

The Drama of the Leap: Kaspar Hauser Exits the Cave

SunInn Yun

Institute of Education, University College London

In 1828, a strange teenaged boy was discovered in the street in Nuremberg, Germany. A letter found on the boy's body, addressed to the Fourth Squadron of the Sixth Cavalry Regiment, stated that the boy was in the custody of the author of the letter as an infant on October 7, 1812. The author had instructed the boy in reading, writing, and religion but had never let him take a step out of the house. The letter stated that the boy would like to be a cavalryman as his father was and left the boy's life to the decision of the captain, either to take him in or hang him. The boy could answer few questions and had a limited vocabulary but could write his name, Kaspar Hauser.

Once discovered, Hauser initially gained some attention from the people in the town. He lacked the ability to speak, to walk, or to behave properly in the ways that were expected of people of his age. He was offered a home and some education but was then physically attacked twice by an unknown man. The later attack caused his death, upon which there resulted a big debate and much controversy. The headstone of his grave reads "Here lies Kaspar Hauser, riddle of his time. His birth was unknown, his death mysterious. 1833."

Public curiosity over Hauser's life has continued unabated through nearly two centuries. Naturally, the story of his life has been adapted many times — in music, television programs, and films, fictional and nonfictional, most of which have in some way addressed the question "Who was Kaspar Hauser?" It is likely that curiosity regarding his case will never be exhausted.

Hauser's story has most famously been adapted as a film by Werner Herzog, entitled *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*.¹ The film follows the life of Hauser with no apparent effort to convince the viewer to accept any of the existing assumptions regarding Hauser's life. The film seems to focus on simply revealing how Hauser's life appeared to the people in the town, and, hence, to us, the viewers. The film itself is plainly frustrating for anyone seeking to uncover the "truth about Kaspar Hauser's life" — that is, for anyone who expects its secret story to be revealed. But this is, as the title indicates, the enigma: there will be no evidence sufficient to reveal the truth of the matter. There will be no answer to the question of the truth of Kaspar Hauser, but the film will acknowledge the enigmatic nature of his life. And it is on the life as depicted in the film that my discussion focuses.

In this film, Hauser is presented as having learned many things that are offered to him. When he learns how to speak and write, he is asked about his past, and it is clearly expected that he will provide a succinct answer to the question — though clearly he fails to do this. Consequently, he is condemned for lying about himself. But even with language, there still remains the enigma of his life, which no one can solve and which ends up being reduced to the traps of doubt and rumor.

Doubts regarding Hauser's life and experience invite us to question the nature of language and education. The aim of this essay is to explore the enigmatic nature of Hauser's life in terms of language and education. In a recent comparison of Stanley Cavell and Giorgio Agamben, Joris Vlieghe and Stefan Ramaekers have connected the idea of the educable being with the notion of the leap of language.² In it, they discuss the idea of freedom as finding oneself without any sense of destination. Following this theme, I will develop an understanding of the nature of the educable being within the relationship between language, education, and freedom with reference to Martin Heidegger. In doing so, I identify three dimensions in the relationship among them in terms of becoming, leaving, and beginning.

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND FREEDOM

Returning to the film, the story of Kaspar Hauser offers nothing like the happy ending that might be expected in an account of the extraordinary overcoming of difficulties. The image of a man once chained in a cellar and eventually coming into the light resonates with Plato's Allegory of the Cave: The chained prisoners in the cave are freed so that they can step forward and up towards its mouth. Hauser's life illustrates, then, the exit from the cave of ignorance. But if the story were to end there, it would simply reiterate a common understanding of and belief in education in Western history regarding the transformation of human being in contemplation of the truth.³

In Western history, such a division between untruth, as it were, and truth is accentuated in educational thought in such dichotomizations as animality and humanity. Immanuel Kant places pedagogy in service of turning the child's animality into human nature: "Discipline or training changes animal nature into human nature ... since the human being is not immediately in a position to do this [intelligent conduct], because he is in a raw state when he comes into the world, others must do it for him."⁴ In Kant's view, human nature is developed through education. And the pursuit of freedom is part of the human being's inheritance. He writes, "Now by nature the human being has such a powerful propensity towards freedom that when he has grown accustomed to it for a while, he will sacrifice everything for it ... Therefore the human being must be accustomed early to subject himself to the precepts of reason."⁵ If reason is understood in terms of the etymology of *logos*, then being educated indicates nothing other than that developed state of the language being, where the human being has exited from the state of having no language — that is, from animal being. In this respect, the definition of human being, for Kant, is based fundamentally on the acquisition of language through the help of others, in service of freedom. To put it differently, education represents the drama of turning a non-language being into a language being, a process through which one becomes rational, free, and, thus autonomous. The process might be formulated as shown in figure 1:



Figure 1. The relation between education, Language, and Freedom as understood in Western Philosophy

Whether we agree with Kant or not, the relationship between language, education, and freedom in his thought is clear: rational being is not granted by birth but achieved through education. The educated being's rationality is evident in the exercise of her autonomy — through her free will and in freedom. In this conception of humanity, Kant is not alone. The ability to speak is acknowledged as a key factor for humanity. According to Arnobius the Elder in the fourth century, the inability to speak suggests that the human being is no different from animals. As he puts it, "if a child were raised in total isolation on a simple diet, he would emerge after 20 or more years 'as baffled and mindless as an animal, a piece of wood or a stone.'"⁶ Hauser's case is like this: as a young man and still without language, he is treated as not yet human.

On this view, humanity comes to be understood in terms of a state that is developed through education. Across a vast range of political agendas, in this mechanism of achieving language, education is placed at the center as a basic but powerful means of recuperating our lost "humanity," which is often represented in politics as some kind of truth or freedom. To achieve freedom from oppression, to become an autonomous individual, one needs to be *properly* educated. And the nature of human being, or humanity, in Western philosophy is often understood in terms of what is included in the box in figure 2:

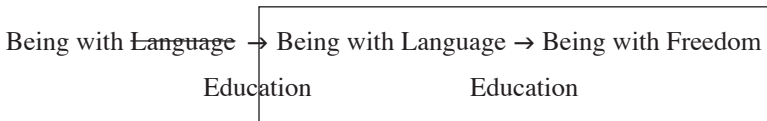


Figure 2. The emphasis of the relation in Figure 1.

The formula naturally prompts a series of questions. What is the relation to language of this activity named "education"? And what is meant by freedom? The previous formula expressed the relationship between language, education, and freedom as conventionally understood in Western philosophy. And the formula above with the box suggests the common understanding of humanity in Western philosophy where freedom and truth are related via education. And this coincides with the way I found myself naturally imagining Hauser's exit from the cellar, connecting this with Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Hauser's experience is one of a transformation from his status as a non-language being to that of a language being, with a kind of freedom to live on his own. Of course, the connotations of freedom outside the cave vary, but it seems clear that there is a very practical relation between learning language and the values attached to humanity, that is, truth and freedom. The acquisition of language in this respect is the indicator or threshold of the human being who is ready to receive the benefits of truth and freedom. Regardless of what has actually happened in history, this is the scenario that education has taught us. Thus, by discussing the relationship between language, education, and freedom, I would like to show how the enigma of Kaspar Hauser is not only a matter of his mysterious life, but also of the mysterious nature of language and freedom, and thus with education itself.

THE BECOMING OF LANGUAGE

So far, there is nothing special about the claim that “being *without* language” becomes “being with language” via education. But the claim becomes problematic if such a distinction stands for the definition of humanity or human being as a language being. Was Hauser not yet a human being (enough) when he was without language in the cellar in chains? In Kant’s statement, Hauser is not yet human in a full sense, but in need of education in order to turn his animality into humanity, for the understanding of the human being as a language being excludes “being without language” in its definition.

On humanity, Giorgio Agamben claims, on the contrary, that the entry from pure experience to language is essential for the nature of human being. In other words, the experience of turning into “being with language” from “being without language” constitutes the nature of human being. Human being in this respect is not defined by language itself, but by the experience of *becoming* a language being.

Animals do not enter language, they are already inside it. Man, instead, by having an infancy, by preceding speech, splits this single language and, in order to speak, has to constitute himself as the subject of language — he has to say I. Thus, if language is truly man’s nature (and nature, on reflection, can only mean language without speech, genesis *syneches*, ‘continuous origin’, by Aristotle’s definition, and to be nature means being always — already inside language), then man’s nature is split at its source, for infancy brings it discontinuity and the difference between language and discourse.⁷

In his analysis of human infancy in terms of pure experience without language, Agamben claims that language makes the human being historical on the strength of the differences and discontinuities of being. Such discontinuity is not between the nonhuman and the human, but between ~~language~~ and language. In his emphasis on the discontinuity between ~~language~~ and language, Agamben addresses the nature of humanity and historicity. What defines the human being, as it is compared to the animal, is the experience of becoming a language being. Based on this discontinuity emerges the dynamics of becoming. The differences between infancy and language show that what makes the human being a language being is ascribable not entirely to the nature of pure language, but to the movement from pure experience to language.⁸ In this view, the emphasis in the definition of humanity is on *becoming*, in terms of movement from the non-language being to the language being. Thus, in Agamben’s notion of humanity, the formula is to be adjusted as in figure 3:

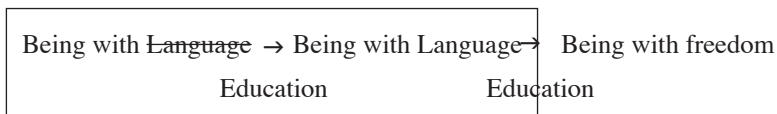


Figure 3. Education from an Agambenian perspective.

Putting aside the question of what is meant by “freedom” in this formula, to which I shall return in the final part, how in the process of education does the movement between “being with ~~language~~” and “being with language” appear? To put this differently, what is it in the acquisition of language that warrants the name of

education? In contrast to a traditional understanding of humanity, the emphasis now is on the becoming of the language being. An approach to Hauser's case should, in this respect, be focused on his experience of learning language. If education is not merely a process of transforming a child from animality to human being, how, in this renewed understanding of humanity, does education figure in this? Agamben's primary suggestion relates to the becoming of language. The question then must be one of how education substantiates this dynamic.

PEDAGOGY OF LEAVING

The phenomenon of becoming a language being in Agamben's thought is characterized, in Vlieghe and Ramaekers's terms, as the moment of turning into the educable being. As they suggest, it is the transformation of being within a condition of self-loss.⁹ Within self-loss, one becomes disempowered, and this disempowerment turns one into an educable being. Although I agree with the notion of self-loss as part of this process, I would like to speak of it in relation to a process of *leaving*.

Stanley Cavell's notion of a leap in learning language is helpful for picturing the moment of leaving. To leap, one needs to have a ground to jump across. Cavell emphasizes that "where you can leap to depends on where you stand."¹⁰ The movement of leaping, in other words, involves the ground that one jettisons. Without the moment of jettisoning, leaping is not possible. Based on this, Cavell's argument focuses on the language community: language is a matter not only of acquisition but also of bequest. In this respect, language comprises both the language of the community with the criteria it supplies and the ground that one is to leap across and jettison.

The process of the leap suggests a distance between A and B. The phenomenon of jettisoning within the leap prompts questioning of the ground that is left behind. Leaving allows us to be able to question what is left behind the leap. Having a distance is the basic condition for one to question and examine the other. Questioning what one has jettisoned becomes possible on the strength of the distance that is achieved through leaving.

There is a danger, however, if we imply hastily a kind of fixed ground that we can examine after we have left it. This would be a mistake in that it might imply that there is some more or less fixed ground from which we have come. To make a similar point following Vlieghe and Ramaekers, self-loss may suggest, as it were, that there is a concrete sense of "self" to lose. However, it is not fixed criteria or a fixed ground that one has left behind, for such criteria themselves will constantly change. It is not clear what is left behind in the moment of leaping. The place from which we leap is not seen in the same way after the leaping as before. To take Heidegger's account, the process of leaping creates a true accessibility to the ground from which one jumps, but the ground will not be looked at in the same way as before.¹¹ The process of the leap is a kind of leaving after which there will be no way back.

~~Language~~, with this strikethrough, in this essay, indicates non-language. The strikethrough is intended to suggest that it is not possible to describe non-language other than through language. Pure experience will no longer be able to be explained without language, except with this language with a strikethrough. In Agamben, the

experience of infancy is wordless pure experience or experience without language. Such experience can only be described or captured through language *after* infancy, for infancy etymologically implies being incapable of speaking. This negativity of language, which tries to describe its nonexistence through its own form of existence, is the nature of discontinuity that Agamben points out: humanity is where history begins.¹² And this negativity of language appears to be so as a part of leaving.

Turning into the educable being in (or through) the process of self-loss, therefore, suggests the inevitable departure of living, or leaving. In this leaving, in a form of self-loss, no concrete self or language criteria appears or is captured in the same way as before. The turning into the educable being already includes the negativity of language. Although limited, through this leaving, things become surveyable, understandable, and approachable. The process of becoming a language being can properly be grasped by looking at the past through the angle of the present language. And the past is seen with a detached-from-the-now perspective. This is why the past is presented as a form of negation. Moreover, this is not a linguistic ability to obtain once and remain ever after. Becoming a language being is a kind of circular process that we experience in daily life: humanity is renewed at a moment of leap. This phenomenon of leaving is the experience of becoming a language being as human, the educable being.¹³

Within the relationship between language and education, we have discussed humanity as a becoming that is grounded by the pedagogy of leaving. Even so, the pedagogical picture, however, is not quite optimistic. To recall Hauser's case, even with his ability to speak, his fate was not friendly to him. He disappointed the villagers for not being able to provide the true story of his own life in the past. He was also accused of lying and attacked to death by an unknown person. His life story in a way frustrates the educational believers who claim that one gains a freedom of one's own through education. Or his case may suggest there is some kind of quality or value attached to the notion of language in relation to the achievement of freedom and education. In the final section of this essay, I will discuss the phenomenon of freedom in the process of learning.

BEGINNING AS FREEDOM

We see now that the nature of human being is to be understood not as the animal with language, but as the becoming-language-being, and that the leap of language is a turning into the educable being, which I want to style as a pedagogy of leaving. "Being with Language" suggests that the nature of leaving is only conceived, differentiated, and finally negated via the present "being with language."

The previous formula seems to fail to explain Hauser's case. There was no drama of the exit from the cave. We see from Hauser's case that being with language does not guarantee us freedom. Rather, Hauser gradually gathered more suspicion upon himself: the more he spoke, the more he gained suspicion. Is there, then, a higher, more appropriate notion of language and education that grounds freedom? To understand the nature of language and freedom in relation to education, we must look at it differently. Traditionally, especially in Christian history, language and freedom

have been seen as having a particular bond with each other and with the idea of truth. From this perspective, it is crucial to support the necessity of education, and its alliance with truth.

Language in this respect also affects the understanding of education in Christianity. Learning scripture (divine writing, holy texts) is a crucial activity in education. Education is the way to learn God's word in order to reach the realm of truth, and thus become free. Truth and freedom are replaced by the light.¹⁴ Light sheds upon the darkness to make things clear, visible, and thus truthful. It naturally implies that the educated human being is enlightened through the light of the word. In the metaphor of light, freedom obtains the value of truth. To be lightened, and enlightened, human beings must persevere. In these terms, the notion of freedom grounds the power of the human will, human rights, and the truth. For Heidegger, however, this is not quite the case. The process of *lighting* involves a degree of shadowing or darkening. Or in his terms, revealing comes with concealing, and *vice versa*. Freedom, for Heidegger, is the realm where the exceeding and withdrawal of revealing appears.

The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human willing.

Freedom governs the open in the sense of the cleared and lighted up, i.e., of the revealed. It is to the happening of revealing, i.e., or truth, that freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship. All revealing belongs within a harboring and a concealing. But that which free — the mystery — is concealed and always concealing itself. All revealing comes out of the open, goes into the open, and brings into the open. The freedom of the open consists neither in unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws. Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils. Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts as revealing upon its way.¹⁵

Freedom is illustrated as the realm of the open which is revealed in the withdrawal of being. However, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, freedom is the beginning that is not the same as the origin.¹⁶ The lighted being begins the story but is not its origin. Freedom is neither an origin one gets back to nor a state that one achieves, for freedom cannot be grasped in a concept since freedom frees itself. Freedom is not a concept to be grasped by thinking, but a fact, a fact of existence, that is to be experienced. Nancy's reading of Heidegger's concept of the *Geschick* (destining) of being is attached to freedom. As Nancy concludes, "Freedom cannot be awarded, granted, or conceded according to a degree of maturity or some prior aptitude that would receive it. Freedom can only be taken: this is what the revolutionary tradition represents. Yet taking freedom means that freedom takes itself, that it has already received itself, from itself. No one begins to be free, but freedom is the beginning and endlessly remains the beginning."¹⁷ In this respect, freedom is not to be conceptualized but is to be experienced within the educational movement of becoming a language being, as depicted in figure 4.

The relationship shows that freedom is at the heart of *logos*, which indicates the sharing of beginning. Freedom combines shadow and light. The discontinuity between light and shadow constitutes a groundless grounding. Hauser's life suggests the spacing of a beginning that he cannot revisit directly but can only imagine. Through this imagining, he forms and adopts the history of his life.

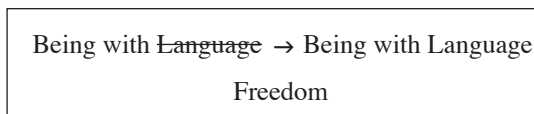


Figure 4. Freedom as experienced in the process of becoming a language being

The phenomenon of freedom as beginning elaborates the pedagogy of leaving. To put this in Heidegger's terms, "Certain other possibilities are thereby already withdrawn from Dasein."¹⁸ We experience something becoming clear whilst the other remains defocused, dimmed. We tend to focus on language that gives us a clearer vision of the world. But in fact language holds this open possibility because, as soon as we hold a clear vision of the world through language, it already leaves us with an unfocused vision of the world as mystery. Language in this respect is not a tool for us to unlock the meaning of the world. The more we know, the more we do not know.

This should not, however, lead us to hopeless nihilism or skepticism. On the contrary, the enigmatic nature of language is rooted in freedom. Within this phenomenon of the leap, the world becomes accessible, understandable. Hauser's life is highly suspicious from the beginning. His life shows that the nature of language involves a leap that is enigmatic. What is left behind becomes a dream, something imagined, something illusory. The nature of language with this leaping constitutes a part of the enigma of Kaspar Hauser, this mysterious man. The enigma lies not only in Hauser's life but in the nature of language itself. It is through open possibility that finite beings like us experience the enigma of language.

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1. *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, directed by Werner Herzog, (Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, 1974).
 2. Joris Vlieghe and Stefan Ramaekers, "The Show of Childhood: Agamben and Cavell on Education and Transformation" (presentation, Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, NM, March 13–17, 2014).
 3. On this point, Heidegger claims that this is one aspect of the allegory and one that has influenced Western history, but the other aspect of the story — regarding the essence of truth — has been forgotten. Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill, trans. T. Sheehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166; Iain Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 142.
 4. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History and Education*, eds. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, trans. Mary Gregor et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9: 441.
 5. *Ibid.*, 9:442.
 6. Arnobius, *Sieben Bücher gegen die Heiden*, Trier 1858 (English translation in vol. 19 of the ante-Nicene Library), quoted in Martin Kitchen, *Kaspar Hauser: Europe's Child* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 6.
 7. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 59.
 8. In this reading of Agamben, infancy is also read as the moment of a potentiality and an impotentiality which constructs a new form of emancipation and education, as discussed in Tyson Lewis, "Rethinking the Learning Society: Giorgio Agamben on Studying, Stupidity, and Impotence," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30, no. 6 (2011): 585–599.
 9. Joris Vlieghe and Stefan Ramaekers, "The Show of Childhood."
 10. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172.

11. Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 60.
12. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 55.
13. The experience of becoming a language being is situated within the hermeneutic circle, which is a process of understanding the world as not separated from us but rather as constitutive of ourselves in the world. In this process, the human being is already affected by the situation. Education is culturally and historically situated within the hermeneutic circle. See Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Martin Heidegger, *Supplements*, ed. John Van Buren, trans. Charles Bambach, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).
14. John 8:31-32 (New American Standard Bible): "If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine: and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Here, language represents the truth, and is the light of the world, as thus God.
15. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 2013), 25.
16. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 1993), 78.
17. *Ibid.*, 77.
18. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 128.