

Introduction

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Evolving from Post-Reformation visions of religious piety, Prussia and other German states looked to the expansion of public schooling to improve literacy and promote practical Christianity. This necessitated instruction grounded in a theocentric conception of human nature and the social good. Reason and action had to be guided by the dictates of Scripture and a Biblically sanctioned knowledge of Creation. Enlightenment thought brought a profound shift in ideas about mind and society, initiating what might best be described as a Copernican Revolution in pedagogy. Rather than imposing order from without, educators now looked to the development of the innate potential within. Educability and the notion of Bildung—variously applied to the instruction of different social classes—justified humanistic ideals of individual autonomy and the historical progress of civilization. Papers in this special issue examine these changing visions of pedagogy and explore how they were exported to the world as a panacea for the social ills that beset modern society.

Throughout the 1830s reformers in both Britain and America looked upon educational developments in France and Germany with great interest. Victor Cousin's 1832 *Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia* translated into English by Sarah Austin (1834), provided a compelling blueprint for how the state might organize an effective system of public schooling. From the funding and supervision of district schools to the training of teachers, the measures adapted to rejuvenate the nation after the Napoleonic Wars made Prussian education the envy of Europe. Indeed, under the guidance of Francois Guizot, the Minister for Public Instruction during the July Monarchy, Cousin's *Report* formed the basis of the 1833 law that established elementary schooling throughout France.

The *Report* also played a central role in parallel English and American campaigns to engage government in the administration of schooling. On both sides of the Atlantic, the expansion and improvement of instruction was presented as an obligation of the state; a moral responsibility to raise the character of the population and ensure all citizens understood their civic and religious duties. The problem of social order was key, especially in urban-industrial areas. But progressive voices also looked to the historical advancement of Christian civilization. Rather than

an economy of compliance, the pedagogic methods perfected in Prussia promised to create a society based upon rational cooperation and the imperatives of a shared faith.

Historical accounts of this crucial decade have typically focused on the dynamics of church and state relations to explain why entrenched sectarian differences thwarted fundamental reform in Britain, while pan-Protestant cooperation ensured the movement's success in America (Smelser, 1991; Komline, 2020). Rather less attention has been paid to the religious and philosophical traditions that underwrote the instructional methods at the heart of Prussian schooling. It was sufficient, it seems, to associate the new pedagogy with the iconic names of Pestalozzi or Fellenberg. Certainly, their celebrated achievements at Yverdon and Hofwyl inspired the establishment of teaching seminaries across Germany, but these institutions and the practices they perfected also drew upon a long and rich history of ideas about the aims and methods of education not readily apparent to the Anglo-Saxon reader. Often described as "the age of pedagogy," German thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries was preoccupied with questions about human nature and the social good (Munzel, 2012). Understanding the mind—the role of language, reason, and the passions—offered a key to the

meaning and purpose of life. It also pointed to the power of education as an instrument of human improvement.

A Copernican Revolution in Pedagogy

The papers in this issue explore the situated roots of pedagogic theory from the religiously inspired missions of Comenius and the German Pietists, to the idealistic notions of perfection and historical progress that arose in the course of the German Enlightenment. While there are substantial continuities between these theological and the philosophical approaches, they nonetheless frame the human condition in radically different ways.

Stephen Tomlinson explains, in “Comenius and the Didactic Order of a Godly Society,” that Comenius sought to initiate a second Reformation through a program of universal schooling designed to overcome the evils of original sin and restore Mankind to its prelapsarian state. Employing a developmentally appropriate Ramist logic, revealed and scientific truths about God’s Creation would be used to teach the imperatives of practical Christianity and heal the faculties damaged by Adam’s fall. While Comenius’ efforts to initiate this program in England were frustrated by the advent of war, his Christian Philosophy and realistic, sense-based methods of instruction played a significant role in the pietistic pedagogy developed by August Francke at the University of Halle—the site of Prussia’s first teaching seminary. Stressing *praxis* over doctrine, Francke sought to reformulate theological training in order to prepare clergy and teachers with the practical skills necessary to lead a pious Christian community.

Crucially, Tomlinson continues in “German Pietism and the Pedagogic Reformation of Human Nature,” this involved expanding Comenius’ focus on rational understanding to the awakening of the individual’s spiritual nature. Harnessing the power of the Divine Word, the inspiring lessons of Scripture would be employed to excite religious sentiments and encourage conversion; the free acceptance of God’s will and a life modeled on the example of Christ, the New Adam. This psychologically based method of

internal control also served an important political purpose. Seamlessly aligning with the interests of the state, its core values of obedience, neighborly love, and personal industry were embraced by the Prussian monarchy to further the ideological control of the population.

In “Piety Rationalized: Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and the Ramsit Logic of Method” Douglas McKnight reveals how Puritan divines in England and North American colonies embraced similar hopes for the transformative power of religious education. Indeed, Francke’s work at the Halle Orphanage, translated and popularized in Britain by his former student Anthony William Boehm, informed and energized the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge both in its support of charity schooling and its missionary efforts to instrumentalize the spiritual power of the Bible (Jones, 2019). Francke’s place in the history of education is also marked by his academic and personal contest with the rationalist scholar Christian Wolff, a clash over the nature of mind that affirmed the supremacy of the theological faculty at Halle. But Wolff’s expulsion from the University in 1723 only served to highlight the claims of reason. With the spread of enlightenment thought, his forceful writings gained authority, restoring philosophy to the forefront of academic learning; even at Halle, where he was reinstated by Fredrich II in 1740.

“Enlightenment,” Kant (1999) famously argued, “is man’s release from his self-imposed minority (1999) to make use of his understanding without direction from another” (p. 17). This vision of education stands in stark contrast to his own schooling at the pietist academy in Konigsberg—a program, he later complained, that “that robs people of the courage to think for themselves . . . and spoils the genius” (Kuehn, 2001, p. 45). Inspired by Locke and Rousseau, his own writings on pedagogy offered a fundamentally different view of human nature and a radically different course of instruction. Rather than imposing order from without, he would develop the innate potential within.

Kant's early scholarly work embraced Wolff's rationalism. Adopting the Newtonian worldview, he sought an empirical explanation for the lawful structure of experience. Central to this project was an understanding of the self as a knowing subject, an ever-present topic throughout his many works but the special focus of the *Anthropology* (2007). Here he noted Mankind's unique capacity for rational thought. Animals had instincts perfectly adapted for life, but humans were born incomplete; socially dependent, our nature must be formed through education. This raised the pivotal question, "What should men and women make of their lives?" Kant's answer went beyond meeting physiological needs and promoting happiness to *moralization*, the realization of the individual's capacity for free and rational action. Contrary to pietistic teachings of his youth, Kant (2007) thus extolled the essential dignity of humanity. Given the power of the emotions, he recognized this ethical goal would not be achieved easily; the movement from animality to autonomy would be the work of history. "An immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next" was required for Mankind "to propel its germs . . . to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim" (p. 110). Refinement in the arts would produce more elevated sentiments and the laws and customs of increasingly just societies would help temper the passions. Formal education was also important. Schooling had to guide children through the same stages of discipline, cultivation, civilization, and moralization the species was undergoing through history. If this were not yet possible for all, he called for an educated elite others could emulate (Louden, 2011).

Kant's (2007) ideal of human formation (*Bildung*) involved a moment of "crystallization" or "rebirth" when, after discovering the power of their own thought, an individual could assert their capacity to govern themselves rationally. Similar tropes aside, this epistemological shift from a theologically to a philosophically based anthropology marked a profound reformulation of

the educational project. Rather than facing God fearful of their corruption, children were to cultivate their nature as free, rational, and moral beings. This formative sketch, laid out in Kant's (2007) fragmentary *Lectures on Pedagogy*, was the starting point for his successor at Königsberg, Johann Friedrich Herbart.

In "J. F. Herbart on the Art of Teaching: *Bildsamkeit* and Pedagogical Tact," Christine Becks describes how Herbart became one of the most influential (if misunderstood) theorists among Nineteenth Century English and American educators. The overarching goal of his foundational *Science of Education* (1896) was to help teachers facilitate the student's personal struggle for autonomy (much as Dewey psychologized the learning situation) through an empathic understanding of their developing ability to reason—the practical art of teaching captured in the concept of pedagogic tact. Faced with the problem of developing an efficient system of schooling to meet the needs of the modern society, late Nineteenth Century German and American educators looked to Herbart's insights as the basis for scientific approach to instruction. But while Herbartianism's focus on the learner caught the spirit of Progressive era reforms, its quest for standardization and technocratic order undermined the uniqueness of the individual and the educational situation. For Becks, such narrow conceptions of learning continue to frustrate effective approaches to the pedagogic art. Drawing upon the framework of practical action central to German didactic tradition she thus offers a compelling justification for revisiting the foundations of curricula thought envisioned by Herbart and his even more influential contemporary, Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The Linguistic Turn

The product of a similar pietistic education, Kant's one-time student, Johann Gottfried Herder offered a significant adaptation of this educational project. While committed to a scientific explanation of mind, he rejected the narrow enlightenment focus on reason for a broader

appreciation of the holistic relationship between language, thought, and the social context of experience. Drawing upon the teachings of the Göttingen naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Herder explained all life through the action of vital forces. In the case of human beings, these formative drives (*Bildungstriebe*) led to the development of mental powers adapted to cultural norms and practices (Herder and Churchill, 1803). The mind was thus shaped by the historically situated institutions and arts that comprised the character and values of a people. This suggested a rather different approach to schooling. Starting with the inherent diversity of human talents, Herder looked to the social encounters by which individuals constructed meaning and thus formed their own unique identity—a dynamic process that began within the intimate and tradition-based context of family and community life and continued through wider exchanges with other cultures. *Bildung* resulted from the varied and rich interactions that promoted the full and harmonious development of each person's innate potential.

As Herder knew from his own teaching experiences the narrow orbit of traditional schooling offered little to the expanding mind (Clark, 1955). In place of proficiency in Latin and the memorization of text, he advocated vernacular instruction that would encourage the child and the nation to think for themselves. Schooling had to excite the student's natural curiosity and demonstrate their essential agency as creators of meaning and value. In 1776 Herder was appointed superintendent of schools and churches in the Duchy of Weimar. Here, in the home of Goethe, Wieland, and Schiller, he sought to enact the pedagogic ideas that flowed from his philosophical project—most importantly, through the refashioning of secondary education. Convinced that emulation of the ancient Greeks would enliven the German spirit, he instituted classical studies designed to engage students with the most remarkable minds in history; a program of humanization, which under the reforms initiated by von Humboldt, would shape the German

Gymnasium and university in the coming century (Schleunes, 1989).

The Politics of Bildung

Von Humboldt's own commitment to the notion of *Bildung* took root in the intense and exciting intellectual culture fueled by the ethical, linguistic, and historical ideas of Kant and Herder. Combined with a deep reverence for the Greeks, human development itself became an object of aesthetic interest; a creative task of self-formation in which the individual must struggle to realize their inner potential. It is remarkable that this profound philosophical vision and its associated pedagogic practices would become the governing rationale for the revolutionary educational reforms set in motion during the most desperate moments in Prussia's history.

Following its devastating defeat to Napoleon in 1806, half the nation was annexed, and its economy burdened with crippling reparations. Under the terms of the treaty agreed the following year at Tilsit, Prussia was also forced to enact the republican reforms required of France's compliant states (Clark, 2007). Granted sweeping powers by Frederick William III, Baron Karl von Stein set about dismantling the political structures of the *Ancien Régime*. Serfdom was abolished, laws governing trade and the ownership of property were liberalized, and municipal governments were established across the country. Subjects were to become citizens whose common rights would be protected by an efficient and well-ordered bureaucracy. As Stein recognized, the entire process turned on the promise of education. Best captured in Fichte's 1808 *Addresses to the German Nation* (2008) Prussia's rejuvenation from material destruction rested on the creation of a free, independent, and ethical population united in their loyalty to king and country. Fichte also identified the instructional methods perfected by Pestalozzi as the best means to secure this spiritual rebirth. Stein was equally enthusiastic. Establishing a Ministry of the Interior with a section dedicated to religion and public instruction, he appointed the Königsberg professor Johann Wilhelm Süvern and

a number of other liberal thinkers to advance the training of teachers in the new pedagogy as he pressured von Humboldt into accepting leadership of the department (Sweet, 1978). By January 1809 when von Humboldt finally took control, Stein had been ousted by Napoleon. His own tenure would last a mere 15 months, but during that time he was able to marshal the incipient plans developed by the group into a single, coherent program that would serve as an ideal for future reform.

Given his aristocratic upbringing at the hands of private tutors left him with little knowledge of public schooling, von Humboldt was happy to support the measures already underway for the improvement of elementary instruction; most notably through the establishment of Pestalozzian teaching seminaries. His interest lay more with the equally pressing problem of reorganizing secondary and higher education. A confusing patchwork of schools with widely varying curricula and academic standards had to be reconciled; and, in the wake of Napoleon's conquests, the loss of the University of Halle was to be remedied by a new site of learning in Berlin. This was an opportunity to establish a higher standard of intellectual and moral leadership for the nation. No task could have been more suited to his personal preoccupation with human genius.

Nurtured in his youth by the leading lights of the Berlin intelligentsia, Humboldt's nascent interests in philosophy and language led him to the University of Göttingen, which by the 1780s, had become Germany's premier institution for scientific, historical, and philological studies. Here the goal of *Wissenschaft* united with that of personal growth, suggesting the intimate relationship between the ordered advancement of knowledge and the harmonious development of the human faculties. He was particularly taken with the progress of the German mind—surely now able to rival that of France. Two years later his own quest for excellence brought him to Weimar and the circle of Schiller and Goethe (Sweet, 1978). By the 1790s, however, the conditions that fostered such intellectual and aesthetic brilliance were under attack. With Frederick William II on the throne, a

more conservative ministry chastened by events in Paris looked to roll back the religious freedoms enjoyed under Fredrich II; even Kant's (2001) *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* was censored. Von Humboldt's response was to defend the notion of *Bildung* in what would become a classic text of *laissez-faire* policy, *The Limits of State Action* (2008). Much as Herder argued, he drew upon Blumenbach's vitalism to explain human development and demonstrate that individuals would only realize their unique potential when given the freedom to encounter the widest variety of experiences. Forces of centralization and political conformity only served to narrow and stultify the opportunity for growth. Government, he insisted, had to "refrain from every attempt to operate directly or indirectly on the morals and character of the nation," most especially in the regulation of education and religion (p. 81).

By 1809 Humboldt's thought had evolved to embrace a more positive role for the state. Given the historical situation, he recognized the government's duty to create the conditions necessary for human *Bildung*. From the elementary school to the university, every individual had to receive a common, general education designed to develop their moral and intellectual powers. Vocational and narrowly focused class-based teaching would only undermine the larger political object of nation building. This was a truly radical departure from earlier proposals to improve public instruction which stressed separate schooling for the different social orders (Melton, 2003). But von Humboldt was adamant that the realities of life would prevent social levelling. The key thing was to create a sense of national identity by unifying the population with a common appreciation for the worth and dignity of all, irrespective of their station.

The example of Göttingen had clear and obvious implications for the new University of Berlin. After the loss of Halle, Schelling, Fichte, and others offered programmatic visions of a future institute dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge (Howard, 2006). Even so, Stefan Becks argues in

“More than a Theologian: Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Mark on Education,” it was the blueprint of Friedrich Schleiermacher that most impressed von Humboldt. Greatly influenced by Herder’s writings on language and mind, he put forward a passionate case for a university true to the spirit of the German nation. In contrast to the special schools and technical academies of the French, this required a commitment to the twin goals of individual development and intellectual inquiry. If the majority would not become researchers themselves, Schleiermacher was adamant that they should understand the purpose of rational advancement; indeed, he argued, there was no better preparation for professional training. Free from religious and political constraint, philosophy would be allowed to thrive for the benefit of the individual and the nation. Even theology would prosper by embracing science. Presented by von Humboldt, this union of *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft* underwrote the blueprint for the University of Berlin (officially opened in 1810), which by midcentury would become the model of the modern research university.

As Robert Anderson (2004) notes, the same holds true for von Humboldt’s vision of secondary education. Regulations were instituted to standardize the *Gymnasium* around a secular, classically oriented curriculum designed to perfect the mind and character in preparation for higher education. Teachers had to earn a university degree (more often in philosophy than theology) and students were required to complete an eight-year course of study ending in a culminating examination, the *Abitur*. But von Humboldt’s plans for elementary schooling proved far less successful. While the expansion of teacher training moved forward, the wars that engulfed the continent between 1812 and 1815 undermined any opportunity for meaningful reform. Then, with Napoleon’s defeat, the Congress of Vienna completely redrew the map of Europe, restoring Prussian territories and granting lands that greatly expanded its size. A new problem thus emerged; how to unite a linguistically, religiously, and culturally diverse population within a single state.

Recognizing the role of education, the department was transformed into a ministry under the leadership of Karl von Altenstein and charged with developing a comprehensive law for elementary schooling across Prussia (Schleunes, 1989). In 1819 a proposal drafted by Süvern was sent out for review. True to the philosophical aims and egalitarian spirit of von Humboldt’s program it quickly fell foul of conservative critics. In place of nation building, events across Europe now stirred fears about the destructive passions of the masses. Indeed, by teaching peasants to think for themselves many feared Pestalozzian pedagogy would incite revolution. Looking back to the stability of the traditional order brought calls for a firmer hierarchy of functionally distinct classes. Far from fostering an idealistic notion of humanity, education had to focus on vocation and the practical needs of life. Most importantly, the lower ranks had to be taught the kind of religious conformity celebrated by Francke. Accordingly, where Süvern proposed a general curriculum composed of language, literature, mathematics, history, and geography the leading voices of the Prussian *Vormärz* demanded that elementary education for the largely rural population be restricted to “Positive Christianity” (Schleunes, 1989). Burgher Schools could be established to provide occupationally relevant coursework for the urban manufacturing and commercial classes, but neither would serve as a steppingstone to the *Gymnasium*. Tailored to the higher orders, this remained the sole avenue to university and the learned professions. Given the linguistic, legal, and religious differences of Prussia’s new lands, no comprehensive legislation was enacted. However, teaching seminaries were held to a tighter mission. Eschewing unnecessary learning, rural schoolmasters were pressed to focus on religion, morals, and basic literacy. Contrary to Süvern’s proposal, the goal of *Bildung* firmly planted in the secondary and higher education of the higher classes, was replaced by the cultivation of religious piety for the general population.

In one respect at least, the Prussian system was highly successful. After analyzing Altenstein’s

returns for 1831, Cousin could report that with the extension of attendance laws to the new territories, 99% of children aged 7 to 14 were enrolled in elementary schools, more than twice that of France or England. Along with the modest cost to the government, such statistics clearly impressed foreign observers. Yet as Tomlinson demonstrates in the final paper of this issue, “Victor Cousin, Sarah Austin, and the Cause of National Education,” it was the quality of instruction that proved key for British American reformers. Impressed by the transformative power of Pestalozzian pedagogy, the Prussian master and the teaching seminary were presented as proof that education could improve human nature and create a more religious and enlightened society—a project itself informed by the spread of German ideas about mind, culture, and civilization.

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