in the capacity of the self to be more than it currently is, to be transformed in the transcending movement that subordinates itself to what is other, that forgets itself in response to a value, and that reorients itself in the engagement with a practice.

24 Scheler, *Formalism*, 86; Manfred Frings, *Max Scheler: A Concise Introduction into the World of a Great Thinker*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 80. Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 49.

25 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 63.

26 von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 416.

27 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 219.

28 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 227. Similar ideas of calling can be found in Taylor's notion of the "buffered self." See Taylor, *Secular Age*, 27. Or Emmanuel Lévinas's account of accusative subjectivity in which it is the call of what is other in the sense of above that allows the self to gather itself in a response logic. See Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 11. See also McGuirk, "On the Role of the Call in Professional Work and Practical Knowledge," in *Exploring Practical Knowledge*, ed Carl Cederberg, Kåre Fuglseth, and Edwin van den Sande, *Professional Practice and Education* 3 (Leiden, Brill, 2023), 151–68, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004547360_010.

29 Von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 227.

30 A similar account of human action as the tending and cultivation of objective values can be found in Roman Ingarden, *Man and Value*, trans. Arthur M. Szylewicz (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983).

The second point I wish to address has to do with the role of others and specifically with what exemplars or models contribute to the scaffolding of attention. I have said, following von Hildebrand, that what draws us into relation with the value of a piece of music, an artwork, a practice like skiing, or the activity of learning French, is not the fact that it offers resistance, but that it's worthwhileness seizes us and calls for an adequate response. But, as much as the values move us and rearrange us, we can, at times, require the assistance of others in coming to see them in the first place. The pull of our own affective immediacy can produce a noise that inhibits our capacity to attend to the important in itself, and so we require others that can bring us into the space in which the values can reveal themselves to us.

Thus, while value experience is central to human experience as such, it can initially, and in some cases, present in a way that is vague or difficult to make sense of. What is more, children (adults too in some cases) can be unsure when faced with a value, how exactly to respond. Hence, the need for others to scaffold our attention and response to values.

How is such a scaffolded reorientation to be understood? While the scope of the present discussion precludes a deep dive into the relevant literature, there is a large and growing body of research that outlines the various ways in which the self's relation with itself and with the world is mediated by both the material and social environments that draw forth, cultivate, and maintain the developed functioning of human cognition and affectivity.³¹ Our ways of attending to the world are scaffolded by the attention of others with whom we are naturally inclined to cooperate and to imitate.

A similar kind of approach can be found in the neo-Aristotelian moral theory of exemplarism as outlined by Linda Zagzebski, for whom our moral sensibilities are not grounded (initially at least) in a theory or set of ideas about what the good life is, but in our admiration of concrete others to whom we are drawn and whom we seek to emulate.³² The point of the theory is not to eschew reflection on what a good life is, morally speaking, since this is both worthwhile and desirable, but to return the locus of explaining moral formation to the realm of practice.³³ According to Zagzebski, "moral exemplars are those persons that are most imitable or most deserving of emulation. They are most imitable because they are most admirable."³⁴

This line of reasoning connects to the discussion of *Bildung* in two ways. The first is that it explains the important role of modeling in the reorientation of the student's

31 For the material environment, see Kim Sterelny, "Minds: Extended or Scaffolded?," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 9 (2010): 465–81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-010-9174-y>. For the social environment, see Giovanna Colombetti and Joel Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the Affective Mind," *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015): 1157–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2014.976334>; Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

32 Linda Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190655846.001.0001>.

33 The point here is not that the moral life is practical, which is fairly uncontroversial, but that our insight into morality is largely an outcome of the admiration and imitation of others.

34 Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 15.

attention. This in itself can happen at two levels at least. At one level, the student may be arrested by the high-level performance of a given activity—skiing, speaking French—that gives rise to the emotional response of admiration and the consequent desire to imitate. But this in itself may not be enough, so an instructor who can lay out the activity in a stepwise fashion will be required in order to facilitate the pedagogical unfolding of the student's incorporation of the activity in question. The initial performance seizes our attention, in other words, while we must then learn to attend to the activity in a way that allows the nuances and complexity of the activity to reveal themselves. Scaffolding involves thus a play of simplicity and complexity inasmuch as what initially attracts the attention is a performance that is seemingly simple, but eminently admirable. At the second level, this simplicity is revealed as involving depths of subtle nuance that need to be attended to in an analytic fashion that will later enable the student's own synthetic performance to reproduce what had attracted their attention in the first place. In both cases, scaffolding unfolds as an aesthetic phenomenon through the mediated and layered perception of a value as testified to in the performance of another.

The second reason brings us back to our earlier concern about the tendency to view the practices that made up the practical enactment of *Bildung* in an instrumental fashion. That is, if all that is at stake is negativity or resistance, then we struggled to account for the difference between one form of resistance and other—except perhaps quantitatively—or to avoid the sense that any activity such as speaking French or skiing are just occasions for the kind of resistance that is required in order for us to grow. From the point of view of scaffolding, this also entails concerns around motivation. What I mean is that if the practices in question are worthwhile only because they provide resistance, then the teacher that brings us into the space of attending to them will be initially experienced as simply forcing the orientation of attention in some arbitrary direction. By contrast, the idea that these practices are first and foremost grasped as values suggests a more collaborative model from the beginning. It is by no means a model in which teacher and student are on an equal footing from the outset. The student's grasp of the value will most likely be partial and inarticulate and they will certainly be unable to predict or fully understand the initial orientations required by the teacher. The process as a whole will be one that requires trust. Still, if there is some initial awakening in the revelation of the value of the thing in question, however vague, then the process will not be experienced as a meaningless submission that later gives way to a meaningful transformation, but of the gradual unfolding of the depth dimensions of a value and of the worthwhileness of attending to this value for the subject themselves.

6. Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate the nonexclusivity of my own and Brinkmann's account of *Bildung*. I believe that nothing in Brinkmann's account is hostile to what I have argued just as I believe that nothing in my argument fundamentally undermines his exposition of the matter. My emphasis on value experience and value response was intended to show, however, a necessary moment in the *Bildung* process that an emphasis on mere negativity is ill equipped to provide. While resistance no doubt facilitates the movement of self-transcendence, it does so not as *mere* resistance, but as the revelation of a positive value that brings the self into a relation with some good that in turn unlocks the self's possibilities to be. As such, my claim is that an articulation of the process of *Bildung* that accounts only for the negative moment in experience cannot do full justice to either the goal of *Bildung* or the process by which it unfolds.

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