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Transhuman Education: Sloterdijk's Reading of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*

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Introduction[1]

Peter Sloterdijk makes an outlandish claim for a new type of literacy impacting on education. Replacing the humanism based on the literacy required to read and write letters (one thinks of Cicero and Seneca), he speculates about a new literacy based on the reading and writing of genetic codes. Just as societies used the humanism based on literacy to separate the literate from the barbarian by means of a "book education", so perhaps contemporary societies now need a new kind of education which promotes genetic literacy to "improve" the human lot. In Sloterdijk's view, where education, as an elitist behaviour, once separated the literate from the illiterate, so education in advanced societies need to optimize development by promoting gene enhancement. Every teacher will by then have become a biotechnologist. This basic thought links in with the work of futurologists like Ray Kurzweil and others who claim that a new age is about to break upon us (1999). Sloterdijk's paper, published as *Regeln für den Menschenpark. Ein antwort zu Heideggers Brief über Humanismus* (*Rules for the Human Park: a response to Heidegger's Letter on Humanism*), was first presented in Basel on July 17, 1997 and then at Elmau Castle, the Bavarian Hotel of G7 summits, in 1999 and precipitated huge controversy throughout Germany. Did it amount to a return to the eugenic arguments of Plato's *Statesman* or the eugenics of the holocaust? His essay title alone seemed to implicate Heidegger indirectly in the same eugenic project, and along with Heidegger, modern educators, who were suddenly roused from their dogmatic slumbers by the implications of Sloterdijk's remarks. Educators objected to the "taming" idea but it was Mary Varny Rory, translator of Sloterdijk's piece on the human zoo, who summarised the issue as follows:

> If what happens in the mind influences the body, perhaps what happens in the body influences the mind; in the absence or failure of a widely read literary canon, perhaps we can carry on the humanistic project of reducing barbarism and "taming" man's bestial tendencies by breeding for civility? (See http://web.stanford.edu/~mvr2j/for_love (accessed 12/02/2016))

Educators are not used to seeing the humanistic foundations of education linked in such a stark way to biological concerns. Nor are they used to identifying education with "taming" a wild beast (child). This proposal, however, occurs now at a time of great promise in genetic research for the cure of cancers and there seems to be a ground swell of support to rewrite the genetic code in certain instances in order to reverse the ravages of disease. A new type of genetic literacy makes eugenics desirable in certain circumstances such as the proposal to abolish harmful traits, with the result that the old dream (some might call it a nightmare) of a genetically modified future generation which boasts better health and more optimal social skills is now on the verge of being possible. Where does this put education? This development points to the emergence of a posthuman age and would such an age, Sloterdijk asks,

not fulfil the educational need to generate the humanism required in future societies?

Although anthropotechnology seems a remote issue for educators, controversies still abound about the many interfaces which children now use in their daily lives to connect with information and people. The relevance of Sloterdijk's dark hypothesis to educators is reflected in certain reservations about the interfaces at work in children's lives. While Papert (1994), Turkle (in her early work) and Burbules (Burbules and Callister Jr, 1996) are generally optimistic about the implications of computer-aided learning, others have voiced concerns (See Walters and Kop, 2009). Papert speaks of a "megachange" (1994) while Lankshear et al. propose that "the digital age is throwing many of our educational practices and emphases …into doubt" (2000, p. 39). Others agree that there has been a "fundamental transformation in learning infrastructure" (Livingstone, 2012, p.20). One of the impacts of this educational "revolution" is that many think that information itself no longer has the power to civilize and they look for some way to control it in order to make it amenable to the learning project. One feature that is currently popular is the generalised application of control measures by means of assessment instruments. These contrary trends, the one toward unlimited freedom of access to information, the other a tightening of control through frequent testing has led to the paradox that even if one allows for the fact that child-centered learning has become the norm, there is less appetite now for Rousseau's "natural" child or A.S. Neill's "adult-free" educational zone in neoliberal, performance-directed systems. The hidden coercion of some of these latter orientations resonate with Sloterdijk's view of the need to generate a new humanism that will finally end the époque of the "wild" child, who must be "tamed" in order to be civilised. Hence the issues raised by Sloterdijk are not quite as alien to the current experience of teachers on the ground as it may appear at first glance. Sloterdijk primarily challenged the view that putting humans in contact with the great literature of the past is an adequate basis for calling such an education humanist. Instead he pointed to the fact that evidence of man's inhumanity to man should reveal to everyone that humans are indeterminate in their being and moral attitude. This means that quite contrary to the view that man is made in the image of God, to adopt the *Genesis* account, we humans are golems, that is, units of biological mass which have no particular *telos* or end purpose.

This contention might have upset some educators in the audience but more shocks were to follow. Sloterdijk went on to contend that human societies should support elements of selective breeding that would enhance the human and so it became clear to listeners that the augmentation he had carefully traced out in *Sphären* 1 (Sloterdijk, 2011/ 1999) was now being brought to bear on the education process itself. To listeners, this *Star Trek* view of the future with its image of a technologically advanced world resonated unhelpfully and rather scandalously with Nazi eugenics and certainly presented an unhelpful model for education to follow. If Sloterdijk thought Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* "opened up a transhumanistic or posthumanistic space for thought" (*Rules for the Human Zoo*, p. 17). I will argue that he did so by distorting Heidegger's already fragile grounds for an ethic of care and observation. What particularly upset the German public at Elmau was the way Sloterdijk advocated genetic intervention as a form of self-mastery relevant to educators. What could have upset educators was his wide-ranging support for human enhancement.

In response to Sloterdijk's paper, a whole series of letters and reviews populated the pages of *Frankfurter Rundshau*, *Süddeutsche Rundshau* and particularly *Die Zeit* where Thomas Assheuer contributed an article with the provocative title "The Zarathustra Project" (*Die Zeit*, September 2, 1999, p. 31). The sequence of this debate has been well outlined by Luis Arenas (Arenas, 2003). Sloterdijk rather surprisingly responded angrily to these criticisms, suggesting that Habermas was the "*éminence grise*" hiding behind them who rather aggravatingly refused to emerge for face-to-face debate. The sophistry of his position became exposed even as he challenged Habermas to open debate, and, having already called criticisms of his article "lies and hallucinations" in the *Frankfurter Rundshau* of 31 July 1999, and because no real face-to-face debate followed, he announced the death of Critical Theory in September 1999. Habermas responded to the challenge without mentioning names by assembling his more considered objections to human germline experimentation in a series of articles, later assembled in a book form in 2001 and quickly translated into English (Habermas, 2003).

This ethical debate, however, neglected the issue of education per se and avoided some of the more telling educational issues. Humanist education is not threatened by the context of germline experimentation but by chemical or technical enhancement presented as a baseline assumption for education in the future. In other words, the issue as to how to understand the human body is now becoming central in the philosophy of education. When the body is enhanced for therapeutic reasons, there is generally little or no objection but in view of the general slippage from medical to non-therapeutic uses in practice, the chemical and mechanical transformation of the body is now becoming central to the very idea of education at all. Even on a logical level, the slippery slope from one to the other seems indicated (McNamee, 2006). It is in this context that the issue of transhuman education, however ill-defined, now arises to dislodge our assumptions about human education, natural justice, human rights etc. The popular culture appetite now favours transhuman enhancement but ethicists and educators are generally resistant. These lines of resistance have been drawn by Habermas and others like Jünker-Kenny (Junker-Kenny, 2005) and Edgar (Edgar, 2009).

Space requires that many aspects of this controversy must be left aside. Instead the focus of this paper is to interrogate the issue of humanism for educators in the light of the Elmau controversy. It considers in particular Peter Sloterdijk's 1999 re-evaluation of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* and proposes to move in three phases: (i) to examine Heidegger's original letter, marking its key understandings of humanism; (ii) to examine Sloterdijk's paper (as later published) to identify his objections to Heidegger's presentation of humanism; (iii) to draw some implications from this debate for education in general and for transhumanist education in particular.

Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*[2]

In a letter dated 10 November 1946, Jean Beaufret asked the now disgraced and apparent Nazi-sympathiser, Martin Heidegger, for his thoughts on an address made the previous year by Jean Paul Sartre and published in French in 1946 with the title

L'existentialisme est un humanisme. In that text, Sartre claimed that there is no human nature as such, and that humans are not creatures born in the image of God (*imago dei*) but rather beings who must create their own way of being through their action (*praxis*) and choices. Sartre had gone on to argue further that this new state of affairs was the new humanism. Heidegger finished his response to Beaufret in December of 1946 and expanded this piece for a publication in 1947, translated into English as *Letter on Humanism* (See Krell, 2008). The text follows a set of reflections on the question *Comment redonner un sens au mot 'Humanisme'?* [How can we give meaning once again to the word 'Humanism'] Heidegger emerged from his enforced teaching silence to reject Sartre's position, almost entirely. He agreed on one point only, namely, that the human was not to be understood by reference to being in the image of God (*imago dei*). But he particularly rejected the causal link Sartre drew upon between action and being, which lay at the heart of Sartre's position and used it as a further example of the forgetfulness of Being. By saying that we are still not thinking in the sense that we are not responding to the existential challenge posed by thinking, he set out to dismantle Sartre's assumptions about subjectivity. He rejected any strong notion of *cogito* just as he rejected various forms of interface that risked removing Dasein from the challenge of thinking. Heidegger had consistently argued for the vulnerability of the human openness to the world and the concealment of this openness by various technical devices, such as concepts, ideas and pre-formed templates. This pattern, he argued, originated in Plato's theory of forms which, after Descartes, became further complicated by the subject-object distinction. Heidegger included in this rejection the written letter form, which may have been historically important in Roman times at the very origins of *humanitas* but which presented an interface reliant on the assumption of humans as rational animals, whose interaction would be enhanced by literacy. He pointed these remarks at Beaufret, arguing that "the questions raised in your letter would have been better answered in direct conversation" (Krell, 2008, p. 195). For Heidegger, to engage as a human, one has to confront the experience of being alive and in time. One has to be open (Agamben, 2004), called forth (Sallis, 1970) to the "worldhood of the world". Heidegger's word for what I call here the interface is the German word for frame, *Gestell*, (already important for him in his reflections on technology in 1947). Heidegger's complaint about technology is that it simply re-presents existential experience in "frame" form and actually occludes the central character of thinking in human life per se. As he writes:

> For us 'world' does not at all signify beings or any realm of beings but the openness of Being. Man is, and is man, insofar as he is the ek-sisting one. (See Krell, 2008, p. 228)

The essential point is that openness is the feature that characterizes the human as distinct from the animal in Heidegger's account and while Sloterdijk will agree in general, he will argue that this openness is of a different sort, an openness to that which augments the self, and this element whether it is the placenta in the womb or the air we breathe is necessarily an element in the material universe which then shares the ontical character of a human being (Sloterdijk, 2011/ 1999). For Heidegger, on the other hand, humans are not material in this sense. Since language is the house of Being (Heidegger in Krell, p. 217), thinking, like language, cannot be mastered even by bright individuals because they are never centered at the executive origin of language or thought. Everyone has to grapple with thinking in order to generate even

one clear idea. Just as language accompanies the speaker, thinking accompanies the thinker and one finds oneself not simply the subjective agent but also the object of that which allows the action to occur. Heidegger's general name for this complex space is the human *ek-stasis*, the condition of humans to be neither entirely here nor there but nevertheless somewhere. In this space, Being is not experienced by humans as an object standing over there but rather as a type of condition facilitating actions of various kinds, including speaking and thinking.

Heidegger, perhaps unfairly, blames the Greeks for the reduction of human action to *pragmata* but it is certainly true that a technological understanding of thinking has obliged philosophy to justify its relevance. Philosophy prefers to operate in the broad spaces rather than in the reduced spaces allowed by proper scientific method. "Thinking is measured by a standard that does not measure up to it" (p. 219) and so Heidegger suggests that a general reduction can take hold, turning humans into what might be called "thin" beings or "small men", a point later made by Sloterdijk with reference to a quote from Nietzsche (see *Rules*, p. 21). Instead of such a reduction, one might refer to thinking always as the "thinking of Being", recognizing the double genitive and that it is both the subject who thinks and Being which thinks and that this double agency is central to understanding the broad texture of thinking. It tames the human reality, as it were, and prevents it from seeking to branch out and disregard all limits (p. 221). This is summed up in a typical quote:

> But if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless. In the same way he must recognize the seductions of the public realm as well as the importance of the private (p. 223).

The seductions of the public realm are possibly those images and whispers that persuade a human being to believe that they have this or that nature or are limited to this or that definition. The sequencing and overloading of public messages to this effect can easily seduce the confused human into opting for a "thin" understanding of his destiny. To counter this, Heidegger conceives of the human being as contingent, a being whose action does not channel exclusively through its own executive function. He accepts this fallible geometry as the given and final context for the humanism he wishes to explore (a non-centered clearing) against the type of profile advocated by Sartre and existentialists in general, which he finds only partly true and generally reductive in outline.

The quest for *humanitas* leads Heidegger to an exploration of Roman and Greek culture, linking the concept essentially to *paideia* or education (p. 224). The human is not barbaric thanks to the form of education he has received. Moreover only a fragile set of circumstances distinguishes the human from the barbaric. Sloterdijk agrees with the contention that letter writing in the Roman world demonstrated to all participants the *humanitas* available. But the meaning of this insight is quite different for Sloterdijk who is willing to embrace *animalitas* as the essence of the human in contrast to Heidegger's claim that "only man is admitted to the destiny of ek-sistence" (p. 228). Similarly, Heidegger rejects the Greek model of the animation of a body by means of a separable soul on the grounds that it reduces the complexity of the "essence" of the human (p. 231). Indeed the human does not live in these narrow regions only but in what Heidegger calls a clearing and "the clearing itself is Being" (p. 235).

The point is that humans do not exercise any thin executive function as they might if they were executive agents. The augmented space of their *humanitas*, their pastoral environment as a shepherd of Being (p. 245), means that their destiny is one of "care". Hence they are correspondingly weakened by the prospect of the responsibility opened up by "care" compared with beings governed by *animalitas*. In other words, the human comes to know itself as human when it finds itself responsible for the environment, responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the world as a physical and a social reality and it is this feature that appears under the aspect of "care". If we were to contrast this destiny with what humans actually do, not only in warfare, terrorism and general economic exploitation, themes emphasized by Sloterdijk, then we would have to conclude that *humanitas* is not a very dominant feature of human behavior. This may well indicate that the human is much more in the grip of a lapsed character (*Verfallen*) than should perhaps be the case and that what should be an exception to the humanist rule has often become the norm.

Heidegger's view of the human as quite different from an *imago dei* did not lead him to abandon an ethical stance for the human. This meant that for Heidegger, humans were not made in the image of God but nevertheless operated on the basis of an essence described as a state of openness to being, or openness to the world. In this openness the essence of man's own being as a temporal being becomes manifest, as time is not something human beings can avoid. Heidegger's suggestion of homelessness submits the structure of ek-sistence to the care of Being (p. 246), a responsibility for and to Being. This is not merely speculative concern but is rather an ethical commitment to the Being proper to *humanitas*. In answer to Beaufret's question, Heidegger reiterates that it is the metaphysical meaning of Being (i.e., turning Being into an object) that has on the contrary obscured and eclipsed the nature of the human (p. 247) and that this position will, on his own admission, make Heidegger's account quite "curious" to many commentators (p. 248).

The *Letter on Humanism* continues this interesting reflection on ethics, commenting on the Heraclitus fragment 119, namely, *ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn*, a phrase which Sloterdijk translates quite differently in a later work ("Man's character is his fate" see Sloterdijk, 2013/ 2009, Chapter 3). For Heidegger the *ēthos* refers to the space or the "open region" (p. 256) in which the human can appear, a dwelling place for the human. Heidegger qualifies this region in terms of standing in proximity to the gods, thus modifying the *imago dei* concept, but nonetheless retaining reference to the gods in human identity. Why did he need to do this? Because he follows Aristotle's *De partibus animalium*, 1,5, 645a, where Heraclitus is described as linking the gods to the activity of warming oneself by the fire: "Here too the gods come to presence" (as cited by Heidegger in Krell, p. 259). The appearance of *humanitas* does not happen once and for all as if any individual could fully express human being at any given moment but it is rather historically dispersed and may be found in the smallest detail. The motif of a journey is suggested, if not mentioned, vulnerable to health or disease (p. 260). In contrast, the presumption to speak for Being itself is the greatest presumption of all and results in nihilism. In other words to deny the space in which the human dwells is to foreshorten human powers and to embrace the totality of Being as one's own, thus situating it entirely in oneself and becoming, as a result, simply nothing. Such is Heidegger's argument. When Sloterdijk, on the other hand, rejects the *imago dei* idea, his objection takes a more Sartrian form, meaning that it is up to

humans to make of themselves what they can and therefore that an Enlightenment project, as expressed in technological advances, still offers human life some key traction points both now and in the future.

Sloterdijk's *Rules from the Human Zoo*[3]

Before broaching the *Letter on Humanism* itself, Sloterdijk examines the central impact of letter writing on the cultivation of human attitudes and values, a point raised initially by Heidegger's text together with the curious circumstance that led to Jean Beaufret's letter. Like Heidegger, Sloterdijk seems to base his definition of humanism on Cicero and the "literary genre" of Roman culture that "recruited adherents by writing in an infectious way about love and friendship" (*Rules*, p. 12), developing a genre which, both writers acknowledge, found its origin in the Greeks. Indeed this source is so rich that Romans are reduced in this great chain of transmission, according to Sloterdijk, to being "decipherers" and "deliverymen" or "interpreters". By linking humanism to the communication of friends by means of reading and writing rather than by means of speaking and listening, Sloterdijk agrees with Heidegger that the humanism to be rejected is a form of elitism signaled by the powers of reading and writing among civilized people.

We learn that the analysis of the golem legend is being closely followed. In Hebrew "golem" stands for "shapeless mass". Humanism in its original sense is the attempt to shape the shapeless golem or, in other words, to save people from barbarism (p. 15). Moreover, Sloterdijk surmises, it is little wonder that after the war, after the release of so much "barbarism", that an acute appetite for humanism would declare itself as its antidote. However the illusion of humanism would soon reveal its fragile historical roots. Its inability to resist in the face of barbarity would also reveal it as illusory. His analysis toys paradoxically with the idea that the human is based on the barbaric itself, a materialist picture governed by Hobbes's idea of a life that is brutish and short. The theme of bestialisation and degradation causes Sloterdijk to echo back from the second world war to the display of bloody battles offered as entertainment to the literati of Rome, pointing to the ease with which the *homo inhumanus* could sometimes reconcile this behavior with the elitist strategies built up to deny it in the company of friends. In this context, "the resistance of the books against the amphitheatre" (p. 16) set up a strategy of distance, distant friends writing to one another but without any real transformation. What further evidence do we need for the superficiality of letters to friends favoured by Cicero's humanism where the offer to calm the savage beast is proposed in the context of battle or, in other words, where the tamed can be kept available for warlike purposes:

> But, thereby, it is affirmed that humanity itself consists in choosing to develop one's nature through the media of taming, and to forswear bestialization (p. 16).

A pendulum announces itself and at either end there is a different node: one swing carries the beast back towards civility through taming practices like reading and writing; the next swing carries the partly civilized back towards bestiality and the loss

of all inhibitions. The twin features of the human then come into view, namely, its biological indeterminacy and then its moral ambivalence. Such is Sloterdijk's view.

So having given Heidegger's text this particular introductory twist, which effectively neuters Heidegger's argument for care, Sloterdijk finally turns to the *Letter on Humanism* itself. He agrees with Heidegger's abandonment of any Christian, Marxist or existentialist (i.e., Sartrian) reading of humanism and proposes that humanism in its post-Cartesian sense adds yet another example to the general forgetfulness of Being. Humanism's denial of Being has become bound up with the density of the human nature concept (p. 17), which gestures towards a fixed form of being, a mistake further compounded by the basically Aristotelian thought of "rational animal". Sloterdijk correctly explains Heidegger's distinction between human and animal in terms of ontology rather than any Linnaean distinction between species and genius (p. 18) but he complains about Heidegger's anti-vitalistic moves to separate the human from the animal, especially when the latter proposes a stark distinction between the human and the animal. And yet he accurately presents Heidegger's key thought about *ek-sistence*:

> So the point is that in the determination of the humanity of man as *ek-sistence* what is essential is not man but Being—as the dimension of the *ecstasis* of ek-sistence (as quoted p. 18).

While Heidegger is sceptical of any reliance on modern technology to enhance the human substrate or to bring into being other accomplishments not possible at the moment, Sloterdijk suggests that the problem is one of a difference in degree, rather than a difference in kind:

> Why should humanism and its general philosophical self-representation be seen as the solution for humanity, when the catastrophe of the present clearly shows that it is man himself, along *with his systems of self-improvement* [my italics] and self-clarification that is the problem? (p. 17)

In place of the imaginary human being as a special being, an exceptional being, in view of his reflection of God and thus a demi-god, Sloterdijk, echoing his earlier work on cynicism (See Sloterdijk, 1983/1988, p. 26) and his preference for materialism prefers to insert the human fully and completely into the animal world. This preference effectively reverses the *imago dei* tradition and situates humans "below" the animal in the biologically amorphous state of the golem. From this perspective any anthropo-technology designed to raise the human to the status of a fuller being is not only permissible but also to be recommended. By refusing to accept Heidegger's main thesis, Sloterdijk supports the clearing of Being idea for other purposes, denies the ethics of care explicit in Heidegger's position, and opts instead for a theory of breeding that leads directly to positive eugenics. Indeed Sloterdijk complains that Heidegger's clearing will promote more taming than humanism ever did by proposing a default attitude of listening and obedience. Sloterdijk points to the fact that this new avocation as shepherd of being is a call to become more inactive, more passive, allowing Heidegger to assume the default position of chief spokesperson for Being and "the measure and voice of the nameless Ur-author" (p. 19). Sloterdijk notes how frequently the taming of many people leads to the raising of oneself to a position of central importance. All in all, for Sloterdijk, Heidegger's

shepherding becomes a cryptic statement of fascist power and far removed from the open democracy of traditional humanism which it might have signalled to the unwary reader:

> Humanism cannot contribute anything to this ascetic ideal [a society of knowers] as long as it remains fixated on the image of strong men. (p. 19)

But if Heidegger is guilty of crypto-fascism, where does this leave Sloterdijk? Is he an opponent of fascism? Not really. There is a definite irony in Sloterdijk's approach, perhaps even a cynicism. Shepherding still has the function of seeking out the like-minded, "receptive neighbors", or "groups of silent herdsmen" (p. 19) who arise contingently on a day to day basis. More to the point, Sloterdijk asks of Heidegger's space, what is the ecstatic clearing in which the human resides? (p. 20) He recognizes that it is the protection of this clearing that forms man's destiny, for to lose it would mean losing humanism itself for the main purpose of this clearing is to conceal "the chronic animalian immaturity of man" (p. 20). The nature of a shepherd who is safeguard for a safety environment for sheep becomes the metaphor for the individual who is both self and safeguard of the tamed environment for humans. This Heideggerian space becomes a space of thought (p. 21) by which domesticity, taming the manifold and corralling take place through categories of the understanding and concepts. It is also a space of decision and choice for what Nietzsche in a lengthy passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, quoted by Sloterdijk, calls smaller man. There is an ambiguity here in Sloterdijk's account and for a moment it is not clear whether he favours taming or opposes it? Following the Cynics, one might contend that domesticity itself has surrendered man to patterns of choice and power that are devoid of humanity and thus open to the loss of all initiative. Rather than resolve this issue, Sloterdijk calls the domestication issue the "great unthinkable" (p. 23) and yet he continually associates domestication with dullness and lack. Sloterdijk calls the sciences taming devices for knowledge and in relation to this issue connects "a collaboration of ethics and genetics." (p. 22) "a pet-like accommodation" (p. 23) which returns us to an indistinguishable state.

The link between taming and toothlessness continues to manifest itself through Sloterdijk's analysis and there are occasional polemical swipes at Christianity but the key emphasis Sloterdijk makes is that there are self-breeders and those who are bred by others (p. 23). In a technological age, there will be more active breeders than bred and the selection process will become more broadly available and thus require regulation by a codex of some kind.

Sloterdijk makes the rather uncontentious claim that bestialization is becoming ever more prevalent in the new media. He is equivocal on the question of prenatal selection or "genetic reform" (p. 24), which he nevertheless accepts as an inevitable feature of our time. It is clear that his preference for self-breeding over passive breeding tips the balance in favour of germline modification wherever appropriate even though the puzzle remains as to how prenatal breeding could ever be considered self-breeding. If I decide the pattern for the genetic make-up of my offspring, how free are they to be self-breeders?

The upshot of this analysis does not resolve the tension between taming as an ontological attitude and the issue of care which continues to unfold ambiguously in

Sloterdijk's argument for anthropo-technological enhancement. On the one hand, enhancement might lead to more elaborate patterns of care through the provision of computer-aided comforts and the establishment of biotechnological aids which steadily remove biological vulnerability from the rich and well-minded population; on the other hand, it might give rise to general release from inhibition in genetic experimentation on the grounds that the human species is ready to move on to a "higher" form of being. In neither case, however, does Heideggerian "care" appear as a central motif. Sloterdijk prefers to reach back instead to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and the satirical comment about man getting smaller (p. 21). Now coming to the fore is Nietzsche's criticism of "educational institutions" for their role in taming people and making them "smaller". Schools, on this reading, become stifling places, places of dullness, places designed to thwart initiative and creativity in order both to "tame the savage beast" which may ironically result in the release of the energies of the powerful and privileged in the direction of self-taming. It would seem likely therefore that education and biotechnological enhancement go hand in hand.

Educational Queries

The puzzle is that rather than taking up the ethic of care as a way of expressing human originality and responsibility for the world and its environment, Sloterdijk describes moderns primarily as "profitable breeders" (p. 22) who use as their primary tools a lattice texture of educating, reading and taming. Humanistic culture is viewed as a kind of taming in a negative sense, where people put themselves in parks, zoos, cities, space stations and domestication structures so that the best will emerge as those who dominate the flock. As evidence of this new taming spirit, Sloterdijk invokes that curious Platonic dialogue, the *Statesman*, which sets the tone and corroborates, by means of the Stranger's tale, ideas about the plasticity of the human. The Stranger speaks about a metabolism's growth and its reverse in another universe where old beings become young again and return to an amorphous mass. This Stranger is Sloterdijk's ally because he argues for a reversible view of human nature, the view that power by necessity makes things unequal, and that stability will only follow when some superior types ("new, idealized, exemplary individuals" (p. 25)) are invented to keep the herd in order:

> What Plato puts in the mouth of the Stranger is the program of a humanistic society that is embodied in a single full-humanist, the lord of royal shepherding (p. 26).

Sloterdijk dark view of education may have slipped immediately into equating humanism with *über*-humanism (p. 26) as the full impact of Hobbes begins to take hold on his analysis. Not only will scholars of Plato be somewhat miffed at the presentation of their Greek thinker as a supporter of mutant realities rather than the avowed passifist of the *Seventh Letter* but humanists of a more modern sort, including Heidegger, would equally be miffed at the Hobbesian assumptions behind Sloterdijk's analysis. Even a statement like "the wise have been left as the only worthy shepherds and breeders" (p. 27) is one liable to raise hackles. And it did.

In sum, the Roman humanist discourse with its stress on the emotions and its advice on the governance of empire could never be contained within the reinterpreted

humanism of Heidegger's man of letters or the biotechnologically enhanced humanism of Sloterdijk's account. The question of a human dimension has once again arisen in the context of machine interfaces and computer-aided learning. It seems more plausible to suggest that the absorption of energy, exchanged through dusty letters of the past, about which Sloterdijk complains, says more to educators than the editing of genes. And yet he could claim that he only wanted to provoke debate and that he was not taking up any radical position. But this response seems strangely disingenuous since others at the Elmau meeting understood that he supported a number of contentious positions:

- That he favoured enhancement technologies in non-therapeutic circumstances and consequently in educational contexts and that he was advocating a kind of positive eugenics (to further enhance the healthy). Furthermore it was clear that he would argue in favour of genetic enhancement at the germline level. This would suggest that Sloterdijk not only supported the transhuman but also the posthuman, meaning the experimentation with the human embryo with a view to creating new (post)human species.
- That man was not born in the image of God (i.e., against the Judeo-Christian tradition) but was a beast in Hobbes's sense, only separated from barbarism by education and particularly the literacy involved in the communication by letter of literate friends and an elitism that could not be denied. This would seem to locate Sloterdijk's philosophy of education in the context of a perpetually augmented materialist sphere of human being.
- That education is generally paradoxical and that teachers are involved in taming the wild beast but in doing so it is hard to see how creativity can be nurtured in any way other than in the enhancement of the power of the tamer. The only creative solution to the taming mechanism is a kind of self-taming and this brings Sloterdijk closer to Sartre than to Heidegger.
- That the humility of Heidegger's ethic of care is denied as bogus and that there is no option outside an ethic of mastery.

Habermas voiced one worrying feature in this debate for education when he noted that liberal eugenicists base their arguments on the claim that there is "no particular difference between eugenics and education" (Habermas, 2003, p. 49). It is now clear that he had Sloterdijk in mind. Many of those attending the Elmau Conference interpreted Sloterdijk's position as support for routine transhuman enhancement. As a result, the augmentation value of any education would be less closely linked to static models of the human and more closely identified with the medical enhancement possibilities of the human species, including improvements in memory, eyesight, speed of reaction, application to work, concentration levels and various other abilities that are now also subject to genetic experimentation. These are the ways that "royal shepherds" will in the future govern the tamed masses.

Considering the possibility of these transhuman effects, Arenas suggests that whoever jumps first into positive eugenics will have taken a Promethean step because he will have offered to humankind not fire but a whole new way of being human. And if this happens, humanist education will give way to many individualized ways of being human without any common measure or the moral parameters of a civilized human ideal. Why is this state of affairs relevant to education, the reader might ask?

First, technology as interface has increased its grip on teaching and learning over the past number of decades. Commentators differ, however, on the location of educators on this slippery slope, how steep the slope is and where the slope will end. Dahlin offers a three-part grid, which it might be helpful to consider (Dahlin, 2012). First there is the current incorporation of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the classroom. As evident in resources for teaching and testing, multimedia resources that colour classroom interactions are almost universally welcomed (although there are some noteworthy exceptions) (For a contrary view, see Bowen, 2012). These new resources are welcomed by teachers who are hard pressed to keep the attention of children well used to the distractions of multi-media devices at home. In general one could characterize these new resources in terms of mainstream Enlightenment beliefs in human advancement.

In a second step, forms of interface actually change the nature of the interface and turn the interface into a separable object in the world. As an example, the simple calculator generates a set of knowledge strategies, which learners must master, quite independently of their ability to do simple arithmetic calculations. There is also a joke about the driver who hit the wrong destination on his GPS and ended up several hundred miles away from where he intended to go. The dependency on interface devices is a feature of a "transhuman" state of mind, which is probably not an advance on our cave man ancestors since it has replaced a sensory relation to the environment with a sensory relation to the interface. And yet it continues the Enlightenment view that science and technology is inerrantly linked to advances in human achievement. The transhuman is therefore indicative of forms of machine-supported intelligence which have the potential to make humans both more intelligent and more stupid. Ethically, there is also a potential for dulling the human sense or converting raw, sensory experience into simulation experience. Paul Virilio has developed clear reflections on the link between the game-console behaviours of fighter pilots operating from a bunker beneath the Nevada desert and the drone aircraft they control in Iraq, presenting the very transhuman prospect of "clean wars"(See Der Derian, 1998). The preparation of these ethically transhuman mental states is already widespread among users of current interface technologies. An argument can be made that teachers are unwittingly enhancing the normativity of screen-interface relations with the world at large.

A third step, and one considerably further down the slippery slope, is the transformation of the human brain and nervous system by means of neurological implants, thus transforming humans into cyborgs or cybernetic organisms. This moves runs parallel to pharmaceutical alterations in order to improve study performance. Various experiments are currently funded (by the American military) to achieve this link, as it offers those who have lost the use of limbs to walk fluently again. While no one denies the benefit of such a use of a "post-human" technology to help the paralysed, it is all too likely that this new technology (when it becomes available) will be used by the rich to further enhance the wealthy and the healthy and the initial clarity about the benefit of such research will disappear. Current editing of the DNA, which has now become more straightforward, will soon modify the human genome and this will precipitate a new age of the post-human with unforeseeable results.

Whether we find ourselves at step one, two or three of the slippery slope, the role of

the human body in learning is now becoming a central issue in the philosophy of education. At the core of this central issue is the problem of enhancement. Most commentators recognize that the difference between enhancement as therapy and non-medical enhancement will not survive close scrutiny. Although there may be logical reasons for this ambiguity, there are also considerable social pressures to allow and even promote an enhanced view of the human species. Apart from exaggerated accounts such as that of the *Worldwide Transhumanist Association*, for instance, claims that humans should avail of every possible technological means to enhance cognitive or emotional capacity gathers momentum on a weekly basis. Current uses of Ritalin in schools is evidence of a general appetite for chemical enhancement among the population at large. It only remains to be seen what will happen if parents are able to avail of gene editing features to enhance their children's prospects in competitive school environments. Is it not time for philosophers of education to return to an examination of the human and to forge new links between what is now appearing as the human and education as we know it?

A final word. The transhuman challenge to education centres on the way gaps prevail over continuity. A tolerance for gaps in knowledge, attitude and values, to be filled in by relevant technical apparatus, typifies the transhuman challenge to education. This tolerance displaces the element lying at the heart of *humanitas*, not letter writing or literacy per se, but rather the phenomenon of memory. Ironically it is by means of memory that both animals and humans relate and find a common basis for learning, as Aristotle quite rightly noted (*Meta* 1,1). In our postmodern world, however, it is memory that is slowly being dismantled by the technologies that compete to make it redundant. It is memory that is being replaced by the vivid imaginings of a brave new world.

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Notes

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[2] I am obliged to the translation offered in David Farrell Krell's 1977 collection *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* reprinted by Harper in 2008 with a new forward by Taylor Carman.

[3] SLOTERDIJK, P. 2009. Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the Letter on Humanism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27**,** 12-28.