



I could not resist the attraction of this title and the reputation of the Viennese philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann. [Education as Provocation](#) is a comprehensive attempt to oppose the messianic implementation of skill acquisition and the consequent lack of substance in European educational curricula and to argue for a normative European canon of education in the humanistic tradition of the 19th century.

KPL starts with a somewhat cynical analysis that education has taken on the role of a religion in postmodern, atheist societies and unites all promises of salvation. This analysis is to be agreed with and nothing essential to add, except perhaps that the cause of this change in roles is to be found in competitive capitalism of so-called knowledge economies, and possibly not religion education but, as the historian Harari says, capitalism itself to religion, and education has become one of its rituals.

But here, in the first chapter, there is a deficiency in the tractatus philosophicus, which runs through the entire essay like a red thread. KPL is not even superficially proficient in the field of economics, at least not in this book, and thus fails to introduce an important aspect into the discourse on the significance and purpose of education within a society.

However, the author illuminates other essential aspects and opens up an important discussion with the question of whether and to what extent a person can change himself through education. This question is comprehensively discussed by KPL: *The term self-*

change can be assumed to mean three meanings.

- First, it is I who change his sense of identity, and this of his own free will: one could speak here of a self-education autonomy.

- Second, it is my self that is changed by education; this presupposes a substantial self that can be changed by an activating and controlling ego: education as self-search and self-realization.

- And thirdly, I do not just have to change myself or my self, I have to change my life par excellence. One could call this the Rilke-Sloterdijk requirement profile, which supposes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a radical cut in a way of life: education as a caesura.

I have enjoyed subsequent discourse, as KPL makes it extremely readable with his own education, but I miss especially when it comes to the understanding or the existence of the self, psychological and neurological findings of the last 20 years. Recent findings of consciousness research as well as epistemological neurology can not be replaced purely by philosophical debates of the past centuries.

As a citizen of the world, I also deeply resent that KPL is committed to a European educational canon. He thus gives away that he is one of those thinkers who, although they have broadened their horizons beyond their own ancestral society, are not yet ready endorse genuine cosmopolitanism. The reason for this widespread opinion in Europe may be found in the contemporary corrosion of the European idea and identity felt by those living there.

Only a few months ago I read an editorial by the chief editor of the Munich philosophy magazine Hohe Luft. Thomas Vasek argued eloquently for an unconditional basic income; however, he sought a rejuvenation for the idea of a common Europe, just as Liessmann advocates the strengthening and revival of this construct through a normative canon of education.

If one lives like I me far away from the society of origin in a completely foreign culture, the term foreign changes meaning over time and one day one arrives at the conclusion that only this planet remains as homeland and identity becomes a concept of permanent teleological change. In the sense of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, I am at home, where I see meaning and take the responsibility to work towards the fulfillment of this meaning.

Surely, this individual development of meaning alone does not create a cultural system. However, every mindful citizen must realize that in view of the sixth mass extermination announced by thousands of scientists, a common, normative canon of education must be purposeful in learning survival strategies, moderate consumption, respectful use of resources, etc., but not primarily in the recitation of Goethe, Hugo, and Dante. If learning is in this era about our and our children's survival, I allow myself to argue without further

substantiation for a normative curriculum geared towards sustainable living and a complimentary curriculum for e.g. literary classics.

In the second part of this book, KPL's comments on the value of the human hand and his clear respect for their work has delighted me. In my humble opinion, he did not only fail to interpret Goethe's verse from Faust II (*"to complete an undertaking of a thousand hands, only a single spirit it takes"*) correctly for his final examinations, but he has rightly recognized that the hand plays a prominent role in the evolution of man. *The upright walk allowed the development of the front limbs to a gripping hand, which could now take on a variety of tasks.*

Unfortunately, unlike I would have expected, KPL does not advocate for dual training, i.e. that trains both manual and intellectual skills, and through this duality can bring both abilities to new heights, although he quotes anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan: *it would not be particularly important to mention that the importance of the hand diminishes, if this activity were not closely related to the balance of brain regions associated with it. Being unable to think with his hands means losing part of his normal and phylogenetic human thinking.*

Instead, KPL continues to emphasize humanist literature as an essential vehicle for education and thus self-transformation. Thus, he propagates that education system which is closest to him and in which he himself was able to succeed above average. But what about the innumerable types of learning that can be shaken up in such a - well-meant - normative humanism and can not develop their talents?

I remember one of my classmates, who spent eight years in our grammar school suffering in all languages, especially German, but despite his adversities passed his final examination and eight years later, started a postdoctoral research position at the ETH Zurich in bioinformatics. Neither Homer, nor Seneca, neither Kant nor Rilke have ever touched this colleague and I doubt that self-transformation was less harmful to him through a normative humanistic education canon than the Chinese STEM focus would have been on a young Liessmann.

In the last part, KPL loses the reader interested in education and slides into the lowlands of politics without really treating the topic of education any further. It almost feels like 70 more pages were required by the publisher to achieve a publish-able length of manuscript. It may also be that the title education as provocation refers less to a general educational canon than to the personal education of the author, who revolts at the end of his career against politics and nostalgically revives his own youth of Viennese Actionism.

Just on the last two pages, KPL brings home the title subject, by citing an eighteenth-



century commentary that is indeed fitting to the revival of 21st century nationalism: *an educated nation knows no other danger in itself as the excess of its national happiness*. Liessmann concludes by affirming the need for a new enlightenment, but unfortunately offers no substantial content therefore. Nonetheless, he delivers a book worth reading, if only to rub yourself against its thoughts like I did myself.

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This is a superficially checked google translation of the original German review on darkmatteressay.org