

10. Towards a Plastic Starting Point: Rethinking Ethical-Political Education with Catherine Malabou

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Abstract

Sometime around 500 BCE, Heraclitus is supposed to have said that it is impossible to step in the same river twice (Plato, 1997, p. 120; Graham, 2015). Since then, the problem of being and change has never left Western philosophy. Evidently important in and to education, change continues to be an important field of inquiry. In this text, I approach the concept of change by way of an examination of Catherine Malabou's philosophy of plasticity. I revisit what I identify as three main moments in her philosophy: Her re-elaboration of Hegelian time and dialectics as the process through which change happens; the open potentiality of the moment as she finds it in Heidegger; and change as driven by, and dependent on, concepts and schematization as she finds it implied in Derrida. By setting change at the center for what might be called her post-post-structural, materialist, yet non-deterministic ontology, Malabou's three moments could open up for a rethinking of the changeable character of the Nordic model, as well as the character of ethical-political education.

Keywords

Change, ontology, Catherine Malabou, plasticity, Ethical-political education

Does ontology matter for ethical-political education?

The title of this book – “Rethinking Ethical-Political Education” – situates it in time and space as well as in a certain theme: We are invited to (re)think ethical-political education as a spatio-temporal phenomenon. If we take this invitation seriously we might have to accept that the various forms of ethical-political education¹ can and perhaps should be rethought; perhaps even that such a rethinking is inevitable. We might also be reminded that *rethinking* something suggests that it is time to re-engage with familiar problems but in new ways, or in other words, re-situating the exploration of an old problem in a new time. What we are saying seems to be that there is a tripartite complicity between time, change, and continuity. In this text, I have chosen to focus on change. One reason is that education in many respects purports to produce change in the student in some way, either by eliciting it from her, by supervising change that will inevitably occur, or by causing change in some way. Another is that the projected future changes of the society is often a part of the political project involved in the institution of education. A third is that both ethics, politics, and education as institutions and practices all

¹ As Torill Strand mentions in her introduction, ethical-political education has worn many guises, and still does. Some of them go by the name of *paideia*, *Bildung*, or progressive (democratic) education.

can be thought of as subject to and product of the changes that time and continuity allow and deny, respectively.

The context of this book is “the Nordic model”. According to Ari Antikainen (2006), an important trait of this model is the focus on lifelong learning. Antikainen explains the Nordic model as based on the belief that good education and schooling takes into account both national and current needs, and international and (so far unknown) future needs. Central to the Nordic model is the assumption that change will happen, both in the student, their relations; national and international conditions and relations; and in the interrelations between them all (Antikainen, 2006).

How can we think this change? We can say with Jacques Derrida that the meaning of ‘change’ is constantly changing. As he argues in “Structure, sign and play”, even the concept ‘structure’ is unstably structured. Throughout the history of the concept, which is as long as philosophy’s, the concept has undergone constant transformation. This leads Derrida to suggest that concepts have no solid or eternal ‘center’, but that they are organized loosely around a space that allows the concept to remain, yet change (2001, p. 351ff). Derrida thus presents us with the job of examining or rethinking the concepts that we rely on. Torill Strand, in her introduction to this book, argues that the Nordic model is one such concept. The Nordic model has somewhat definable ‘contours’: education has potential to solve societal issues and should be for everyone. The ‘center’, however: the details and concretizations of the concept, is subject to continual debate, or in other words, *change*.

My intention here is therefore to present the problem of change as an ontological concept in the context of ethical-political education. This does not entail neither asking *the* question (or even *a* question) of ontology and attempt to bring about an answer, but rather to elaborate how the concept itself might be formulated. Presenting the problem of change in this way might be an intervention for a rethought conception of ethical-political education. The need for such a rethinking is found most fundamentally in the realization that the social and environmental issues we are facing today are, by the simple but inexorable force of time’s passing, not the same as anything we have encountered. A more specific concern is expressed in Ole Andreas Kvamme’s chapter in this book: The impending force and peril of climate change. Carol Taylor’s chapter argues that we have entered a “posthuman” period, where it is no longer possible to uphold the idea of the human as the unbound controller and exploiter of the world’s resources. The natural sciences have shown us just how complex and fuzzy the relationship and interplay between individual and environment is, and it seems likely that this now presumably outdated idea is closely tied to the myopic and self-centered imperialist past of the Western world.

The present text is structured around three main “moments”. These moments are points in Malabou’s authorship where she elaborates what I identify as ideas which are intertwined but concern different things. I am using the temporal sense of the word “moment” deliberately because I identify them as points where Malabou’s oeuvre itself can be read as transitions from the predicative to the speculative perspective. We will see in the first moment that the concept plasticity is introduced and its relation to time and dialectics are revealed; in the second that the openness and undecidedness that plasticity represents is thought as the perpetual origin of essence; in the third that plasticity understands itself as a mode of thinking capable of causing change, even to change itself so as to make itself obsolete.

Having thus already in the proper Hegelian fashion paved the way for a transition from the predicative to the speculative, let us go into the three moments in further detail.

The Three Moments

In the first moment, I explore Malabou's reading of Hegel as it is presented in her work *The Future of Hegel* (Malabou, 1996, 2005). It is centered around three concepts: Plasticity, temporality, and dialectics. In this work, Malabou suggests a reading of Hegel that's different from the prevalent French reception at the time, the interpretations offered by Kojève and Koyré. In their readings, inspired by Heidegger, Hegel's concept of time is seen simply as an expression of what Heidegger called "vulgar time", that is, the simple linear sequence of "nows" with no possibility for deviation. In that sense, time is nothing but a realization of what must come, and there is no room for the unexpected or freedom or agency.

Malabou's reshaping of Hegel's concept of time is constructed around the concept *plasticity*, a concept designating the productive space between total rigidity and total dissolution. I find that Malabou's reading produces at least two important results. The first is a contemporizing of Hegel, interpreting him as a thinker with a dialectical yet non-determinist concept of time and futurity. This includes re-reading Hegel in dialog with Heidegger and Derrida. Her engagement with Hegel opens up for a non-transcendental, yet non-deterministic ontology. In this ontology, change and the historicization of the moment happen not thanks to an organizing principle outside the System, but as a result of the tension between essence and accident within. In this perspective, the question of the wholly Other "is always in fact a question about an origin that could have been wholly otherwise"; a question which in Malabou's Hegel is answered by a reference to the necessary and "inherent complicity" between that which is and that which could have been (Malabou, 2005, pp. 163-164).

This complicity, to Malabou, reveals the dialectic as the original ontological principle of change: "Everything begins in the same moment, where the becoming essential of the accident and the becoming accidental of essence mutually imply one another. There is nothing beforehand. The dialectic is primordial, indeed, it is the origin" (Malabou, 2005, p. 164). Already here we can discern the beginning of an ontology in which change can be seen as a central element. Her 2004 book *What Should We Do With Our Brain* (English translation published in 2008) approaches the phenomenon *brain plasticity* and argues that the brain is plastic in precisely this dialectical and primordially originary fashion. Although she mentions neural plasticity almost 20 years prior in *The Future of Hegel*, *What Should We Do With Our Brain* marks what could perhaps be called her "neurological turn", refining a critical and productive engagement with the natural sciences (mainly cellular biology and neuroscience) from the angle of Continental philosophy. This turn allows her to bring Continental philosophy into a new era and read neurology as a science of change, self-production, accident, and freedom, instead of a discourse that blocks conversation (Malabou, 2004b, 2008). But in keeping with the original problem of this text, I will not go further into this strand of her thinking but rather concentrate the first moment on her reshaping of Hegel's concept of time and plasticity. The reader should, however, keep in mind that plasticity as it will be understood after the neurological turn takes it upon itself to both describe change as I will be discussing it in this text – in primarily metaphysical terms – and as the gradual (self-)development, deposition, and destruction of the body. Reading the present text in this speculative way might foreshadow a potentially transformative perspective on both ethics, politics, and education.

A second result is the introduction of plasticity as a novel approach to theory and theorizing. This approach is connected to the development of metaphysics as Malabou finds it in Hegel: By doing philosophy, the philosopher changes and influences the course and form of philosophy itself (Malabou, 2005, p. 131ff). It is this feature primarily that we will discuss in the latter two moments of this text.

In the second moment, we will be looking at change as the moment of perpetual origin as Malabou finds it in Heidegger. It's his three terms *Wandel* (change), *Wandlung* (transformation) and *Verwandlung* (metamorphosis) which she sees as a hitherto undiscovered common thread in Heidegger's discussion of change.

The third moment explores Malabou's relationship with and inheritance from Derrida, in seeing the concept plasticity as capable of describing a general tendency in science and society, as well as shaping it at the same time. In this part, she adopts, changes and moves beyond Derrida's concept *writing*. Whereas Derrida argues that the philosopher's job is to describe what's going on and that change will inevitably come, Malabou argues that the philosopher is already provoking change by describing what's going on. Malabou thus challenges one of the main tenets of deconstruction: Even if the text deconstructs itself, the very act of deconstructive analysis is simultaneously a cause of change. In light of this, the concept plasticity – paradoxically, as it functions as an ontological principle – itself must be seen as plastic in the sense that it, too, will be changed and surpassed one day.

Moment I: Hegel

Catherine Malabou's first book, *L'Avenir de Hegel* (later translated to *The Future of Hegel*) is a radical re-reading of Hegel. It was written as an answer to what was the current French media-tions: Koyré's and Kojève's. Both had read Heidegger and argue that Hegel's conception of time was merely something "to be passed by", and, consequently, that he could not be thought as a thinker of future and futurity. As Hegel's "Absolute Knowledge" in their interpretation was nothing more than the end point of history and the *Phenomenology* simply a linear developmental narrative, they argued that he left no possibility for variation during the course of the development of Absolute Knowledge. In this perspective, history and time is seen to be locked to a one-dimensional teleological line. What is lost in the process, in Malabou's view, is the energy of the negative. In order to reclaim the negative and consequently also the dialectic, Malabou re-reads Hegel from an ingenious perspective: *plasticity* (Malabou, 1996, 2005).

Malabou observes that Hegel already uses the concept of plasticity in a way that highlights its negative energy. In the *Aesthetics*, plasticity is used to describe the "plastic arts" such as sculpting. The sculptor's work is to extract the essence of the sculpture from the slab of marble, and by extension Hegel applies the word "plastic individuals" to persons from Greek mythology who have grown up to become free, substantial, independent, self-made; essentially "what they were and wanted to be". Yet in spite of these characteristics, their becoming must also be understood as a mediation between what the Cosmos supposed that they become and what they actually became. Malabou thus sees this as a "middle term" between plasticity as the passive reception of form by the marble and the active and self-encompassing concept *philosophical plasticity*. The latter has two forms as Malabou reads it. First, it represents the act of philosophizing in that the philosopher engages with philosophical matter as it is presented to her, and causes it to change by the very act of doing philosophy. In dialectical terms, the philosopher is in a way the locus and origin of the negation and sublation of philosophy. Second, philosophical plasticity is a way of conceiving philosophy's form and "rhythm in which the speculative content is unfolded and presented" (Malabou, 2005, pp. 9-10). Hegel's plasticity is thus to be understood as a concept which captures several different but not competing aspects: the reception of form like the marble receives its new form from its sculptor; the (albeit limited) capacity of the subject to self-form; and the dialectical dynamics of thinking.

Martin Heidegger is the one who gets to represent Hegel's critics in Malabou's book. Malabou's interest in Hegel is motivated precisely by the French interpretation of Hegel as a necessary, sequential

progression towards some predefined future, thus effectively negating the very concept of future in the process. How can we reconcile the fact that Hegel is something like the foundation of all of the western philosophical tradition and his concept of time being read as having no future? Malabou's re-reading takes Hegel's philosophical behest that one should "philosophize in one's idiom", effectively softening and opening up Hegelian speculative conceptuality by placing two interlinked concepts together: *plasticity* and *voir venir*.

Plasticity is the *mode* which controls the relation between time and the future, she writes – something I understand to mean that plasticity is the process or dynamic by which time and the future are turned into multi-dimensional and variable units with a constant opening to change and accident. She writes, «Indeed, to posit the future as 'plasticity' amounts to displacing the established definition of the future as a moment of time» (Malabou, 2005, p. 5). In other words, the future is *not* defined as just another time like the others, but rather something which is completely open. Drawing this contrast between "the future" and "a moment of time" means that the future is conceptually different from moments of time. Malabou suggests also that time is dialectical in the sense that it historicizes itself by turning future into the now, then to the past.

This opening to the unexpected, but which is still dependent on what went before, Malabou calls *voir venir*, translated into «to see (what is) coming». As the English translation suggests, this French idiom is used to convey that something will happen ("to see what is coming") and what happens won't necessarily be a surprise, but it might be ("to see coming"). Seeing something coming is what you do when you're not actually certain that's what's coming, while "to see what is coming" is a matter-of-factly observation, recalling Derrida's famous separation of *futur* as the programmed, foreseeable future and *avenir* as the future which can't be predicted. In the same vein, *voir venir* is a principle which is able to capture the open variation that the future represents. Whereas the past is what establishes the premises of the moment, the moment is a locus where time historicizes itself by allowing one of several possible futures to turn into the now, then to the past.

Plasticity is in this way an ontological principle based on a certain concept of temporality, as plasticity is defined *as* future, or «the excess of the future over the future» (Malabou, 2005, p. 5) – the possible variation of the suggested future. But this variation is not infinite. Malabou explores how Hegel uses the term and discovers a fundamental duality in the concept: giving shape and receiving shape. This tension is central to Hegelian dialectics, where tension, contradictions or negation is dissolved into sublation (*aufhebung*). For Malabou, dialectics is a source of energy in a system which can't receive anything from the outside. Dialectics itself she sees as plastic because it constantly «makes links between the opposing moments of total immobility and vacuity, and then links both in the vitality of the whole, a whole which, reconciling these two extremes, is itself the union of resistance and fluidity» (Malabou, 2005, p. 12).

This implies an explicit re-elaboration of the concept of *form*. Malabou sees the form as a plastic unit, contrary to the thought of form as the contour of matter. As Tracy Colony points out, Malabou «envisions form itself as a site of self-dissolution and re-generation: 'Between the emergence and the annihilation of form, plasticity carries, as its own possibility, self-engendering and self-destruction'» (Malabou, 2005, p. 193, quoted in Colony, 2015, p. 104). Form, in this way, becomes its own alterity, where the form of the past is different from the form of the now. Malabou writes, «Form is the metamorphizable but immovable barrier of thought» (Malabou, 2009, p. 49) – thinking in forms is unavoidable, and is therefore a concept which captures both *the human* and *the world*. Malabou suggests

that plasticity is a human trait, but also that the human is what understands the human. As we shall see later in this text, Malabou suggests that plasticity is a concept which can be used about human activity as such – and plasticity is dependent on a concept of form.

Through this plastic re-reading of Hegel, Malabou wishes to be able to open up to a Hegelian ontology which allows us – and Hegel – a relatively open future. And one of the motivations for this work was, as we recall, Heidegger's critique of Hegel's narrow concept of time.

Moment II: Heidegger

In a later book, Malabou writes that the reader of *The Future of Hegel* couldn't know whether the book was a reading of the development of Spirit or whether it was a discussion of the fundamental principles of the universe. She writes, «After reading *The Future of Hegel*, it is not clear whether plasticity is a strictly Hegelian notion or whether it is a wider hermeneutic instrument, a smuggler trafficking between dialectic, destruction, and deconstruction. The plasticity of *The Future of Hegel* therefore lies in wait for its own future» (Malabou, 2009, p. 22). What she does in her 2004 book *Le change Heidegger (The Heidegger Change)* (Malabou, 2004a, 2012) is therefore, first, to let Heidegger speak, and second, to connect the concept of plasticity to Being itself. The way she does this is by «interrogating the very concept(s) of change underlying the destruction and deconstruction of metaphysics» (Malabou, 2009, p. 26).

Malabou's reading of Heidegger, as it appears in *The Heidegger Change*, follows the same motive, approach and logic as her reading of Hegel. In the same way that she moulds the concept *plasticity* into the key for reading Hegel, she turns the concepts *Wandel* (change), *Wandlung* (transformation) and *Verwandlung* (metamorphosis) into the structuring concepts of Heidegger's philosophy. These concepts are “omnipresent in [Heidegger's] texts” (Malabou, 2012, p. 1), which to Malabou is both a reason why the triad has been repeatedly overlooked and why they are interesting to examine more closely. Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as a changing form becomes the starting point for Malabou's mediation, and she concludes that Heidegger's constant return to the idea of the primordial transformation first of all opens up for a new Heidegger, one whose infamous anti-semitic “Black Notebooks” are not the necessary result of his thinking (Malabou, 2012, p. 273ff). Second, Malabou's study presents a changed Heidegger whose philosophy allows her to claim that “ontology is nothing besides an economy” (Malabou, 2012, p. 270), and that it is the changeability of the form itself which is that “everything depends” on in terms of formulating an ontology and discussing the history and destiny of metaphysics. Malabou's approach is unique, Tracy Colony argues, because former readings of Heidegger have been structured around *ontological difference* and not the form's difference from itself (Colony, 2015, p. 105).

An example of this structure is Malabou's close reading of Heidegger's text «Plato's Doctrine of Truth». Malabou finds that Heidegger's reading of the allegory of the cave represents several types of change simultaneously. First, the allegory describes a change *in the prisoners*: «the change brought about *in* the soul of the prisoners by their *formation (paideia/Bildung)*». Second, it shows the change the allegory itself undergoes when it shows us how Plato changes the contents of the concept of *truth*. Thus the text is under two authorities simultaneously: Plato's and Heidegger's. Heidegger provides a new way of reading Plato, where the very change in the concept of truth is set front and centre (Malabou, 2012, p. 55). And we should of course also recognize that the text is now also under a third authority, namely Malabou's: By showing how Heidegger reads Plato, she uncovers one relation and adds her own. The implication is of course that the present author adds their own as well – and that the present reader does, too. Each reading adds a layer of thinking which is itself changed and

changes metaphysics. This (ex)change both constitutes what Malabou calls a fundamental economy, as well as indicates that change precedes form and is thus originary.

The idea of change as the primordial state of form implies that essence only come into being when change has already happened. «The fantastic» in Malabou's terminology is «the visibility of being granted by the latter's molting, the visibility of the molt of being through which being is revealed to be nothing—but its mutability» (Malabou, 2012, pp. 53-54). In other words, «the fantastic» is the state of becoming visible only after the form has consolidated as a phenomenon of the past. Essence then must be seen as something always already *past*.

In this perspective, metaphysics is also understood as a *plastic form*, because it changes as philosophy develops, and because it represents a history which changes direction but still remains consistent. And change will always be the beginning of thinking because it, too, can only be understood when it has become visible. Malabou explains this by marking the difference between the *image* and the *concept*:

The fantastic: the locus of originary (ex)change can only be invested with images. The concept falls forever short of it. Because ... the commencement of metaphysics—the setting into form and on its way of the first (ex)change—coincides with the vesting of the image as the inaugural event of being (exchanged): idea, essence, face, picture (Malabou, 2012, pp. 71-72).

Malabou's treatment of Heidegger is radical and turns metaphysics into an instance which is always already changing – something which paradoxically also puts Malabou's own ontology under debate, because plasticity as an ontological principle inevitably also becomes *fantastic*, that is, something which is only visible when it has become essence. In several texts (Malabou, 2007, 2009), Malabou underlines that plasticity remains nothing other than a *schème moteur* – motor scheme – which will have to be replaced when its role in metaphysics is over.

Moment III: Derrida

Malabou uses the term *schème moteur* in texts where she discusses Derrida's philosophy. Let us enter into one of these discussions to clarify the term. Examining *Of Grammatology*, Malabou argues that «grammatology» was never meant to be a «positive science» and never had the possibility of becoming one. First, she points to Derrida's own presentation of grammatology as an impossible science, and that *Of Grammatology* was an attempt to show precisely that. Second, Malabou claims that Derrida's concept *writing* constituted a paradox or logical weakness. She suggests – perhaps not surprisingly – to call this paradox *plastic writing* (Malabou, 2007).

This paradox surfaces in a discussion of how Derrida (re)defines the concept of writing. Whereas the «vulgar» or «narrow» definition of writing is the immediate, that is, the connection between sign and graphics, the «enlarged» definition is something that covers «the entire field of linguistic signs,' which is also to say, the entire field of human practice» (Malabou, 2007, p. 434).

Defining writing as nothing more than the transformation of spoken to written language, as a grammatology would do, would be to accept the idea that there is a natural connection between voice and sign (Malabou, 2007, p. 434) – but such a connection doesn't exist. Writing is therefore not radically different from other forms of human signage, such as spoken language. For Derrida, language and all

forms of human practice therefore must be on the same level of logic, and therefore, writing can no longer be seen as something radically new.

Instead of creating a new term, Derrida chooses to *enlarge* writing, because the narrow concept in itself represented a radical break with what was before. «It threatened the desire for living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning» (Derrida, 1998, quoted in Malabou, 2007). Thus no other concept can represent a greater break with the narrow concept than the enlarged one.

Malabou argues that the transition from «narrow» to «enlarged» writing reveals a paradox, because it forces new questions: What allowed this enlargement? Why did the concept allow itself to be enlarged? How can a philosopher change the meaning of a concept? And most importantly: *Can one understand the change of a concept from a different dynamic or logic than the language's own?*

These questions, Malabou argues, suggests a *different logic* than the one suggested by Derrida. She questions (and answers):

If it is true that writing comprises language in its totality, can one argue, given the extension of the meaning of writing, that the passage from the common signification to its original signification may also be ascribed to the work of writing? Or to the contrary, is it necessary to think that an original modifiability, not reducible to the single operation of writing, is initiated from the beginning as well? It is this modifiability that I call 'plasticity' (Malabou, 2007, p. 434. Emphasis in original).

Here, too, she suggests that the form – understood here as the concept *writing* – has a capacity for change which precedes the form – or concept – itself. «If this is true, then modification, the operation of enlarging the concept of writing, would escape the grammatological field: it would be impossible to produce, in the framework of the science of writing, the conditions of the possibility of the plastic re-elaboration of the concept of writing. *The expansion of the concept of writing is not necessarily, or not uniquely, a graphic gesture*» (Malabou, 2007, p. 435).

This is an important point for Malabou because Derrida elsewhere seems to explain changes in language as historical movements or the coming-to-light of always-already-there aspects of the text. Derrida famously claims that “*There is nothing outside of the text [Il n'y a pas de hors-texte]*”. This is because he understands language as relations of difference (différance with an ‘a’ in his terms) – a word is what it is only because it isn't what it's not. As no signifier has a necessary relation to its signified, the attempt to get to the original and originary signifier is futile. Everything is therefore bound in context, and so there can be nothing outside of it (Derrida, 1998, p. 158). Since a signifier has a necessarily arbitrary relation to the signified, and its meaning is dependent on the signifier's relation to other signifiers, meaning is consistently delayed and deferred. This delay and deference, which Derrida sees as the non-centered center of the structure, is what he calls the *supplement*.

To Derrida, the supplement both *adds to* and *replaces* what it is meant to supplement. To Rousseau's claim that writing is nothing more than a supplement to speech, Derrida answers that «[t]he supple-

ment adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence» (Derrida, 1998, p. 144. Emphasis in original). But because the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, this presence can't be positive, but rather, the accumulated presence of another signifier. And so we have come only so far as to add another supplement to the chain and no closer to discerning the positive meaning of the sign, conceding that the supplement is both an addition and replacement. On the one hand, the supplement is thought to add to and enrich the original sign, thereby also increasing its presence. On the other, the supplement is dependent on and refers to the original sign, and this relation simultaneously constitutes a replacement. If writing is a supplement to speech, it means that writing adds to speech by producing speech where and when there is none. Us reading Derrida is an example of this. But by the same gesture, inherent in the delay of the sign, writing simultaneously replaces speech because it takes the place of speech where and when there is none: "It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence" (Derrida, 1998, p. 145).

To Derrida, this continuous chain of supplements is a feature not only of writing, but of language and thought itself. He writes,

what one calls the real life of these existences of «flesh and bone,» beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the «real» supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity (Derrida, 1998, p. 159).

Moving not to infinity but one step further: the act of reading a text is also captured inside this network of difference and chain of supplements. It is in fact not possible neither to avoid discovering tensions like the one present in the word *supplement*, nor to force the discovery: "In the deconstruction ... one does not make a choice" (Derrida, 1998, p. 62).

Malabou disagrees that there is no choice to be made and argues that writing as a concept wouldn't have been enlarged unless Derrida was there to do the job. What Derrida does when he enlarges *writing*, according to Malabou, is transforming it into a *schème moteur*, or in other words:

an encounter of a pure image, that is, of a concept—here arche-writing—, or difference—with an existent real, given to intuition ... [it] is a kind of tool capable of appropriating the largest quantity of energy and information from the text of an epoch ... To summarize, the 'enlarged' meaning of writing is at once intuitively given and conceptually constructed (Malabou, 2007, p. 437).

A *schème moteur* is in other words a concept capable of meeting and absorbing the intuitively given, in other words a concept capturing the spirit of the times. The reason why these *schème moteurs* arise is that thinking functions as a «schematizing process». In the same way that *the fantastic* describes the coming into vision only after change has happened, thinking is a synthesis of the intuitively given and

the conceptually constructed. We can only understand it after it *has* changed and thus stands out for us (Malabou, 2007, pp. 437-438).

And, Malabou says, what stands out for us *now* is a turn *from* writing as a *schème moteur*, like Derrida described it in 1967, *to* plasticity as the replacement. In genetics, the metaphor of the code is weakened. In neurobiology, *formation, transformation* and *reshaping* has become more important than the *trace*. In cybernetics, the program is «no longer even the master word». Everywhere around us, the graphic is being replaced by the plastic (Malabou, 2007, pp. 437-438).

If plasticity is the schema of our time, then logically it would follow that it too would have to make way for what comes after. Malabou's elaboration of the concept is, as she says, «tributary to a historical understanding and thus destined to be transformed, modified and changed. In this sense, the present explanation on the basis of plasticity is not definitive. Plasticity, like writing, is only a supplement» (Malabou, 2007, p. 441). If change is at the heart of ontology, then what will be revealed as the essence of our thinking today and what twists and turns it will take from here on, remains to be seen.

What Changes?

The Hegelian, Heideggerian and Derridean moments in Malabou's philosophy paint one portion of the picture of *plasticity* as an ontological principle. Its importance is found in its upheaval of the concept of change, which could have conceptual repercussions for the whole idea of ethical-political education. As the Nordic model incorporates an idea of ongoing change, the way change is construed should have consequences for how ethical-political education within the Nordic model is thought. I will outline two aspects where this might come into play: the change that a concept undergoes, and change as that which ethical-political education in the Nordic model might facilitate or produce.

Before I describe these two aspects, there are two facets to plasticity that should be emphasized. One is plasticity's incorporation of concepts into the thinking of forms, and the other is plasticity's implicit relationality: if form receives and donates form, *every* form receives and donates form to *every* form.

The first aspect is that the concept "the Nordic model" itself is a changing form. As Alfred Oftedal Telhaug points out, important features of the Nordic model have changed considerably (2006). Yet it remains recognizably itself – form has changed while remaining the same. Oftedal Telhaug's study (2006) as well as others (Antikainen, 2010) show that the Nordic model has changed in a neoliberal direction in recent history. In light of plasticity, we can think that this change is caused by political events and currents, but also that there is at every turn a possibility to change that trajectory. Oftedal Telhaug shows that there has been no lack of criticism towards the neoliberal trend in education, and discusses whether the Nordic model can still serve as an ideal of an educational system for prosperity and equality. He concludes by suggesting that it might (2006, p. 279). Whatever conclusion we reach in this discussion, plasticity urges us to put in the work to keep the good bits and reject the bad. If everything is changing anyway, we might as well influence what we can in the way that we can.

The second aspect is that ethical-political education within the Nordic model should incorporate form's propensity to change and emphasize the student's role in inflicting change. As a contrast, R. S. Peters' well-known metaphor of education as the "initiation" of the children who are "barbarians outside the gate" into the community of education (Peters, 2015, p. 104) can't hold in the paradigm of plasticity. The simple fact that the citadel realizes that there are barbarians outside the gate will change the citadel, not to mention the multitude of changes that will take place once the barbarians enter. Plasticity's relational character implies that everyone can contribute to the development of society. Ethical-political education should thus instill in the student not only that they can contribute, but that they are always already doing it. This responsibility should not be taken lightly.

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