

CHAPTER 35

BILDUNG

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35.1 INTRODUCTION

It is no exaggeration to claim that nineteenth-century philosophy stands under the sign of *Bildung*—formation in culture, as it is often translated in an effort to distinguish it from mere *Erziehung*, child-rearing, upbringing, and school education. The history of nineteenth-century philosophy is, in a certain sense, the history of the idea of *Bildung*, as it includes (but is not limited to) the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schiller, the Romantics, G. W. F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Across its different shapes and permutations, the discourse on *Bildung* explores a form of knowledge that presupposes the intertwining of the I and its symbolic-historical world and insists that understanding culture and tradition initiates a deeper and more profound self-understanding that, in turn, translates into the wider spheres of judgment and action. In this sense, *Bildung* targets a kind of knowledge that, in its crossing of the boundaries between theoretical and practical knowledge, cannot be formalized, nor learned by imitation or imitation-based training, but must be self-motivated. Towards the end of the century, the notion of *Bildung* had shaped the conception of culture and cultural education all over the Western world.

In a German context, the Second World War abruptly ended the unquestioned faith in the culture of *Bildung*. Theodor W. Adorno, Thomas Mann, and others took it upon themselves to ask why the rich and wide-spanning tradition of philosophy, art, literature, and music had offered so little resistance to the atrocities of the "Third Reich." The culture of *Bildung*, it seemed, had failed massively; with its fostering of the beautiful soul, it had naively turned its back on real life and the critical and political attitudes needed in order to stand up against the machinery of fascism. This, no doubt, is an important concern—one that must be part of any contemporary discourse of the relevance of *Bildung*. Yet we must not let a naïve and apolitical commitment to education in culture (characteristically portrayed in the petit bourgeois anti-hero of Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* [1924]) stand in for the philosophical, political, and educational potential of the notion of *Bildung* as such. And to the extent that educational politics is still on the agenda (which is very much the case in Europe, especially Germany, after the educational reforms within the European Union, and in the United States and the United Kingdom, where

tuition fees have soared over the past years), the reference to *Bildung* plays an important role in contemporary debates. Hence an effort to understand the roster of positions developed in the nineteenth century is, at the same time, an effort to acquire a set of tools that might help fine-tune our contemporary thinking about the aims and objectives of higher education.

It is the ambition of this chapter to question the notion of *Bildung* as an aesthetic or aestheticizing cultivation of the self and its inner space.¹ I trace the philosophical notion of *Bildung* back to its beginnings in the Enlightenment, and suggest that this discourse does itself offer the critical commitment—the emphasis on individual responsibility, the democratic ethos, and the appeal to reflection and independent thought—needed in order to stand up against the lukewarm and accepting attitudes of the *Bildungsbürger* that Adorno, Mann, and others so relentlessly criticized in the wake of the Second World War. At the end of the day, only this critical and reflective notion of *Bildung* can explain why even its staunchest critics, in spite of their misgivings and worries, were never willing entirely to abandon this ideal.

A discussion that isolates the philosophical approaches to *Bildung* risks narrowing down a discourse that knows no disciplinary boundaries. The notion of “*Bildung*” has roots in a religious context (pietism and its cultivation of the inner as the space of divinity and worship),² and traverses political discourse (both the optimistic build-up to the French Revolution and the sobering reflections on its outcome), meta-discussions in history (in particular the birth of history as an academic discipline and its expansion from a mere fact-oriented discourse to a comprehensive concept of culture and tradition), and the birth of the modern novel (in works that center on individual character development and retrieve the protagonist’s growth toward self-understanding, Christoph Martin Wieland’s *The History of Agathon* [1766–7], Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* [1795–6], and Friedrich Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* [1797–9] being cases in point).³ While there nonetheless appears to be a particularly close relationship between *Bildung* and nineteenth-century thought—which is what feeds the image of the nineteenth century standing under the sign of *Bildung* in the first place—this is not because extra-philosophical disciplines or practices have not contributed to our understanding of *Bildung*, but, rather, because philosophy is

¹ An example of such a reading is found in Bruford’s *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*. Bruford largely identifies the notion of *Bildung* (up to, but not including, the late Thomas Mann) with that of self-cultivation, understood in light of an “inner man.” See W. H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: “Bildung” from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vii–x. For a critical treatment of this tradition (and its ramifications in German academia and twentieth-century politics more widely), see Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Hanover, New England: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

² For an overview of the religious roots of the notion of *Bildung*, see Franz Rauhut, “Die Herkunft der Worte und Begriffe ‘Kultur’, ‘Civilization’ und ‘Bildung,’” in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bildungsbegriffs*, ed. Carl-Ludwig Furck, Georg Geißler, Wolfgang Klafki, and Elisabeth Siegel (Weinheim: Verlag Julius Beltz, 1965), 11–25.

³ The importance of the *Bildungsroman* for the modern novel is emphasized and analyzed in Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 132–44. We could add to this genre, however, that of the anti-*Bildungsroman* from Gustave Flaubert and Stendhal, via Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, to Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy* (1938) and the education of Nabokov’s tragic-comical protagonists in works such as *Lolita* (1955) and *Invitation to a Beheading* (1957).

the discipline that systematically explores and conceptually articulates the idea of *Bildung*, thus opening the way for an inquiry into the distinction between *Bildung* and *Erziehung* and a discussion of the relationship between *Bildung* and self-determination, as well as the particular kind of truth, knowledge, and understanding that *Bildung* yields. By comparing and contrasting it to other kinds of knowledge-acquisition, nineteenth-century philosophers would view *Bildung* as the distinguishing mark of the human sciences at large. Most importantly, however, philosophers came, in this period, to see the search for *Bildung* as intrinsic to philosophy itself. From this point of view, reflection on *Bildung* and its place in modern society is but reflection on philosophy's place and function in past as well as contemporary life.

35.2 ENLIGHTENMENT PRELUDE

It is a common misunderstanding to think that Enlightenment philosophy harbors no notion of *Bildung*, and that the philosophical turn to the formation of the self only emerges with Romanticism and its interest in art and genius. At stake, according to this standard narrative, is an aesthetic upholstering of the Cartesian ego, an attempt to furnish it with creativity and culture. This model, however, overlooks the very context in which the discourse of *Bildung* takes form: that of the late Enlightenment and its discovery of the historicity of human life and reasoning. The central terms in this context are those of freedom, self-understanding, and cultural diversity.

The new scientific world-view, and the Enlightenment currents that followed in its wake, went hand in hand with a process of secularization. This not only changed the prevalent understanding of God and nature, but also that of the human being. Secularization involved a new sense of freedom, yet this new sense of freedom could not be conceptualized with reference to the point of view of eternity. It would have to be a freedom that is realized in concreto. Hence a new challenge emerged: how can freedom be related to history and tradition? The answer to this question seemed to lie within human nature itself. As expressed through art, language, science, and politics, human nature is not given once and for all. Human spirit forms itself in an on-going process of education. Thus freedom is linked to the way that a human being—at an individual as well as societal level—realizes itself and its world. This, further, is related to the fabric of beliefs and practices against which actions, events, and expressions gain meaning.

As such, the premises for historical work must be rearticulated.⁴ History is no longer a collection of brute facts and fragments, but involves synthesis, understanding, and narrative models of explanation. To the extent that a human being is itself historical, historical understanding is not only a study of the past, but also contributes to the present. By definition, historical understanding involves a dimension of self-understanding.

⁴ For a discussion of this development, see Stephen Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680–1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 421–53.

If reason, as historically and culturally situated, is deprived of a point of view that is culturally and historically untainted, then we have to ask how it can at all grasp, critique, and expand its own limits in a way that facilitates freedom and rationality. The late Enlightenment responds to this challenge by pointing out that whereas culture, in the singular, may be limiting, cultures in the plural are not.⁵ Throughout history and across traditions, human rationality gets realized in an endless number of ways. Reason gains in universality by learning to know the varieties of its expressions. This is the age of history, anthropology, travel literature, and philosophical reflection on the differences between East and West, North and South.⁶ The realization of humanity through culture opens the possibility of ascending from a local life-world context to a cosmopolitan point of view.

Here lies the key to a codetermination of freedom and history. If finite humanity allows for a dimension of freedom, then freedom must be realized within the realm of tradition and culture itself. Freedom is not a postulate, but a project. And the responsibility for carrying through this project rests with the human being alone. This is the soil in which the philosophical discourse of *Bildung* initially takes shape.

35.3 A NEW IDEAL OF HUMANITY

The ideal of *Bildung* was expressive of a new ideal of the human; a being who can and should take responsibility for itself and its world. Only such a being can be educated to freedom. Human existence is not passively created in the image (*Bild*) of God or tradition, but must form (*bilden*) itself and its world in its own image. Knowledge is the tool through which freedom is realized. Its arena is that of culture, broadly speaking. *Bildung* and culture are two sides of the same coin, or, to put it otherwise, *Bildung* is culture in the active, progressive sense of cultivation.⁷

The new-won interest in history and culture is sometimes staged as the antidote to another dominant trend of the period: that of transcendental idealism, as it reaches its shape in the works of Kant and Fichte.⁸ Although this picture has some truth to it, it is not entirely justified. As it responds to, furthers, and transcends the Enlightenment spirit,

⁵ For a study of the prominence of this idea in the enlightenment tradition, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁶ As far as literature goes, two early examples, both fictive in style, are Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759). Another example is the travel letters sent home from by Captain James Cook in the 1770s, which were swiftly translated into French and read by the Enlightenment philosophers.

⁷ In the German language, the terms "*Bildung*" and "culture" appear at the same time. See *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bildungsbegriffs*, 14–17.

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer is among the twentieth-century philosophers who have been interested in the idea of *Bildung* and, in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, made it the very core of his own hermeneutic theory. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2003), 9–19. In Gadamer's work, the turn to *Bildung* is staged as an alternative to transcendental philosophy. He sketches a contrast between an orientation towards tradition and history in *Bildung*, on the one hand, and a search for the a priori conditions of experience, its transhistorical ground, on the other.

Gadamer

transcendental philosophy does itself reflect a notion of *Bildung*. Kant and Fichte, however, were not only interested in the practical aspects of *Bildung*, but also sought theoretically to justify the new image of the human being, the subject who understands itself in and through ongoing striving towards freedom.

With regard to Enlightenment discourse, Kant's critical philosophy is often ascribed a somewhat paradoxical status. On the one hand, Kant offers a most stringent definition of Enlightenment as man's liberation from his self-inflicted tutelage, yet, on the other hand, he suggests that this notion of Enlightenment can only be realized to the extent that we embark on a new, philosophical trajectory: that of transcendental philosophy.⁹ With this, history and culture are sidelined as central fields of philosophical inquiry. The backbone of philosophy, the job that it alone can do, is to lay bare the conditions of possibility for epistemic, moral, and aesthetic judging. How, then, can Kant at all be said to interact with the paradigm of *Bildung*? His is, one could argue, a philosophy that seeks to defend the image of the human being as a creature who is not only capable of taking responsibility for itself, but is indeed compelled to do so. If Kant pushes the self-formation in culture to the margins of philosophical research, he does so in order to demonstrate, from a transcendental point of view, that the self-responsibility that enables and calls for *Bildung* is not something that can be chosen or rejected: it is the defining core of subjectivity, of that which makes us human. The young Kant's philosophical heroes, Rousseau, Shaftesbury, and Hume, not only awakened him from his dogmatic slumber (as he is known to have said about the latter), but also shaped his larger vision of transcendental idealism as it revolves around the question "what is a human being?" The philosophical backbone of the three critiques, the mapping of legitimate (and exclusion of illegitimate) uses of reason, reflects the image of a finite, sensuous being, a being who is an indisputable part of nature (and thus subject to causal laws), but is nonetheless able to rise above nature and form itself as free and self-determining (and thus as being its own law-giver).

When approaching Kant's philosophy from the point of view of *Bildung*, we ought to ask if the postulation of such a distinction between nature and spirit (a human being realizing itself as free to the extent that it transcends nature) does not break with the interest in culture and cultivation (*Bildung*) as fields in which causality and freedom are co-positing as phenomenal and noumenal aspects of subjectivity. If Kant's philosophy had consisted of only the first and the second Critiques and if we, in addition, bracket the early Kant's call for a turn from philosophy (as a set of doctrines) to philosophizing (as a critical activity),¹⁰ the question could perhaps be answered in the affirmative. However, in his early work, Kant explicitly addresses the task of education. And, in the third Critique, he discusses the possibility of a higher synthesis of freedom and nature, thus reiterating, to some extent, the concerns from his so-called pre-critical period. Seeking to unify the approaches pursued in the first two critiques—the idea of nature as subject to laws and the idea of the human being

⁹ Kant's definition of enlightenment is discussed all the way to Adorno, Foucault, and Habermas. For a helpful collection of texts on this issue, see James Schmidt (ed.), *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Kant, "Announcement of the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1765–6," trans. David Walford, in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 253.

Kant & Bildung
 ✓ Kant's Bildung
 1765-1766?

as free—the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) presents the possibility of nature as a field of intentionality and freedom. The experience of natural beauty hints in this direction. Judgments that are based on this experience cannot be ascribed objective validity (this would violate the conclusion of the first Critique); as disinterested and pure, however, they can be granted a subjective universality: they purport to be valid across the realm of judging subjects.¹¹

This is expressive of a humanist ethos in Kant's work—one that is articulated in his pre-critical writings, serves as a motivating factor in his Copernican turn, and gets its systematic formulation in the *Critique of Judgment*.¹² Given the (self-imposed) limits of transcendental idealism, Kant can hardly be seen as a central figure within philosophy of *Bildung*. Yet it would be wrong to stage his work as opposed to this tradition—especially when considering how the third Critique influenced central proponents of *Bildung*: Goethe, the Romantics, and Hegel included.¹³ However, with the turn to Fichte, who perceived his work as the true realization of Kantian philosophy, the link between idealism and philosophy of *Bildung* is beyond dispute.¹⁴

Fichte launches a critique of the Kantian dualism between nature and freedom, yet suggests that this dualism must be overcome with reference to an absolute I, an I who is spontaneity, not only postulating itself, but also its counterpart, the non-I.¹⁵ At first glance, Fichte thus appears an unlikely candidate for a philosopher of *Bildung*.¹⁶ Still it was Fichte who would influence Humboldt and his talk about a *Bildungstrieb* and stake out a path that was soon to be followed by Hegel, Schleiermacher, and the Schlegel brothers. Unlike Kant, Fichte does indeed have a pronounced philosophy of *Bildung*. Further, this part of his work is not added to his system, his *Wissenschaftslehre*, as some kind of extra-philosophical decorum, but is integrated into his program from the very start.¹⁷ Fichte's lectures on the vocation of the scholar (1794) summarize his thoughts on academic life, life in and for the sake

¹¹ Aesthetic judgment is, as Kant puts it, subjectively universal; it is “not connected with the concept of the object considered in its entire logical sphere, and yet it extends it over the whole sphere of those who judge.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §8.

¹² The humanistic reading of Kant (along the lines of Goethe's work) is pursued, among others, by Ernst Cassirer. See his *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. James Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 271–5. Hannah Arendt offers a broader political recapitulation of this dimension of Kant's work in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 42–5 and 72–7.

¹³ In this context, Kant's pedagogical manifesto seems to have been less influential. For this manifesto, see Immanuel Kant, “Lectures on Pedagogy,” trans. Robert B. Loudon, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a collection of essays dedicated to this text, see Klaus Roth and Chris W. Surprenant (eds.), *Kant and Education: Interpretations and Commentary* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge. With the First and Second Introductions*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 4–5.

¹⁵ Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 93–100.

¹⁶ This is even more so to the extent that Hegel, himself heavily influenced by Fichte, tends to emphasize the subjectivism of his theory, thus, by implication, taking the sole credit for the intersubjective articulation of human spirit. See, for example, Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 479–506. For a discussion of Fichte's influence on Hegel, see Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77–83.

¹⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 147–50. Further references to this work will be abbreviated EPW, followed by page number.

Fichte

of *Bildung*. If a human being is free and self-determining, then it is the task of the scholar to think through the nature of this freedom and how it ought to be put to societal use (EPW 146). The scholar reflects on, but also exemplifies, the "spiritual element in man" (EPW 147). For Fichte, a human being never exists as a means to an end, but simply for its own sake and by virtue of being an I. Being an I is to be autonomous, a person who has the capacity for self-determination (EPW 149). Indeed, the human being is characterized by its striving to live up to and gain unity with its own self-image (*Bild*). This, for Fichte, is the highest good: the complete harmony of a rational being with itself (EPW 151). It is the vocation of the scholar, as of man in general, to approximate this goal in a process of self-perfection (EPW 152, 176-7).

The drive to *Bildung*—and this, in part, is what must, in spite of its transcendental baggage, have made Fichte's philosophy so attractive to Humboldt—cannot be realized by an isolated individual. Or, rather, the individual can only see and understand itself as an individual to the extent that it encounters, acknowledges, and is itself acknowledged by other individuals. Humanity, in short, is only realized in society, understood as the field of free interaction and mutual recognition (EPW 157).¹⁸ In order to be free, the individual must grant freedom to others. Fichte insists that it is impossible to be free alone (and, for that reason, deems the freedom of the slave owner an illusion [EPW 158-9]). In this sense, *Bildung* is not, strictly speaking, self-formation, but a formation of the self in society and of a society with "complete equality of all of its members" (EPW 163).¹⁹

Bildung
a formation of
the self
in society

This political mission rests at the heart of Fichte's later, somewhat discredited *Bildungs*-manifesto, *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807-8), which was written after the French Revolution turned stale and Fichte envisioned that the Germans, through education and critical reason, were to take on the mission of liberty, equality, and brotherhood that the French had let down. With its mix of pompous rhetoric of the fatherland and profound insights into the need for an educational reform that would facilitate democracy and self-determination, this text makes it clear how Fichte, throughout his work, seeks to develop the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's teaching for large-scale educational, cultural, and political-philosophical purposes. Thus we now need to turn to the work of Herder, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt, who were, roughly, contemporaries of Kant and Fichte, but whose philosophies seek to implement the ideal of *Bildung* in the concrete contexts of society, schools, and universities.

¹⁸ At this point, we observe, in spite of their different philosophical approaches, a significant overlap between Fichte and Herder. It is this overlap that later made it possible for Dilthey to situate Schleiermacher and the beginning of modern hermeneutics in the intersection between Herder's empirical philosophy and Fichte's transcendental program. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System in Relation to Earlier Protestant Hermeneutics* (1860), trans. Theodore Nordenhaug, in *Hermeneutics and the Study of History, Selected Works*, vol. IV, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 89 and 100-3. See also my "Enlightenment, History, and the Anthropological Turn: The Hermeneutic Challenge of Dilthey's Schleiermacher Studies," in *Anthropologie und Geschichte. Studien zu Wilhelm Dilthey aus Anlass seines 100. Todestages*, eds. Guiseppe D'Anna, Helmut Johach, and Eric S. Nelson (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 323-55.

¹⁹ Hence Fichte views class and occupation as, ideally, a matter of choice rather than a predicament into which the individual is born. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," EPW 167.

35.4 EDUCATION TO FREEDOM

The discourse on *Bildung* reflects a new understanding of the human being. The individual is not determined by inherited identity and privileges, but viewed in light of his or her on-going capacity for self-formation, as this does itself borrow from and contribute to the community of which he or she is a part. Philosophy is the discipline that traces the structures of this process—not at the individual level, but in the sense of its constitutive dynamics. But philosophy cannot stop short at theorizing education (*Bildung*), be it in a descriptive or normative language. It must also educate (*bilden*), that is, translate its theoretical concept formations into the language of practice. These twin commitments—to theoretically conceptualize and practically actualize *Bildung*—become particularly clear in the work of Herder, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt.

Starting out as a student of Kant (but also of Johann Georg Hamann), Herder writes in a climate in which philosophy has lost much of its prestige and the academic establishment, in order to save the discipline, had sought shelter under the aegis of mathematics and theoretical natural science.²⁰ In this environment, Herder asks how the truths of philosophy can be defended and find application. In its existing form—as coined by rationalist school philosophy and its model of passive learning²¹—philosophy can have no use, save that of reproducing mediocrity and advancing individual, academic careers. In its ideal form, however, philosophy should foster self-understanding, independence, and freedom. If the truths of philosophy are to be useful, then the notion of philosophy, the notion of truth, and the notion of usefulness must be subject to revision. All three must be recast in light of the new ideal of *Bildung* that Herder characterizes as a logic that is not yet invented (PW 11).

Philosophy must evoke curiosity and a thirst for learning and thus cultivate the kind of questioning and reflection that makes up the backbone of modern citizenship. As such, philosophy cannot be the privilege of the few. Herder pleads for an education (*Bildung*) of all classes, and of women as well as men (PW 27).²² A first step in this direction is a learning that

²⁰ Herder discusses this point in an early essay, “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People (1765),” in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–33. Further references to this work will be abbreviated PW, followed by page number. Herder follows Kant, who notes, in the same period, that “nothing has been more damaging to philosophy than mathematics, and in particular the imitation of its method in the context where it cannot possibly be employed.” Immanuel Kant, “Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality (1764),” trans. David Walford, in *Observations*, 230. The pre-critical Kant also speaks of the need to move from a notion of learning philosophy to one of learning to philosophize. “Announcement of the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1765–1766,” in *Observations*, 253.

²¹ This is how Herder describes rationalist school philosophy in 1765. His text, though, is polemical throughout and Herder later speaks approvingly of philosophers such as Wolff and Leibniz (PW 5). For an affirmative reading of German rationalism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² Herder at this point is more progressive than his teacher Kant, who suggests that women can only view learning as external decorum. See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209. Kant also held this position in the period when he was mentoring Herder's intellectual development. See, for example, *Observations*, 111–12.

Bildung
 Herder
 Herder

addresses humans as both cognitive and sentient beings, and communicates in the native German rather than French and Latin, the languages of the educated elite.²³ Herder's philosophy of *Bildung* seeks to build a society of self-determining individuals, individuals that—in realizing the ideal of freedom—demand respect and recognition independently of class and social standing.²⁴

But the educating individual does not only beg recognition regardless of rank. As historically and culturally situated, human understanding only proceeds on its path to *Bildung* by taking on and contemplating the world as it might possibly look from other points of view. By being able to see the world through the eyes of others, the individual gains in experiential richness, expressive sophistication, and cognitive depth.²⁵ Diversity is not the enemy of reason, but a *sine qua non* of its development, and the diversity of outlooks encompasses individuals within a given culture as well as the expressions and points of view of horizons that are temporally, geographically, and culturally distant from the interpreter. For Herder, *Bildung* does not simply involve the development of the individual human being, but also of the human species as a whole. (a point that would later be taken up by Hegel).

This co-thinking of *Bildung* and humanity also lies at the heart of Pestalozzi's program.²⁶ Pestalozzi suggests that humankind does not strive for divine salvation, but for "a civilized humanity" (*EM* 4). Humanity, however, can only be achieved through individual human beings taking responsibility for themselves. However, such a responsibility is not given; it must be earned. And according to Pestalozzi, it can only be earned to the extent that one begins with a revolution in early childhood education. Inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Emile* (1762) came to shape a whole generation of educators and philosophers,²⁷ Pestalozzi translates the larger, Enlightenment ideal of *Bildung* into an educational program that would gain influence in Germany, France, and even the United States.²⁸

²³ This point would later be misread along wrongful political lines and create the impression of Herder as a nationalist philosopher. For alternative readings of Herder's contribution and relevance as a philosopher, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98–167 and Michael N. Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–283.

²⁴ See, for instance, *PW* 231 (footnote). Bhikhu Parekh misunderstands Herder when claiming that he (Herder) only acknowledges diversity between cultures, but not within them. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 72–3. For a more sympathetic reading of Herder's contribution to political philosophy, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 189–222. For a translation of some of Herder's work in political philosophy, see Johann Gottfried Herder, *On Social and Political Culture*, ed. and trans. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

²⁵ See Herder's early hermeneutic study, "On Thomas Abbt's Writings," *PW* 167–78.

²⁶ See Heinrich Pestalozzi, *The Education of Man: Aphorisms*, trans. Heinz and Ruth Norden (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1951), 3. Further references to this work will be abbreviated *EM*, followed by page number.

²⁷ See, for example, how Fichte, in his discussion of the scholar's vocation, incorporates a discussion of Rousseau (though not so much *Emile* as *First Discourse*) and seeks, with a credo that was to generate much hermeneutic dispute, to understand the author of this work "better than he understood himself" (*EPW* 178).

²⁸ Pestalozzi had met with Goethe, Wieland, Herder, and Fichte during a trip to Germany in 1794. For his influence on Anglophone education, see William H. Kilpatrick's preface in *EM* vii–xii.

According to Pestalozzi, the goal of education is an integrated, well-rounded personality. This, in turn, requires self-knowledge (EM 13). Only self-knowledge enables self-determination, that is, freedom. The kind of freedom Pestalozzi has in mind is not simply liberation from outer force and authority. By his lights, freedom is related to maturity—that is, the capacity to make use of this liberation in a responsible way. Pestalozzi observes that if a man in chains is a dreadful thing, it is still the case that for every one stuck in chains a hundred lay them on themselves (EM 80). The ultimate goal of education is the ability to lead a full and worthy human life.

Philosophically speaking, Pestalozzi's notion of education addresses two kinds of challenges. First, there is the question as to what extent independence and self-determination can at all be taught. *Bildung* cannot be externally imposed, but must come from within. The teacher should be a facilitator, not an authority. Second, education should not seek to make the student into somebody else, but further the process of uncovering his or her real self. Again, the call for such a self-discovery must come from the student. The teacher sets an example through encouragement and affirmation. Love, not force, is what powers education (EM 33). Initiating a Copernican turn in pedagogy, a shift from an authority-centered to a student-centered model of education, Pestalozzi's teaching conveys a new respect for the developing human being, while, all the same, insisting that only through *Bildung* is this development realized and brought to fruition.

Humboldt
Though his thoughts would shape educational ideals for centuries to come, Pestalozzi was not involved in state level *Realpolitik*. Humboldt, by contrast, was in a position to put force behind his ideas—and, to that extent, those of Pestalozzi. A high-ranking administrator in Prussia, he played a central role in revamping the educational system and founding the new university in Berlin.²⁹ In fact, Humboldt's thoughts on *Bildung* are still brought up in contemporary debates about the future of higher education, especially (but not exclusively) in a European context.

For Humboldt, it is not primarily the education of children, but education as such that matters. Further, Humboldt is interested in the relationship between education, on the one hand, and science and scholarship, on the other. Education is not a stage one leaves behind upon graduation, but a life-long endeavor. This reflects back on life in the university. In Humboldt's view, the time has come to change the structure of an institution that, since the Middle Ages, has served to reproduce the dogma of clergymen and worldly authorities.³⁰ Under his tenure, education is not perceived as a one-way process in which established knowledge is transferred from professor to students. In fact, education is no longer a pragmatic means to an end, but a goal in itself, an ideal that is shared by students and professors alike.³¹ It is in this climate that the university, as we know it today, takes shape. The

²⁹ For an overview of Humboldt's 1809–10 tenure as Head of the Section for Religion and Education in the Prussian Ministry, see David Sorkin, "Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (*Bildung*), 1791–1810," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, nos. 1–1983, 5–73.

³⁰ As Humboldt puts it: "Whatever does not spring from man's free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being, but still remains alien to his true nature; he does not perform it with true human energies, but merely with mechanical exactness." Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action* (written in 1791–2, posthumously published), ed. J. W. Burrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 23.

³¹ In Humboldt's words, "anything which charms us by its own intrinsic worth awakens love and esteem, while what is only looked on as a mere means to ulterior advantage merely appeals to self-interest," *The Limits of State Action*, 23–4.

ideal—though an ideal whose realization, even in the twenty-first century, leaves a lot to be desired—is not to reproduce the ideologies of past and present authorities, but to produce knowledge for the future.

Humboldt's vision for the new university is based in his image of the knowledge-seeking individual whose path is one of life-long learning. Goethe's *Faust* (1808) had dramatized the costs of this curiosity—this insatiable appetite for the new—were it not funneled into a productive and healthy trajectory. The Humboldtian university was to serve such a task; it was to steer the restless modern individual onto a path where potential vice would be turned into manifest virtue and thus allow the individual as well as society at large to benefit from the thirst for knowledge. How, then, is this achieved?

Humboldt's
vision

Humboldt's university does not cultivate one-dimensional experts. Education—and, again, we hear the echo of Pestalozzi's teaching—should facilitate the development of a well-rounded personality. A well-rounded personality is the opposite of narrow technocratic expertise. But the opposite of excellence, it is not.³² According to Humboldt, excellence can only be achieved by scholars who are able to transcend the narrow limits of one particular discourse and situate their knowledge within a larger context of learning. In order to broach a broader platform of knowledge, students must be able to choose classes across departments and disciplines. They should be exposed to a variety of teaching styles and methods. If knowledge takes independence, then students must be given an increasing amount of responsibility for their own learning. What students need is not, primarily, to master a body of knowledge, but to develop the tools adequate to contributing independently to the overall body of learning. Doctrines and drills will no longer do; learning to learn is the motto. The goal of education is to ensure long-term success and give students the capacity ultimately to move beyond their teachers. The professors, in turn, thrive in and through interaction with critically-minded students.³³ In Humboldt's ideal institution, teaching and research go hand in hand. Only thus can the academic institution serve as free and self-correcting, nurturing and sheltering the human drive to Bildung, ultimately also the development of humanity itself.³⁴

In this way, Herder, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt contribute to the nineteenth-century discussion of *Bildung* by translating the ideal of freedom into the fields of societal education, schools, and the university.

³² As Herder had put it in his essay on philosophy, the philosopher needs to be educated as a human being before he is educated as scholar (PW 22).

³³ In his posthumously published work on the Kawi language, Humboldt discusses the sociality of thought (as mediated through language) and suggests that "[t]he power to think requires something equal to yet differentiated from itself. It is fired up by its equivalent; from its counterpart it acquires a touchstone for its innermost products." See Wilhelm von Humboldt, "The Nature and Conformation of Language," in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1989), 102.

³⁴ For a discussion of this point, see Gunter Scholtz, "Humboldt und Schleiermacher. Anregungen für einen Humanismus der Gegenwart," in *Humanism in the Era of Globalization: An Intercultural Dialogue on Culture, Humanities, and Value*, ed. Jörn Rusen, Working Papers, no. 14, available at <http://www.kwi-humanismus.de/cms/download.php>.

35.5 TRANSCENDING SUBJECTIVE IDEALISM: SCHILLER, SCHLEIERMACHER, AND HEGEL

Philosophy of *Bildung* had been an important aspect of the work of Herder, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt. With Schiller, Schleiermacher, and Hegel—who drew on their idealist predecessors, but also followed the more practical attitudes of Herder, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt—it moves into the very center of philosophy.

In the context of nineteenth-century philosophy of *Bildung*, Friedrich Schiller is almost larger than life. As the editor of the journal *Die Horen*, he provides both inspiration and a venue for the experimental thoughts and poeticizing of the Romantic generation, both in its Tübingen coinage (Hölderlin, Schelling, and the young Hegel) and in its Jena variety (the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Schleiermacher, and Tieck). Schiller, further, seeks to realize his philosophy of *Bildung* through art (poetry and drama) as well as theory. His name not only brings to mind philosophical works like *The Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1795) and *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), but also historical plays, *Bildungsdrama* one could almost call them, such as *Don Carlos* (1787), *Mary Stewart* (1800), and *Wilhelm Tell* (1804).

Schiller
Kant's theory of freedom—as further sharpened by Fichte—makes up the theoretical platform of Schiller's philosophy of *Bildung* (or *Erziehung*, as he puts it in his letters). In fact, for Schiller, being a Kantian or not is not a choice: as moderns, we are all *de facto* Kantians.³⁵ Schiller's work on aesthetic education seeks to realize the Kantian-Fichteian call for freedom in the form of a historical theory, a political utopia, a theory of art—and, most importantly, a theory about how human existence, facing its status as both free and a being of nature, realizes its determination through aesthetic education. In this sense, Schiller deliberately (yet critically) carries on the spirit of the third Critique.³⁶

The Greeks, Schiller thought, understood themselves as nature. We moderns, by contrast, see ourselves as split between reality and our ideals. Indeed, the modern individual often identifies with this lacuna, this gap between the real and the ideal, and hence perceives him- or herself as a void, rather than a presence. Art serves as a bridge between nature and culture, it helps us win ourselves (and our first nature) through second nature (LAE 90). Art frees humanity from the “cold hearts” of an alienated, un-aesthetic state (LAE 102).

Through his friendship with Goethe, Schiller developed a theory of drama as exemplifying the gist of this aesthetic state. As laid out in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, it is through drama that the modern individual overcomes an estranged existence and wins not only love, but also the free sociality that enables self-realization (Goethe, in turn, borrows amply from their common friend and collaborator Wieland's discussion of the utopian, aesthetic being of the beautiful soul). Modern life, though, begs modern expressions.

³⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, in *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 2005), 87. Further references to this work will be abbreviated LAE, followed by page number.

³⁶ For a discussion of Schiller's disputes with Kant, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 169–90.

Schiller distinguishes between naive and sentimental art, between the immediate expressions of pre-modern culture and a modern culture born with the consciousness of such an immediacy being irrevocably lost. While Schiller's philosophy is sometimes mistaken for a cultivation of classical ideals for their own sake, a more charitable reading would emphasize how he maps out the differences between ancient and modern lifeforms so as to allow us moderns to understand our situation and inhabit it in a meaningful way—a way enabled through aesthetic *Bildung*.

Why, then, is art so central to this picture of modern life and *Bildung*? Or, put otherwise, why does Schiller cast education (*Erziehung*) as an aesthetic enterprise? As Kant had pointed out, a human being is both nature and culture, sensuousness and form, passive receptiveness and synthetic spontaneity. Along these lines, Schiller speaks of a material drive and a form drive (LAE 118–25). In modernity, the form drive has gained the upper hand. Law (rather than material content) and conceptual orientations (rather than sensuous ones) dominate our lives. What is needed is a mediation of these different aspects of humanity (Schiller here draws on the Fichtean notion of *Wechselwirkung*). Art presents such a mediation. As Kant had shown, aesthetic feeling is generated by the free play between conceptual understanding and the imagination. Schiller views the play drive as the higher unity through which the human being can be brought back to itself. To this extent, this ideal of *Bildung* is an aesthetic ideal (LAE 169–70). However, when fully realized, this aesthetic ideal coincides with morality. Even though this point of Schiller's philosophy would be subject to a gross misappropriation during the Third Reich (as were a number of other ideals from this period, including that of *Bildung* itself³⁷), his analysis of the alienated modern individual and art's role in healing this predicament remains an important educational insight—a point that resounds, albeit in a social and hermeneutically modified version, in Schleiermacher's theory of *Bildung*.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was unfortunate enough to have his reputation coined by his critics. His rivalry with Hegel gave rise to a bitter mischaracterization of his philosophy of religion as a naive celebration of unmediated feeling (even a dog can feel, Hegel chides him).³⁸ In the twentieth century, Hans-Georg Gadamer mistakes Schleiermacher's work for a fatal mix of Romantic aestheticism and positivist thought—and stages this in contrast with Hegelian *Bildung*.³⁹ Schleiermacher, however, is no more a philosopher of feeling than one of *Bildung*, though his theory of *Bildung* is, as we will see, quite different from that of Hegel.

Like Schiller, Schleiermacher's theory of *Bildung* grows out of a concern about modern alienation—and a hope that this alienation can indeed be overcome. If Kant and Fichte were right to celebrate individual freedom, their transcendental orientation still prevented them from asking whether post-Enlightenment society offers a context in which such freedom can be realized. A notion of abstract, subsumptive, and identity-forming reason had led philosophers to overlook the irreducibility of the individual and its world. And it had

³⁷ This is further analyzed in Bruford's discussion of Mann in *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, 226–63. For a less charitable reading of the tradition of *Bildung* (in its particular, German form), see Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*.

³⁸ For an overview of Hegel's objections, see Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70–98.

³⁹ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 164–97. See also my discussion of this point in *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50–60 and 155–85.

Schleiermacher

led them to overlook the fact that the universals of ethical, social, political, and historical life, of nature as it realizes itself in and through history and culture, is but the sum of diverse individualities that represent a manifold of outlooks and worldviews.

Schleiermacher had experienced such a sociality during the short and happy years of the salon culture in Berlin. With the Schlegel brothers, the Humboldt brothers, Fichte, and others, Schleiermacher had been part of the social circles that were gathering in the homes of intellectually gifted women such as Dorothea von Schlegel (née Mendelssohn) and Rahel Varnhagen.⁴⁰ Even in his own time, Schleiermacher was seen as the philosopher who gave voice to the informal symphilosophizing of the salons.⁴¹ In this environment, the Enlightenment culture of critique and self-reflection was translated into a language of free sociality and informal exchange of works and ideas, of exposing one's thoughts to the responses of others. The community was conceived organically and along the lines of a work of art: each part, each individual, reflects the whole of which it is a part, yet this whole is but the unity of different, individual parts. According to Schleiermacher, it is not the insistence on abstract laws or freedom, but, rather, the interplay, the mutual recognition, and the ongoing mix of critical and supportive sociality that sparks true *Bildung*. Every person is different; every person needs to realize his or her potential in a unique way. Yet this individuality can only find its shape in a social world, that is, in and with the recognition of other individuals.

Historically speaking, the social equilibrium of the salon was but a brief intermezzo. By the early 1800s, more conservative societies had gained influence. Neither women nor Jews were welcomed in their quarters. This was a period of political and social reaction.⁴² Schleiermacher, however, had anticipated this backlash in his early writings. His image of free sociality is contrasted with the picture of a tradition that has become estranged to itself and clings to lifeless and stifling mediation of classical texts.⁴³ *Bildung* represents the opposite of this; it keeps tradition alive through ever new, individual adaptations. This indeed is tradition—surely identity-forming, but through the freedom that rests with ongoing, individual appropriation.

In this way, Schleiermacher issues a hermeneutic program that insists that understanding—of other people, of the symbolic expressions of the present and the past—is always about understanding an utterance as a particular outlook on, or grasping of, a given subject.

⁴⁰ The philosophical relevance of the Romantic salons is expounded in Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1974). For an overview of the culture of the Romantic salon, see Konrad Feilchenfeldt, "Die Berliner Salons der Romantik," in *Rahel Levin Varnhagen: Die Wiederentdeckung einer Schriftstellerin*, ed. Barbara Hahn and Ursula Isselstein (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 152–64.

⁴¹ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Essay on a Theory of Social Behavior* (1799), trans. Peter Foley (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

⁴² See Hannah Arendt, "Berlin Salon," in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 57–66. Arendt convincingly situates the salon in the culture of *Bildung* ("Berlin Salon," 60).

⁴³ Schleiermacher links this with (rationalist) philosophy and claims that the philosophical reception of religion has led to "barren uniformity" and "dead letters." See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 108.

matter.⁴⁴ Just as *Bildung* requires a universal form through which the individual can externalize or express herself, so the arena of culture and tradition only lives in and through individual mediation.⁴⁵

From his early *On Religion* (1799) to his last lectures at the university of Berlin almost 35 years later, Schleiermacher combats what he takes to be an inherent tendency of modern reason to unify that which is different, to level individuality in the name of universality—in spite of the fact that reason, at the end of the day, only lives and thrives in difference. If the universal is seen as an abstract universal, as a uniform, undivided mass, then there is no way in which the self can be unified with its concept or ideal. Nor, however, can the universal be attained in the finite, historical world. In this way, Schleiermacher's philosophy of *Bildung* represents a social propaedeutic, an attempt to bring the freedom postulated by Kant and Fichte down to a concrete, empirical-historical level and translate it into a quest for real knowledge and self-understanding.⁴⁶ Some of these thoughts were realized when Schleiermacher, being called from Halle, became a key force in the establishment of the new University of Berlin.⁴⁷ In his reflections on the university, he makes it clear how philosophy should be a unifying intellectual power, keeping together and providing the justificatory discourse for the faculties of law, medicine, and theology. Philosophy thus plays a key role in promoting academic freedom.⁴⁸

Much of this thinking resonates with the central topoi of the Enlightenment conceptions of *Bildung*, though it does so in a way that further develops the humanist commitments of the third Critique. Moreover, much of Schleiermacher's thinking on history and *Bildung* resonates in the work of Hegel, in spite of Hegel's outspoken animosity towards his colleague in Berlin.

In different ways, Schiller and Schleiermacher had made *Bildung* entirely central to philosophy. With Hegel, however, *Bildung* is philosophy, that is, it is identified with the dynamic that leads reason to express and understand itself so as to enable its historical and systematic determination, thus realizing, in a grand philosophical synthesis, the Fichtean idea that freedom consists in the ability to live up to one's concept.⁴⁹ In this way, Hegel, like Herder, links *Bildung* to an overall historical development, that of the human species.

Hegel develops his notion of philosophy through a critique of Kant and Fichte. According to Hegel, idealism establishes subjectivity, spontaneous and free as it is, as the

⁴⁴ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ For a study of Schleiermacher's philosophy of *Bildung* and culture, see Gunter Scholtz, *Ethik und Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995). This study also contains a comparison of Hegel and Schleiermacher's views on education and the university (*Ethik und Hermeneutik*, 147–70).

⁴⁶ See Christian Berner, *La philosophie de Schleiermacher: Herméneutique, Dialectique, Ethique* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 179–267.

⁴⁷ See Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 70–98.

⁴⁸ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn" (1808), in *Pädagogische Schriften*, vol. II, ed. Erich Weniger and Theodor Schulze (Düsseldorf: Georg Bondi, 1957), 110–24.

⁴⁹ This, however, is not to say that Hegel does not also have a philosophy of education. For a discussion of this point, see Allen W. Wood, "Hegel on Education," in *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (London: Routledge, 1998), 300–18.

principle of reality. Philosophy, in turn, seeks to lay out the a priori principles of subjectivity and is, as such, a subjective idealism. Subjective idealism fails to account for the way in which the mind is situated in the world. Schelling, Hegel's friend from his student years in Tübingen, had made this clear. His was an objective rather than subjective idealism.⁵⁰ However, if objective idealism counters subjectivity with a principle of reality, it still fails to take into account the mediation between the two—it fails to take into account how mind and world interact dialectically in and through history. Or, rather, it fails to see how human spirit forms (*bildet*) nature and, in this process, recognizes itself in that which is other. This, and not simply a process of individual self-formation, is for Hegel the material of *Bildung*—that which makes *Bildung* the very principle of history: history as a process of learning.⁵¹ Philosophy must account for this process of learning and experience as it proceeds, often through difficulties, mistakes, and misunderstandings. It must make explicit, bring to concept and system, the knowledge gained through experience and, thus, facilitate spirit's (self-)education. This, Hegel insists, is the goal of absolute idealism.

In this sense, philosophy finds itself standing on the sideline of history, always arriving too late, observing and conceptualizing rather than being a part of the action. In this reflection, however, philosophy shelters an action of its own. Once human spirit realizes the norms, ideas, and principles on which it acts, once it uncovers the rationale behind its actions and practices, this rationale can be reflectively assessed and adjudicated. Spirit is driven forward by criticism, reflection, and an increased degree of self-knowledge. And to map this process of knowledge—this process of growth and education—is the project of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).⁵² It is his unspoken goal that the dialectical progress of spirit, as retrieved by the philosopher, unifies the *Bildung* of world-historical spirit with that of the reader, culminating at the point where the two perspectives merge and turn into one.

Like Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Hegel's *Phenomenology*, though written at a stage when the French Revolution had turned into terror, is a celebration of freedom and a reflection on the historical-philosophical conditions of possibility for its realization.⁵³ Freedom—the idea that we, *qua human*, are furnished with a capacity for rational deliberation and that a sound political system allows this capacity to be realized in its full—is tantamount to self-determination. But only a self that knows itself can determine itself in a mature and meaningful way. The *Phenomenology* seeks conceptually to map the development of increasing individual and social autonomy, thus also bringing it to awareness and furthering the path to self-understanding (PS 50). This process is driven by the tension between what spirit

⁵⁰ For an overview of how Hegel draws on the philosophical development from Kant to Schelling, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16–91.

⁵¹ In this context, it is worth noting that Schelling had lectured on *Bildung* already in 1802. Schelling had been suggesting that “a methodology of university study must be rooted in actual and true knowledge of the living unity of all the sciences, and (...) without such knowledge any guidance can only be lifeless, spiritless, one-sided, limited.” F. W. J. Schelling, *On University Studies*, ed. Norbert Guterman, trans. E. S. Morgan (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966), 7.

⁵² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 16–17. Further references to this work will be abbreviated PS, followed by page number.

⁵³ For a study of Hegel and the French Revolution, see Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution: Essays on the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Richard Dien Winfield (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982).

claims to know and what is true. The ultimate goal is not only knowledge, but also insight into what knowing is (PS 17). Spirit strives for ever more reflective and transparent knowledge, but in the educational process of the *Phenomenology*, that which it thought was true and valid proves only partially true (only a stage in the process of knowledge-acquisition and not the final end-product). Hence, what matters is the capacity to learn from experience, that is, for spirit to retain that which is true and lasting in and through historical change. Hence, the *Phenomenology* is itself an education of consciousness to the standpoint of science (PS 50).

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes this process of education, formation, and learning through a series of shapes or figures of thought. Initially, these figures are rather general and bear resemblance to a broader spectrum of philosophical positions. Later on, as humanity has recognized itself in its other, hence also as its own object, the educational stages are pitched as a series of transformative historical periods and world-views. Each figure represents but one approach to knowledge and holds no more than a partial truth. Hence, the self-discovery of spirit is but the discovery that its own ideals and models of understanding fall short and must be subject to continuous dialectical revision and improvement. Hegel speaks of this as the journey of despair: of spirit learning to know itself through confronting its own shortcomings (PS 49).

Whereas Schiller and Schleiermacher, though in different ways, had seen *Bildung* as a way to overcome alienation, Hegel takes alienation to be the very engine of *Bildung*. The goal of overcoming alienation is not postponed to a utopian future, but realized in the philosophical process itself. *Bildung* is spirit externalizing itself, leaving its imprint in the world—and then recognizing itself in that which is other, hence appropriating and making its own what initially was unknown and alien. This labor of understanding is generously rewarded. At the end of the journey, spirit understands the purpose of its hardship; it is able to see how one formation leads to another and why each of the transitions is indeed necessary: spirit has found itself. Freedom is reached when spirit is able to recognize itself in the world, that is, when the world is seen as shaped and known by human beings.⁵⁴ At this point, reality and concept are one. Philosophy no longer traces the journey towards true and universal knowledge, but lays out the structures of knowledge, hence also of reality itself. Such is Hegel's grand narrative of spirit's *Bildung* in world-history and its culmination in a logic that, in one and the same gesture, lays out the structures of mind and world.⁵⁵

35.6 SCHOPENHAUER AND NIETZSCHE

If Hegel is critical of the (Kantian) idealists and their hypostatizing of an abstract notion of subjectivity, he still remains within their framework. At least this is the judgment of the

⁵⁴ Hegel's perspective at this point is, no doubt, Eurocentric. Nevertheless, his work has played an important role in the shaping of philosophy of race and post-colonial studies. For an early testimony to this, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 191–7.

⁵⁵ As such, Hegel's system contains more specific advice for the educational goals of the family and state than the *Phenomenology* does. See, for example, G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §§174–81.

last two philosophers to be discussed, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, whose respective contributions seek to recast the notion of *Bildung* in a distinctively non-humanist language, thus issuing a fundamental assault on earlier nineteenth-century apologists of *Bildung*, yet an assault that aims to rescue the ideal of *Bildung* by liberating it from a presumably philistine coinage.

Schopenhauer deliberately positions his philosophy against Hegel and the Hegelians who, in his view, dominate intellectual life and education in Germany. He calls for a return to Kant, in whose work he finds a lucid philosophical prose and an exceptional clarity of thought, but also (and, for Schopenhauer, not unrelatedly) an attentiveness to the limitations of rationality.⁵⁶ Hence, what Schopenhauer values in Kant's philosophy is precisely what Fichte, Hegel and their generation saw as its most fundamental problem: the division between, on the one hand, a noumenal realm of things in themselves and, on the other, the domain of individuation, understanding, and appearances. In Schopenhauer's work, though, the ultimate reality is constituted by a purposeless, blind will. This dimension of reality not only makes the talk about freedom, responsibility, and rationality appear as *Schein*, but is also the most fundamental condition of (human) life, an endless striving for a satisfaction that is tragically beyond reach. For Schopenhauer, a philosophy that denies the fundamental suffering at the heart of human existence is guilty of false idealism. In Schopenhauer's mind, philosophy should theorize the human condition, but it cannot offer much by way of consolation. Only art can disclose existence in its true colors and, in the experience of a truth that transcends all individuation, offer a sublime, yet transient sense of bliss. While the general contours of his thinking are laid out in *The World as Will and Representation* (first edition in 1818), Schopenhauer's distinction between natural and artificial education is explained in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851).⁵⁷ His discussion of these educational models reflects his metaphysical pessimism and his disrespect for the academic establishment, but also his hope that the future might open the way for individuals whose aesthetic attunement makes them susceptible to the ephemeral beauty of art (as it captures the tragic essence of human existence).⁵⁸

Artificial education is all about passively absorbing the dominant doctrines of books, a digestion of readymade ideas (*PP* II, §372). As such, it stunts individual development. Popularity, false profundity, and professorial pomp characterize this domain, as it, in Schopenhauer's judgment, saturates the educational system. This is a model that, along the lines of bad Hegelianism, prioritizes conceptual understanding. As Schopenhauer puts it, "with artificial education, the head is crammed full of concepts by being lectured and taught through reading, before there is yet any extended acquaintance with the world of intuitive perceptions" (*PP* II, §372).

Reflecting the Enlightenment ethos he openly criticizes, Schopenhauer insists that natural education begins with perception and intuition. This is not a study of books, but of

⁵⁶ See in particular the Second Volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. Here Schopenhauer writes admiringly about how Kant lives "by and for philosophy." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Routledge, 1948), 362.

⁵⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vol. II, §372. Further references to this work will be abbreviated *PP*, followed by volume and section.

⁵⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, book III, 219–346.

the “real ways of the world” (PP II, §376). Whereas concepts divide and compartmentalize, intuition is one and unifying. Perception and intuition not only serve to educate through the book of the world, but also, in some cases, to “eradicate the prejudices of [false] education” (PP II, § 373). Education through experience is, Schopenhauer insists, a lifelong commitment (PP II, §376). Yet the attunement to intuition is rewarded with the capacity to experience the redemption of art, in particular music. Novels, by contrast, often present a false view of life, though Schopenhauer grants that an ironic *Bildungs*-novel such as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) helpfully demonstrates the limits of artificial education (PP II, §376).

Natural education produces independent thinkers (whom Schopenhauer contrasts with the servile intellectual bureaucrats that populate academic institutions). In seeking to evoke independent thought, Schopenhauer thus prepares the ground for the readership he sorely misses. After his death, though, he would perhaps have taken a certain pleasure in observing that of all the nineteenth-century philosophers of *Bildung*, it would be he, with his uncompromising standards of style and truthfulness, that came to influence some of the greatest twentieth-century writers, Emil Cioran, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Thomas Bernhard being amongst them. His most avid reader, though, would be none other than Friedrich Nietzsche, whose youthful vision of philosophy is expressed in the essay “Schopenhauer as Educator” (1874).⁵⁹

Nietzsche’s theory of *Bildung* works on two levels. On the one hand, he views philosophy, as it is, as a grand project of *Bildung*, yet one that has been misunderstood and is therefore in need of critique. On the other, his reflections on *Bildung*, as it should be, are funneled into more specific thoughts on education and scholarly obligations, most clearly presented in the 1872 lecture series *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*.⁶⁰ To understand Nietzsche’s contribution to *Bildung* is to see how these planes of thinking mutually inform and support each other.

As far as his general philosophical framework goes, Nietzsche’s position is in constant development. Yet it is possible to ferret out a set of concerns that seem particularly important throughout his work. First, Nietzsche, from his early days as a classicist in Basel, wishes to analyze the conditions for and nature of modernity. He worries that we moderns have come to underappreciate life. Facing the inescapable finality of all things human, the modern individual is marked by a tendency to turn life into a quasi-bureaucratic project, something that needs to be managed, organized, and taken care of rather than lived.⁶¹ Greek culture allowed for a different point of view: it was built around the affirmation of human life, short and miserable though it is. Consequently, Greek culture (and in particular the art of early tragedy) provides a lens through which we moderns might gain a

⁵⁹ In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125–95. Later on, Nietzsche will claim that the views discussed in this piece are not so much those of Schopenhauer, as those of “Nietzsche as Educator.” See *Ecce Homo*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), §3.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (Lexington, KY: Maestro, 2011). Further references to this text are abbreviated FE, followed by page number.

⁶¹ Nietzsche discusses this under the rubrics of “Socraticism,” “scientism,” and “aestheticism.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76.

perspective on the choices upon which our way of living rests. Influenced by Schopenhauer and Wagner, the philosophical-artistic heroes of his youth, Nietzsche sees early Greek tragedy (and festivals) as an expression in which the fundamental experiences of human existence, the suffering, the burdens, the constitutive loneliness of an individualized being, get articulated in a way that, through the immediacy of music, also discloses the most fundamental meaning and value of life, drawing audience and actors into a sublime, yet ephemeral experience of transcendence.⁶²

Is such transcendence through art available to us moderns? Nietzsche vacillates, though in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) he initially airs the hope that Wagner's music can bring this possibility to life.⁶³ Equally important to Nietzsche's conception of *Bildung*, however, are the general methodological tenors of his early work, how he recommends that we, as philosophers in search of the conditions of a worthy human life, proceed by looking into what he calls the unexamined value of values. Nietzsche views Socratic philosophy as one such system of unexamined values, Christianity as another one. Common to these systems of value is the investment in a life beyond this, and thus the preaching of potentially life-denying attitudes.⁶⁴ According to Nietzsche, final human life allows for no absolute values. What tradition has taught us to see as fundamental values is, in reality, reflective of self-centered interests and will to power.

How, then, do we get a perspective on the value paradigms in which we are raised and through which we are shaped? Nietzsche suggests that we proceed by way of historical criticism. Tradition is no larder of meaning to be appropriated and consumed, but a field in which values and world-views reach domination. Consequently, the critical philosopher should study the dominant values of his time by tracing them back to their early beginnings, examine the interests they reflect, their historical competitors, their rise to power, and the cost to pay for their domination.⁶⁵ This is Nietzsche's genealogical method, his answer to the stifling model of history as a museal cabinet of past events or as a series of heroic, tradition-forming deeds and actions.⁶⁶

Finally, Nietzsche seeks, through a series of stylistically playful yet philosophically provocative essays, to explore the alternatives to a conception of life that, as this-worldly and human, is deprived of metaphysical meaning. In this context, Nietzsche infamously presents his critique of democratic ideals and their tendency to level all values. Against this tendency, Nietzsche propagates the notion of a higher, exceptional existence through which life celebrates and manifests itself in culture.⁶⁷ This, for him, is the opposite of passive nihilism. It is nihilism in the active, creative sense, the celebration of man's liberation from the yolk of ideology and religion.

⁶² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 30–3.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 101–4. This hope is later retracted in "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" (1886), *The Birth of Tragedy*, 3–12.

⁶⁴ See Nietzsche, "What do Ascetic Ideals Mean?" in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1–9.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of Nietzsche's understanding of history, see Raymond Geuss, "Nietzsche and Genealogy," in *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–29.

⁶⁷ See, for example, the discussion of the higher man in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 24.

In this way, Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed a philosophy of *Bildung*: of a human being seeking to be itself—not as an alienated citizen of bourgeois culture, but as a being through which life, even when facing the ultimate finitude of all things human, affords celebration and affirmation. This notion of *Bildung* is meant to replace the idealism of Hegel and the German tradition. *Bildung* is an education to life and action, not to reflection and conceptual clarity. It does not aspire to individual and societal autonomy (which, for Nietzsche, is but another ideology), but seeks to spark a life that affirms itself through acts of strength and release of will. This becomes clear in Nietzsche's lectures on education. In these lectures, Nietzsche voices his disappointment with the academic field, but also bolsters his commitment to education, as the only possible cure to the lethargy of modern academia.

In its existing form, education provides a shelter for barbarism (FE 12). It does not act in the service of life, but is ruled by utility-oriented strategists seeking simple human beings whose lives can be priced and classified without too much ado (FE 11–12). Repetition and passive imitation dominate this kind of education. The democratization of culture, the turning of it into a mass phenomenon, has, all the same, gotten rid of value questions by absorbing them into a language of brute quantification. These are bleak times, the times of the last human being.⁶⁸

For Nietzsche—and, again, he challenges the Enlightenment spirit out of which the modern notion of *Bildung* was born—true *Bildung* is never a matter of democracy. Nor is it a matter of institutionally mediated knowledge. Following his friend Jacob Burckhardt, who was present when these lectures on education were given, Nietzsche suggests that culture always aspires towards a transcendence of the status quo. The state, by contrast, strives towards preservation. Hence a strong state implies a weak culture, and vice versa. Culture should not be the playing field of the populus, but an arena where exceptional individuals posit their values in a dynamic *agon*, thus reconnecting us with the multitude of values that is an integral possibility in all things human.

This is also the purpose of Nietzsche's own educator, Zarathustra, and his mythical-poetical teaching. And it is, one could add, the purpose of the late Nietzsche's (ironic) *Bildungsroman*, *Ecce Homo*. In both cases, Nietzsche seeks to overcome what he sees as a stifling and inhuman state—one in which culture is reduced to the farce of civilization—by evoking the hope and inspiration for an active nihilism and a will to creativity and truly human values.⁶⁹ Nietzsche thus seeks to rescue the notion of *Bildung* from its philistine defenders by making it key to a philosophical program that flies in the face of the petit bourgeois culture by which *Bildung*, in Nietzsche's eyes, has been grossly perverted.

⁶⁸ For Nietzsche's reflections on the last human being, see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9–10, 171.

⁶⁹ For the literary aspects of Nietzsche's style (as it reflects, at a deeper level, his view of life itself), see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

35.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

If nineteenth-century philosophy stands under the sign of *Bildung*, the discussion in this chapter remains but a basic roadmap. More names could have been mentioned, more points could have been explored in more detail and more complexity. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, through explicitly staging their work as an alternative to the distorted idealism of *Bildung*, nonetheless draw on this paradigm in that they, though in different ways, stage philosophy (criticism) as the project of making explicit (*ausbilden*) the very structure and principles of society and individual minds, thus initiating a process of societal and individual healing. Yet nineteenth-century philosophy of *Bildung* should not be thought of as a development where each position builds on and sublates the previous one in a neat progressive structure. At stake, rather, is a roster of different, systematic ways of thinking about *Bildung* and the particular role of philosophy when it comes to theoretically conceptualizing and practically contributing to the education of human reason and understanding.⁷⁰ Moreover, the fascination with the notion of *Bildung* is related to the way in which theoretical questions (what is *Bildung*?) and practical implementation (how can philosophy contribute to *Bildung*?) cannot be kept apart. As such, nineteenth-century philosophy of *Bildung* is not a thing of the past, but a repertoire of philosophical tools and concepts that enables critical reflection on our lives as students, scholars, and educators. By viewing philosophy through the lens of *Bildung*, we form the picture of an on-going self-critical theorizing in which reflection springs out of and works back on tradition as well as present-day culture and thus establishes the ceaseless intellectual consciousness of society itself. This, obviously, is a grand vision of philosophy. Yet it is a vision of philosophy that, as the watchdog of society, culture, and human self-understanding, enables the kind of critical reflection that figures such as Adorno and Mann were missing in the period leading up to and following the Second World War in Europe. While the bourgeois culture of *Bildung* has sought to preserve prevailing traditions, the philosophy of *Bildung*, in its endless fight against a lukewarm domestication of culture, pitched itself as a critical theory. This, in my view, is the true legacy of nineteenth-century philosophy of *Bildung* and it is a legacy—and a challenge—that twentieth-century philosophers, from Gadamer to John McDowell, have sometimes overlooked in their identification of *Bildung* with historicity, second nature, or culture in the more conservative meaning of the term.⁷¹

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⁷⁰ This perspective is left out of Martha Nussbaum's recent study of the humanities. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). According to Nussbaum, it is imagination and creativity that makes humanities graduates attractive on an ever more rapidly changing job market.

⁷¹ While Gadamer has been mentioned throughout, McDowell's discussion of *Bildung* is found in *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 123–6.

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