

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE: UNCOMMON SCHOOLING AND THE PROSPECT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Reading Thoreau's *Walden*

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1. Introduction

At one point in *Walden*, Thoreau remarks that philosophy needs to be released from the confines of academia and to serve the practice of life. And for this purpose, he calls for the creation of «uncommon schools»:

We have a comparatively decent system of common schools, schools for infants only, excepting the half-starved lyceum in the winter, and latterly the puny beginning of a library suggested by the state, no school for ourselves. We spend more on any article of bodily ailment than on our mental alignment. It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities, with leisure – if they are indeed so well off – to pursue liberal studies the rest of their lives¹.

Today the turmoil of the world is made worse by the grip neoliberalism has on education itself – in the shape of the excessive focus on the planning and management of learning and an overall instrumentalization to the imagined needs of society. With regard to what matters in education, Thoreau's call rings far more true. In the divided world, it is an urgent to *find a way to transcend the deep divides between those whose feelings are not acknowledged or not well expressed, and those who are oblivious to them, and to learn from each other as "friends"*; to how we can achieve a common humanity². To these ends, the humanities in university education need to reconsider their role. *What kind of institution might serve to achieve a common humanity? What, in such a project, would be the task of philosophy and how should philosophy be reborn?*

In response, this paper tries to reclaim the idea of *philosophy as a way of life* – an idea and a name associated especially with Pierre Hadot³. This involves the reconsideration of the task of philosophy and of its practicality. Philosophy faces a crisis of identity. On the one hand, in the tide of the global economy, the division between useful and useless knowledge has been reinforced, and philosophy tends to be categorized as the latter. On the other hand, philosophy has in some quarters become assimilated into the trend of self-improvement – in Japanese, *Jiko Keihatsu*, an idea that carries the distinctive connotation of enlightenment of oneself, which is fairly close to the idea of self-help in the U.S.A and in

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¹ H. Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government* (ed. William Rossi), W. W. Norton & Company, New York 1992, p. 74.

² Cf. R. Gaita, 2000. *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*, Routledge, New York 2000.

³ See P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 1995.

Europe. In this trend, «fast knowledge»⁴ is treasured and the language of philosophy is translated into easy, accessible terms. Torn between these two tendencies, philosophy needs to reconsider its use, neither turning its «uselessness» into something to be proud of, as has sometimes been the tendency in the liberal arts tradition, nor selling out to «usefulness» under the pressures of the global economy; it needs to reaffirm its intrinsic value. In this paper, I shall point to the idea of philosophy with a higher sense of use and with an alternative economy of education, one that necessitates the *conversion* of the way we see ourselves, others and the world.

In the following I shall, first, examine the boom of *Jiko Keihatsu* in Japan, as a peculiar mode of doing «philosophy» outside the school, and consider how it resembles the culture of self-help in the U.S.A. and Europe. This will bring to light some philosophical questions that need to be addressed regarding the task of philosophy and its use. Second, taking up these questions, I shall discuss Pierre Hadot's idea of «philosophy as a way of life» and his view of liberal studies and the task of philosophy. He points us to a peculiar role of philosophy, one that is distinguished from *Jiko Keihatsu*. Hadot develops Thoreau's ideas regarding the task of philosophy, and yet he does this in a somewhat mystical way. Third, to make Hadot's position a little more «practical», I shall further develop his direction of thought but in a more Thoreauvian, more attuned to the ordinary: hence, I shall introduce Cavell's reading of Thoreau's *Walden* as a book on the economy of living. This will guide us to an alternative way of doing philosophy in the uncommon school. In conclusion, I shall propose a way of putting uncommon schooling into practice, in a conception of university education and liberal studies in the age of *Jiko Keihatsu*. In order to be reborn as an institution as a place to serve the purpose of achieving common humanity, the university must become a locus for conversion and human transformation.

2. *Jiko Keihatsu*

What is the useful knowledge? What would be the practicality of philosophy, if any? Should philosophy be practiced outside school? The *Jiko Keihatsu* boom in Japan provides a concrete case in which these fundamental questions about the task of philosophy are raised.

In the Japanese journal, *Spectator*, a special issue entitled «The Secret of *Jiko Keihatsu*» has recently been published.⁵ The purpose of this special issue is to conduct a critical examination of the contemporary vogue for *Jiko Keihatsu* books and to explore what lies behind this trend. It covers books published in this vein not only in Japan but also in Europe and the U.S.A., where they tend to be categorized as self-help books. Beneath the trend lies the desire (and simultaneously the anxiety) to be acknowledged by others, the fear of isolation (the atomization of the self⁶) and an inward turn to the self. Outwardly the self has been driven to acquire more knowledge and competences in a process of upskilling or brushing-up, where useful knowledge is sought in aid of success in life. This whole trend, the editor of the journal points out, is tied up with

⁴ See Ragy, *Fast Knowledge: People Who Want Answers in Ten Minutes*, Shuei-sha, Tokyo 2002.

⁵ Editorial Department, Inc. (Ed.), «Jiko-Keihatsu no Himitsu (The Secret of Self-Enlightenment)». *Spectator*, Vol. 51, 2023, Tokyo Gento-sha.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

consumer consciousness⁷. Taro Hanamura, one of the critics in the special issue, points out that *Jiko Keibatsu* is a means to acquire social recognition with the aim of living out this story of the growth of the self – this eternal process that continues to the end of one's life⁸. And this self, according to the general critique in *Jiko Keibatsu*, has thus far been trapped in a negative loop – a vicious cycle in which the self is driven to raise itself, in the process of which it loses self-confidence, through failure (the very opposite of success), and as a result of which any positive self-evaluation has to be scaled down⁹. Happiness and the meaning of life, Hanamura writes, are identified with success or failure. In this general trend, Ayako Osawa, another critic, points out that while making the effort to raise oneself up in one's life seems to be a forward-looking, cheerful manifestation of healthy desire, we should question again whether the self is the kind of thing that should be raised up¹⁰; and this, by implication, is to ask whether we need growth or not. In response, the editor of the journal poses the question, «What does it mean to grow?»¹¹. As these writers point out, growth in the culture of *Jiko Keibatsu* is driven by fear and anxiety, in a kind of isolation from common humanity. Living in the shadow of the «fear of failure», society as a whole is not willing to «take a chance»¹².

The *Jiko Keibatsu* boom presents some challenges to philosophy and liberal arts studies in university education. First and foremost is the question of the meaning of knowledge and culture. As the acquisition of knowledge is seen as the way of self-improvement as «fast knowledge» (like fast food), it is not used for the cultivation of common humanity, but for the reinforcement of the individual's self-consciousness, which itself is a mark of an inward turn in an isolated and divided world. Second, there is the role of university education. If «philosophy» is being practiced outside the school, as purports to be the case with *Jiko Keibatsu*, what would be the role of philosophy education in university, if there is still one? There is a vague distinction between philosophy and *Jiko Keibatsu*, and given the ambiguity of this border-line, the former is easily assimilated into the latter. The alternative, reactionary move is to retain the idea of philosophy as «useless» knowledge in an unchanged, conventional way. How can the university be the locus for the experience of self-enlightenment through philosophy in a way that is different from *Jiko Keibatsu*? What kind of knowledge would it involve? We cannot simply go back to old-style liberal education and to learn «useless» knowledge. We live in times when knowledge is to be «used», and yet what is needed is for use not to be assimilated into the discourse of the global market and efficiency. But is this possible? Have we become stuck?

3. Hadot: Philosophy as a way of life

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 232.

N. Saito, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*

Philosophy was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom, and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us «be» in a different way.¹³

Pierre Hadot provides us with an entrance into the realm of philosophy that is to be distinguished from *Jiko Keibatsu*. In his view, philosophy as a way of life is a kind of «spiritual exercise» – «the transformation of our vision of the world» and «a metamorphosis of our personality»¹⁴ (Hadot 1995, p. 82). He uses the term «conversion» as well¹⁵. In the Middle Ages, philosophy became «a purely theoretical and abstract activity»¹⁶, being detached from concrete human lives, but in its origin, in the Classical Greek and Hellenistic periods, Greek philosophy took the form of «a way of life, an art of living, and way of being»¹⁷. The task of philosophy was not to present a systematic theory of truth but to initiate people, through dialogue, into a process of self transformation¹⁸. As Hadot writes:

The infinite connection between dialogue with others and dialogue with oneself is profoundly significant. Only he who is capable of a genuine encounter with the other is capable of an authentic encounter with himself, and the converse is equally true¹⁹.

So philosophy, he says, entails «communitary engagement»²⁰.

In doing philosophy, what counts is «not the solution of a particular problem, but the road travelled to reach it: a road along which the interlocutor, the disciple, and the reader form their thought, and make it more apt to discover the truth by itself»²¹. Philosophy in antiquity was also an exercise that «invites us to concentrate on each instant of life, to become aware of the infinite value of each present moment» in a cosmic dimension²².

From this stance, Hadot is critical of the current situation of philosophy at the university level. Universities were made up of

philosophers, or professionals training professionals. Education was thus no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists²³.

¹³ P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, cit., p. 265.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

If we transform the way we see and do philosophy, the language of philosophy itself and the way we are engaged with language are also transformed. In this regard, Hadot appreciates anew the significance of Wittgenstein²⁴.

Hadot's idea of philosophy as a way of life has some implications for the reconsidering of the task of philosophy, and it can help us to see how philosophy can differentiate itself from the *Jiko Keibatsu* style of thinking and the practice that goes with that. First, the practice of philosophy has to do with release from the state of obsession with one's self, a release from egoism. This is most explicitly expressed in his view of cosmic consciousness. In *Jiko Keibatsu*, by contrast, there is an incessant drive towards the self, even to the degree of self-gratifying self-consciousness. Second, there is the perfectionist sense of completing and perfecting each moment of one's life, found in the advice of the Stoics and the Epicureans on living «*in the present*»²⁵. Philosophy is an eternal quest, a matter of searching with no final end. This is clearly different from the thinking of *Jiko Keibatsu* whose primary goal is to establish clear targets for success and self-improvement and to reach them. The third is the question of what can be meant by the practicality of philosophy. If philosophical theories are in the service of life, theories are to be tested in the practice of life. But in what way?

There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.²⁶

It is within this idea of philosophy as a way of life that Hadot appreciates anew the contemporary significance of Henry D. Thoreau's *Walden*. Indeed he has a paper entitled "There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, but not Philosophers"²⁷. In this article, Hadot pays attention to the common ground between, on the one hand, Epicurean philosophy and certain aspects of Stoicism and, on the other, Thoreau's *Walden*. «In choosing to settle in Walden, Thoreau has thus decided to live according to what we can call an Epicurean mode of life»²⁸. Both the Greek philosophy in question and Thoreau's share the view that we have to return to «the essential act of life, to the pleasure of feeling and existing»²⁹. This is illustrated in Thoreau's words, which Hadot quotes, «to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived»³⁰. Hadot also finds «cosmic consciousness» in Thoreau's *Walden*. Yet he identifies also some peculiar traits in the book that do not correspond to the Epicurean

²⁴ See P. Hadot, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage*, J. Vrin, Paris 2004.

²⁵ P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, cit., p. 268.

²⁶ H. Thoreau, Henry, *Walden*, cit., p. 9.

²⁷ P. Hadot, *There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, but not Philosophers*, «The Journal of Speculative Philosophy», 19, 3, 2005, pp. 229-237.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³⁰ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 61, quoted in P. Hadot, *Wittgenstein*, cit., p. 230.

attitude. First, there is Thoreau's emphasis on solitude, which is at odds with the Epicurean emphasis on the sharing of pleasure with friends. The Stoic has the sentiment that one is «a part of the cosmic Whole (*du Tout cosmique*)» (in reference to Marcus Aurelius)³¹. Also in Thoreau, there is an emphasis on manual labor, which is not necessarily foregrounded in Epicurean thinking. In any case, Hadot's stance is that Thoreau's conception of philosophy, which he considers to be philosophy as a way of life, is colored by a «mixture of Stoic and Epicurean nuances»³². Hence he writes:

The experience recounted in *Walden* seems to me, therefore, extremely interesting for us because in choosing to live in the woods for some time, Thoreau wanted to perform (*faire*) a philosophical act, that is to say, to devote himself to a certain mode of philosophical life that included, at the same time, manual labor and poverty, but also opened up to him an immensely enlarged perception of the world³³.

Interestingly, however, this writing of Hadot ends up with a certain frustration with, though not necessarily criticism of, Thoreau. That is manifested in Hadot's view that Thoreau's actual experience of living in the woods exceeds what can be expressed in words. In other words, Thoreau's «philosophic discourse» is different from «philosophy itself, that is to say, other than the experience that Thoreau has really lived»; and «the philosophical act transcends the literary work that expresses it; and this literary work cannot totally express what Thoreau has lived»³⁴. Indeed, this sense of the limits of language is exactly what he appreciates in Wittgenstein's view on language³⁵. He ends up with this sense of the limits of language in Thoreau as follows:

Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.³⁶

Much as Hadot's interpretation of Thoreau does share common ground with the Stoics and Epicureans, there remain some concerns with regard to the question of how philosophy as a way of life is to be distinguished from *Jiko Keibatsu*. First and foremost, there is the question of the intimations of mystification in Thoreau, especially with the idea of cosmic consciousness. This makes philosophy as a way of life otherworldly «useless». Furthermore, Hadot's quest for a certain kind of totality and sense of the whole seems to cover over the sense of separation and of a strong sense of individuality, the element of the «uncommon», in Thoreau. In *Jiko Keibatsu* boom, one of the problems is the

³¹ P. Hadot, *There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy*, cit., p. 232.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³⁵ See P. Hadot, *Wittgenstein*, cit.

³⁶ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. X, quoted in P. Hadot, *There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy*, cit., p. 234.

separation of the self and its inwardness. Is such separation to be resolved by appealing to a quasi-mystical sense of the whole? Second, there is the meaning of «practicality», as manifested in Hadot's distance from Thoreau. For Hadot, the practicality of philosophy lies in the «experience that Thoreau has really lived», which Hadot claims is beyond expression; and Hadot thinks that «the story that Thoreau tells of the way in which he lived these philosophical practices and exercise, is a philosophical discourse»³⁷. In other words, the *actual, real* experience in the woods seems to be the locus of practice, and hence, ironically, Hadot seems to fall into the dichotomy of language and practice (mind and body). Such a dichotomization makes philosophy as a way of life vulnerable to being assimilated into the dominant discourse of *Jiko Keihatsu*, with all the problems of the latter's tendency to simplify the language of philosophy. There seems to be a need for more robust and alternative sense of practice in order not to be drawn under the tide of *Jiko Keihatsu*.

Is there not a more *practical* way of reading *Walden*, without dividing language from experience, an alternative sense of philosophy being practical?

3. Cavell's reading of Thoreau's *Walden*: An alternative understanding of philosophy as a way of life

I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; not did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.³⁸

For philosophy to find a niche without being assimilated into the discourse of the global economy or acquiescing in the «uselessness» of the liberal arts, let us explore an alternative way of reading Thoreau's *Walden*. As Hadot makes clear, *Walden* is definitely the book of philosophy that makes us think and rethink how we should live. But the book does not give the reader explicit answers to the question; it is necessarily not written in easy, accessible language, and it does not satisfy an appetite for «fast knowledge» that is easily digestible: rather, through engagement and reengagement with the text of *Walden*, the reader learns gradually how to live. Paradoxically, this apparently inefficient, even perhaps sometimes tiresome emphasis on language makes the book more practical. Stanley Cavell's reading of *Walden*, *The Senses of Walden* (1992), makes us realize this paradox and directs us to the practical in a higher sense; more broadly, it points to an idea of philosophy as a way of life that is to be distinguished from the *Jiko Keihatsu* books.

Walden begins with the chapter, *Economy*. It describes, in a somewhat laborious manner, the accounting of the goods and materials Thoreau purchased, the money he spent. Yet this is a part of his strategy. As Paul Standish describes in detail, this is a book on the «economy of living»³⁹ – that is, on the «ordering (*nomos*) the home (*oikos*)», in its Greek origin⁴⁰. And as Standish writes, 'Walden'

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³⁸ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 61.

³⁹ P. Standish, *Uncommon Schools: Stanley Cavell and the Teaching of Walden*, «Studies in Philosophy and Education», 25, 2006, pp. 145-157, p. 146.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

is not just the name of a place but the name of a book: hence, it also refers to «the writing of *Walden* – the realizing of a language (or of the possibilities of language) that can provide the conditions for the economy he seeks»⁴¹. Indeed, this is a book in which Thoreau «accounts for himself»⁴², presenting us with «a holistic vision of an economy of living»⁴³. Cavell himself writes as follows:

To read the text accurately is to assess its computations, to check its sentences against our convictions, to prove the derivation of its words. Since every mark counts, the task is to arrive in turn at each of them, as at conclusion⁴⁴.

The physical labor of cultivating the field, of building the hut by Walden Pond, is inseparable from the detailed calculation of – recounting of, accounting for – his life and words.

The opening visions of captivity and despair in *Walden* are traced full length in the language of the first chapter, the longest, which establishes the underlying vocabulary of the book as a whole. ‘Economy’ turns into a nightmare maze of terms about money and possessions and work, each turning toward and joining the others⁴⁵.

Thus, the idea of an economy of living cannot simply be a matter of numerically calculable gains and loss; it has a spiritual connotation, as in the words of the Bible: «What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?»⁴⁶. The economy of living also involves the way we use the words. Thus, Standish continues: «there is a responsibility in using words so that they do not devalue, so that you return them with interest»⁴⁷. There is an indication of being involved in the practical, as it were, in a higher sense, as in the case of «reading in a high sense»⁴⁸. Hence, reading *Walden*, and more generally the act of reading itself, is inseparable from the way we live.

Hadot says about Thoreau that «the philosophical act transcends the literary work that expresses it; and this literary work cannot totally express what Thoreau has lived»⁴⁹. Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy would take a contrasting view concerning the idea of the limits of language: what we live, how we live, cannot have meaning or be shared with others unless we express it. It is we, the language-users, who are responsible for giving life to words, and, conversely, it is through reengagement with language that we are reborn. In Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy, it is not that experience itself has more meaning beyond the limits of language; rather the meaning of experience cannot be

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴⁴ S. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, p. 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁶ Mark, 8, 35-36, quoted in P. Standish, *Uncommon Schools*, cit., p. 151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 71.

⁴⁹ P. Hadot, *Wittgenstein*, cit., p. 234.

uncoupled from language. Having experience – experience in the ordinary human sense – is the product of having words: it always has a linguistic background.

The limits of language do not leave us in an abyss: they inspire us to keep finding words here and now, and Thoreau expresses this with the remark, «I do not suppose that I have attained to obscurity»⁵⁰. And this, as Cavell says, involves a process of translation.

Thoreau's book on *Walden* can be taken as a whole to be precisely about the problem of translation, call it the transfiguration from one form of life to another.⁵¹

In *Walden* Thoreau himself writes:

The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly translated; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures⁵².

Translation and transcendence are processes of achieving not clarity, the stability of meaning in completion (as in the language of *Jiko Keihatsu*), but obscurity – learning to persevere in the rift between meanings, above the abyss⁵³. To think philosophy in connection with translation is not to propose some simplistic idea of rendering the difficult language of philosophy in the easy terms of the ordinary, but to recognize translation as inherent in the higher process of reengagement with language – high in the sense that it requires us to think and find language in the «most dismal swamp», in the darkest wood⁵⁴.

In the process of translation, there is always a residue of the unexpressed, the uncommon, that resists full assimilation to the common. The language of *Walden* is itself a manifestation of the uncommonness the human being is fated to accept. And this is exactly what Cavell means by «reading in a high sense» – finding the right word at the right moment in a particular context. Far from its being a matter of gentility of expression, Thoreau finds in this a challenge that reverberates existentially and pervasively through human lives:

If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 217.

⁵¹ S. Cavell, *Walden in Tokyo*, forthcoming.

⁵² H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 217.

⁵³ P. Standish, *One Language, One World: The Common Measure of Education*, «Philosophy of Education», 2010, pp. 360-368, p. 366.

⁵⁴ H. Thoreau, *Walking*, in R. W. Emerson, *Nature/Henry David Thoreau, Walking*, Beacon Press, Boston 1991, pp. 69-122, p. 100.

⁵⁵ H. Thoreau, *Walden*, cit., p. 66.

The idea of rebirth in *Walden* is also expressed by Thoreau in the idea of the «father tongue» – «a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak»⁵⁶. We are born from the mother, initiated early into the mother tongue; our reengagement with language in the process of translation – that is, in the continuing ways in which our words can become strange to us, strange as in the encounter with a foreign tongue – is our relation to the father tongue. This reengagement with language, epitomized by the process of translation, is not simply «a question of our personal fulfilment, or of our saving of our souls, but the condition of seeing the world aright»⁵⁷. Translation is the process of the transcendence of self, beyond the narrow ego, in search of the common.

Thus, Cavell's reading of Thoreau's *Walden*, sharing the idea of philosophy as a way of life with Hadot, develops a path that opens in a different direction from *Jiko Keibatsu*, – it avoids seduction by facile forms of language, by the clichés of therapy, by the easy attractions of fast knowledge: it elucidates what is problematic about the language of *Jiko Keibatsu*. Furthermore, while sharing the idea with Hadot that philosophy is inseparable from the practical, Cavell's reading of Thoreau's *Walden* is more radical than Hadot's in the sense that the former destabilizes the dichotomy between language and experience, mind and body, the ordinary and the spiritual. In other words, there is a difference between Cavell and Hadot in the way philosophy is returned to the ordinary. Whilst Hadot, somewhat uneasy with Thoreau's recursion to matters of language, prefers to foreground the notion of *experience* in his sense of the practical, Cavell considers language internal to the very ideas of experience and the practical. Of course, parts of Thoreau's text do have a mystical quality to them, as Hadot claims, especially in the manner of evoking a communion with nature. So Hadot's interpretation of *Walden* in a quasi-mystical, spiritual way is understandable. In the case of Cavell, however, such a mystical dimension is deeply embedded in the ordinary – the details of the events in the daily lives, the apparently trifling things. This is what Cavell elsewhere calls «preaching the everyday as the locale of the sublime»⁵⁸. Such an embeddedness of the spiritual in ordinary practice is a helpful guide in differentiating *Walden* from popular self-help books of *Jiko Keibatsu*. Such stance of Cavell situates philosophy as a way of life neither in the «fast knowledge» of global market discourse nor in philosophy in old liberal arts tradition, where being «useless» is sometimes something to be proud of. An alternative economy of living points to practice in a higher sense – involving human transformation through language and the quest of the common.

4. Achieving common humanities: uncommon schools and the education of grownups

What kind of institution might serve to achieve a common humanity? What, in such a project, would be the task of philosophy and how should philosophy be reoriented? In response to these central questions of this paper, a rereading of Thoreau's *Walden* through Cavell's ordinary language philosophy has provided us with an alternative

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁷ P. Standish, *Uncommon Schools*, cit., p. 151.

⁵⁸ S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979, p. 463.

conception of philosophy as a way of life – one that can shift our mode of thinking from *Jiko Keibatsu* and that can do this in a manner more radical Hadot's. In conclusion, some educational implications are drawn out.

Cavell's Thoreau, or to put it more precisely, the way he reads *Walden*, elucidates the point that philosophy, as it is inseparable from the way we live, is simultaneously inseparable from education – education not only for children but for adults, as a matter of *becoming* human. And this process of becoming necessitates our continuous and endless reengagement with language. This is the idea of education in what Cavell calls *philosophy as the education of grownups*⁵⁹. The expression, «grownups», unlike «adults», is characteristically a child's term, and the force of this is to convey some sense of the adulthood not as a point of arrival but as a time of continuing growth and possibility, the child still there in the grownup. The idea of philosophy as education was once proclaimed by John Dewey in his *Democracy and Education* (1916), and rehearsed more recently by Hilary Putnam⁶⁰. And we have seen that this process of becoming through language involves moments of human transformation here and now, in the diverse particular contexts of our ordinary lives. This is a process of translating our own selves, of undergoing recurrent moments of estrangement. Cavell writes:

[F]or a child to grow he requires family and familiarity, but for a grownup to grow he requires strangeness and transformation, i.e., birth.⁶¹

The expression «uncommon schools», which Thoreau proposes, carries various meanings but one of them is that the process of growing up involves the destabilization of one's identities (this is very different from the way that the language of *Jiko Keibatsu* purports to play the role of securing the identity of the self – something that it can succeed in only on the surface). Thoreau's sense of the estrangement of the self speaks to the self's experiencing *un*common aspects of its being. Cavell's and Thoreau's message is that such undoing of the common is crucial, paradoxically, to achieving the common. Awakening to the uncommon about one's self is a process of release from the insistent demands of one's narrow ego: it is the beginning of opening oneself to common humanity.

This requires education for becoming human. Cavell writes:

Both imagination and experience continue to require what the Renaissance had in mind, viz., that they be humanized. («I brag for humanity», i.e., the humanity that is still to awaken, to have its renascence. And the writer praises science that humanizes knowledge...)⁶².

The issue here is not so much that schools as alternative institutions be set up outside the common school. Rather the uncommon school implies a place and occasion for transforming and translating oneself and the way one sees the

⁵⁹ S. Cavell, *ibid*, p. 125; P. Standish and N. Saito (eds.), *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups*, Fordham University Press, New York 2012.

⁶⁰ See H. Putnam, *Words and Life*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1995, p. 223.

⁶¹ S. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, cit., p. 60.

⁶² S. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, cit., p. 75.

world: it can be created both within and without the existing school. The concept of the uncommon school transcends the dichotomy between inside and outside school. It is a place, as Cavell implies above, where the border between science and humanities is transcended. In uncommon schools, science, literature, all manner of things enrich human life, and such cultivation of humanity goes on throughout life – in the way people live. Whether in science or the humanities, one has to learn the way of «reading in a high sense» and of «responsibility in using words»⁶³ (Standish 2006, p. 151). In this sense, teaching and learning in uncommon schools is different, for example, from popular practice of philosophy for children, from lifelong learning for adults, and from «philosophy» as a part of the reskilling demanded in cultures of neoliberalism.

Such education is not exclusively for the elite or for those who can afford to receive a university liberal arts education. In his article, *The Spirit of the University and the Education of the Spirit* (2000), Paul Standish calls for a spiritual commitment on the part of the university in resistance to the cultural erosion effected by the market economy, commercialization and utilitarianism. Standish proposes a perfectionism that responds to the «spiritual need» of ordinary people⁶⁴. What he envisions for the quest of the perfect soul is not some purified, perfected state of mind, but rather a «humble perfectionist yearning» derived from the realistic, actual problems that ordinary people face⁶⁵. Standish's stance has common ground with Cavellian and Thoreauvian ideas of education for grownups. This is perfectionist education for ordinary people: philosophy in service to the *common* people. While the common school in the conventional sense is directed to the democratization of education for all, education at the uncommon school takes a different stance, of democracy as a way of life. And the foremost task of liberal education here is learning how to read – how to interpret the word and the world. This is what is missing from the way «fast knowledge» acquired in *Jiko Keihatsu*.

⁶³ P. Standish, *Uncommon Schools*, cit., p. 151.

⁶⁴ P. Standish, *The Spirit of the University and the Education of the Spirit*, in F. Crawley, P. Smeyers, P. Standish (eds.), *Universities Remembering Europe*, Berghahn Books, Oxford 2000, pp. 217-236, pp. 330.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 326.