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## After postmodernism ... let's talk about education

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Now that the enthusiasm for postmodernism has more or less come to an end, the question emerges as to what comes next. Some can't get enough of the 'post,' as the current rise of references to posthumanism and the posthuman seems to suggest. In hindsight, however, we may want to conclude that the use of the prefix 'post' was perhaps a little arrogant, at least when it seemed to suggest that it is possible to leave the past behind, that it can be 'over and down with,' rather than that it is our ongoing task *to come to terms with the past*. That is why Adorno's call for education 'after Auschwitz' (see Adorno, 1971) remains a more meaningful gesture, because it doesn't ask us to forget Auschwitz and leave it behind, but rather urges us to carry the burden of Auschwitz with us. After all, as Primo Levi (1986, p. 199) reminds us, this 'fundamental unexpected event' of Auschwitz has happened and 'therefore it can happen again.'

What remains unfortunate about the rise of postmodernism is that it largely has been taken up as an epistemological point, hence the frequent (and perhaps still ongoing) identification of postmodernism with epistemological relativism—an idea also present in the current discourse about 'post-truth.' I have always (see Biesta, 1995) understood postmodernism as a challenge to the epistemological worldview—of which objectivism and relativism are *both* a part—that is to the idea that the question of knowledge is the 'first question.' The proclamation of the 'end of metanarratives' was, in my view, not meant to say that all knowledge is relative, but to highlight the challenge—the ethical, political and existential challenge—of *living together in plurality*. Not, of course, on the assumption that all plurality is good, but at least to become more hesitant of attempts at reducing plurality to unity, to put all plurality under one concept or one overarching vision.

To suggest, following Zygmunt Bauman (1993, p. 13), that it is not knowledge but responsibility that is 'the first reality of the self,' puts the educational question understood as the existential question of arousing the desire in another human being for wanting to live in plurality, for wanting to exist 'in the world but not in the centre of the world' (see Meirieu, 2007, p. 96), at the top of the agenda. Therefore, after postmodernism we should not be looking for other 'isms' and ways to go 'beyond' them, but should rather, simply and straightforwardly, start talking about education.

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### Notes on contributor

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