

## Book Review

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**Adrian Costache, *Cum să nu predăm? Studii de didactica disciplinelor socio-umane*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2025, ISBN 978-606-37-2652-1**

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Adrian Costache's book provides the readers, first and foremost, with different approaches, which are philosophically inspired, to better understand what pedagogy and the act of teaching is all about. His book is divided into five chapters, each representing an autonomous study on ardent problems concerning education. His overall goal is not to offer the potential teachers reading the book with a full-fledged account of how teaching should unfold, but rather, he gives certain hints towards the way in which the pedagogical methods can be strengthened and improved.

For example, and as we are going to see, he discusses the dialogue between student and teacher, the role of metaphorical analogy, the limits of certain thematizations in education science, but also, an assessment of the notion of the Cartesian method in the process of teaching. His main interest involves the so-called humanities disciplines, wherein



major improvements are meant to take place, to facilitate the overall process of learning.

His approach is mainly hermeneutical, although here and there he inserts theories and notions pertaining to the phenomenological tradition in philosophy and to different approaches in pedagogy and didactics.

From the very commencement of his first study, Costache regards the question (and answer) between student and teacher to be paramount. He appeals to Gadamer's notion of dialogue between I and Thou to describe how the process of living spoken interaction between the two actors of the educational process unpacks. Costache appeals, though critically, to the method of active participation of the student to the course, and not to his or her passivity, since he acknowledges from the very beginning that the learner is not a recipient in which the teacher pours knowledge, but rather, the student and teacher participate via dialogue into the overall process of education, each contributing to this dialogical event. Costache traces the method of dialogue to the maieutic of Socrates, wherein certain convictions were challenged by Socrates to arrive at different conclusions and to a different view upon a certain aspect of the world.

Costache then tackles the phrase of dialogue with oneself, a saying very dear to Gadamer, to point how the pedagogical process can be carried further by the student even on his or her own (outside the class), bearing always in mind the questions which we address to ourselves and the tentative answers which we can provide at a certain moment in time.

The author of the book advances further by commenting certain passages from Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, in which the latter discusses the problem of question and questioning in general. Costache considers that Gadamer puts such emphasis on the act of questioning to establish the very horizon of the question (and answer) per se. The horizon of the question, and accordingly, of the answer cannot be too wide, nor too narrow, but rather the question should point to a certain tentative answer, which could consequently fuel the dialogical relation between student and teacher. The horizon of the question pertains to the situation wherein the overall situation of questioning and answer takes place; thus, the context of this communication is also addressed. Costache distinguishes between wrong questions, rhetorical ones and the so-called blind ones, out of which the rhetorical questions seem to provide a certain aid to the educational process sometimes. Once again, the horizon, which in Greek designated a certain landmark or even a limit, seems once again to represent the *sine qua non* of this interaction between student and teacher.

The second chapter of Costache's book investigates, in a Nietzschean tone, the uses and abuses of dialogue in education. He starts by recalling the active methods of participation in the classroom, alongside several definitions of dialogue

provided by different scholars. Soon after, the author considers that the standard thematizations of dialogue prove themselves insufficient, so he appeals to the thought of Jacques Derrida, to disentangle this web of diverse significations attached to the notion of dialogue. This living dialogue between I and Thou (student and teacher) involves not only the reality of the act of communication, but also its effectiveness. The horizon of dialogue seems once again to be the crucial point, if we were to think about the legitimacy of the to-and-fro game between question and answer. The horizon of dialogue cannot encompass all the possible answers to a question; thus, Costache provides us with Derrida's critique of Ferdinand de Saussure. By introducing the reader to the framework of thought pertaining to the father of deconstruction, Costache suggests that the Thou encountered in dialogue is always and already radically another Thou. What does this precisely mean? He emphasizes Derrida's notion of becoming-other, to suggest that there is a certain tension between I and Thou in this register of dialogue, since the theme of dialogue, i.e. its object is most of the time taken for granted. The play of "difference" involves somehow the trace of language. This means that every word spoken or uttered transposes us into another horizon of meaning and so on and so forth. This points to the idea that unless the to-and-fro game between question and answer is presented alongside its horizon, i.e. limitation, there exists an infinite number of directions in which the dialogue can be reoriented, this leading to the failure of grasping the essential traits of the question and answer.

As the author of the book considers, there exists an impossibility of an exchange between I and Thou, unless the abovementioned conditions are satisfied, namely taking into consideration the horizon of dialogue, and accordingly, the knowledge which the student has at a certain point in the process of education. Therefore, the issue of becoming-other represents a reality, but also a constant menace to the unfolding of dialogue. We could suggest that the problem of becoming-other is not a hindrance to the educational dialogue, but rather, in a Gadamerian manner, a mutual enrichment between I and Thou, which pertains to the receptivity and responsivity of the student insofar as the teacher initiates the dialogue.

Costache argues, towards the end of this chapter, that the "play of difference" involves a hindrance vis-à-vis the possibility of the coagulation of a certain theme or object of dialogue. Finally, the author expresses his gratitude towards the method of dialogue regarding the possibility that encountering this sort of radical alterity, namely the Thou, as someone who stands opposite of myself, alongside his or her worldview. This difference and distance between I and Thou represent not only the possibility of a fruitful interhuman encounter, but also the very emergence of existential questions concerning how the other thinks, feels, and conceives the world, in a different manner

from myself. Therefore, difference, and not difference this time seems to be the *via regia* through which we can bridge the distance between two subjectivities, enter into relation and take advantage of this perceptual mutual enrichment.

In the chapter dedicated to the metaphor and analogy, Costache starts with a very interesting reference to Gadamer. In his magnum opus entitled *Truth and Method*, Gadamer points towards an innate “metaforicity” of our language. After this reminder of the perennial feature of language, the author moves towards Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where we can find the relation between metaphor and analogy as explicitly posed for the first time. The natural formation of concepts does not obey Aristotle’s equation between the proximal genus and the specific difference, but rather it works by virtue of metaphor. Thereafter, the transfer of the name of one object to another is enabled by the usage of metaphors. Not only does the metaphor prove itself to be pivotal for semantics, but it plays a decisive role also in the psychology of memory. Hence, Costache, drawing on psychological sources, holds that the metaphor allows the passage of an informational content from short-term memory to long-term memory. He finally applies the function of metaphor and analogy to an example taken from a high-school lesson in economics.

The fourth chapter inquires into the notion of problematization, as it is applied in the classroom. The author states clearly from the very beginning that education is educating oneself, and moreover, it means educating oneself about something, i.e. a specific discipline of study. Costache advances in describing the difference between the method of inquiry of Descartes, for example, wherein the subject (of inquiry) was divided into several parts by means of analysis, to finally reach clear and distinct results or conclusions. He contrasts this method with other approaches to pedagogy in which the teacher leaves space open for the student’s discovery of his or her own. This discovery implies certain aspects of reality, to which we can arrive thanks to the feeling of wonder and surprise. Not only do wonder and surprise stimulate the learning process, but also, the two feelings raise the need for questioning further the world. Moreover, surprise and wonder might be the key elements through which a problematic situation can be resolved, providing impetus for the process of questioning and answering.

The author further considers, following the lines of the phenomenological sociology of Schutz and Luckmann, that reality or the world is composed of different finite provinces of meaning, which have their peculiar cognitive style, providing different significations depending on our attention to life and to the tensions of duration. For example, a painting might represent a piece of material, onto which colors are added, or it can be as well considered a work of art, or even a masterpiece. Thus, Schutz and Luckmann reject the idea that there could exist a “world in itself”, rather, the world is composed of these finite provinces of meaning, such as the

world of dreams, of art, fantasy, work, or play. They describe these provinces of meaning to finally reach the paramount reality, which can be described first and foremost as pertaining to the notion of common sense, i.e. the unquestioned reality of everyday life and of everyday face-to-face encounters with others. This would be the phenomenological notion of natural attitude. The paramount reality, i.e. the everyday world and life, is guided by a pragmatic motif, and it designates different facts pertaining to common sense, such as the way we do not question the existence of objects and others, but rather take them for granted, and act accordingly.

Summing up the conclusions of this very chapter, problematization should be applied according to the stock of knowledge (Schutz and Luckmann) possessed by the students at a certain moment in time. Problematization should also involve questioning, which is an actual problem and not some sort of pseudo-problem that could lead the student to confusion. Moreover, the problem should designate an aspect of life and of reality, i.e. a pragmatic motif for action and interaction. Finally, there should exist an actual and genuine interest in resolving the problem, this designating its urgency.

The final chapter retraces the author's steps back to his early critique of the Cartesian method; hence, this inquiry will take the critique of the latter as its starting point. The two points which will be made explicit throughout these pages point to the lack of grounding of the pedagogical and didactical methods as they are applied to the humanities, especially to philosophy. Furthermore, in a similar vein to Martin Buber, the author considers that it is not the method which proves itself to be decisive, but rather the pedagogical tact. Without a method, the teacher would be a dilettante, but the uniqueness or the personality and character of the teacher really make the difference.

As Costache acknowledges, the Greek word for method represents first and foremost a path to be followed. Only with Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* from 1620 does the notion of method receives its modern usage. For Bacon, method describes the process through which the mind established a relation with the external world, to search for its truths. Even though Bacon paved the way for Descartes' own account of method, it is only with the latter's appraisal that this very notion will sink its roots into intellectual history.

For Descartes, method designates the set of rules thanks to which the mind comes to distinguish truth from falsehood. After providing certain excerpts of Descartes' theory of method, Costache concludes that it is improbable that this very method would have any success in the case of contemporary didactical methodology.

After establishing a list of different pedagogical methods, Costache comments upon them, showing at the same time that they are insufficient, namely that they present certain limitations. For example, the magistral lecture seems to be a sort of

teaching method wherein the participation of the students is not triggered as such. Costache then opposes the so-called magistral lecture to the heuristic conversation, which would have more credibility than the former approach of lecturing.

Analyzing another method, namely that of brainstorming, Costache traces its origin back to the medieval period when there existed the so-called exercises of arousing one's mind. The most relevant example for this would be precisely the work of Anselm of Canterbury, i.e. the *Proslogion*. Costache enumerates many other methods of teaching such as Phillips 6-6, focus-group, fishbowl, jigsaw, or the cube approach.

The bedrock distinction of Descartes between *res cogitans* (thinking substance) and *res extensa* (extended substance) is well known, but the author further discusses Descartes' lack of interest or orientation towards spiritual object, such as texts, works of art, rituals, or the laws. Therefore, it is the duty of hermeneutics to help disentangle the meanings of these spiritual objects, and moreover, to overcome Descartes' tendency to overlook them.

Drawing some conclusions from his appraisal of the Cartesian method, Costache suggests that the teacher should create an opportune context for the student to explore the text on his or her own. Thus, one of the first duties of the teacher should be to familiarize the student with the context in which that text was written. The text is not only an expression of the author's mind, but also of the world in which he or she lived in. Moreover, the teacher should indicate towards the problem with which the author of the text was struggling to resolve. Finally, the teacher should present the utility of such a text for the student's own intellectual development.

Concluding, Costache's book proves itself to be of great aid both to teachers, philosophers, students and for every person who wants to understand what is at stake in education, both in Romania and abroad. Costache's thoughts seem to have a wider reach and implication than merely their application in the Romanian educational system, because besides applying them to the actual context of education, some of his recommendations might prove themselves crucial for the future generations as well. Not only does the author emphasize how the hermeneutical problem is a universal one both in philosophy and education, but his thorough analyses reach a larger scope, since notions as "linguality" (Gadamer), dialogue or metaphor seem to be the very essence through which the educational process can be facilitated further.

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