

Bildung and Authenticity: A Critical Synthesis for Contemporary Education

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HOW TO CITE:

Seung-Hwan Shim (2026). Bildung and Authenticity: A Critical Synthesis for Contemporary Education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 41(6s), 593-612.

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ABSTRACT:

This study critically examines the problems of instrumental and outcome-oriented education by comparing the philosophical concepts of Bildung and Authenticity. Both concepts offer a powerful framework for an education that encourages learners to independently reflect on their life's purpose and realize it. The two concepts share fundamental commonalities: both value individual subjectivity and free will as the foundation for a life of meaning. They advocate for a continuous process of self-reflection and self-formation, which fosters unique individualities and cultivates the will to overcome challenges. Instead of prioritizing the efficient acquisition of skills, both pursue knowledge and abilities derived from a deep, moral-based reflection on the value of life. This process-oriented approach, rather than a focus on outcomes, builds resilience and a passionate engagement with learning. While sharing these principles, they diverge in key aspects. Bildung emphasizes the cultivation of a harmonious and universal character through the internalization of societal values. In contrast, Authenticity prioritizes an individual's unique will and attitude toward life, often in direct opposition to popular values and inauthentic forms. By exploring their shared principles and key distinctions, this paper proposes a philosophical framework for an education that fosters genuine human flourishing beyond the confines of technocratic thinking and standardized success.

Keywords: Bildung, Authenticity, education, subjectivity, self-cultivation

I. Introduction

While contemporary society promotes diversification, individuality, and freedom, the ideology of competition based on standardized success remains deeply ingrained at both the structural and cultural levels. This is particularly evident in East Asian societies, where academic background, career, salary, and other factors are closely tied to one's perceived success or failure. The pressure to raise scores and meet such standards is especially intense. A clear example of this is the phenomenon of the 'N-retaker,' individuals who spend years re-taking exams to enter prestigious

universities.

In such an environment, it becomes difficult for students to reflect on and discover the meaning and direction of their lives based on personal beliefs and individuality. From an early age, influences from parents, teachers, and peers often dictate how well one is progressing toward these standardized measures of success. Questions like "Who am I?", "What is important in my life?", and "How should I live?" are often seen as irrelevant or inefficient in the race for achievement. As a result, individuals focus solely on meeting preset goals, and anything outside of this pursuit is often regarded as a distraction.

Over time, this environment erodes intrinsic motivation, making it harder for students to sustain learning in the face of challenges or to engage in creative, independent thinking. In such a system, everyone is conditioned to a uniform standard of efficiency, and once external incentives—such as rewards or punishments—diminish, the limits of autonomous learning become apparent. In a result-oriented culture, the joy and value of the learning process are overlooked, and success is often reduced to the final outcome. While life continues for those who fall short in exams or fail to meet expectations, the psychological toll can be severe, often resulting in extreme disappointment or lasting harm.

This study focuses on the concepts of *Bildung* and Authenticity, which emphasize independent reflection and effort, to reconsider the values and goals that education should seek to recover in response to this socio-cultural issue. Originating from 13th-century German mysticism, *Bildung* refers to the discovery, cultivation, and realization of one's inherent potential. Similarly, existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger advocated for Authenticity, a critique of blindly following universal values and prescribed methods, urging individuals to define the direction and meaning of their own lives.

Although there is substantial literature on each of these concepts in isolation, few studies have explored them together, particularly in relation to education. From an educational perspective, both *Bildung* and Authenticity share similarities, though they also have significant differences that need careful consideration. This study aims to compare and synthesize these two concepts in order to address the challenges and opportunities for education in today's society.

To begin, it is essential to trace the origins and defining characteristics of each concept and explore their particular relevance to education. This foundational understanding will serve as the basis for a comparative analysis, which will then inform a discussion on the future direction and goals of education in contemporary society.

II. Meaning of *Bildung*

1. Origins of *Bildung*

Bildung is believed to have its roots in 13th-century German mysticism.¹ Contrary to the idea of education shaping individuals into an ideal human being, it is based on the theological notion that each person inherently carries the image of God, which they realize and perfect through self-experience and reflection. According to Gadamer (1989), *bild* (form) encompasses both *nachbild* (imitative figure) and *vorbild* (original). The theological concept of humans created in God's image suggests that while individuals possess God's inherent nature, they are also incomplete. In this context, *Bildung* refers to the process of realizing and completing this latent, imperfect image. German mysticism emphasized reverent personal experiences and attitudes over the mere accumulation of external knowledge in this process.

Humboldt (1968) extended this concept by highlighting education's role in forming humanity and individuality through Greek culture. The ancient Greeks viewed humans as autonomous beings with their own individuality, free from external control, and believed education should foster this autonomy. Humboldt argued that education should prioritize universal human development, not merely practical vocational training. His vision aligns with the Greek ideal of liberal education, which sought both passive

¹Flasch (2006; 2015) contends that Meister Eckhart and the so-called tradition of 'German Mysticism' cannot be reduced to a mere continuation of inner or spiritual experience. Rather, Eckhart's thought was profoundly shaped by philosophical traditions—most notably Arabic-Islamic philosophy, Aristotelian-scholastic reasoning, and theories of the intellect—which provided the conceptual framework for his mystical insights. From

this perspective, *Bildung* arises not solely from mystical or experiential sources but from a philosophical milieu that integrates intellect, language, and ethical self-formation. Hence, the origin of *Bildung* should be understood as both mystical and intellectual, grounded in an educational or formative (*bildend*) process of self-realization.

freedom from external constraints and active engagement with rational reason to achieve higher human freedom. Humboldt's *Bildung* embodies these two aspects of liberal education.

2. The German Ideological Understanding of *Bildung*

Kant (1963) expanded the concept of *Bildung*, centering it on modern reason and enlightenment. He viewed enlightenment as self-cultivation, harmonizing individuality and sociality, with an emphasis on the cultivation of legal conscience and reason. Kant argued that human talents, particularly reason and free will, should guide one's life, not innate abilities or external influences. Education, for Kant, must discipline these faculties. As children, individuals must learn societal norms, while adolescence should focus on cultivating rational thinking and logical expression through extensive knowledge of society (Kant 2015).

For Kant, *Bildung* involves forming humanity where actions are motivated not by personal interests, but by the cultivation of reason as an end in itself. This ideal aligns the individual's free will with society's general will, based on universal moral principles. However, Kant's view is limited by the potential conflict between individual and societal wills, which arises from individual diversity or social inequality. While Kant did not fully address how to resolve such conflicts, his conception of *Bildung* remains significant for emphasizing autonomy, reason, free will, and the harmony between individuality and sociality.

In alignment with Kantian thought, Hegel (2002) posits that *Bildung* enables humans to dialectically synthesize the particularity of the individual citizen with the universality of the state. *Bildung* guides citizens, who are often driven by desire and economic imperatives, toward an awareness of genuine ethical freedom, orienting them towards public ends. Specifically, *Bildung* empowers individuals pursuing private goals and particular interests to recognize that public purposes and universality constitute both the conditions and the ultimate aims of their lives. In doing so, it serves as a force for overcoming the inherent contradictions of civil society, such as wealth concentration and

poverty, thereby actualizing authentic ethical freedom.

However, Hegel's perspective has historically faced criticism for its perceived overemphasis on universality, its abstract nature, and the potential for totalitarian implications. Yet, Hegel's conception of *Bildung* extends beyond the formation of the individual, serving as a principle that shapes the entirety of society. It directs individuals with particularity toward universality while simultaneously compelling a universal society, grounded in universality, to respect individual particularity.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel elucidates the meaning of *Bildung* through the example of the master and slave, illustrating the relationship between self and other, particularity and universality. Initially, the master, though dominant, remains trapped in an egoistic individuality, merely enjoying the products of the slave's labor. This isolation prevents the master from truly understanding the meaning of interaction and relationship with the world.

From Hegel's vantage point, *Bildung* commences precisely within the context of relation to the other. The slave, through labor, engages with nature and the will of the other (the master). In the initial stage, the slave experiences an absolute self-negation, recognizing that their life and labor are dependent on nature and the master. This awareness of self-negation dismantles the egoistic, abstract independence of the slave, as it reveals that their existence is mediated by the other. However, as labor persists, the slave's consciousness undergoes a transformative shift. Through labor, the slave autonomously comprehends and simultaneously reshapes (*bilden*) the world. By mediating themselves through the world, they actively engage in a process of self-formation (*Bildung*). This process allows the slave to overcome their initial non-independence and discover genuine autonomy through relationship. This elevated autonomy is not an egoistic or abstract independence; rather, it is a relational consciousness forged through mediation by the other—be it nature, the world, or other individuals. Thus, for Hegel (1976), the essence of

Bildung lies in this process of discovering and forming true autonomy through relation to the other.

Hegel (1986: 54) defines the logical as "the universal that encompasses the richness of the particular within itself," asserting that the universal must include particular moments and be mediated by particularity. From Hegel's perspective, Bildung unfolds through a process encompassing custom (Sitte), knowledge (Wissen), and formation (Bilden). First, Bildung enables individuals to transcend their natural inclination to pursue solely private desires, making the orientation towards universality their essential habit. Second, Bildung leads citizens to recognize universality as both the purpose and the achievement of their substantive freedom. Third, Bildung encourages citizens to shape the form and content of the world with an autonomous and creative will, grounded in the consciousness of universality (Hegel 2002).

Evidently, Hegel's perspective viewed Bildung in a broad sense, extending beyond individual character formation to encompass the formation of humanity within relationships. It aimed at the formation of civil society, realizing true ethical freedom through the dialectical synthesis of individuality and universality. This concept of Bildung carries a normative force, compelling individual citizens to recognize public-sphere objectives. Simultaneously, its significance lies in the individual's free and voluntary internalization of universality through habit and will, leading to the creative actualization of public values.

In his 1809 address as headmaster of the Nuremberg Grammar School, Hegel (1809; 2016) emphasized the concept of Bildung as a necessary process for the self-realization of the human spirit and the formation of a free citizen. He particularly pointed out that through the study of the classics, Bildung is shaped by deep understanding, reasoning, and conceptual reflection, where individuals critically examine their limitations and philosophically contemplate human reality. For Hegel, Bildung is not merely the acquisition of personal experience or knowledge, but rather an intellectual and ethical process of self-formation,

where one realizes the self by understanding it deeply and exercising free will while fulfilling social responsibilities.

3. Bildung and Education

In modern German history, the concept of Bildung developed in conjunction with, yet with significant differences from, education (Erziehung). When compared to education, Bildung signifies an individual's self-cultivation for the purpose of self-formation. This is a spontaneous development that creates unique forms from within. In contrast, Erziehung is a concept reflecting the modern emphasis on societal demands and control, implying nurturing an individual to fit pre-existing forms (Retter 1997). Given its pursuit of free formation, Bildung extends beyond the specific scope and methods of institutional schooling, encompassing a wide range of experiences and activities that foster human development throughout one's life. Thus, while Erziehung denotes a more formal and restricted set of practices, Bildung refers to more informal and broad-ranging activities.

This concept of Bildung stands in contrast to the instrumentalist and technocratic culture prevalent in late industrial society. Technocratic culture tends to prioritize productivity and efficiency over a consideration of purposes or values, often seeking to control everyone to achieve these ends. However, Bildung fundamentally rejects the limited, heteronomous control of technocracy because its focus is on individuals autonomously forming their unique values. Weber (1978) criticized the technocratic tendencies of modern society, emphasizing the autonomy and openness of Bildung. He argued, first, that Bildung is not a virtue finally acquired at a specific stage of life but rather an ongoing task continuously re-formed through diverse lifelong experiences and learning. Second, Bildung cannot be guaranteed by prescribed schooling or teachers; it is ultimately an act of self-cultivation that each individual must freely realize. Third, Bildung is both individual and social human formation, striving for both individual and societal maturity.

Weber's perspective on Bildung suggests that human learning should not be heteronomously and

restrictively controlled by narrow, predetermined goals and methods. Instead, it should fundamentally respect individual uniqueness and broadly incorporate diverse social values and approaches, pursuing continuous renewal in an autonomous and open manner.

Schäfer (2009) critiques the tendency to approach *Bildung* merely through the dichotomy of instrumentalization versus subjectivity. From his perspective, the pedagogical invention is fundamentally social and emerges within relational contexts. He emphasizes that the intentions of educators and their interactions with learners are inevitably shaped by social norms and power structures. This observation is particularly valid in that an exclusive focus on *Bildung* as idealized subjectivity risks overlooking the concrete effects of social norms, power relations, and interpersonal dynamics. Normatively, it also underscores that growth and self-realization occur within social values and contexts, a process that inherently involves certain instrumental elements. Nevertheless, as highlighted in the introduction, when interpreting the meaning of *Bildung* critically within the current educational landscape—where attention is overwhelmingly centered on standardized grades, examinations, and employment outcomes—this study argues for a greater emphasis on the aspect of free and autonomous self-formation, which stands in opposition to mere instrumentalization.

In examining *Bildung* from Heidegger's perspective, Biesta (2016) argues that although Heidegger offers a powerful critique of its humanistic foundations, his emphasis on the maturation of the self as the ultimate aim of education remains self-centered and still operates within the logic of *Bildung*. Heidegger (1962: 68) defines *Dasein* as “that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue,” suggesting that the self transforms itself by questioning its own existence. Yet, prior to any act of self-interpretation or meaning-making, the self is already thrown into the world as one who listens. As beings who hear and respond to the world, we are led to consider what the world is saying to us, what it demands of us, and how we ought to respond. Of course, listening to

others may appear to weaken one's subjectivity by implying submission to authority or external command. However, Biesta points out that through such listening, we can in fact be guided toward genuine subjectivity and true freedom. He therefore proposes a shift from the self-centered logic of *Bildung* to the receptive and relational logic of *Erziehung*, where teaching and being taught play a central role.

Biesta's argument and proposal are indeed persuasive. Yet, the meaning of *Bildung* already contains this dimension within itself. As will be discussed later in Humboldt's conception of *Bildung*, it is through being educated that individuals can cultivate the discernment and strength necessary for the realization of genuine freedom. Reflection and creativity in the formation of a true self cannot emerge from nothing; they arise through appropriate and meaningful interaction and stimulation. What matters, however, is the manner in which such interaction and stimulation occur. As stated in the introduction, if they are conducted in a technocratic way—aligned with fixed objectives and standardized criteria—the fundamental intention of *Bildung* is inevitably distorted.

4. Humboldt's Systematization of *Bildung*

The scholar who most systematically conceptualized *Bildung* from an educational perspective was Humboldt. He distinguished *Bildung* as a concept of universal human education (*allgemeine Menschenbildung*), differentiating it from practical vocational training (*Ausbildung*). Practical vocational training is an activity of disciplining and training individuals according to clear external purposes and intentions, corresponding to the concept of *Erziehung* which aims to preserve and transmit social order and the culture of preceding generations. In contrast, *Bildung* is not an activity performed according to any external normative purpose or intention, but rather an activity through which each individual freely shapes themselves to realize their own personality (Borsche, 2015; Hörner, 2008).

In this context, Humboldt's concept of *Bildung* can be seen as a process of maturation towards true

freedom and humanism at both individual and societal levels. First, at the individual level, it is crucial for each person to discover and form their true self through free daily life and inquiry. Humboldt (1968: 106) believed that all academic pursuits should unfold in a state of "solitude and freedom (*Einsamkeit und Freiheit*)," entirely free from political and social coercion. This implies that *Bildung* is not intended to realize specific political ideologies or for socioeconomic development, but rather stems from insights and self-awareness gained through free and autonomous academic study and research.

Second, at the societal level, *Bildung* transcends mere individual self-formation, aiming for a citizenship characterized by full humanity based on humanistic intellect, thereby actively participating in civil society with a reflective and moral consciousness. In this context, *Bildung* specifically seeks the formation of individuals who resist and strive against the problem of societal "human alienation and its overcoming" from a critical standpoint (Heinzlmaier 2013: 7).

Humboldt's reform of the school system reflects the core of his concept of *Bildung*. He divides education into two categories: "general education (*Allgemeine Bildung*)" and "vocational education (*specielle Bildung*)". His vision places general education before vocational training, emphasizing the need for education that aligns with the individual's value and abilities, rather than with state demands or inherited social status. His educational model consists of three stages: "four years of foundational education, eight years of school education, and higher education." Moreover, at the end of each stage, students have the option to transition into vocational tracks depending on their interests and aptitudes. In general education, all students are encouraged to develop a balanced set of abilities—"philosophical, linguistic, mathematical, historical-experiential, aesthetic, and physical." Through this process of stimulation and training, students are guided to discover their unique personal talents, which allows them to gradually set the direction of their further studies according to their individual abilities (Humboldt 1968: vol. 10, 205-206; vol. 12, 260ff.; , vol. 13, 277).

From this school model, we can identify three crucial aspects of Humboldt's concept of *Bildung*. First, it is the principle that everyone should have equal opportunities for self-formation and development, irrespective of their social status or class. The ideal of a free education is fundamentally based on this. Second, the cultivation of a harmonious personality and fundamental abilities takes precedence over specific vocational skills. Although prioritizing the latter and providing all students with the same curriculum for a set period might seem to contradict Humboldt's vision of free learning, it is, in fact, essential for the development of a more mature and liberated spirit. Basic abilities are necessary not only for personal growth but also for discovering one's true interests and talents or cultivating the underlying skills that support them. Finally, Humboldt's educational model can be seen as aiming for a form of self-actualization that goes beyond individual fulfillment to encompass a broader social value. The primary importance of basic general education lies in its role as the foundation for moral citizens, reflecting the collective values and knowledge shared by society.

The core value of *Bildung*, which permeates both these levels of endeavor, is the pursuit of complete humanity and genuine freedom. Humboldt's view of *Bildung* aims for the goal of discovering and realizing complete humanity, both individually and socially. However, this complete humanity is not derived from religious absolutism or modern universal reason. Instead, it fundamentally arises from each individual's unique potential, through a process of independently discovering, forming, and realizing their true self. Furthermore, socially, complete humanity is not achieved by conforming to biased or fixed political ideologies or socioeconomic demands, but rather through a process of openly discovering, and at times critically challenging and overcoming, true freedom in civil society.

From Humboldt's perspective, the aim of *Bildung* is to elevate broad knowledge of the world into the holistic formation of individual personality through the interaction between the individual and the world (Zelic 2017). Humboldt (1810) advocated for fostering subjective *Bildung* through objective

knowledge. In his view, since every individual is a human being before being a citizen of any particular state, *Bildung* should focus on cultivating the qualities of true freedom necessary for universal humanity, unconfined by specific national circumstances.

The true purpose of human existence is to cultivate each individual's potential to its highest degree, fostering them into whole human beings. Freedom is the most fundamental and indispensable condition for achieving this *Bildung*. "The ultimate task of human existence" is to bring "the humanity within our personality to its fullest maturity" through the influential experiences of our lives, and this can only be cultivated "through the connection between our individual selves and the world around us" (Humboldt 1851: 283).

Individuals are members of communities, states, and humanity as a whole, and the development of their unique characteristics is intertwined with how they shape the world around them. Therefore, each individual's great and dignified "humanity" must be achieved in connection with cultivating the "culture, truth, and virtue" of society (Humboldt 1851: 284). The process of *Bildung* through knowledge or scholarship begins with each individual maximally utilizing their receptive capacities to absorb the influences provided by the surrounding world and their inner being. Subsequently, they must use all their active powers to reconfigure and adapt these influences to themselves, creating something new. In this process, the interaction between their personality and nature occurs in its "most general, active, and harmonious form" (Humboldt 1851: 117).

From Humboldt's perspective, this process of *Bildung* does not aim at the mere acquisition and transmission of empirical knowledge about the historical facts of nature and culture, but rather at self-development and self-cultivation. Furthermore, *Bildung* does not primarily seek to educate individuals to fulfill material needs, but continuously strives for a deeper understanding of oneself, others, and the world through self-reflection and critical comprehension.

5. Key Characteristics of *Bildung*

The core characteristics in the discussions of *Bildung* from an educational perspective up to the present can be summarized as follows:

First, *Bildung* aims at the holistic personality cultivation of an individual. While this concept today may also seek the cultivation of specific competencies, such as scientific *Bildung*, democratic *Bildung*, or digital *Bildung*, its original intention was to foster an individual's general character—that is, to nurture them into a complete and mature human being. Therefore, *Bildung* does not solely target the acquisition of specific technical skills or abilities (Humboldt, 2000: 58). While individual character development certainly requires embracing one's unique personality and aptitudes, *Bildung* fundamentally aims at the harmonious formation of basic intellectual, emotional, and volitional elements of human personality.

Second, *Bildung* is realized through a holistic and organic process. In *Bildung*, the process of holistic personality cultivation achieves an organic coherence among the various aptitudes and abilities that constitute an individual. Individual aptitudes and abilities interact, depend on, and permeate one another. Furthermore, this process is dynamically driven by an individual's self-understanding and attitude, while the organic cultivation process of *Bildung*, in turn, influences the individual's self-understanding and attitude (Klausen 2018). Humboldt (2000: 68) noted about *Bildung* that it is "the self's reaching the most universal, most lively, and most disciplined interaction with the world, a convergence where everything influences us." This also serves as a point of critique against today's fragmented and instrumental elite education. For example, if someone achieves outstanding physical ability and technical skill to win an Olympic gold medal but fails to cultivate empathy and consideration for others, leading to problematic behavior, this would not be considered proper *Bildung*. Similarly, if someone possesses exceptional knowledge and skills, perhaps enough to win a Nobel Prize, but uses them in ways harmful to the environment, or experiences depression or self-abuse due to a negative self-perception, this too would not qualify as proper *Bildung*.

Third, *Bildung* is a free and uncoerced activity. According to Humboldt (1969: 28), "what does not arise from a person's free choice, but only as a result of guidance and direction, is alien to their true nature; it is performed not by genuine human power but merely with mechanical precision." In other words, true *Bildung* is possible only through a voluntary will for self-cultivation and formation. When *Bildung* stems from an inner passion and dedication to learning, knowledge does not remain external but can be deeply absorbed, assimilated, and embodied.

However, for humans to learn new things and develop their character in a better direction, they must confront methods that are often alien, uncomfortable, and sometimes even provoke resistance. Most people would likely avoid such situations rather than willingly endure and learn from them. From this perspective, even *Bildung*, which emphasizes freedom and spontaneity, may require a certain degree of guidance and adjustment. However, for *Bildung* to maintain its original intent, external guidance should only serve to trigger and support the motivation and continuity of voluntary learning and self-cultivation.

Fourth, *Bildung* is an empirical process where individuals voluntarily judge and learn under the influence of their environment. In *Bildung*, rather than teachers instructing and directing, individuals observe and interact with their environment, adjusting themselves and compensating for their shortcomings. In this process, conflict, tension, and opposition are not negative elements but rather the groundwork for the subject's growth toward a better state. The subject can sometimes transform their previously familiar concepts, methods, and self-understanding through conflicting experiences (Klausen 2018).

This element of conflict is particularly relevant to the experiences of adolescents. For children in earlier stages, family, natural surroundings, and school were simply given and seamlessly connected to their self, without question. However, as adolescents, students suddenly perceive their entire surrounding world as alien; they begin to doubt and question the meaning of relationships with those

around them and various actions. This awareness of a changed environment at home or school, along with existential questions, induces "adaptive transformation" through the "resonance" of subjective responsiveness and expression (Rosa 2019: 188-189).

Fifth, *Bildung* cultivates a balanced character and sensibility that uses knowledge and abilities appropriately and discerningly. *Bildung* does not aim for mechanical precision; rather, it seeks the cultivation of judgment and intuitive sensibility to find the most appropriate responses to specific situations and problems. From this perspective, *Bildung* can be seen as the comprehensive art of living a constantly changing and complex life (Klausen, 2018). Therefore, it focuses not on the accumulation of factual knowledge in a specific field or the mechanical acquisition of planned behaviors, but on fostering students' broad potential and sensibility, and cultivating autonomous activity and mature judgment in various domains of human life, using knowledge from diverse fields as a foundation (Klafki 2000).

Given these core characteristics of *Bildung*, it contrasts sharply with any process that is heteronomously imposed and trained from external sources to achieve specific goals. The initiation, process, and conclusion of *Bildung* are all driven by the individual's voluntary will, founded on their self-perception of self and world. This connects to *Bildung*'s aim of fostering the overall capacity and attitude for a human being to live harmoniously with the world. *Bildung* prioritizes the cultivation of a harmonious and whole personality—encompassing intellect, emotion, and will—rather than specific skills or expertise.

Just as the German word '*Bildung*' is connected to the English word 'building,' when constructing a building, it's crucial that it harmonizes well with the overall purpose of its environment or city, and also achieves balance and harmony within the building itself. In this way, *Bildung* simultaneously aims for harmony between the individual and the world, and harmony within the individual. Furthermore, just as various buildings have their own purposes and uses, with diverse shapes and characteristics, *Bildung*, in

its act of building a person, nurtures that person's unique individuality, potential, and life purpose, unfolding in a distinctive way aligned with them.

III. The Meaning of Authenticity

1. Inauthenticity and Authenticity

Authenticity fundamentally entails discovering and restoring the true essence or origins of oneself or an object. This concept has been primarily employed by existentialist philosophers such as Sartre, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. It signifies the need for an individual's unique determination, choice, and responsibility to become true to themselves amidst the massification and alienation of industrial society. According to Sartre (1957), authenticity represents the self-recovery of an existence corrupted by false beliefs, denoting the power to continually reject or choose anew. This involves persistently asking the existential question, "Who am I, truly?", thereby aspiring to an individual's new and unique will, unfettered by conventional norms, public opinion, or their own antiquated beliefs.

From Heidegger's perspective, human inauthenticity or fallenness arises from subjugation to the average understanding of the masses. People become ensnared by superficial transmission in idle talk focused on popular concerns, failing to directly examine the true nature of things themselves. Moreover, driven by curiosity, they ceaselessly seek novelty, thereby failing to grasp and deeply examine their current state. Furthermore, by relying on rumors and expectations in their conversations, people find themselves in a state of ambiguity, unaware of what is true (Heidegger 1927). These factors—idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity—identified by Heidegger, distance individuals from the truth of themselves, others, or objects, or even extinguish any curiosity about that truth.

Heidegger (1927) identifies "death" as the pivotal moment for overcoming this inauthenticity and recovering authenticity. Here, death does not signify biological demise but rather an existential pre-running toward one's own end. When one existentially confronts death, it becomes a burden no one else can assume, compelling one to be

entirely concerned with one's unique existence. Superficial concerns or pretenses, evident in idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, vanish in the face of death. Before death, the self hears the jarring awakening call of conscience, recognizes the finitude of one's life in urgency, reflects on a life lived in subservience to everyday conventions, and solidifies a resolve to earnestly live a genuinely unique life.

In this regard, authenticity possesses two key characteristics. First, it is not a universal truth or essence. Sartre (1946) argued that existence precedes essence. This means that for humans, rather than an objective and eternal essence, individuals must discover and create their own unique and newly emergent existence, here and now. Second, it cannot be found through systematic knowledge and speculative reasoning. Unlike the rational discernment and adherence to a moral law, as in Kant's court of conscience, authenticity can be sought through an urgent awareness and resolve in existential situations of life, such as death.

Nietzsche (1968) asserted that the individual is a perpetually self-creating being, and all their actions must be purely their own. From his perspective, the highest value in human life originates from each individual's unique, subjective will. He believed that an authentic human life depended on an attitude of deep self-reflection on questions of value, rather than merely conforming to familiar traditions or comfortably accepting popular values. For Nietzsche, the core of life's value lies in one's view of the self. Nietzsche (1974: 270) stated, "What does your conscience say? - You should become who you are." He criticized the notion of an unchangeable metaphysical self that conscience appeals to, arguing that the true self is not hidden deep within one's being, discoverable through introspection (Cooper 1983). Nor is the authentic self simply the everyday self an individual encounters. It signifies the genuine self that is yet to become, a being that is "new, unique, incomparable, self-legislating, self-creating" (Nietzsche 1974: 235). This implies that authenticity is not a hidden completeness within, but rather a continuous will and effort of self-criticism and self-overcoming regarding the existing self.

2. Authenticity and Self-realization

Discovering this authentic self and life requires not knowledge or scholarship, but an understanding of wisdom for life. This wisdom is cultivated through an individual's awareness of their present situation and their sincere struggle with their beliefs and values in relation to it. From Nietzsche's perspective, the acquisition of knowledge and methods of inquiry through rationality, objectivity, critical awareness, and systematized scholarship are of little help in discovering the authentic self and realizing an authentic life.

The person is so beleaguered by the most serious and difficult problems that, guided in the right ways, he will succeed to that philosophical astonishment... upon which alone... a deeper and nobler education [Bildung] can grow... especially in the stormy days of youth, almost every personal problem is reflected in a double light, as an example of something everyday and, at the same time, as an eternal, astonishing problem requiring interpretation and understanding (Nietzsche 1964: 5).

The knowledge contained in many academic disciplines and the methods for attaining it can serve as a general background for life. However, this knowledge is merely general and neutral; it cannot immediately become the wisdom for engaging with one's unique life situation here and now. For Nietzsche, what is crucial is a deep awareness of one's current situation and the choice and resolution of which path to take from that point. Human situations such as love, persecution, poverty, and death demand a certain attitude and act of choice. The interpretation and understanding of a situation are related to the choice of a particular attitude or action, and this choice is made through the establishment of individual values (Cooper 1983). Existentialism particularly focuses on difficult and dark moments in life, such as anxiety, suffering, and frustration. Traditional education, by concentrating on continuous and seamless growth, tends to view these challenging moments as obstacles to be avoided. However, existentialism posits that it is

precisely in these moments, by confronting them without giving up and deeply contemplating the direction of "my" life, that genuine awakening and learning become possible.

Nietzsche (1988) also emphasizes will in the pursuit of authenticity. For Nietzsche, humans exist as beings in a process between animal and *Übermensch*, and their direction depends on individual will. He believed that humans possess the will to achieve greatness, which is the subjective power to make decisions alone, not merely following the crowd. This will tirelessly induces deep inner reflection, awakening, and change, possessing the strength of rigorous internal discipline for self-overcoming.

In relation to the necessity of this subjective will, Kierkegaard (1968) points out that humans instinctively tend towards becoming something other than themselves, i.e., towards inauthenticity. If all humans naturally sought and aimed to realize their own uniqueness, there would be no need to emphasize authenticity. However, humans, on the one hand, may fail to realize who they are, or on the other hand, tend to view someone as an ideal model and try to live accordingly. In this context, from Kierkegaard's view, the formation of the authentic self requires resolute decision and concentrated effort. Authenticity is not an ultimate state achieved in an instant, but a continuous process of reminding oneself of one's aim and achieving oneself, requiring persistent effort with a dynamic character.

Furthermore, authenticity is not formed by the influence and shaping of the external environment, but actively achieved through the individual's own will and choice. This dynamism is also connected to Kierkegaard's particularly emphasized concept of passion. He views humans as contradictory beings, simultaneously possessing realistic limitations and transcendent possibilities. Here, the authentic human being is one who thoroughly confronts themselves in objective reality while passionately pursuing the possibility of transcending this reality subjectively. The core of authenticity lies in the fierce and passionate process of agony and struggle—a choice between "this or that"—in contradictory situations of reality and possibility.

This passionate process reflects upon and acknowledges limiting situations, leading to an existential leap towards a higher, truer self (Kierkegaard, 1968).

From Kierkegaard's perspective, the path towards the authentic self involves a process of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-regulation, and self-responsibility (Klausen 2018). First, it demands a deep question and awareness of "Who am I?" Existential self-knowledge is not constituted by objective observation or knowledge about oneself, but by realizing one's proper task as a unique individual through the practice of life. This means that one's thoughts and actions align in life. That is, this self-knowledge is achieved when what one passionately pursues is directly realized in one's actions in life, thereby confirming that this is one's true self. Next, self-acceptance signifies the will to confront one's past and present. Authenticity is not about escaping one's past and present life simply because it is embarrassing or difficult. The path to finding the authentic self is not merely recognizing abstract core values one should pursue. This path demands the will to passionately confront and interact with one's specific environment, even if it is sometimes challenging. Confronting oneself means facing not only one's accidental mistakes but also one's fundamental imperfection.

Self-regulation and self-responsibility, first and foremost, mean that the direction of one's life and the criteria for choice reside within oneself, not externally. Kierkegaard particularly emphasized the concept of the single individual (*Einzelne*) and pointed out that societal problems stem from the powerlessness and fragility of the masses. He argued that "only when the single individual has acquired a firm ethical stance, unmoved even when facing the entire world, can true unity be achieved" (Kierkegaard 1936: 114). The meaning of this assertion is not to vehemently resist the thoughts of the masses, but rather that it is far more important for each member of society to reflect on their own problems and conscience, and to passionately and steadfastly resolve and act, rather than merely following universal values and public opinion. And only when that is achieved can the ethics of the entire society be established and harmony realized.

The responsibility, as viewed by Kierkegaard, signifies an attitude of being able to stand alone, utterly and honorably, before God. This is quite different from the feeling of being somewhat protected when in a group. As a single individual, one receives no protection from anyone and acts solely in light of an absolute and unconditional good. This sense of responsibility also fundamentally presupposes the other, neighbors, and social values. Humans continually agonize and struggle to realize their own values and those of others. However, this realization of values is not performed on relative and conditional criteria but stems solely from one's responsibility to one's absolute good (Martinez 1988).

3. Authenticity and Relationship

Is authenticity truly achieved solely through confronting oneself and one's own choices and will? Critiquing the existentialist view for interpreting authenticity too subjectively, Taylor (1991) posits that authenticity can be realized through dialogue and relationships with others, by recognizing one's identity. Humans are beings of self-interpretation, and the self is constituted through this self-interpretation, which, in turn, occurs through communal relationships and communication with other selves within a linguistic community. Individuals discover the meaning of identity in domestic and social spheres, through intimate relationships with loved ones or through social roles, while considering the moral values of the communities important to them. In social relationships, we create and activate a shared space through dialogue, within which we collectively form the meaning of what is important (Taylor 1989).

From Taylor's perspective, human life as a social being must have some kind of framework. This signifies the horizons through which we understand the meaning of life as we live it. To realize a whole humanity, humans must live a qualitatively differentiated life through these horizons of significance. This is connected to the question of identity: "Who am I?" Self-identity is an understanding of what is decisively important to oneself, defined by one's position in existence and the objects to which one is committed and with

which one identifies. That to which one is committed and with which one identifies provides a framework or horizon, guiding value judgments and actions in every matter.

Humans form their identity through experiencing recognition and conflict in interaction with others. Identity is shaped through horizons of significance regarding what is valuable. The formation of self-identity is not merely a choice based on preference, but can be achieved by sincerely considering the broad horizons of meaning of significant others related to oneself. The categories of these others include one's historical background, the demands of nature and fellow humanity, civic duties, and divine revelation (Taylor 1991).

From an existentialist perspective, while Taylor's assertion regarding authenticity is valid in some respects, it also has problematic aspects. Firstly, Taylor's view that authenticity is related to life's direction and value judgments aligns with the existentialist perspective. In particular, the shared understanding that it is a deep, continuous process of understanding and interpretation of life's meaning, rather than a mere taste or preference, is a crucial commonality between both views. The meaning and direction of life are not something for which simple, easy, or quick answers can be derived. This perspective is commonly vital for overcoming the result-oriented tendency of contemporary and late-modern society that emphasizes only productivity, or the instrumentalist tendency that emphasizes only efficiency, without deep reflection on values and meaning.

However, from an existentialist viewpoint, the problematic aspect is how deeply the horizons of meaning of significant others can truly be understood within the individual's inner self, and at times, criticized and newly created. Existentialism does not disregard the process of serious reflection on societal values and ethics. However, that reflection should manifest not as convergence or mere adherence, but through passionate struggle, resolve, and action connected to the problems of one's own life in one's specific, present situation—why it is important, and how it should be practiced. In this process, one may even reject popular values

and discover alternatives independently. From Taylor's perspective, existentialism might be criticized for a lack of deliberation on the content and constitution of choices. Conversely, from an existentialist perspective, Taylor might be seen as lacking in the depth of *personal internalization and critical reflection* following choices.

Thompson (2015) views authenticity as a complex interaction between "being true to oneself" and "being in the world." From his perspective, authenticity involves a multilayered self-exploration that includes self-understanding, self-care, and self-acceptance. This exploration is not a fixed state but a fluid and interactive process that involves navigating both internal and external dynamic relationships. In this context, authenticity does not remain confined to self-alignment and self-contentment but requires consideration of the dynamic adjustment of conflicts and tensions. Authenticity, therefore, is experienced alongside acceptable tensions, prompting reflection on oneself and encouraging the consideration of things one has yet to imagine. Thompson's argument resonates with existentialist notions of authenticity, which suggest that authenticity is most deeply sought when one reflects intensely on oneself amidst life's shockingly conflicting and challenging phases, in search of one's true path.

From an educational perspective, educators often expect learners to follow standard, exemplary, and secure paths, feeling disappointment, reproach, or abandonment when they do not. This attitude similarly extends to the educators' own teaching practices. However, the crucial point that authenticity raises in the educational dimension is how educators and learners should approach situations involving tension, conflict, dissatisfaction, or unexpected challenges that are not standardized or safe. These moments demand a stance that aligns with the authenticity embedded in educational processes.

IV. Comparison of Bildung and Authenticity

1. Commonalities and Similarities

The most fundamental commonality between Bildung and authenticity is their shared emphasis on

individual subjectivity and free will. This directly relates to a critical awareness of the result-oriented and instrumentalist tendencies of modern society, which prioritize productivity and efficiency. These tendencies often disregard individuals' subjective values and meanings, instead pursuing efficient management and control based on predetermined goals.

Bildung, in its original sense, aims for the personality formation of a free individual who realizes their latent potential independently and possesses unique individuality, free from external control. Furthermore, in Germany, Bildung developed with non-systematic and informal characteristics, contrasting with the concept of Erziehung (education), which emphasizes societal demands, control, and external shaping. Bildung rejects the heteronomous control of technocracy in late industrial society, is not bound by specific political ideologies or socioeconomic development, and focuses on self-cultivation through autonomous exploration, pursuing autonomy and openness.

Authenticity, similarly, stems from an awareness of the massification and loss of subjectivity in industrial society, leading individuals to strive for subjective awakening, resolve, and responsibility to become true to themselves. This aspires to a new and unique existence, unbound by popular customs, public opinion, or existing personal habits and thoughts. An authentic life overcomes inauthentic attitudes that rely on popular interests, rumors, and expectations, instead aiming for a direct and deep confrontation with oneself and the world. Heidegger presents death as an existential turning point for overcoming inauthenticity. In death, individuals confront their own death—and no one else's—alone, profoundly feeling the total responsibility they must bear. Similarly, Kierkegaard, through the concept of the single individual, emphasizes a passionate and steadfast subjective resolve and responsibility sufficient to stand alone honorably before the Absolute. Nietzsche also pointed to subjective self-awareness of one's situation, deep contemplation about the direction of one's life, and the will for self-overcoming as crucial elements of authenticity.

Second, both Bildung and authenticity pursue deep reflection on the meaning and value of life. Neither focuses on acquiring specific skills and techniques demanded by industrial and late-industrial societies. Instead, they fundamentally aim for autonomous learning based on subjective reflection on the purpose and meaning of individual life. This reflection on the meaning of one's life, grounded in the moral aspect of humanity, pursues subjectively constituted knowledge and abilities. Bildung fundamentally strives for a humanity endowed with true freedom and reason. Kant always sought to form a humanity that held universally valid moral principles in mind and acted accordingly, and Hegel emphasized the processes of custom, knowledge, and formation to move from an existence solely pursuing private desires to one that awakens to and pursues genuine ethical freedom oriented towards public purposes. Bildung personally explores and realizes one's unique humanity within, and socially strives to overcome human alienation and various forms of injustice to realize true freedom in civil society. In this process, Bildung aims for a continuous understanding of self, others, and the world, simultaneously undertaking self-reflection and deep reflection on society's morals and culture. Unlike training for mechanical precision, Bildung aims to foster the comprehensive perspective and art of living through a balanced character and sensibility.

Similarly, authenticity fundamentally focuses on the individual's awareness of their true life. From an existentialist perspective, a true life signifies a subjective meaning that is unique and newly created in one's present, here-and-now life, rather than an objective and universal truth or morality. Nietzsche (1964) points out that the learning involved in discovering the authentic self is not about objective knowledge or scholarship, but about realizing the subjective wisdom of life. This is achieved through profound interpretation and understanding in relation to the problems one faces in concrete life situations, leading to choices of attitude and action, and discovering values concerning the meaning and direction of life. Kierkegaard (1968) also noted that existential leaps occur when individuals struggle with the contradictory meanings of realistic

limitations and transcendent possibilities in their lives, striving to discover a higher self. Taylor (1989) further argued that realizing a whole humanity requires an awareness of identity ("Who am I?"), which in turn demands value judgments about the qualitatively differentiated meaning and direction of life.

Third, both *Bildung* and authenticity are not finalized at any single point in time but possess a continuous and process-oriented character. This also connects to an open characteristic that rejects any predetermined ultimate goal, embraces diversity and difference, and seeks new possibilities and creativity. Possessing this continuity and openness, both concepts, on the one hand, positively embrace heterogeneous experiences, situations of conflict, and difficult or challenging circumstances as conducive to individual growth. One aspect of *Bildung*'s etymology is imperfection, implying the continuous need for supplementation and maturation. Kant (2015) also believed, at the societal level, that humans are beings born with animalistic attributes and anti-social inclinations, and must form social qualities and the attributes of a public citizen through habit and the teachings of reason. *Bildung*, which primarily developed in Germany as a movement of resistance against state-led, controlled education, possesses an openness that embraces broad and diverse experiences and activities, unlike formal education performed systematically within limited frameworks. Weber (1978) criticized the technocratic tendency focused on heteronomous control, viewing *Bildung* as a process of self-cultivation continuously re-formed through diverse lifelong learning. Humboldt (1851) also saw *Bildung* as a dynamic process of continuously adjusting, reconstructing, and creating the inner personality through the interaction between the individual and the world. *Bildung* also aims for making elements of conflict, tension, and opposition the groundwork for growth, through subjective questioning, adaptation, and transformation in continuous interaction with an ever-changing and newly emerging environment.

Authenticity aims for the power to continually reject or choose anew (Sartre, 1957). The authentic self possesses the will to constantly renew all

existing frameworks. Authenticity rejects the universal, objective, and eternal, instead pursuing an existence that is unique and newly created by individuals in their present, here-and-now, and changing specific situations. Nietzsche (1974; 1988) also advocated for the *Übermensch* as an existential subject who, possessing a will for self-overcoming that does not merely follow familiar traditions, is new, incomparable, and self-creating. Such a subject is also a being in process, continuously agonizing, struggling, and choosing between animal and *Übermensch*, between reality and possibility. This existential agony and choice are not finalized at any single moment in life (Kierkegaard 1968). From an existentialist perspective, authenticity focuses on the difficult, challenging, and extreme situations of life, such as anxiety, despair, suffering, death, poverty, persecution, alienation, and failure, and separation. Heidegger (1927) pointed out that by confronting death, humans become entirely concerned with their unique existence, hear the jarring call of conscience, and earnestly resolve to live their authentic life. We can indeed observe many cases of people living with terminal illnesses who lead more earnest and meaningful lives than before. Faced with difficult life situations, individuals gain a more urgent understanding and interpretation of the meaning of their lives. Nietzsche (1964) noted that a more noble education is achieved when one deeply contemplates the direction of their life when confronted with serious life problems, far beyond what systematized scholarship and knowledge can provide. Of course, the adversities of life themselves are not excellent education; rather, it implies that individuals, by confronting them, deeply ponder the meaning and direction of their lives, resolve, and practice a responsible and authentic life.

2. Dissimilarities and Differences

While the concepts of *Bildung* and authenticity share a fundamental aim in discovering and realizing one's true humanity, several dissimilarities exist in their specific content and methods.

First, *Bildung* aims for the harmony of individuality and sociality, emphasizing, in particular, the process of internalizing values and norms

pursued by society. Authenticity, however, emphasizes an individual's self-awareness and resolve rather than merely following general and systematized societal values. Kant (2015) pursued an ideal where individual free will and the general will of society align, based on universal reason, and believed that humans, born with antisocial inclinations, should be transformed into social beings with a legal conscience through discipline and teaching. Hegel (2002) also sought to dialectically synthesize the particularity of the individual and the universality of the state through *Bildung*. For him, *Bildung* means realizing true ethical freedom, which involves overcoming private interests or purposes and recognizing that public purposes are ultimately the conditions and goals of one's life. This realization of ethical freedom is achieved through the relationship between self and other and the consciousness thereof, and through the process of making the orientation towards universality one's essential habit. Humboldt (1851; 1910) also viewed *Bildung* as universal human education and saw it as cultivating citizenship that actively participates in civil society based on humanistic intellect, transcending mere individual self-formation. For him, *Bildung* was about elevating broad knowledge of the world, and the culture and virtues of society, into the holistic formation of individual personality through the interaction between the individual and the world, thereby aiming for subjective *Bildung* through objective knowledge.

In contrast, authenticity fundamentally views the loss of individual uniqueness amidst the massification of industrial society as the root of the problem, and aims to overcome popular customs, public opinion, and one's own fixed ideas and habits. Heidegger (1927) pointed out that humans fall into inauthenticity amidst idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, relying on the average understanding, common sense, rumors, and expectations of the masses. The way to overcome this is possible only when each individual solely confronts their unique existence, hears the jarring call of conscience, and makes a resolute commitment to their authentic life. Authenticity is not the knowledge of an objective, eternal essence, but is achieved as individuals

discover and create a unique and new existence for themselves, here and now.

Nietzsche (1968) emphasized individual subjective will and creativity, advocating for not comfortably accepting popular values but actively contemplating values oneself, continuously discovering and forming a new, incomparable self. This existentialist perspective on authenticity is fundamentally based on skepticism towards completeness and universality. In contrast, the original meaning of *Bildung* suggests that God's perfect nature is latent within the individual, and thus needs to be discovered and formed. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the modern German concept of *Bildung* emphasized discipline and education consistent with universal societal values and knowledge. However, Nietzsche (1964) points out that objectivity and systematized scholarship are of little help in discovering and realizing authenticity.

What is crucial in authenticity is the wisdom for engaging with one's unique life, which involves confronting life's problems, subjectively interpreting them, and independently choosing and resolving the direction of one's life. Kierkegaard (1936) also emphasized the concept of the single individual, advocating for an attitude where each person recalls their own problems and conscience and makes passionate resolutions and acts, rather than being conscious of universal societal values and public opinion. From his perspective, self-knowledge is not objective observation and knowledge, but a subjective and practical understanding confirmed by the alignment of one's thoughts and actions in the concrete reality of one's life. Furthermore, he emphasized confronting and accepting oneself, viewing it as crucial to discover and accept one's mistakes, limitations, and imperfections. This contrasts with *Bildung*'s view that completeness is latent within oneself and should be sought and realized.

However, an exceptional perspective within authenticity is that of Taylor (1989; 1991), who emphasizes dialogue and relationships with others. He argues that as social beings, humans need some kind of framework to discover identity and meaning

in life, and this is possible through horizons of significance that integrate various elements such as history, the demands of nature and fellow humanity, and civic duties. This perspective largely resembles Bildung's emphasis on societal values and norms. However, what is crucial here is that the individual is the subject who constitutes these horizons of meaning. That is, individuals pursuing authenticity do not merely acquire and internalize objective and universal knowledge itself, but rather integrate it as background knowledge for constructing the framework for interpreting their identity and the meaning of life.

Second, while Bildung aims to form a human being with overall harmony and balance, authenticity focuses on changes in will and attitude. In this regard, Bildung is concerned with what kind of life one should lead, attempting to explain the substantive characteristics of life, whereas authenticity focuses on how one should live life, aiming to understand the characteristics of one's attitude and stance toward life. According to Humboldt (2000), Bildung aims at the holistic personality cultivation of an individual, not merely specific abilities. This seeks to achieve a whole and harmonious personality by encompassing various elements of humanity, including intellect, emotion, will, spirituality, physical strength, and sociality. This holistic personality cultivation involves an emphasis on rational thought concerning universal values and the acquisition of diverse objective knowledge and culture from society. Through this, Bildung aims to foster the comprehensive art of living a complex life, exercising mature judgment in various domains of human affairs. In the Bildung process, the abilities that constitute a person organically interdepend and interpenetrate. Bildung aims for the formation of a whole humanity by allowing intellectual capacity (centered on thinking and judgment), aesthetic sensibility (including empathy and artistic appreciation), subjective will and physical ability (driving decision and action), and spirituality (gaining insight into the meaning and value of life) to mutually influence each other.

In contrast, authenticity presupposes an attitude of rejecting one's inauthentic self, rather than seeking to realize some whole and positive ideal.

Authenticity cannot be achieved as long as one does not urgently realize one's subjugation to the average understanding and customs of the masses, or to one's own outdated thoughts and habits. What is necessary and important in this existential awareness is passionate will. Even vast knowledge, excellent thinking ability, or subtle sensibility cannot lead to the resolve to earnestly confront one's life problems and bring about new change.

What kind of education evokes subjective passion for how one should live one's life? In response to this, Kierkegaard (1968) presents the concept of indirect communication. He points out that if one wishes to communicate the problem of what existence is, it must be done indirectly. This is because the core of existential awareness is inwardness, which can never be achieved by merely conveying results. In education, we typically try to convey some complete totality or a definitive answer with certainty. However, on the path towards authenticity, what is important is not such a complete totality or a definitive answer, but how passionately the individual learner internalizes knowledge. The focus of authenticity is not the content of knowledge, but one's attitude or will towards knowledge. What makes this possible is not a teacher explicitly and directly transmitting knowledge as a result, but rather an attempt to stimulate the learner's passionate self-inquiry, perhaps by concealing the teacher's status itself. Kierkegaard connected this image of the educator to Socrates' maieutic method, who constantly questioned people in the streets and markets, stimulating their own reflection. For Socrates, what was important was not the answer but the process of seeking wisdom through the question itself. And this process, he argued, arouses the individual's intense passion for truth, leading not to an experiment in thought but to changes in one's actual life stance and actions (Manheimer 1977). What is important here is that the teacher himself or herself is not a complete being but a being in process, constantly and passionately exploring the wisdom of life, and should be able to stimulate and challenge the student's continuous and passionate process of exploration.

V. Conclusion: A Synthetic Observation to Contemporary Education

In the introduction, we critically raised the problem of the negative impact of an overheated competitive spirit in education, driven by standardized measures of success. *Bildung* and authenticity commonly view life not as success or failure, and if there are standards or goals of achievement to be attained and realized in life, they are considered to be different for each individual and something that each must find and realize for themselves. *Bildung*, which emphasizes the process of self-reflection and self-formation, values unique individuality, thus fostering subjective effort based on healthy self-esteem, overcoming comparative thinking and heteronomy. Authenticity, which overcomes popular customs, public opinion, fixed ideas, and habits, and aspires to a new and unique existence through subjective awakening, resolve, and responsibility, enables education that cultivates diverse personalities and enhances self-overcoming and responsibility based on autonomous will.

Bildung and authenticity also propose a path to overcome the instrumentalist social culture that emphasizes only productivity and efficiency. A culture that focuses on producing more and faster, and efficiently controlling it, stifles reflection on values and direction. Education solely devoted to efficiently achieving grades, university admissions, and employment hinders contemplation and effort regarding what kind of person one will become or how one should live life. *Bildung* fosters deep reflection on the meaning of humanity endowed with true freedom and reason, while authenticity guides individuals to seek a qualitatively differentiated path in life through profound interpretation and resolve related to their own life problems. This education, which recognizes the value of life oneself, also finds significant meaning in overcoming social problems, such as the misuse of knowledge and technology in various forms of intellectual crime, particularly in today's highly technological society.

Finally, *Bildung* and authenticity present a path to overcome the pitfalls of the result-oriented culture pointed out in the introduction. Both possess a

continuous and process-oriented character and are open to new possibilities. Furthermore, both aim to foster the strength to positively accept and overcome conflict and difficult situations. This characteristic, first of all, allows learners to joyfully immerse themselves in the learning process, regardless of the outcome. If one can joyfully immerse oneself in the learning process with one's own motivation and passion, it will have a very positive impact on achievement in any field. More importantly, this point, in terms of what is emphasized today as resilience, cultivates the strength to recover well and overcome obstacles independently when encountered, and moreover, to make those very obstacles the groundwork for a greater leap.

Additionally, while *Bildung*'s emphasis on universal values and knowledge and harmonious character differs from authenticity's emphasis on individual uniqueness and existential attitude, both can complementarily converge in education depending on the situation, considering today's pluralistic and complex environmental characteristics. That is, in a culture that is excessively individualized, the education of universal societal values and knowledge should be emphasized. Conversely, in a culture where the power of universal customs and public opinion is excessively strong, education that cultivates individual subjective will and creativity should be strengthened. Furthermore, the comprehensive elements of the harmonious character emphasized by *Bildung* should constitute the content of education, while fostering the subjective will and attitude emphasized by authenticity would be well applied in terms of educational methods. The learning content should be structured to allow learners to fully interact with the diverse and rich knowledge of the world, along with their inner intellect and sensibility. The learning method should utilize the aforementioned "indirect communication," attempting to stimulate learners to question the learning content themselves and relate it to their lives, inspiring awe and thrill (Kierkegaard, 1978). In indirect communication, the teacher should sometimes exemplify conflicting perspectives or situations, or pose challenging questions that oppose existing ideas, thereby

helping students see contradictory aspects and cultivate an attitude of continuously challenging existing frameworks. However, what is crucial here is that, unlike dialectical speculation or critical thinking, the focus of this method is on reflecting upon one's inner self and attitude, and the practice of one's own life.

Korsgaard et al. (2024) explore the concepts of Bildung and authenticity in relation to the notion of place. Here, place is understood through three dimensions: humanity, ethnicity, and individuality. Bildung unfolds through the complex and sometimes conflicting interactions between these three places. From a Romantic perspective, individuals realize authenticity in harmony with the place they belong to, their sociocultural context. However, in modernity, place represents both a possibility for the realization of human identity and a source of alienation. In particular, in many commercialized spaces of modern society, individuals lose the intimate personal connections and meaning-making that characterize true human experience. The discussion of the multifaceted influences of place allows for a more nuanced examination of Bildung and authenticity.

When connecting this perspective to the current study, it reflects a critical reflection on the specific

socio-cultural dynamics of East Asian countries, where education has become closely linked with industrialization and socio-economic mobility. Under the dominance of the logic of competitiveness and technical rationality, the aspects of Bildung that emphasize free, autonomous, and value-mediated self-formation have significantly weakened. Notably, the Confucian cultural tradition has historically had a profound influence on East Asian societies such as Korea, China, and Japan, where an essential value is the idea that individual self-realization is intertwined with the moral value and prosperity of family, community, and nation.

However, during the transition from the medieval to modern periods, the spiritual values of Confucianism were distorted toward the practical demands of social advancement through exams and public recognition. This distortion, combined with the logic of competitiveness and technical rationality during modernization and industrialization, has led to the issues mentioned above. The socio-cultural context of East Asia, therefore, represents both a crucial value to revive in the pursuit of authentic self-formation and a challenge to overcome.

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