

TOWARDS AN ETHICAL EDUCATION: ADDRESSING ETHICAL BANKRUPTCY IN ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

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Education has become a commodity under the hegemony of the market economy as education economists tend to restrict the aims, purposes, and motivations of education to economic growth.¹ Education economics puts too much of a premium on the productivity and employability of students which in turn undermines the creativity and morality of learners. This paper endeavors to re-orient and re-evaluate the meaning of education beyond the economic sphere. I use Ricoeur's hermeneutical model of the threefold mimesis: prefiguration (mimesis 1), configuration (mimesis 2), and refiguration (mimesis 3) to argue that the goal of education is not merely for economic growth but for ethical progress, i.e., human flourishing. I conclude with a thought-provoking dialectic between the terms educated and learned to further justify that education is not the handmaid of economics but the harbinger of ethics.

Keywords: economics, education, Ethics, mimesis

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a neoliberal world where the meaning of education has been tied with economic ideals. Education had been unjustly reduced to mere transmission of information and skills from the teacher to the student. Neoliberalism has created an educational structure that treats students simply as consumers of knowledge, as puppets of an unquestioned world, and as passive minds who uncritically conform to the status quo. In other words, education has become a commodity under the hegemony of the market economy. The aims, purposes, and means of education have been defined by the wealthy in order to monopolize the poor.² Education economists have reduced education as an economic tool. Eric Hanushek argues that the quality of education is causally related to economic growth. Present education conducts economic analysis to assess teacher effectiveness as well as to gauge student performance (Hanushek 2023).³ George Psacharopoulos and Maureen Woodhall highlight the importance of the World Bank investment in education and articulate how schools should repay the debt by augmenting human capital.⁴ However, it is

important to note that this paper does not outrightly discard the importance of education economists. I acknowledged their aid in policy-making to sustain financial stability in educational institutions. Criticizing some of their economic stances on education does not mean that I completely reject the reality that schools need capital in order to operate, students and teachers need funding to supplement learning and teaching, and schools are expected to produce human resources in the labor force. The statistical data from their economic analysis could be material in the deliberation and decision-making process on the allocation and distribution of economic goods in the educational system. My only contention is how education economists limit education as an economic instrument to champion their goals and satisfy their interests.

In the Philippine context, the education curriculum has been patterned from Western ideals in which academic success is solely measured by the employability of the graduates. In this manner, most schools both public and private, have become mere training grounds for the development of technical skills that would meet the expectations of the employer in the workplace. Agustin Martin Rodriguez observes that the main objective of the education system in the Philippines is not on the holistic formation of the human person, which he termed as the "*Filipino loob*" but on the numeracy and literacy development that could "serve the Western-defined and imposed economic and governance systems (Rodriguez 2023, 1-13). Thus, schools are designed to shape the learners not to have a better understanding of themselves and their being-in-the-world, but to be obedient followers and workers in the economic bureaucracies, i.e., wealth extraction systems of capitalism. Ironically, the Philippines has long gained its independence from foreign occupations, but colonization continues to creep into the educational system. Rowena Palacios (2021) confirms that "a succession of general superintendents in the earliest years of the American colonial period proposed and experimented with different curricula, but eventually a model of industrial education prevailed (33-34)." Education in the Philippines has become economically oriented so that when you ask an individual why he/she wants to go to school, the immediate answer would be for a job and salary aside from the diploma and fame. In other words, the current education system effectively produces money makers: bureaucrats, technocrats, entrepreneurs, industrialists, contractors, and the like.

Education economists seem to confine educational experience within the parameters of market economy in which the sole purpose of education is to train individuals to become useful laborers. They simply rely on statistical methods, i.e., econometrics, to understand the essence of education. But in reality, economic growth is a deceptive indicator of human flourishing. Modernization does not always imply educational development. Because we are too busy for economic progress, we tend to overlook the more valuable dimension of education, which is the ethical growth of the human person. This is the great challenge of educators at present, wherein some legislators want ethics removed from the curriculum of higher education in order to prioritize what they consider as functional literacy subjects, namely Mathematics, Science, and English. The basis of this abrupt move is the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment, where the Philippines ranked 76th in Mathematics, 77th in reading, and 79th in Science, among 80 other countries. This is problematic in three aspects as far as this study is concerned. Firstly, is this a proper

gauge to measure proficiency levels? No, because there are discrepancies in different levels—selection of examinees and mode of examination, the quality of the teaching-learning process, and the variation of curricula. In order to have a more equitable assessment, all examinees must at least have an equal footing in the aforementioned levels because PISA, in the first place, is a standardized test. Secondly, what is the main intention of the PISA? Aside from the front of promoting global competency, it brings us back to the old feeling of inferiority and a sense of lack, which foreign aid alone cannot suffice. In order to be useful as a worker in the capitalist system, one must satisfy the standard criteria set by the employer. Lastly, is our standing in PISA the main reflection of the educational crisis? No. The PISA result is simply part of the tip of the iceberg, for the crisis in education lies within the system itself. Simply put, the PISA is not a proper rationale for the removal of ethics because the more essential aspects of education are unquantifiable, beyond any standard and metrics.

To argue that education is more than economics, this study offers Ricoeur's notion of education. For him, education is not meant to be quantified, for it is beyond economics—it is poetics, i.e., ethics. His hermeneutical model of the threefold mimesis⁵: *prefiguration* (mimesis 1), *configuration* (mimesis 2), and *refiguration* (mimesis 3) presupposes a threefold educational experience: *pre-existing world of the student* (prefiguration), *proposed world of the teacher* (configuration), and *poetic interplay of both worlds* (refiguration). Simply put, education economists claim that the ultimate aim of quality education is economic growth⁶ whereas Ricoeur believes that the noble aim of education is ethical progress—refigured self, renewed being, just world. The Ricoeurian threefold mimesis sheds light on how education economists confine educational experience and educational process to pure economic productivity. In a way, this paper is an appeal that education economics should not cripple the creativity of students to develop their ethical aptitude.

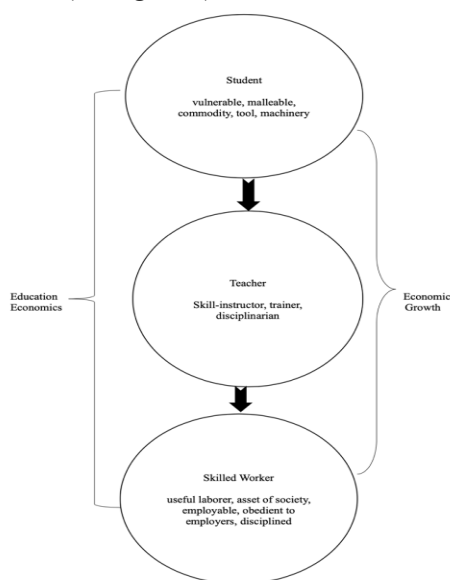
To give substance to what I have presented thus far, the discussion of this paper is subdivided as follows: First, I present an exposition of the problematic of education economics and articulate how the paper is designed to be an appeal for an ethical education. Second, I provide a comprehensive understanding of the learner's pre-existing world: convictions, beliefs, dispositions, worldview, and expectations prior to the educational activity. *Mimesis I* implies the vital role of education in making a difference in the learner's world. Third, I scrutinize the proposed world of the teacher manifested in the teaching process, in the curriculum, learning content, testimonial beliefs, and the teacher's intended learning outcomes. *Mimesis II* highlights the task of the teacher in introducing a world, however, this proposed world may be liberating or enslaving, enlightening or obfuscating. Fourth, I argue that students have the responsibility to critically decipher and creatively interpret the proposed world of teachers in order to refigure the former's world and re-orient the latter's world. *Mimesis III* accounts for the dialectic of both worlds, which results in ethical maturity. Hence, the aim of education that the paper advances is not simply economic prosperity but the heightening of students' ethical consciousness. There are certain values that are not formally taught in school. There are important competencies that are not captured in lesson plans or course syllabi. There are essential lessons that are not taught by the teacher. This limited world of the teacher, if accepted uncritically, can be more limiting to the already limited pre-existing world of the learner. *Mimesis III*, then, is the creative space

where the dialectic interplay of the learner's pre-existing world and the teacher's proposed world unfolds the ethical possibilities of education beyond the limits of economics. Finally, to supplement the said aim, I further analyze the difference between educated and learned, which have been carelessly interchanged—educated as knowledgeable and economically skilled, and learned as wise and ethically responsible.

RICOEUR'S THREEFOLD MIMESIS: AN APPEAL FOR AN ETHICAL EDUCATION

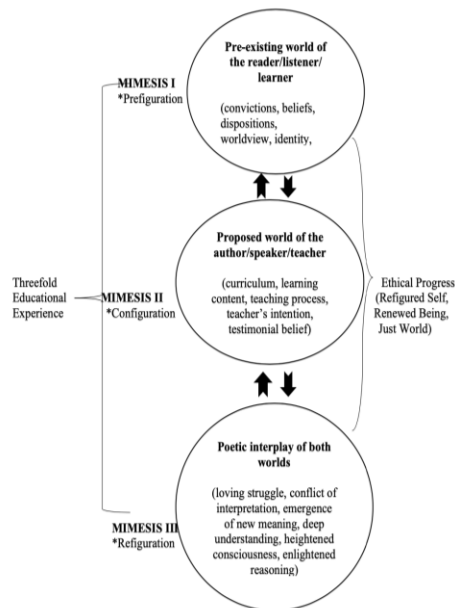
To clarify further the problematic of education economics, this section illustrates how the Ricoeurian threefold mimesis unfolds the true essence of education beyond the realm of economics. Education economics seems to adopt the banking system of education (Freire 1970, 71-86)⁷ as the teacher is compelled by the system to treat the student as a mere repository of knowledge and skills. Schools become training grounds for technical-vocational skills, where students' vulnerability and malleability become an opportunity for teachers to mold and discipline them in such a way that they are equipped with the necessary skills expected by employers.⁸ This view on education is apparently fine at the economic level; however, there are crucial moments which have been overlooked if we delve deeper into the intricacies of the teaching and learning process: the rigorousness of the educational activity, the academic freedom of teachers to conduct their subject matter, and the creativity of students to explore the meaning of their being, which is constitutive to ethical progress. These elements in education are crucial because they presuppose the dynamic relationship between the teacher and the student, and capture the freedom of both in the educational activity. Education becomes more meaningful if it is liberating rather than exacting, as well as enlightening rather than obfuscating. Hence, the economic value of education is material to learning, but its ethical value is substantial for learners. (see figure 1)

Figure 1:
Education Economics Framework



By appropriating Ricoeur's mimetic theory to education, I present a different outlook on education to the other side of economics. The recurring theme that is constitutive of this study is the parallelism between the figure of an author as a teacher and the figure of a reader as a learner. An author implicitly reifies their thoughts in texts and tends to posit a world in which readers simply concur with the author's intention and obliviously inhabit the proposed world of the text. Ricoeur's mimetic theory pays great heed to the world that is being proposed by the author in the texts and provokes the reader to critically and creatively decipher new possibilities for transforming that world and incidentally the reader. In other words, the text has a life of its own apart from the author's intention. The text is instilled with life through its openness to diverse interpretations, which can be meaningful as well as transformative to the readers. It is in this world of the text that the reader deciphers meaning that does not only incite new ways of thinking but also inform new modes of acting, interacting and living in the world.

Figure 2:
Ethical Education Framework



In the same manner, the teacher introduces a world to their students in the teaching-learning process, wherein the latter can wander with wonder. The world that is proposed by the teacher can either be limiting or enabling for students. There are passive students who simply adopt the world presented by the teacher, and there are radical students who critically engage with the teacher's world in order to creatively re-construct their own worlds. Teachers implement their lessons with an intended meaning or projected outcome and it is the responsibility of students to tease out and explore the learning content in order for new meaning and outcomes to emerge. So, where does learning experience happen in Ricoeur's threefold mimesis? Learning happens when the world introduced by the teacher reinforces, challenges, contradicts

or poses a problem, re-orient, and renew the pre-existing world of the students. Hence, Ricoeur's hermeneutical model of the threefold mimesis takes the traditional as well as neoliberal teaching-learning process into a new depth where the world of the teacher and the world of the student is in a constant poetic interplay. In this poetic interplay, we can witness the working of creative imagination—not the passive imagination which is the fantasizing of the unreal, but a radical imagination which refigures the real to make it more habitable, meaningful, and humane.

It is quite premature to already state this crucial claim, but this is necessary to point out as early in this part because this claim is the source of inspiration as well as the pole of attraction of this paper. Nevertheless, I will support this claim in the succeeding sections. Moreover, this poetic interplay, which suggests the rigorousness of learning (education is not linear but intersectional), produces not necessarily skilled entrepreneurs but ethical human persons. Without ethical human persons, our prospective society loses its perspective. Therefore, this research work is an appeal for an ethical education using Ricoeur's threefold mimesis. (see figure 2)

MIMESIS I: PREFIGURATION OF THE LEARNER'S PRE-EXISTING WORLD

To begin with, it is more proper to explore the meaning of education as a learner than to define it as an educator, because under the banner of educational experience, we are all students constantly learning within our lifetime. What is education? There is no straightforward answer to this question because it incites further questioning: What is to be a student or teacher? What are the aims, purposes, and values of education? It is indeed a struggle to make sense of something until you are immersed in the activity. In that struggle, we found out that education is not that plain and simple, but dynamic and complex (Fulford and Hodgson 2016). In this part of the paper, I intend to present education as a rigorous activity that provokes the learners to evaluate their pre-existing world vis-à-vis the world offered in education, as opposed to the notion of education as economically transactional, wherein teachers merely transmit knowledge and skills to their students. Hence, *Mimesis I*, construed as the prefiguration of the learner's pre-existing world, recognizes the vulnerability of the student's convictions, which are amalgamations of ideas from their pre-educational experience as well as the possibilities that unfold through the student's educational experience.

Prior to education, formal schooling for that matter, a child is already exposed to a world and gradually developing their worldview. A person is biologically born in the world and as Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962), in the Heideggerian sense, one inescapably nurtures a view of this world and a notion of themselves which shapes their actions, interactions, and other course of affairs. But most of the time this pre-existing world is an unquestioned world i.e., it is an inherited world of beliefs, cultures, dispositions, biases, character-identity, and so on. The vulnerability of the child lies in the childish thought that everything is given. This passive kind of thinking, what I call as a *lazy docility*, makes a child simply a receiver, a spectator, and a conformer of whatever is transmitted. The curious inquisitiveness of an innocent child is dampened by the traditional conception that a child must unquestioningly learn from the adult,

regardless of the latter's credibility and veracity of claims. This passive dependence of the child on the adult is correlative with the superiority of the teacher over the student in the educational activity. The fragility of the child is taken advantage of to impose ideologies, to simply obey commands, and to inherit the worldview of the adult. The learner is taught as the passive receiver of whatever is given by the teacher. This is the unquestioned world inherited by every child.

One serious phenomenon that aggravates the vulnerable condition of the young in this present generation is the rapid rise of social media platforms. In the Philippines, for example, Filipino children, at an early age, are provided with gadgets to keep them busy while their parents make a living. The unquestioned and unregulated world offered by social media becomes the new pacifier of children. Parenting, which is supposed to be the most responsible way of raising a child toward an ethical life, turns out to be a burden for some that ends up spoiling or even indoctrinating the child, which makes them a weakling in society. Education and parenting is closely intertwined in child rearing.⁹ Aside from parents, social media influencers like vloggers and content creators become part of child-rearing, hence, have a huge influence on the child's way of thinking, acting, feeling, and living. Nevertheless, not everything that is accessible on the internet is beneficial to the well-being of the child. Every child can become a victim of cyber abuse, bullying, sex exploitation, fake news, gaslighting, and the like. Making this point about the effects of social media on the young does not intend to disregard their educational importance. The internet can augment the creative imagination of the child and heighten their consciousness worldwide. If such is the case, when does social media become a threat to the young? Social media is not evil *per se*; it depends on the use of an agent because it can either be productive and innovative or addictive and destructive.

On a societal level, like the Philippine society, politics and religion also have a massive impact on the child's being. Political disputes and religious scandals have become the staple of the people. Politics turned out to be legalistic to the extent that violence is legitimized (Ricoeur 1965, 234)¹⁰—justice is reduced to vengeance, and religion turned out to be moralistic, that doing good is instrumentalized to achieve personal reward at the expense of others—goodness, which is primordially a selfless act, becomes a selfish interest. Indeed, the two most corrupt institutions are the state and the church as both are "institutions of gathering together, of recapitulation, of totalization (Ricoeur 1974, 423)." ¹¹ The state totalizes its constituents by propagating a false consciousness that sustains the status quo, and the church totalizes its faithful by dogmatizing religious teaching that propagates herd mentality. Most children grow up in the trust that everything that the state does is just and everything that the church says is holy. Fear is instilled in the young that one must always obey the law; otherwise, they will end up behind bars, and one must do good; otherwise, they will go to hell. In the pre-existing world of the learner, politics and religion remain unchallenged.

Apart from politics and religion, economics inevitably plays a huge part in the conditioning of children. The young witness the importance of money in daily existence. Parents work hard to gain profit, children are sent to school and advised to study in order to earn a living; people fight and even murder for the amassing of wealth. Modern society advocates the value of consumerism, which encourages individuals to expend their efforts for the consumption of goods and services as a means of attaining

satisfaction. But is there any contentment in a consumeristic society where pleasure is insatiable?¹²

There is a worsening value crisis in the pre-existing world of the learner, where economics becomes the primary intention, motivation, inspiration, and end goal of education. Value is confused with price, i.e., monetary cost. Is not that what is truly of value, priceless? Is it not that real worth lies beyond any amount of capital? One cannot buy justice, peace, knowledge, wisdom, respect, goodness, and so on.¹³ These values are not given; they are tasks appropriated in "our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire (Ricoeur 1970, 46)" for a good life. In the same way, life is not simply given; it is a vocation, it is a gift under our care and responsibility. In prefiguring the pre-existing world of the learner, being a person is construed to be a project. Ricoeur refers to this project of the person as humanity "not in the collective sense of men but the human quality of man (Ricoeur 1965, 107)." The most fundamental concern, therefore, that is central to us humans above anything else, is the meaning of our humanity. Globally, there is progress in technology and economy, but along with these advancements emerges the regression of rationality and meaning. The most alarming absurdity of modernity is the overwhelming abundance of material wealth and the disturbing decline of substantial goodness. People nowadays find happiness in the acquisition of money rather than in the accumulation of meaning. In the modern world, one can empathize with Ricoeur's observation that "what people lack the most" aside from justice and love is "meaning: the meaninglessness of work, the meaninglessness of leisure, the meaninglessness of sexuality [the meaninglessness of politics, the meaninglessness of education]—these are the problems to which we awaken."¹⁴ Education could enlighten and liberate us from this meaninglessness. Freire affirms this by stating that education ought to be enlightening as well as emancipating.¹⁵ *Mimesis I* presents education as the creative activity that "opens up the horizon of possibilities" of being human (Ricoeur 1965, 79) and educators as the frontliners in the struggle for meaning. Thus, the challenge of prefiguring the pre-existing world of the learner is the hostile world presented by oppressive political, religious, economic, and technological ideology.

MIMESIS II: CONFIGURATION OF THE TEACHER'S PROPOSED WORLD

As time passes by, the pre-existing world of the learner becomes outdated and obsolete. The old world which has been introduced in childhood needs to be rehabilitated and re-oriented against the backdrop of the ever-renewing present.¹⁶ Parents do not only procreate species in their image and likeness, but through birth a world is born with the offspring. Ricoeur would agree then with Arendt that it is an ontological fact that every newborn grows into an old world and the fundamental task of educators is "to prepare a new generation for a new world (Arendt 2006, 177)" —a world that fosters rational discourse and human solidarity, a new world that is more habitable and humane than the pre-existing world. However, educators must be careful enough that the new world that they are introducing to learners does not turn into "the illusion that a new world is being built through the education of children (Arendt 2006,

177)." The shedding of an old world to enter a new one is not mainly the errand of the educator but more so the responsibility of the learner. It is part of human maturity that a child builds their own worldview as they grow older. By virtue of their inquisitiveness, the child not merely grows in age but in wisdom and goodness.

Most of the time, the proposed world by the teacher, manifested in the teaching process, is merely the representation of the old world. That is why it is the initiative of the learner to configure this proposed world and explore what is truly valuable and meaningful. Hence, it is not healthy to always agree with everything that educators claim without rigorous justification and explanation. Learners must maintain a just distance and a critical resistance to what education offers. After examining one's convictions, the learner evaluates the worldview offered by the educator in the educational process.

At this point, we re-evaluate the essence of being an educator beyond its nominal (economic) definition as one who gets paid for teaching their students in a formal educational setting. Some educators view the teaching profession as a career rather than a vocation. The former considers teaching merely as a job where one profits, whereas the latter considers teaching as a passion in which one continues to flourish. In a capitalist society, it is not surprising that the teaching profession becomes a profiteering career for some, who give more importance to salaries than to their learners. It is my hope then that educators must be ethical enough to give utmost importance to the life of their learners over the "life of the capital (Ricoeur 1984, 180)." Educating the young is not a transactional affair that starts with the student's payment of tuition fee, the teacher receiving the salary, and ends in graduation or upon retirement. Education is not a contract but a lifetime commitment that goes beyond the classroom and continues even after the conferment of degrees. The most interesting lessons in life are learned by surprise in the unexpected time, place, and encounter.

Arendt reminds us that the nobility of education ensues from the moment educators "assume the responsibility for both the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world (Arendt 2006, 186)." Education, therefore, is not something forced down our throats; it is a crucial decision in life that we rationally commit ourselves to. Education is not an imposition of someone who is superior—like an adult to the child or the teacher to the student—but a crucial decision and responsibility of both to make the world a better place. This would justify the infamous saying that education is the greatest gift that parents can render to their children. Arendt (2006, 185) confirms this by arguing that

...education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.

We cannot ignore the significance of education to our human condition. Education is one of the most reasonable agenda of a rational human being. It is the most fundamental undertaking of a human person living in a civilized society, which continues to advance as humanity flourishes (Arendt 2006, 185). Education is

constantly renewed as a new generation of students as well as teachers emerges. Accordingly, education not only takes us to great economic heights but also advances our human civilization. Educators must bear in mind that the subject of education is human persons who are in a state of becoming—every child is "a new human being" and "a becoming human being (185)." What learners become as the future unfolds is derivative from the kind of education and educators they had. A collaborative effort is henceforth needed to fashion a common world conducive to mutual human flourishing. In other words, Arendt portrays education as a heritage—not merely a transmission of the same educational tradition, but the creative interplay of the old and new, the young and the ancient, the same and the different. This dialectic of extremes leads to the reimagination of worldviews as well as further innovations in education.

However, what we are witnessing most of the time is the other way around. The physical environment in the context of public schools in the Philippines is not conducive to an efficient and effective teaching-learning experience. The structural integrity of buildings, the lighting and ventilation in classrooms, the materials in the libraries, the equipment in laboratories, and the quality of goods available in school canteens, to name a few, fail to augment quality education. The problems mentioned can be resolved by economic means—funding from private institutions and government agencies, contributions among school heads, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to procure the necessary needs to upgrade the educational milieu. But aside from the physical setting, there is a more alarming problem that is substantial to education, which is the proposed world of the teacher that is sometimes unconducive for learning. As we learn from Freire, (formal) education can become an oppressive system when there is an unbridgeable hierarchical gap between the teacher and the student. In this way, the teaching-learning process has the tendency to become teacher-centered when there is a failure to overcome the teacher-student dialectic. Lesson plans and course syllabi are implemented as exacting structures that insinuate students as merely the passive recipients of educational service. The proposed world of the teacher has a tendency to condition the consciousness of students by convincing them that the former solely holds the seat of knowledge, whereas the latter is simply the repository of reified knowledge. The superiority of the teacher over the student, in which the latter simply obeys and conforms to the command of the former, makes the educational activity merely procedural and mechanical, which kills the dynamism of learning as well as stifles the freedom of students to explore learning beyond the educational parameters set by the teacher.

Nonetheless, we must take note that students are not the only victims of this rigid educational system, but also the teachers who were once students. Indeed, the teacher-student contradiction, as Freire would call it, turns out to be a vicious problem in education because it becomes a heritage passed on from one generation to another (Freire 1970, 36-73). What is sickening is the reality that the best practices of academic institutions are actually the unhealthy practices that hinder further development in education. Traditional teachers in the formal school system find themselves comfortable with the sameness of instructional materials, learning content, and teaching techniques that is why the quality of teaching is degenerating as well as the learning of students become irrelevant.¹⁷ The gravity of this setback was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, where most schools were challenged to continue the

educational activity online, have teachers update their pedagogy, and equip themselves technologically in order to flexibly adapt to the changes of the time and creatively deliver what is due to students (UNESCO, 2020).¹⁸ What we are experiencing in the academe is not simply isolated or scattered problems, but a system in crisis. A system in crisis, if not properly attended to, can further lead to the exploitation of educators and learners and finally lead to self-destruction.

The proposed world of a teacher-centered education "presents us with a situation where many cannot think outside its terms (Standish 2007, 159-171)." Sluggish students think that everything the teacher says is all there is that they must know. The learning capacities of students are framed by the matrix designed by the teacher in such a way that the former's logic of thinking, norms of acting, levels of feeling, and ways of living are patterned on the normative order of the latter's proposed world. In other words, the long exposure of students in schooling, from nursery to tertiary, made them simply adapt the proposed world of the teacher as their own world. Students find their options narrowed down until the only plausible choice is to follow the teacher without hesitation in order to pass the course and graduate with a diploma.

In the end, the proposed world of the teacher is nothing different from the world of capitalism because students are disciplined to submit themselves to the superiority of teachers; and this uncritical attitude will nonetheless be carried to the workplace wherein workers turn out to be mere puppets of their employers. Open-mindedness, free speech, and the art of questioning become irrelevant in this milieu. The "intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness" is alien in the proposed world of the teacher where the vice of conformity is normalized. The important quest of *Mimesis II*, therefore, is that it pays great heed to the world proposed by the teacher and opens the learner to the possibilities of engaging and transforming that world. It projects the learner into the proposed world of the teacher as a newcomer who embodies the spirit of curiosity and skepticism. If we closely analyze the educational experience in formal schooling, particularly in public schools, the problem is partially on the teacher, but the fault is majorly on the student, by being fully dependent on the teacher, totally passing on the responsibility of learning to others. The difficult challenge of every child, therefore, is not to lose one's autonomy in the educational process. In this way, *Mimesis II* is not only the configuration of the teacher's proposed world but also the configuration of the student's own world. Ricoeur encourages us to exercise "suspicion within ourselves (Ricoeur 1974, 148)," ¹⁹ because aside from the teacher and other school authorities, the ego can deceive us with its own illusions for in the end, the easiest person to fool is oneself.²⁰ After criticizing the proposed world of the teacher, it is also necessary to undertake "self-critique" (Ricoeur 1998, 88)²¹ for we tend oftentimes to absorb the mediocrity of others. The configuration of the proposed world of the teacher, therefore, becomes an overture toward the refiguration of both worlds.

MIMESIS III: REFIGURATION OF BOTH WORLDS TOWARD AN ETHICAL PRAXIS

In the Ricoeurian threefold mimesis, education is construed not as an introduction and passing on of worlds from the teacher to the student but the radical

dialectic of both worlds. The world proposed by the teacher in education reinforces, challenges, and even contradicts the pre-existing world of the learner; and this interplay between two worlds provides the learner as well as the teacher with imaginative variations of re-orienting the real world, i.e., the common world where we live together (Ricoeur 1984, 71).²² In *Mimesis III*, a stage of more mature educational experience, learners begin to be critical about the process by virtue of the substance. Learners already have the autonomy to think for themselves as they sense that new meanings are emerging by their own efforts. *Mimesis III* accounts for the transition from the reception of learning materials, memorization of learning content, to knowledge construction, from no learning, rote learning, to meaningful learning. However, it is important to note that though the learner has gained some sort of learning independence, *Mimesis III* highlights the critical role of educators as facilitators and collaborators of learning. This radical shift in learning provides a lens for learners to demarcate good education from bad education. Baehr (2013) describes the nature of a good education:

On the one hand, a good education ought to be *rigorous*: it ought to be demanding, stretch student thinking, and provide more than a short-term or superficial grasp of the material. On the other hand, a good education should also be *personal*: it should be attentive to and demonstrate care for who students are (e.g., their fundamental beliefs and values) and for the persons they are becoming (251).²³

This rigorousness is not the rigidity of education but the quality of the learning experience. Good educators do not impose exacting rules on students in order to meet their expectations; instead, they value the learner's freedom to explore their intellectual capacities and assist them to arrive at new understandings. We cannot but agree with Baehr that good teaching as well as quality learning is a rigorous process (Baehr 2013, 251). Education in this manner is neither the simple transmission of ideas nor merely the shallow relay of cognitive skills; rather, it is the cultivation of critical thinking and the stimulation of the ceaseless desire for truth. Critical thinking fueled by the desire for truth is the *conditio sine qua non* of good thinking, and "good thinking is often a precondition for morally responsible action, which in turn is critical to living well or flourishing as a human being (Baehr 2013, 254)." Good thinking is the most underrated intellectual virtue in the academe. Teachers have greatly emphasized basic reading and writing, logical inference, metaphorical interpretation, mathematical solving and so on but seldom explain what constitutes good thinking. Teachers become too preoccupied with trivial matters that they overlook the most essential aspect of learning, which is creating a rapport with students. A personal rather than a transactional relationship with learners is key to a lifelong love of learning, that even after formal schooling, we continue to educate ourselves in every moment of our existence. After all, living is learning, and to stop learning would be the end of living. It is on a personal level that students appreciate the care of their teachers. This intimacy in education has a personal effect not only on the student's academic endeavor but on their life as a whole. Hence, good education does not only generate good thinkers but also transform good human persons.

In *Mimesis III*, the learner becomes independent from the educator. After being introduced to the proposed world of the teacher and nurturing the essential proficiencies in delineating good education from bad education, the learner continues to seek education beyond academic institutions. The refigured learner becomes aware that the scope of learning is not merely determined by teachers or exclusively confined within the corners of a classroom. The whole of life is learning because life never stops inciting questions, and it takes time or even a lifetime to discover their possible answers. The mystery of life and the misery of the problem of evil become the sources of inspiration and the poles of attraction in advocating for an ethical education. The global crisis of poverty, injustice, and climate change is a major manifestation of a problematic education.²⁴ Education, which is supposed to alleviate poverty by educating the economically poor, has been commercialized by the elite to promote their advantage. From this, education, which is supposed to secure justice, creates further inequality in society as well as imbalance in the environment—"education becomes unworldly and the world becomes noneducational (Illich 1971, 12)." Our present generation has become too economic-oriented that we busy ourselves in acquiring money and have forgotten what is truly valuable. Is it not that the questions of value, ethics, morality, and politics are at the core of educational endeavors (Standish 2010, 12)? The aim of education in this sense is no other than awakening and nourishing the ethical consciousness of the human person. And this aim is anchored on the hope "that words may change the 'heart,' that is the refulgent core of our preference and the positions which we embrace (Ricoeur 1965, 5)."

EDUCATED VS. LEARNED

Earlier we have demarcated good education from bad education, in this section we are going to distinguish learned from educated which have been interchanged in everyday life in order to further justify the reason why this paper has put much premium on the threefold *mimesis* (aside from other theories of education) that offers a different outlook on education beyond economics; and intensify our appeal for an ethical education. Through the threefold *mimesis*, we are awakened from the illusion that learning exclusively happens in school by the initiative of the teacher. Learning can happen everywhere and anytime, depending on one's yearning to learn. Is it not that most of the notable learnings in life are the ones that surprise us—our encounter with the needy, victims of violence, conversations with elders and marginalized, and witnessing the death of the innocent etc.²⁵ Sadly, it seems that there are no longer surprises in learning because everything is determined and packaged in a stringent curriculum. Many students are still trapped in the traditional belief that learning only happens in school through the teacher. In this instance, learning becomes rote memorization wherein students simply familiarize themselves with ready-made answers from the narration of the teacher (Freire 1970, 69-78). Besides, students and teachers wanted to be certified in school so that they can be qualified in the market economy. Without a school certification, one is deemed to be economically dysfunctional and useless. Thus, an educated individual is the product of schooling and a learned human person is more of the consequence of life-long learning. Here lies the

confusion of success. Most students find accomplishment in being knowledgeable, while a few learners find fulfillment in being ethically wise. Schooling may be a guarantee for the former but not the latter because being learned is honed in real-life situations. Acquiring practical wisdom is beyond the classroom and the teacher's knowledge. Why is that being knowledgeable not enough? Being knowledgeable is not a guarantee of being a good human person. For example, many public officials in the Philippines are graduates of prestigious universities locally and internationally, but despite their educational attainments, they still end up in graft and corruption. There are many individuals who are economically successful yet ethically impoverished. Hence, the threefold *mimesis* somehow motivates learners to acquire not only knowledge but to seek wisdom—to cultivate a deep yearning to learn that transcends the yearning to earn.

In spite of the increasing literacy rate (Global Data 1922) and more people receiving education as per the statistical report of the Philippine Department of Education, crime and poverty rates are not decreasing but instead proliferating.²⁶ This unprecedented rise of crimes, as well as the worsening conditions of poverty in the country, is deeply rooted in a decaying educational system. Admittedly, most public school teachers in the Philippines teach students merely to become good test takers. There is mass promotion of students out of pity despite their failing grades, and more importance is given to extra-curricular activities (like sports, festivities, and irrelevant contests) rather than substantial academic undertakings (like conferences and workshops). Unfortunately, quality is being sacrificed in favor of quantity, and this contradicts the advocacy of the Department of Education (DepEd) to ensure quality education for all.²⁷ This is the reason why, after graduation, most students only learn facts but not the values of life. Those elected in public office were educated men and women from prestigious academic institutions here and abroad but are still involved in graft and corruption. It is necessary then to ask ourselves: what is lacking in them, given that they have all the means (money and property) to acquire quality education? Had they been thoroughly taught the values of a human person? This is proof, therefore, that not all educated are learned. In Filipino, we say, *hindi lahat ng edukado o maraming alam ay may pinag-aralan o magandang asal*. In Ilokano, it can be translated as: *haan nga amin nga adda pinagadalanna* (educated) *ket adda iti sursuro na* (well-mannered).

Hence, grades are not the ultimate measurement of success for one may graduate with honors but in real life they may not be honorable. One may be at the top of the class but becomes indifferent by using the position to belittle others. A degree is not a guarantee that one is a good person. The real gauge where we can measure success, therefore, is how one ethically²⁸ lives their life every day with and for others in the common world. It is easy to become an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor; but it is difficult to become a good engineer, a good lawyer and a good doctor. There are many teachers and students, but there are only a few good teachers and students. I hope we belong to these few good educators and learners.

To further broaden and deepen the distinction between educated and learned, I appropriated it with Ricoeur's notion of the socius and the neighbor (Ricoeur 1965), which is a philosophical reflection of the parable of the Good Samaritan found in the gospel of Luke.²⁹ The priest and Levite, who simply passed by the wounded man, are

the *socius* because they were absorbed by their social function and helping a stranger on the street is not part of their role. Their high ranking in the context of second-temple Judaism made them unavailable to attend to an emergency. In the same manner, educational status has become an excuse for doing small acts of goodness. It is an insult for the rich to be in communion with the needy. The *socius*, who is educated, is too busy with their agenda that they failed to be available for a personal encounter. It is ironic that the *socius*, who is supposed to be the frontier of aid because of their educational attainment and social function, becomes the model of a bad example. The priest and Levite are examples of educated individuals who are ignorant of practical wisdom. The Samaritan, on the other hand, is the neighbor because he transcends the proximity of social function and makes himself available for an ethical encounter with the wounded stranger. The good Samaritan is learned because despite his ordinary lifestyle, he did not think twice to do the right thing, which is to lend a hand to someone who is in need.³⁰ In connection with what is happening in Philippine politics, politicians who are supposed to fulfill the mandate of being public servants are the ones who are recipients of service from the people. Their *socius* function turns out to be not as a means of service but as an instrument of injustice.

Ethical crisis is a symptom of an ailing educational system. The global problem of injustice, which has taken many forms and been experienced in different fronts, is one of the major justifications that "the effects of education may not be entirely positive (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1982, 291)." For example, the invention of nuclear armaments is a fruit of a laborious intellectual experiment of highly educated individuals who have undergone rigorous education from prestigious academic institutions. But this incredible innovation holds a contradiction: its intended purpose is security, but only at the expense of exterminating the enemy of the state; it might bring victory to one, but it brings destruction to another. The fabrication of atomic bombs may suggest the progress of human intelligence in relation to education, but the impending possibility of the product becoming a means of violence suggest the regress of ethical import in education. In the Philippines, most successful business owners have high educational attainment, but why are there issues of tax evasion, unjust wages, labor exploitation, and abuse of employees? Most politicians label themselves as bright, but how come they have difficulty in discerning what is truth from falsehood, goodness from evil, and fairness from injustice? Education seems to be successful in assuring an economically prospective society, but without an ethical perspective. The threefold *mimesis* therefore serves not as a strict rule that education must be patterned but a guiding principle that educators as well as learners might take into consideration and apply it even beyond the academe.

What is the ethical implication of the educated-learned distinction? The way some educated individuals think and act in society goes against the vision and mission of education to guide learners toward their full human flourishing. Therefore, my appeal for an ethical education recommends a constant re-evaluation of the current situation of education in the pre-existing world of the student, proposed world of the teacher, and the common world in which the two co-exist. There must be a purification of educational conceptual schemes from capitalistic and utilitarian ideologies and a re-orientation of educational principles from the fundamental capacities of a human person:

the capacity to say or to speak—the ability to produce a reasoned discourse; the capacity to act—the power to produce events in society and in nature; the capacity to narrate—the power to recount stories that reveal to us the hidden possibilities of our life; the capacity to feel responsible for one's actions—the capacity to ascribe to oneself the consequences of one's actions; the capacity to promise—the ability to keep one's word...the capacity to forgive—the power to address a liberating word to the Other "You are better than your actions" and the capacity to experience a "happy memory", with just enough remembering and just enough forgetting (Garcia 2005, 1-2).³¹

In this way, education is more of learning, re-learning, and unlearning. It is learning and relearning how to become fully human, as well as unlearning our unbecoming human persons. Rediscovering our true human self through education entails a great sacrifice for: "I find myself only by losing myself (Ricoeur 2005, 106)."

CONCLUSION

Education is one of the most rational investments of a human person. It is an incomparable heritage from one generation to another since time immemorial. However, education, which is supposed to be a free enterprise, becomes an income-generating industry for some. In modernity, education has become a useful tool in promoting the ideals of the market economy. Education economists had greatly influenced school policies to be more concentrated on economic development than to be more concerned with the ethical growth of learners. Schools have been gradually turned into innovation centers rather than centers of academic excellence. Given the present economic depression, students yearning to learn is overclouded by the yearning to earn. Thus far, this study has presented the consequences of exclusively confining education within the economic circle. The contemporary allurements toward neoliberalism has pressured academic institutions to generate educational structures that are implicitly exacting as well as constraining to the moral ascendancy and creativity of learners. In response to this ethical bankruptcy amidst the economic prosperity, this study endeavored to rediscover the meaning of education and re-orient its noble purpose of augmenting human flourishing. By appropriating Ricoeur's hermeneutical model of the threefold mimesis to the teaching-learning process, we are able to venture into the intricacies of education that have been taken for granted by education economists. *Mimesis I* accounts for the task of educators to *prefigure* the learner's pre-existing world—the convictions, beliefs, and worldview of an individual prior to the educational experience. *Mimesis II* demonstrates the task of learners to *configure* the teacher's proposed world—a world of possibilities implicated in the learning content and instructions which learners may and creatively explore and critically challenge. *Mimesis III* highlights the poetic interplay of the learner's pre-existing world and the teacher's proposed world, and illustrates how this dialectic leads

to the *refiguration* of both worlds as well as the ethical regeneration of the learner and teacher. The threefold mimesis elucidates the rigorousness and interactiveness of the teaching-learning process. This mimetic educational activity, if I may put it this way, does not only go against the traditional, linear, banking system of education, but it also goes beyond it. The three Ricoeurian components of teaching and learning—prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—point us toward a more substantial goal of education which is not simply the production of skilled entrepreneurs but the transformation or what Ricoeur termed as the refiguration of the ethical human person. Therefore, this paper is an appeal for an ethical education because without ethical human persons our prospective society loses its perspective.³²

NOTES

1. The commodification of education is also criticized by Martha Nussbaum (2010) in her work entitled *Not for Profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*, and Henry Giroux (2016) in his work *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics Beyond the Age of Greed*, to name a few. In this study, I work with the philosophy of Ricoeur to critique the pathologies of neoliberal education.

2. Sadly, most students construe education simply as a means to get a job. "Education simply confers 'credentials' that employers can use to select workers and to determine relative wages and salaries" (George Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1984, 44). Indeed, education implicitly turns out to be a modern mechanism that discriminates the marginalized.

3. This analysis, however, is not really meant for educational development but more of an "analysis in measuring the profitability of educational investment (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1984, 12)."

4. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1984) view education as a modern economic tool that monopolizes people, particularly students, to meet the set expectations of the World Bank. It is paradoxical that they strongly believe that "education, like other investment in human capital, can contribute to economic development and raise the incomes of the poor just as much as investment in physical capital, such as transport, communication, power, or irrigation" without scrutinizing that making students as economic investments is actually taking from them the freedom to invest in themselves in discovering their ownmost possibilities beyond economics which is more fulfilling. Indeed, as they admit, "every investment decision involves a sacrifice of alternative opportunities (23). However, economic investment in education with selfish motives is not a sacrifice in its genuine sense but a compromise.

5. Ricoeur borrowed and broadened the term "mimesis" from Aristotle in order to extensively examine the narrative identity of the human person in all aspects of existence. It is a working hypothesis in Ricoeurian hermeneutics that pursue the task of deciphering, evaluating, and interpreting the pre-existing world of the human being and refiguring it via the poetic world of the text. In this study, I appropriated mimesis outside the context of literature and concentrate its application in education particularly the analysis of the teaching and learning process, the configuration and

refiguration of the learner's world. And mimesis is a recurring theme in his trilogy *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur 1984, 1984 and 1988).

6. Education economists play a big role in crafting educational policies that champion economic interests over the students' aspirations. "Education projects were designed to meet quantitative demand, and the emphasis was on satisfying enrollment targets (Ricoeur 1984, 25)." And no wonder why overcrowding in public and private schools is considered as a minor problem because quantity is valued more than quality.

7. Paulo Freire considers the banking concept of education as an instrument of oppression because the educational activity becomes teacher-centered. The students are deprived of their freedom to learn how to think for themselves, as they always conform to what the teacher professes. Is it not that education must be liberating than enslaving?

8. To please economic investors, schools make sure that what they produce in quantity (though less in quality) "contribute to manpower and employment goals...[that] every Bank-assisted project must contribute substantially to development objectives and be economically, technically, and financially sound (Freire 1970, 6,7)." And to make this possible, education is committed in "improving the skills and productive capacities of the labor force (Freire 1970, 15)."

9. See Liane Peña Alampay & Aileen S. Garcia, "Education and parenting in the Philippines" in *School Systems, Parent Behavior, and Academic Achievement: Young People and Learning Processes in School and Everyday Life*, vol. 3. Springer.

10. Paul Ricoeur confirms this by stating that "with the State there appears a certain *violence* which has all the characteristics of legitimacy" that justifies the corrupt practices of those in power.

11. Ricoeur (1974) puts emphasis on this because for him the "true evil, the evil of evil, is not the violation of an interdict, the subversion of the law, disobedience, but fraudulency in the work of totalization" (376) that undermines the specificity of individual subjects.

12. Ricoeur (2016) elaborates this conundrum: "When will I have enough? When will my authority be sufficiently established? When will I be sufficiently appreciated? Where in all this is the "enough," the "sufficient (17)"? This unquenchable lust for more "constitutes a form of market manipulation (Illich 1995,8)."

13. That is why it is always proper to qualify the term poor because there are people who are economically rich but poor in values, and there are economically poor but rich in values.

14. Paul Ricoeur, "Prévision économique at choix éthique," in *History and Truth*, 312. (my insertion) In a similar way, Ivan Illich has the same sentiment that the "modern man must learn how to find meaning in many structures to which he is marginally related." [Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 11]

15. See, c71-86

16. In Ricoeurian hermeneutics, "there is not a future time, a past time, and a present time, but a threefold present, a present of future things, a present of past things, and a present of present things" (Ricoeur 1984, 60). In this way, it is an ontological responsibility that being must always be in a constant renewal in the present moment.

Ricoeur emphasizes the threefold present because meaning "share the same foundation within-time-ness (63-64)."

17. Heather Battaly (2016) recognizes the possibility of a teacher to become dogmatic by being "blind to alternatives and evidence that undermine their views—they won't register on his radar..." The dogmatic teacher is allergic to new knowledge and new methodology of attaining them. The dogmatic teacher is secured in their old knowledge and old means of achieving them. It seems that there is nothing new for a dogmatic person but only the recurrence of the same.

18. Also see Cahapay, E. & Rotas, E. (2020) and Santos, A. P. (October 6 2020).

19. Erazim Kohak (Citation here please) argues that as a critique "hermeneutics must combine the attitude of trust with an attitude of suspicion, a willingness to listen to what is revealed through the symbol and a suspicion which would protect it from being misled by its overt meaning (cf. Ricoeur 1966, xxxi)."

20. Karl Mannheim (1936) provides us with appropriate examples of this illusions of consciousness: "As examples of "false consciousness" taking the form of an incorrect interpretation of one's own self and one's role, we may cite those cases in which persons try to cover up their "real" relations to themselves and to the world, and falsify to themselves the elementary facts of human existence by defying, romanticizing, or idealizing them, in short, by resorting to the device of escape from themselves and the world, and thereby conjuring up false interpretations of existence (96)."

21. John Caputo (1997) affirms that a critique is an internal reform for "destruction is not a method or some tool that you apply something from the outside (9)." In the same manner, Linda Maccammon (2002) affirms that critique is not something external, it "is rather an internal critique that suspects, interrogates and challenges... (189)"

22. Ricoeur's notion of the interplay of the pre-existing world and the proposed world is correlative with Gadamer's concept of the intersection of worlds i.e., the "fusion of horizons," where "the close relationship between questioning and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic [educational] experience its true dimension." (Ricoeur 2006, 367).

23. Jason Baehr, *Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice in Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol. 47, No. 2, (2013), 251.*

24. However, the paper acknowledges that the Ricoeurian threefold mimesis is not the final or only solution to these global problems, but the least that it can do is to offer an alternative of how to view education beyond the economic specter. This paper is not prescriptive but more of an appeal toward an ethical education, which may hopefully create changes from the individual level, societal level, and up to the global level.

25. Other than the teacher, Ricoeur affirms (with Levinas) that the *other* is a great educator to oneself; that "the underlying figure of the other is that of the teacher of justice." See, Paul Ricoeur 1991 and Levinas 1991.

26. See, Crime in the Philippines – statistics and facts published by Statista Research Department (November 23, 2022): <https://www.statista.com/topics/6994/crime-in-the-philippines/#topicOverview>.

27. See, DepEd Vision and Mission: <https://www.deped.gov.ph/about-deped/vision-mission-core-values-and-mandate/>

28. Ricoeur's notion of ethics is encapsulated in his renowned book *Oneself as Another*, which he deemed as his little ethics, as the "aiming at the good life with and for others, in just institutions (Ricoeur 2004, 172). The appeal for an ethical education, therefore, is also an appeal for students to aim for the good life at the individual, societal, and global levels.

29. "There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and went off, leaving him half-dead. It happened that a priest was going along that road and saw the man, but passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite saw the man and passed by on the other side. However, a Samaritan, who had an ordinary lifestyle, was moved with compassion. Jesus then asked, 'Which of these three do you think made himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The Teacher of the Law answered, 'The one who had mercy on him.' And Jesus said, 'Go and do the same.' (Lk. 10: 30-37 CCB Christian Community Bible)."

30. The mantra of practical wisdom is – I do the good not for me to be recognized or be repaid, I simply do it because it is the good thing to do. It is simply good to be and do good. And Ricoeur concretizes this idea of phronesis: "Do you remember the men and women whose testimony Marek Halter collected in his film *Tseddek*? What did they all say when they were asked, 'Why did you do that? Why did you take the risk of saving the Jews?' They simply answered, 'What else can you do? It was the only thing to do in that situation (Ricoeur 1998, 167)."

31. Also see Ricoeur 2016, (270-271).

32. There are many educated individuals, but only a few are learned persons. Annually, there are innumerable graduates and board passers in the Philippines, yet it seems that we are facing the same societal problems from the past in varying levels. Obviously, there are a lot of professionals, e.g., doctors, lawyers, engineers, policemen, and so on, but only a few are good doctors, good lawyers, good engineers, good policemen, etc. Hence, education must not merely concentrate on the employability of students but on the ethical flourishing of every learner who always has a passion for the possible.

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