AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

BOOK REVIEW

Guilherme, A. & **Morgan W. J.** (2018). *Philosophy, dialogue, and education: Nine modern European philosophers Routledge International studies in the philosophy of education. New York and London: Routledge*

Reviewed by *Tamas Kozma**

This book is about dialogue. The authors describe the work of nine modern European philosophers – not in general, but by highlighting what they say about dialogue. The analysis of the philosophers' oeuvre shows that dialogue – the dialogue of two people (or many, as Hanna Arendt or Simone Weil, emphasize) – is not merely a conversation. It is more than that: it is finding possible ways to others, and building relationships among them. 'Dialogue' is the primary tool for community building. With that, we are already in the mid of the authors' argumentations. The authors of this volume talk about dialogue – but they think of the importance of human communities.

There are well-known philosophers among the nine, reviewed in this book, and almost unknown ones to us, Central Europeans. Vigotsky may be known from our studies of linguistic psychology in the Soviet era, as well as his pioneering discoveries about the nature of human communication, the development of personality, and the formation of communities. Vigotsky's fortune – or even more so for ours, Central Europeans – was that he was a Soviet scholar during the time of Russian occupation of our region (1945–1990), whom it was ideologically legal to refer to – although his work and accomplishments remain semi-legal in his own country. That is why we know his name in this half of Europe. We can also get to know Hannah Arendt, although her works only came to us after 1990. She and her thoughts on the essential similarities of fascist and communist totalitarianism – albeit ideological differences and variations – became commonsense in Central Europe after the political transition. Not all of us agree with Hannah Arendt today – but all of us agree, that these were insightful and very provoking thoughts in their own time. Of course, we have been well acquainted with Jürgen Habermas, the thinker of the great Frankfurt School, whose works have been and continue to be compulsory literature in philosophy or social science courses at Central European universities.

Martin Buber or Simone Weil may be lesser known for the general discussions in Central Europe; however, they are entirely accepted in professional circles. Jewish and Christian philosophers of religion have regularly cited Martin Buber and his oeuvre since the 1930s. He was portrayed as one of the fathers of existentialist philosophy; although Buber never considered

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himself an existentialist philosopher. Instead, he was a religious thinker who found and presented the common roots of Judaism and Christianity. Furthermore, Simone Weil – the French thinker whose little oeuvre is full of delusions, pathfinding, poignant discoveries and pioneering formulations – has also been known for the small circles of religious philosophers and sociologists during the Soviet era in Central and Eastern Europe.

While getting acquainted with the names of Buber or Weil – at least at a certain extent – we did not know (or did not know enough) about Bakhtin, whose name and thoughts on 'dialogue' is mentioned by the authors together with Vigotsky. Not only because Bakhtin was Russian too, but because their thoughts developed partly in parallel and partly argued with each other. Bakhtin dealt with the philosophy of religion and art, and as a philosopher of religion, he recognized and articulated the importance of dialogue, the authors say.

We have known even less about Emmanuel Levinas, his philosophies and political activities, though he was a genuine East-Central European, arrived in Germany and later in France from Lithuania. We did not know enough about him, perhaps because his thoughts originated in the Judaic tradition, and was shaped by Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's existentialism.

Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre can also be listed here. As a French existentialist, he remains almost unknown to Central Europe, where French philosophy was perhaps less known than, for example, German culture, and where existentialism became not so influential than in Germany or France. However, Merleau-Ponty could be even closer to us, educationalists, as he taught psychology and pedagogy at an essential stage in his life. Nevertheless, at his time, his thoughts could not reach the countries under official Soviet Marxist ideology.

One common focus of the philosophers analysed in Guilherme's, and Morgan's book is their interest in the philosophy of religion. They are, more or less, philosophers of religion. Some of them are philosophers of religion (an academic discipline) – such as Buber, Levinas, or Weil. Others are religious philosophers whose works were influenced religious or transcendent thoughts – such as Vigotsky, Bakhtin, or Merleau-Ponty. However, dealing with or at least thinking about religion characterises them all. Some of them came from the Judaic tradition others from the Christian heritage and arrived in the Catholic worldview. In this sense, all of them are 'European thinkers' as the subtitle of Guilherme's and Morgan's book points out.

Another common feature of these thinkers is that communication between people is considered as an essential activity. Communication – called 'dialogue' – is the means of the development of the Self (Vigotsky); a key for all human relationships (Buber); a way of communicating between the individual and the transcendent (Levinas, Weil); the means of cooperation between the individual and his/her community (Habermas); the 'field for building a good society' (e.g. democracy, Arendt). For these philosophers, 'dialogue' is as vital as is 'culture' for the social anthropologists (such as George and Margaret Mead).

Guilherme and Morgan also emphasize the importance of dialogue in education. In the introduction to their book, they refer to Plato, who taught in dialogues. By the example of Socrates, Plato illustrated the importance of dialogue in teaching. Based on this example, the 'Socratic method' was developed that has dominated European schools for centuries. Moreover, it has reached beyond Europe, for example, to Islamic schools.

However, teaching with dialogues is not the same as students' interrogation in the school. It's not about the teacher raising questions to his/her students about the recent homework. Such questioning is not a 'dialogue' as Socrates or our European philosophers called it. Dialogue, as they mean has a deeper meaning: extracting knowledge that is already in the student's mind

('tacit knowledge'); leading the learner to what he/she already knows, though not yet thought about. Moreover, 'dialogue' is also a tool for providing the learner with new knowledge that he/she can acquire step by step as in 'programmed learning'.

That is not all. Dialogue is the relationship between the Master and the Disciple. Through dialogue, the Disciple is connected to the Master. And even more: he/she is connected to something (somebody) which exceeds him/her: the community, the transcendence. The human Self is also formed in dialogue. (Instead of 'dialogue' the sociologist would mean 'the community'). The special relationship between the Disciple and his/her Master is a well-known thought revealed by many research: the individual emerges from the community while becoming a member of it.

Guilherme and Morgan emphasize the importance of dialogue in teaching. We emphasize its importance of learning. The philosophers the authors deal with talk about the Master's dialogue with disciples. We, however, emphasize the importance of the disciples' dialogue with their Master. Following the Socrates tradition, the Master turns to the Disciple and starts raising questions. At this point, teaching begins. However, the reality is usually the opposite. The Disciple turns to the Master for answers to his/her questions. Following this reality, we would place more emphasis on learning than teaching. We think the starting point is the will to learn: the Learner wants to have a dialogue with the Teacher. Learning is an autonomous and bottom-up initiative because the Learner only learns what he/she wants to learn. The Teacher wants to teach something because he considers it essential – even if the Learner does not want to learn it. The unbalanced situation of Teacher and Learner is an explanation for the failures of the prophets, governments, and schools. If a learner wants to learn, he/she looks for a teacher and the dialogue will begin. Dialogue is, therefore, not merely a pedagogical method. Dialogue is also an expression of social innovation in pedagogy.

Dialogue means the importance of the community in the learning process. There is no learning without community. Therefore, the essence of learning is better expressed by 'social learning' than 'school learning.' The human being is learning throughout his/her life. An essential stage of this process is, of course, organised learning in school. There is no learning without school – but school learning is not enough. It just prepares for social learning. Learning is a lifelong activity that lasts from the beginning to the end of life (lifelong and life-wide). It is called 'social learning.'

It would even be better to call 'social learning' as 'learning in the community.' The phrase 'community learning' (although it has a specific meaning in school education) better expresses that learning is not an individual activity only, but always takes place in the community. 'Community learning' is similar to what Hannah Arendt says: dialogue is the foundation of democracy.

In this sense, learning is a political activity. It expresses the specific relationship between the individual and his/her community, by which dialogue emerges. We consider this to be the most important lesson in the volume of Guilherme and Morgan.