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## ***The Humble Reason. On Education in Kant and Fichte***



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**Abstract:** In this paper I will focus on education as the core function of reason in Kant and Fichte. The notion of reason carries an intrinsic tendency to universality, which is difficult to be reconciled with its local (cultural, historical, anthropological) background and actualisation. I believe that the stress on the importance of learning, which can be seen in the works of both Kant and Fichte, might provide useful clues to approaching the relation between universality and particularity. I will start by focusing on Kant's narration on the genealogy of human reason in the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, and then move on to the critical writings and selected lectures in order to focus on the role of human dignity and ethical education for the moral appraisal and the practice of virtue. Later, I will consider Fichte's lectures on the *Vocation of the Scholar*, the *Vocation of Man* and *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, which are crucial to understanding the social, ethical and political role of the scholar. For Fichte, education is the best instrument to eradicate selfishness, regarded as a historical phenomenon which can lead a nation to ruin. I will then provide some conclusions concerning the two accounts and their implications.

**Keywords:** Education; genealogy of reason; dignity; vocation; cheerfulness of the heart.

### **I. Born to Learn. A Genealogy of Reason**

Education<sup>1</sup> is not merely a peripheral concern in Kant's thought, as we can see both from the lectures and the published works. References to this topic are present in the two short essays on the *Philanthropinum*, the early *Nachricht* from 1765, the *Metaphysics of Morals* – which sets dealing with the spreading and strengthening of moral principles in education as one of its aims (Kant, AA VI, 217) – and in the lectures<sup>2</sup> *On Pedagogy*

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2 Citations to Kant will be made on the basis of the *Akademie-Ausgabe* by volume and page (for instance: AA I, 1–2; 3–4). English quotations will be edited according to the Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, except for the Critique of Pure Reason where citations will use the standard A/B edition pagination (for instance: Kant, CPR, A 709/B 737).

These lectures consist of a collection of a variety of fragments, drafts and personal notes (especially on Rousseau) edited by Rink and therefore cannot be considered as a finished or even sketched text standing on its own (see Weisskopf 1970). However, they can be useful for supporting

(published in 1803).

To Kant, the only creature needing education is the human being (AA IX, 441, 443; AA VII, 323). For rational, moral and animal beings, impulse is not enough to develop fully what Kant calls “humanity”; as Winkler puts it, education concerns the “humanization of the human” (Winkler 1991, 258–259). To understand this point, I will refer to Kant’s genetic reconstruction of how reason – and through it also morality – emerge.

There are passages in the *Religion* and in the essay *Conjectural beginning of human history* (CBH) – a satirical reply<sup>3</sup> to Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity* – which bear a resemblance to the reconstruction of the genesis of human faculties widespread in some narratives of the early modern and the modern age (Rousseau 1755; Bonnet 1755).

In the CBH Kant regards, in the first stage, the emergence of the senses: smell develops as the most basic sense (as animal beings, we need smell to check the fitness of food, recognise other species, etc.); followed by sight, through which we extend our sources of knowledge beyond mere instinct (AA VIII, 111) and start comparing different objects in front of us (“this” near to me and “that” far away from me). In this process, reason develops as a capacity to go beyond the instantaneous instinctiveness of nature by means of establishing comparisons among actual alternatives and then constructing new possibilities by imagining possible alternatives that appeal to us.

In the second stage, the sexual impulse appears and with it, man discovers that by controlling the instinct and by interjecting imagination between desire and its object, the possibilities of enjoyment can be increased. If in the first stage the possible objects of desire are extended by comparison, in this second phase instinct itself is reshaped and directed towards objects of desire rationally constructed: “man passed over from mere sensual to idealistic attractions, from merely animal desires eventually to love, from the feeling for the merely pleasant to the taste for beauty” (AA VIII, 113). This iterative<sup>4</sup> and active process of desire leads to the third stage, in which one becomes capable of thinking about life in terms of possible ends, in which it is possible to desire something we do not have at the moment and plan our life orienting it towards this ideal.

However, as we are limited natural beings, the shadow of death might bring us despair insofar as it limits the realisation of our ideals. This encourages us to generate and grow attachment to our social group and family, so that a part of us can live through them, as well as through our love and work.

After this stage, according to Kant, we develop a self-awareness of our role in

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interpretative attempts based on the published texts.

3 Herder’s *Ideas* proposed a sort of an artistic interpretation of the Genesis, using it to move some points towards a criticism of the Enlightenment (e.g., the Fall is regarded as a self-determination of human reason, which brings inevitability to misery and corruption). Kant replies to this through the CBH in a sort of historical theodicy of reason and an idea of progress or providence, which uses human mistakes to develop rational powers, thus contributing to cultural and moral development.

4 On iterativity as a characteristic of reason see Willaschek (2018).

the world as social beings, able to treat others always as ends as well: “The fourth and final step that reason took in raising mankind altogether beyond the community of animals” (AA VIII, 114). In this passage, the reference to “mankind altogether” stresses the communitarian-social dimension of this step as well as the community of animals intended in Kant’s sense of animality.

Similarly, in the *Religion* Kant develops a moral anthropological theory and individuates three dispositions towards good: animality, which concerns the physical care, preservation, and is described as “a mechanical self-love, wherein no reason is demanded” (AA VI, 26); humanity, a stage in which practical reason is involved but only as “subservient to other incentives” (AA VI, 28); and finally personality: “the susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice” (AA VI, 27).

These stages of the development of reason sketched in the CBH and the *Religion* find analogous passages in the *Lectures*, in which Kant individuates different stages of education: the first one is care (AA IX, 441), intended as the physical support, maintenance and provision needed by children. The second is discipline, which changes “animality into humanity” (AA IX, 441), preventing us from deviating from the ends of humanity by means of disciplining impulses so that we do not damage each other. This phase paves the way to proper education and culture<sup>5</sup>, regarded as the possession of aptitude or skilfulness, and leads to civilization – i.e., prudence as the faculty of using skills in “a socially effective manner (AA IX, 455) – as well as to morality.

Kant is known for drawing a clear line between civilization and morality, and alluding repeatedly to the lack of moralisation in his day (AA IX, 451; AA VIII, 29; AA XV, 641). The difficulty of reaching this stage is, of course, caused by the nature of morality itself, which depends on the grounds of our maxims. As Kant puts it, describing ethical education: “Everything is spoiled if one tries to ground it on examples, threats, punishments, etc. One must see to it that the pupil acts from his own maxims, not from habit [*Gewohnheit*], that he does not only do the good, but that he does it because it is good” (AA IX, 475).

But how can this be taught? Virtue, which consists in the adequation of the maxims to the law, is not an innate capacity, but rather something we have to acquire. As Kant formulates it:

The very concept of virtue already implies that virtue must be acquired (that it is not innate); one need not appeal to anthropological knowledge based on experience to see this. For a human being’s moral capacity would not be virtue were it not produced by the strength of his resolution in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations. Virtue is the product of pure practical reason insofar as it gains ascendancy over such inclinations with consciousness of its supremacy (based on freedom). That virtue can and must be taught already follows from its

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<sup>5</sup> Some interpreters regard the two general terms as being synonymous (Louden 2000, 40). I generally agree, although the term *Kultur* is often used to refer to the possession or procurement of some skilfulness (AA V, 431; AA IX, 449), whilst *Bildung* regards the broader process (including the negative stage of discipline and care) by which one acquires *Kultur* (Kant, CPR, KrV A 709/B 737–A 710/B 738).

not being innate; a doctrine of virtue is therefore something that can be taught (AA VI, 477).

If the highest aim of education is virtue, which concerns maxims grounded in the principle of autonomy, how can virtue be taught without this leading to pursue mere legality (i.e., external accordance to a rule)? In what does ethical education consist?

## II. Ethical Education

Ethical education cannot and should not provide ethical rules, i.e., mere commands, but, rather, teach the subject to recognise and exercise virtue and the related effort to contrast it with the “inner enemy within the human being” (AA VI, 477), namely heteronomy.

In the published works Kant depicts education as being propaedeutic<sup>6</sup> to virtue or a presentation of the doctrine of virtue in a systematic<sup>7</sup> way. This might be acroamatic or erotematic: the first, provides the building materials for education and the pupils are mere listeners, whilst the second requires more active intervention from the pupils who are asked by the teacher in a Socratic way (AA VI, 478). The erotematic method<sup>8</sup> is further subdivided into the “dialogic manner of teaching” if the teacher queries the student’s reason and in the “catechistic manner of teaching” if the teacher merely queries the student’s memory (AA VI, 478). Catechistic education (AA V, 152 ff.; AA VI, 477 ff.), then, is the most elementary instrument used for new pupils: it is not merely a dogmatic situation – in which only the teacher is entitled to speak and the pupils are passive – it is rather a dynamic one, enlivened by questions asked by the teacher in order to enliven the pupil’s attention and memory. It cannot yet be considered as being a proper, equal, reciprocal dialogue, because the pupil still has no determinate questions (AA VI, 479), and sometimes it can start only after a proper dialogical method, in which both teacher and pupils ask and answer questions. In this way, both teacher and pupils are regarded as subjects of learning:

The pupil, who thus sees that he himself can think, responds with questions of his own about obscurities in the propositions admitted or about his doubts regarding them, and so provides occasions for the teacher himself to learn how to question skillfully, according to the saying *docendo discimus*. (For logic has not yet taken

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6 “[T]he product of pure practical reason insofar as it gains ascendancy over such [opposing] inclinations with consciousness of its supremacy (based on freedom)” (AA VI, 478).

7 A method is needed insofar as ethical education is scientific: “As for the method of teaching (for every scientific doctrine must be treated methodically; otherwise, it would be set forth chaotically), this too must be systematic and not fragmentary if the doctrine of virtue is to be presented as a science” (AA VI, 478).

8 The catechistic and dialogic methods are discussed frequently in the *Lectures on Logic* and in some *Reflections* (e.g., AA XXIV, 599–600; AA XVI, 806–808). Here, the catechistic method is addressed as mere “memory work”, in which the student recites thoughts that are not yet his own while in the dialogic one, the teacher and the student alternate asking questions and giving answers to each other.

sufficiently to heart the challenge issued to it, that it should also provide rules to direct one in searching for things, i.e., it should not limit itself to giving rules for conclusive judgments but should also provide rules for *preliminary* judgments (*iudicia praevia*), by which one is led to thoughts. Such a theory can be a guide even to the mathematician in his discoveries, and moreover he often makes use of it) (AA VI, 478)

Apart from that, Kant addresses experimental or technical means intended as a good example set by the conduct of the teacher and “cautionary example in others” (AA VI, 479). Imitation is the first way to form habits, i.e., inclinations through repeated gratification of that inclination or a mechanism of sense and not a principle of thought. But examples, even if they can be an incentive for a specific conduct, cannot determine maxims of virtue. Good examples, then, are not models but rather living proof that it is possible to act in conformity with duty: “So it is not comparison with any other human being whatsoever (as he is), but with the idea (of humanity), as he ought to be, and so comparison with the law, that must serve as the constant standard of a teacher’s instruction” (AA VI, 480).

Before delving into the role of examples, I want to point to Kant’s quite interesting reference to “experiments” in education:

It is even commonly imagined that experiments in education are not necessary, and that one can already judge by reason alone whether something will be good or bad. But this is very mistaken, and experience teaches that our experiments often show quite different effects from the ones expected. One sees therefore that since experiments matter, no one generation can present a complete plan of education (AA IX, 451).

Unlike the standard view according to which Kant basically defends a sort of priority of the theory over the praxis (Kant, CPR, B XIII; AA VIII, 277), in the case of education he recognises the need to experiment and try different educational approaches<sup>9</sup>. Education, in the end, has an instrumental purpose (it is propaedeutic to virtue) and might be more or less efficient depending on a variety of factors, including the historical and contextual situation, as well as the language and personal experiences of the subjects.

As already stressed, education is needed not to merely inculcate “rules” (and here we see one different from legality), but rather to capture the student’s attention through a “feeling for action from duty” (Herman 1998, 255). During the classes, children face some exemplar cases of virtue so that they turn their attention to the specific nature of moral action. In this way, they do not merely confront actions as “natural” but also as moral. Thanks to the questions and the relationship of trust with the teacher, the pupil develops an interest in morality:

Its advantage (of catechism – L.S.) lies especially in the fact that it is natural for a human being to love a subject which he has, by his own handling, brought to a

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<sup>9</sup> Kant hopes that Basedow’s schools could be an impulse to educate students to be citizens of the world, and not merely provincial narrow-minded people: “The present Basedowian institutes are the first which have come to pass according to the perfect plan [of education]. This is the greatest phenomenon that has appeared in this century for the improvement of the perfection of humanity. Through it all schools in the world will receive another form” (AA XXV, 722–723).

science (in which he is now proficient); and so, by this sort of practice, the pupil is drawn without noticing it to an interest in morality. But it is most important in this education not to present the moral catechism mixed with the religious one (to combine them into one) or, what is worse yet, to have it follow upon the religious catechism. On the contrary, the pupil must always be brought to a clear insight into the moral catechism, which should be presented with the utmost diligence and thoroughness. For otherwise the religion that he afterwards professes will be nothing but hypocrisy; he will acknowledge duties out of fear and feign an interest in them that is not in his heart (AA VI, 483–484).

While legality, intended as conformity to rules, needs only some training of rationality (in order to judge which are the “best” means to apply the rule), ethics needs a more complex training of reason, one which deals not only with a choice of the means, but also of the ends, enabling the subject to see which elements of a given situation are morally relevant to determine the maxims according to the moral Law.

This ethical training, stimulated through the erotetic Socratic method of questions and answers, challenges the pupil’s ingenuity and his blindness to morally relevant factors of a situation. In this way, the pupil can broaden his perspective, developing empathic attentiveness, and confront possible situations. But what is needed to achieve this task is community. As Herman puts it:

We do not grasp the moral truths about things by being informed of their names and natures. We require certain experiences – moral experiences – and interpretations of the experiences (instruction) to become aware of and responsive to a moral world. We may have an innate predisposition to morality: a capacity to act from duty and for the sake of the moral law. But if the moral capacity is natural, its actualization in our lives is not; it must be produced (R 23). The conjunction of interpreted experiences with the acquisition of elements of a virtuous character presents the world as a moral world and establishes in us a “second nature.” It is not a new nature; that would be impossible. It involves a construction of a conception of self and the development of innate possibilities by which we would be able, if only ideally, to become fully moral persons (Herman 1998, 257).

The practice of virtue (ethical ascetics) – a practical counterpart of the more theoretical ethical education – aims not at ascetism in a stoic or monkish sense: isolation and self-punishment without repentance and cheerfulness lead only to a negative kind of well-being (AA VI, 484) or to hating the virtue’s command (AA VI, 485). A positive moral feeling must be added to the ascetic regimen, which enables the virtuous to do without the superfluous pleasures and put up with misfortunes (AA VI, 484): “something which, though it is only moral, affords an agreeable enjoyment to life” [*fröhliche Gemüthsstimmung*]. This is the ever-cheerful<sup>10</sup> heart, which brings to mind the virtuous Epicurus (AA VI, 485):

Ethical gymnastics, therefore, consists only in combatting natural impulses

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<sup>10</sup> The term appears in Kant’s other works. For instance, in the *Conflict of Faculties* it refers to the state in which we enjoy life acting freely (AA VII, 104), while in the *Religion* it describes the ideal position of someone who is given a holy will and takes all sorrow upon himself (AA VI, 64). Apart from that, it refers to the state of a person who has no remorse or reproach (AA IX, 499) but also to Epicurus’s “joyful heart” [*fröhliches Herz*], which seeks pleasure (AA IX, 30; AA XVIII, 45).

sufficiently to be able to master them when a situation comes up in which they threaten morality; hence it makes one valiant and cheerful in the consciousness of one's restored freedom. To repent of something and to impose & penance on oneself (such as a fast) not for hygienic but for pious considerations are, morally speaking, two very different precautionary measures. To repent of a past transgression when one recalls it is unavoidable and, in fact, it is even a duty not to let this recollection disappear; but doing penance, which is cheerless, gloomy, and sullen, makes virtue itself hated and drives adherents away from it. Hence the training (discipline) that a human being practices on himself can become meritorious and exemplary only through the cheerfulness that accompanies it (AA VI, 485).

To realise our moral appraisal, then, we need others: we need not only abstract or hypothetical examples but also everyday contact with others, a life together made up of sharing feelings, care and empathy. Kant strongly encourages social intercourse (and its *virtutes homileticae*), stating that:

It is a duty to oneself as well as to others not to isolate oneself (*separatistam agere*) but to use one's moral perfections in social intercourse (*officium commercii, sociabilitas*). While making oneself a fixed center of one's principles, one ought to regard this circle drawn around one as also forming part of an all-inclusive circle of those who, in their disposition, are citizens of the world – not exactly in order to promote as the end what is best for the world but only to cultivate what leads indirectly to this end: to cultivate a disposition of reciprocity – agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love and respect (affability and propriety, *humanitas aethetica et decorum*) and so to associate the graces with virtue. To bring this about is itself a duty of virtue (AA VI, 473).

With practice, by becoming aware of the possibilities of other perspectives (moral reasons of others), we can train our skills for broadening our thought and considering others in their dignity<sup>11</sup>.

### III. The Practice of Virtue

In Kant's published works 'dignity' is sometimes related to 'worth' (AA IV, 435; 436), but it does not describe an innate, fundamental value, but rather 'worthiness' or 'excellence' in the Stoic sense, namely a position or status in a relation in which something is elevated above something else (AA VI, 57, note). In ancient times, the term 'dignity' (from Latin *dignitas*, worthiness) signified some high office, usually an office of the state, which carried certain privileges and prerogatives. This explains why Kant writes not only of attributing dignity to humanity, but also uses expressions such as "dignity of mathematics" (AA III, 323), "dignity of a minister" (AA VIII, 344) or "the dignity of a teacher" (AA VI, 162).

More specifically, in Kant's ethics dignity is attributed to every moral subject and is

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<sup>11</sup> Kant's notion of dignity has been considered as a secondary concept in a non-foundational sense (Sensen 2011). It plays no role in the justification of morality (it does not appear in the passages that should justify morality: The Third Section of the *Groundwork*, the derivation of the Formula of Humanity, the second *Critique*, the *Lectures on Ethics*), because by itself it is not a notion that carries any justificatory weight – rather, it expresses the special standing of someone.

grounded by reason. The unconditioned, formal law that can determine the will is what provides humanity with dignity, i.e., as moral beings, humans have a special standing:

Reason accordingly refers every maxim of the will as giving universal law to every other will and also to every action toward oneself, and does so not for the sake of any other practical motive or any future advantage but from the idea of the dignity of a rational being, who obeys no law other than that which he himself at the same time gives. In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity (AA IV, 434).

Dignity has no price: it cannot be traded away for something else. It is incomparable and cannot be measured:

But a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world. He can measure himself with every other being of this kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them (AA VI, 434; 435).

In other words, as lawgivers, as beings capable of setting ends, humans have dignity: "Now, morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself, since only through this is it possible to be a lawgiver member in the kingdom of ends. Hence morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity" (AA IV, 435). Dignity is intended as a status of the moral subject, insofar as she or he is capable of setting his or her own ends, i.e., being lawgivers. It is not a coincidence that in the *Typic* chapter of the second *Critique* Kant refers to the power to judge as lawgivers in the determination of the will according to the moral Law. The rule of judgment under laws of pure practical reason is the following: ask yourself whether – if the action you propose were to take place by a law of nature of which you were yourself a part – you could indeed regard it as possible through your will. Everyone does, in fact, appraise actions as morally good or evil by this rule:

Thus one says: if everyone permitted himself to deceive when he believed it to be to his advantage, or considered weary of it, or looked with complete indifference on the need of others, and if you belonged to such an order of things, would you be in it with the assent of your will? (...) Such a law is, nevertheless, a type for the appraisal of maxims in accordance with moral principles. If the maxim of the action is not so constituted that it can stand the test as to the form of a law of nature in general, then it is morally impossible (AA V, 69; 70).

But how can we change the perspective and elevate ourselves from a particular, egocentric perspective to a more general one? Many difficulties are related to Kant's proposal to change the perspective from a private, egoistic one to the position of a

lawgiver. I believe that the three “maxims of common human understanding”<sup>12</sup> presented in the third *Critique* can be of some help. The *sensus communis*, namely, is defined as the faculty to judge as if we were to hold our judgements up to human reason as a whole, abstracting from it the subjective private conditions that could be regarded as objective (AA V, 293; 294).

More specifically, the first maxim characterising the use of the common human understanding<sup>13</sup> concerns thinking for oneself:

The first is the maxim of a reason that is never **passive**. The tendency toward the latter, hence toward heteronomy of reason, is called **prejudice**; and the greatest prejudice of all is that of representing reason as if it were not subject to the rules of nature on which the understanding grounds it by means of its own essential law: i.e., **superstition**. Liberation from superstition is called **enlightenment** (AA V, 294)

This maxim states not only that we are and have to be autonomous, i.e., can determine our will independently from empirical motives, but also that our process of judgement cannot but start from our individual, context-situated position. It is we – with our particular motives and background (our rooted rationality) – who are on stage.

The second maxim addresses the capacity to think from the standpoint of everyone else or a:

**broad-minded way of thinking** if he sets himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, within which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects on his own judgment from a **universal standpoint** (which he can only determine by putting himself into the standpoint of others) (AA V, 295).

Through such a maxim “of enlarged thought” (AA V, 294), the subject reflects on his own judgement by shifting from a private position to the standpoint of others (AA V, 295).

Finally, the third maxim regards consistency, which: “can only be achieved through the combination of the first two and after frequent observance of them has made them automatic” (AA V, 295). This maxim is the most difficult to be attained, because each change in the standpoint brings with itself the possibility of something new and therefore its fulfilment should be conceived as a never-ending task and effort. This moral dynamic of adequation of the Law, i.e., the pursuit of virtue, on the one hand finds no motive in the pursue of happiness, and on the other – as mentioned above – is accompanied by a cheerfulness of the heart, which brings to mind Kant’s reference to a moral feeling of respect for the moral law, i.e., a feeling produced by reason (AA V, 76) in the sense that

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12 I will not delve here into the details of the relation between common sense [*Gemeinsinn*] and common human understanding, but just point out that they might be confused with each other, since they are both referred to by Kant with the general Latin term *sensus communis* and are presupposed as grounds for communication (AA V, 239). However, as Kant specifies, while we judge by feeling through the common sense, we always judge by concepts using the common human understanding – although obscurely (AA V, 238).

13 The maxims are presented in slightly different terms in the *Logic* (AA IX, 57) and the *Anthropology* (AA VII, 228; 229).

reason causes an effect on our state or, to put it more clearly, an interest in the compliance with the law (AA V, 80). Cheerfulness could therefore be regarded as the state of a heart that wants and tries to be adequate to the Law<sup>14</sup>.

I cannot delve here into a detailed discussion concerning these terms. However, I want to point out that the notion of happiness is highly ambiguous in Kant: happiness is “necessarily the demand of every rational but finite being and therefore an unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire” (AA V, 25). It motivates the lower faculty of desire, thus changing from subject to subject (and from time to time). Besides, if it is assumed as the determining ground of the will, it opposes morality (AA V, 35). However, this does not mean that one should renounce happiness *in toto*: Kant stresses in particular the motives of the determination of the will, he does not oppose happiness *per se*:

But this distinction of the principle of happiness from that of morality is not, for this reason, at once an opposition between them, and pure practical reason does not require that one should renounce claims to happiness but only that as soon as duty is in question one should take no account of them. It can even in certain respects be a duty to attend to one’s happiness, partly because happiness (to which belong skill, health, wealth) contains means for the fulfillment of one’s duty and partly because lack of it (e.g., poverty) contains temptations to transgress one’s duty. However, it can never be a direct duty to promote one’s happiness, still less can it be a principle of all duty (AA V, 93).

Happiness is nuanced and this suggests a shift in Kant’s use of language: on the one hand, happiness is related to the sensuous well-being, it is a sensible principle (AA V, 120) that is at the basis of eudaimonism and as such cannot be compatible with morality, because it is its euthanasia (AA VI, 378). But on the other hand, it can be regarded as a state of the rational being: “Happiness is the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will” (AA V, 124). This harmony and adequacy between the will and the world describes the state of a soul enjoying the highest good: it is not that happiness is given by the fulfilment of some wishes or mental images of what we believe that will give us happiness<sup>15</sup>, but that everything is as it must be, i.e., there is an adequacy between virtue and happiness (AA V, 108; 114). In this world, where such a state is not possible, we can enjoy sensuous states of happiness that are, however, not necessarily related to virtue and therefore do not consist in the Stoic’s consciousness of virtue (AA V, 111). Kant is well aware that there is a distinction between happiness and morality: what the Stoics referred to as happiness is perhaps more similar to Kant’s notion of cheerfulness of the heart or of moral feeling of respect, which accompany the practice of virtue as a never-

<sup>14</sup> If this actually happens, cannot be decided: there is always a degree of self-obscurity concerning our profoundest motives. Kant sticks to this point repeatedly in his works, referring to the opacity and the unfathomability affecting the depths of the human heart (AA IV, 398–399; AA V, 35; AA VI, 446; 447).

<sup>15</sup> Happiness, namely is indeterminate (AA IV, 418; 419; AA V, 25–27) and it is up to us to try to figure out what it is (Herman 1998, 258).

ending task. Kernels of these ideas, namely that there is no actual joy without morality and that this is an indefinite purpose of man, are later echoed and developed in Fichte's thought.

#### IV. The Idea of Man. Learning to Be at One with Oneself

In Fichte, too, education<sup>16</sup> already plays an important role from his early lectures and writings (see Hankovszky 2018). But it is perhaps the *Vocation of the Scholar*, which can be read as an enlivened reply to Rousseau's account on education, which includes the most relevant references to the topic. However, in order to understand the vocation<sup>17</sup> of the scholar, one must previously inquire what the vocation of man is. This, to Fichte, consists in the unity with oneself:

Man should always be at one with himself, he should never contradict his own being (...). The determination of the empirical Ego should be such as may endure for ever. I may here, in passing, and for the sake of illustration merely, express the fundamental principle of morality in the following formula: "So act that thou mayest look upon the dictate of thy will as an eternal law to thyself." The ultimate vocation of every finite, rational being is thus absolute unity, constant identity, perfect harmony with himself (Fichte 1889, 153).

Unlike Rousseau, according to whom man is made wicked by being made sociable (Rousseau 2002, 113), Fichte believes that inequality is provided by the mistakes of nature (Fichte 1988, 164) and that man's vocation is to live in society, where the natural differences can be reconciliated through education and culture (Fichte 1988, 163–164), which help and inspire the subject to be at one with himself. This task, that is identity, is what perfection consists of, and an adequacy to such an absolute completeness cannot but be realised in everlasting aspiration and struggle. A constant improvement, then, and not the achievement of an absolute status, is the true vocation of man:

It is a part of the idea of man that his ultimate end must be unattainable; the way to it endless. Hence it is not the vocation of man to attain this end. But he may and should constantly approach nearer to it; and thus the unceasing approximation to this end is his true vocation as man; i.e. as a rational but finite, as a sensuous but free being (Fichte 1889, 156).

Given the unattainability of this ideal identity, what one could and must do is to

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<sup>16</sup> One should remember that Fichte, whose lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar had an exoteric purpose, together with Rousseau, Comenius and Pestalozzi (who met Fichte in person), belongs to a trend of reformers who advocated free access to education, which should not be exclusive to a privileged group, and stressed the important social role of education (Dimić 2003, 779–781).

<sup>17</sup> *Bestimmung* can be regarded as the task, meaning and purpose of human existence, which are understood differently depending on the underlying anthropology and metaphysics of a theory. *Bestimmung* can be *Selbstbestimmung*, self-determination, i.e., the human ability to act according to his own insight. This determination is practically characterised: the subject does not only operate purely theoretically determining his own purposes; rather, he applies them to himself by acting on them. In this way, he "defines" himself in practical terms (see Spalding 1997; Gerhardt 1990).

attempt to realise it in a community with other people: man is not isolated or set apart from all relation to beings like himself and has the tendency and need to find other reasonable and free beings to establish a community with them. It is this “fundamental impulse” (Fichte 1889, 163) that leads us to assume the existence of other reasonable and free human beings: “This social impulse thus belongs to the fundamental impulses of man. It is man’s vocation to live in Society he must live in Society; he is no complete man, but contradicts his own being, if he lives in a state of isolation” (Fichte 1889, 163). This is astonishingly close to Kant’s abovementioned passage concerning the duty not to isolate oneself (cf., AA VI, 473): we need others to realise our capacities, of which morality is the profoundest one. But Fichte, slightly differently from Kant, emphasises with more clearness and decisiveness the role of reciprocity for such a dynamic: the social impulse defined negatively by the law of not self-contradiction (the aim is absolute unity with himself) leads to “reciprocal activity, to mutual influence, mutual giving and receiving, mutual suffering and doing” (Fichte 1889, 166) and entering a social dynamism governed by the principle of coordination (and not mere subordination such as that to the material world). Within this perspective, we make ourselves free only insofar as we make others free. Contrary to this, those who consider themselves masters, have the soul of a slave:

He only is free, who would make all around him free likewise; and does really make them free, by a certain influence the sources of which are hitherto undiscovered. In his presence we breathe more freely; we feel that nothing has power to oppress, hinder, or confine us; we feel an unwonted desire to be and to do all things which self-respect does not forbid (Fichte 1889, 167).

And later in the text:

But no one can successfully labour for the moral improvement of his species who is not himself a good man. We do not teach by words alone, we also teach much more impressively by example; and every one who lives in society owes it a good example, because the power of example has its origin in the social relation (Fichte 1889, 192; 193).

On the basis of the abovementioned passages, we could formulate the following definition: a teacher is someone who has the capacity to inspire his fellows to always be objects of respect, to be themselves and be free; he does so not through dictate, menace or rules, but through his own conduct and way of being.

As mentioned above, in Kant dignity is the title which describes the moral nature of human beings as ends in themselves, and the same formulation echoes in Fichte’s works:

every individual in society ought to act on the basis of free choice and on the basis of a conviction which he himself has judged adequate. In each of his actions he ought to be able to think of himself as an end and ought to be treated as such by every other member of society. A person who is deceived is being treated as a mere means to an end (Fichte 1988d, 175).

Besides, Fichte stresses that not only should one not use others as means for his own purposes, but, also, he should not even use them for attaining their own virtue, wisdom

and happiness<sup>18</sup> against their will and that one “must not even desire to do it; for it is unjust, and by so doing he would be placed in opposition to himself” (Fichte 1889, 167). To respect others means to respect their freedom even in the most difficult case: when we want them to be happy and believe we know what is best for them. This, however, in Fichte’s perspective, would only cause damage to our loved ones, insofar as we would put them in opposition to themselves. One can encourage the other, share his point of views, but never force him or her in a specific direction or tell them how to use of their freedom.

Although there are several ways of doing it, in the end there is only one ultimate end for individuals, i.e., perfection or equality to oneself. In society, this assumes the form of the law of internal harmony, which is not static but rather enlivened by the continuous movement of cooperation and mutual pedagogical improvement.

## V. The Guide of the Human Race

*Bildung*<sup>19</sup> is realised in a social dimension. As Kivelä (2012) summarises, there are different characteristics of *Bildung* distinguished in Fichte’s texts: it is an indefinite process and it does not regard events but the development of human capacities and reason. Moreover, it is guided by the idea of harmony, that has to be realised through our actions in the world, embodied in the mutual and reciprocal relations between individuals who help each other to develop their talents (Kivelä 2012). This reciprocal dynamic in which education consists is described by the distinction between the communicative and the receptive impulse: the former drives us to impart the knowledge we possess, while the latter regards the receptive capacity to embrace the culture we are scarce in, with the help of others<sup>20</sup>. On the one hand, the teacher is a “giver”, he can share culture because he has acquired it; on the other hand, everyone is always also a receiver, who has to take advantage of the actions of the others towards him. To Fichte, the second impulse is the most important, insofar as it leads to progress and stresses that nobody can be so advanced in his self-realisation to regard others as if he could not learn anything from

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18 This is also stated by Kant (AA V, 34–35): it is only the form of the law that must determine the maxim, and not the pursuit of happiness (even of others).

19 I will not delve here into a detailed discussion concerning the distinction – which has oscillated from time to time between *Erziehung* and *Bildung* but just stress that the former concerns education in general and the latter refers to the “building”, formation of the person and his personality: one is more externally governed (the noun *Erziehung* refers to animals, too), the other needs an active internal involvement of the subject and involves self-reflection (Hörner 2008, 12). The two, therefore, are not mutually exclusive and in Kant, *Bildung* (formation) refers to a positive aspect of education: “Education includes care and formation. Formation is 1) negative, viz., the discipline which merely prevents errors; 1) positive, viz., instruction and guidance, and insofar forms a part of culture” (AA IX, 452).

20 This division brings to mind what Fichte wrote as early as 1780, when he was 18 years old – he defined a passive and an active form of obtaining knowledge: “(...) we can learn in two ways. On the one hand, knowledge is transferred into our soul so to speak from outside, so we receive the whole as such from somebody else; on the other hand, (...) it seems to us that we ourselves have grasped and comprehended that knowledge by our own mind, while the teacher only leads us onto the way we can reach it” (Fichte 1962, 19; 20).

them.

It is important, here, to not consider this impulse as a compelling one, like the instinct to survive or procreate – it addresses the free nature of man, and for this reason it does not and cannot oblige pupils to do anything but rather incites them to do it through the guidance of a teacher<sup>21</sup>. The main aim of teachers consists, namely, in directing the attention of the students so that they can draw the conclusions for themselves, which brings to mind the dialogical method advocated by Kant. Fichte, however, does not detail this method further and limits himself to providing some examples of this dynamic. For instance, concerning the existence of God, he states:

With the help of examples which appear in front of his [i.e., learner's] eyes in the moment of speaking I am going to direct his mind without his suspecting what aim my speech serves, so that he may conceive there is somebody who created all this, and that he on his own, in his own intention, may wish to know whether that somebody is God (Fichte 1962, 20).

Fichte identifies three kinds of knowledge acquired through learning: philosophical, i.e., concerning the principles of pure reason, philosophical-historical, regarding the connection of the purposes to the appropriate objects in experience, and historical, concerning the understanding of the direction in which progress must go through examining the events of the past and considering the steps made at a given time. The scholar, then, insofar as he sees the whole picture, the relations between the distinct steps and the whole task, can somehow anticipate the future and, therefore, be a guide of the human race:

He sees not merely the present, he sees also the future: he sees not merely the point which humanity now occupies, but also that to which it must next advance if it remains true to its final end, and do not wander or turn back from its legitimate path. He cannot desire to hurry forward humanity at once to the goal which perhaps gleams brightly before his own vision; the road cannot be overleaped; he must only take care that it do not stand still, and that it do not turn back. In this respect the Scholar is the Guide of the human race (Fichte 1889, 191–192).

Furthermore, the teacher must avoid coercion and physical force, since these means are against the ultimate purpose – moral elevation – which can be encouraged only through the example of a teacher who himself is morally elevated. It is also a happy vocation, because it coincides with the common destiny of every man living under the moral law: it is a privilege and a joy to dedicate oneself primarily (even exclusively) to the common vocation of men and be their guide. Education, in other words, is the way in which people in a community relate to each other and orient themselves towards reciprocal moral improvement, which takes place not only within institutions but also concerns

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<sup>21</sup> Another possibility for Fichte is moral genius, in which reason expresses itself with more clarity, exemplified by the beginners of religions – that is to say, by those who were capable to elevate themselves to the moral consciousness without the stimulus of a teacher (see Pareyson 1976, 396; 397).

every aspect of their existence as members of society<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, it is an ethical and social education. From this perspective, the scholar has a peculiar role which consists in educating and ennobling mankind, because he supervises progress; he should encourage and help people to recognise their needs and serve as a living example – not separated from reality, but in the community for which he exists. In this way, politics assumes a primary role; what characterises the vocation of the scholar is not metaphysics, nor ascetism and separation from society, but rather an involvement in life and changing it for the sake of reciprocal benefit and development.

Discussing the constitution of a perfect state in which new universities would be constituted respecting the freedom of their members, Fichte writes that students would be given the possibility to place themselves in a social class – of scholars, for instance – by their own effort and left free to choose good or evil. This project opposes the idea of a passive school system, in which the student is a mere listener who has to develop some specific skills or acquire precise contents that serve a precise purpose. The only task, in Fichte's pedagogical account, is freedom. Consequently, being acquainted with the contents, being educated and erudite in some fields of knowledge, does not mean that one is a true scholar, who is conscious of the possession of the Idea. As he puts it:

This principle pervades the conduct of the True Scholar. He has no other purpose in action but to express his Idea, and embody the truth which he recognises in word or work. No personal regard, either for himself or others, can impel him to do that which is not required by this purpose, no such regard can cause him to neglect anything which is demanded by this purpose. His person, and all personality in the world, have long since vanished from before him, and entirely disappeared in his effort after the realization of the Idea. The Idea alone impels him; where it does not move him, he rests and remains inactive. He does nothing with precipitation, hurried forward by disquietude and restlessness; these may well be symptoms of unfolding power, but they are never to be found in conjunction with true, developed, mature and manly strength (Fichte 1889, 285).

The scholar makes the Idea accessible to human thought (Fichte 1889, 297) by means of his own life, accompanied by a forever young attitude that brings joy to his never-ending vocation (Fichte 1889, 307). It is a process of liberation and therefore of joyfulness.

In later texts, the political and social implications of the vocation of the scholar becomes even clearer and this develops into a controversial project which ties together the fate and development of philosophy and those of the national education in the republic. This is famously explored in the *Addresses to the German Nation*, in which Fichte advocates a national education to save the nation, instilling love of learning for its own sake

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22 This has been regarded as a point in which Fichte distinguishes his pattern from Kant's one: Kant puts a metaphysics of ethics as a point of departure for then deriving the moral sphere of action (i.e., the ethics of duties). By contrast, Fichte: "finds it in the political nature of Man and his life in the community with other people. In that sense, Categorical Imperative is relativized according to circumstances and it is not so unconditional anymore" (Dimić 2003, 782). However, as showed above, in Kant the categorical imperative must be applied and therefore realised in a specific context. The normative value is grounded a priori, but the application is context-sensitive (see Herman 1985; 1996).

and its practical counterpart, namely ethical disposition (James 2014, 501–503), which develops into the love of the fatherland and the support of the constitution of the nation as a unity (Fichte 1922, 130 ff.). The members of such a nation share a non-instrumental form of reason, expressed in the *Wissenschaftslehre* and in the formula of acting for the sake of duty, which implies a liberation from any coercive bonds and corrupted political arrangements. Along this line, education has to contribute to eradicating selfishness seen as a historical phenomenon which can ruin a nation. For this, Fichte presents a world plan in his lectures *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, identifying five stages of the development of reason in its relation to freedom and selfishness. More specifically, in the first chapter, “The Idea of Universal History”, Fichte states that in the first epoch reason “acts as blind Instinct, where it cannot as yet act through Free Will” (Fichte 1977, 7). The development of reason and freedom is then divided into 5 epochs:

- 1) the unlimited dominion of reason as instinct (the state of innocence);
- 2) reason as instinct becomes the external ruling authority (the positive system which compels without convincing or going back to the ultimate foundation – the State of progressive sin);
- 3) the epoch of liberation (directly from the external authority and indirectly from the power of reason as instinct and generally from reason, the age of indifference towards the truth) – the state of complete sinfulness;
- 4) the epoch of reason as knowledge (truth is beloved above all other things) the state of progressive justification;
- 5) the epoch of reason as art, in which humanity builds itself up into a representative of Reason (the state of completed justification and sanctification).

This journey leads back to the first stage, the dominion of reason (Fichte 1977, 9–19). In order to develop this plan, philosophy has to be spread as *Wissenschaftslehre* in a process of continuous education from the earliest ages.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* will become universally comprehensible and easy to understand just as soon as it becomes the main goal and deliberate aim of all education [*Erziehung*], from the earliest age, only to develop the pupil’s inner energy and not to channel it in any anticipate direction, i.e., just as soon as we begin to educate human beings for their own purposes and as instruments of their own will and not as soulless instruments for the use of others. Education [*Bildung*] of the whole person from earliest youth: This is the only way to propagate philosophy (Fichte 1994, 92).

### Conclusive Remarks

Education assumes a fundamental role in the development of both Kant’s and Fichte’s theories. This is because of the account of reason, the moral anthropology and ethics depicted by both philosophers. More specifically, in Kant there are clear hints

towards the application of the command of pure practical reason in a social context-related dimension (Kivelä 2012, 66–69) and Fichte proceeds according to this pattern, regarding the vocation of the scholar as a never-ending social task, which resembles the indefinite *Streben* to adequate the will to the moral Law. Reason must recognise its humbleness: there is no definite achievement, and the learning process is never ended.

However, there are important differences between the two perspectives. I will only briefly point to some of them. Kant does not unite the fate of philosophy and that of the German nation as Fichte does, and he is probably not as sensitive to the need to make philosophy more accessible to a larger public<sup>23</sup>. Besides, Fichte's texts are dominated by the notion of reciprocity in a way that anticipates Hegel's doctrine of recognition: reason is practically ascribed to others and through this process only can one have access to his own I. This social dimension of reason has different nuances in Kant's account, which, although it strongly emphasises the necessity of a relation to others (AA VI, 473; 485; AA VIII, 114), does not describe it in specific practical dynamics – apart from the case of education – as Fichte does. Kant's focus is mainly theoretical, and he does not engage with other dimensions of apprehension and acknowledgement such as the bodily one<sup>24</sup>.

Another important difference and debate is provided by the meaning of notions such as universality, multiplicity and be-at-one-with-oneself. One could individuate a tension within Fichte's works concerning the direction of the self-development of the I and the notion of unity: on the one hand, multiplicity is needed and variety seems to be encouraged (Fichte 1994, 92); the process of growth and acknowledgement is a free process in which the I has to follow its vocation and learn solely by its own powers. As he puts it in *The Vocation of Man*: "the conviction to which I shall come must be thought out by myself; the conviction which I shall accept must be of my own creating" (Fichte 1889, 359).

On the other hand, however, some passages seem to suggest that Fichte depicts the task of education and development of the I as unity or uniformity. Examples of this can be seen not only in the *Vocation of the Scholar*: "The Divine Idea is absolutely fixed and determined, – its individual parts are likewise determined. The particular form of its expression for a particular Age may also be determined" (Fichte 1889, 307), but also, and mostly in the *Addresses to the German Nation*, in which he characterises the German nation as being constituted on the "common characteristic of being German" and

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23 As Seidel puts it: "Fichte was the only one among the great German philosophers who turned the lecturing rostrum into a speaker's platform, sometimes into a tribunal. Leibniz corresponded, Kant taught with a particular punctuality, Schelling's appearances were not without a note of aristocratism and Hegel wrestled with words during his lectures in order to express his profound thoughts. Fichte's mind and heart made him "step out of the words!" (Seidel 1997, 118; as translated in Dimic 2003).

24 In *The Vocation of Man* Fichte writes: "Speculation finds no difficulty in showing how the conception of such things is developed solely from my own presentative faculty and its necessary modes of activity. But I apprehend these things, also, though want, desire and enjoyment. Not by the mental conception, but by hunger, thirst, and their satisfaction, does anything become for me food and drink I am necessitated to believe in the reality of that which threatens my sensuous existence, or in that which alone is able to maintain it" (Fichte 1889, 418).

preserved through the exclusion of foreign elements (Fichte 1922, 4). There is no doubt that when Fichte refers to unity, it should be regarded as something that is not given, but *to be given*, or *angestrebten*. But still, the philosopher remains a partisan of the critical monism of reason (see Kloc-Konkołowicz 2006) and one could wonder how this is not diminishing to the value and dignity of the multiplicity.

In Kant, by contrast, the public<sup>25</sup> use of reason and the application of the categorical imperative – at least as I read it – do not lead to a conception of unity as intended uniformity. Quite the contrary, the goal is not uniformity that is intended, but rather that is justified<sup>26</sup>: the position taken by every moral actor does not have to be shared by everyone, but rather must be grounded on reasons that *can* be shared.

In conclusion, what Kant and Fichte's accounts can still teach us is the thesis of the acknowledgement of the humbleness of reason: the process of the justification, liberation and constitution of the I never ends and it is through the social engagement of our reasons in a dialogical, public way that one can mature and realise his vocation.

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<sup>25</sup> By public use of reason Kant means the enlightened, free exercise of reason made by someone "as a scholar before the entire public of the world of readers" (AA, VIII, 37) as opposed to the private use, which concerns someone who speaks as a member of a particular civil post or office. The former regards judgements made for reasons that can be shared, while the latter concerns a narrower statement, which is based on particular motives (for instance, an officer executing the orders given to him by his superior).

<sup>26</sup> As Forst puts it synthetically: "principles claiming general validity and justifiability must rest on reasons that are "sharable" among all the addressees of the principles as free and equal authors of claims and reasons" (Forst 2012, 81).

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