SCHLEIERMACHER

Outlines of the Art of Education

Introduction

The Common View. Techniques of the Domestic Tutor and School Teacher

[7] One must assume we are all familiar with what is called “education.” But if we ask for whom this familiar knowledge is to be turned into a theory and what this theory should be about, we have to begin again. [...] Originally, parents undertook [a kind of] education, and as is commonly acknowledged, they did so without reference to a “theory.” [...]  

The Foundation of a Scientific Inquiry

... the question arises: What is the starting point for this lecture?

Humankind is made up of individual beings who live through a certain cycle of existence on this earth before leaving it. And this happens in a way that those who are in this cycle at the same time can be divided into an older and younger generation, with the older being the first to leave this earth. However, when we look at humankind in terms of the large masses that we call peoples [or nations], it is clear that over generations, things do not remain the same. Instead, there is a rise and fall [in the welfare of these nations] that is important to us. However, in looking at the life of a people, we cannot tell exactly whether the first half leads to a high point and the second half to a low point, or whether we are confusing the two altogether. Regardless, it is clear that any such increase and decrease are based upon human activity. This activity is more complete and perfect the more it is governed by an idea of what should happen—the more it has an exemplar to guide its action—the more it is an art. 1

A significant part of the activity of the older generation extends toward the younger, and it is less complete or perfect, the less the aware the older generation is about what it is doing and why it is doing it. Therefore, there has to be a theory that is based on the relation of the older generation and the younger, and that proceeds from the question: What does the older generation actually want with the younger? To what extent does the action [of the older] correspond to the [given] goal, the result to the [original] action? This relationship between the older and the younger, and the obligations of the one to the other, form the basis on which we will build everything that lies in the scope of our theory.

The dignity of Pedagogy presented in Formal Terms; Seen in itself as a Theory of an Art 2

So that this [theory] does not seem unjustified, we have to go back to the beginning. We started by saying that the activity of the older generation toward the young [i.e. education] would have to possess the characteristics of an art. If this presupposition is correct, then there obviously has to be a theory of education as art—since every art demands its own [theory]. At the same time, there are human activities

---

1 Here, Schleiermacher is using the word “art” to designate not a purely aesthetic pursuit, but τέχνη or techne, a practical knowing and doing that is variable and context-dependent. It involves craft and technique.

2 Schleiermacher is using the term “Kunstlehre,” which he also uses in reference to his hermeneutics (where it is also translated as a “theory of an art”). Kunstlehre suggests a practical type of knowledge or teaching, one that is realized in practice rather than something that can be articulated explicitly. It is also in this sense that Schleiermacher describes the practice of education as preceding its theory.
which have little to do with art. So the question is: Is education really an art? Humans are beings that carry in themselves the sufficient ground for their development from their start to their completion. This is already in the idea of life, especially of life of the spirit [Geist] and intellect. Where there is no such internal ground, there is no change in the subject, or only change of a mechanistic nature. However, this does not mean that the changes of a living being must not be shaped or modified through external influence. Indeed, this is the essence of the idea of community—or to take it to a higher level, the idea of the world. The idea of community here is nothing other than the idea of the species. If the sum of all individual beings constitutes the species, then the development of the individual being will be determined through their common nature which make them a species, as well as through the mutual influence [of those individual beings]. Without [this] there is no humankind, no human species. One can think of the relationship between the principle of internal development and external influence in various ways. Either [internal development or external influence can be seen] as minimal or maximal. The more one minimizes the importance of external influences, the less reason there is to view external influencing as an art, and to develop a theory about it. But where does this leave us? Is the influence of the older generation on the younger so minimal that it is no longer worthwhile regarding it as an art? This is the first preliminary question. There are two ways to answer it: The first is historical and the second a priori, purely conceptual. However, if we want to begin with the correct starting points, the second option would lead us too far back. So we will opt for the historical path, to find the answer in experience. In historical experience, we find societies at very early stages of development in which the older generation exerts an influence upon the younger without producing any theory [to account for it]. Let us look at two peoples who are very close to us [Europeans;] the first in religious or spiritual matters and the other in philosophical and scientific terms: The first, the Jewish nation, out of which Christianity evolved, and the [second is the] Greek, upon whose culture ours has been built. At its height, the Jewish nation was an [entity] grounded within itself, and had reached an appreciable level of development. This society had only very limited public institutions for education; most education took place in the realm of the family. There is no doubt that this education followed a specific paradigm, but we cannot speak of a theory in this case. [11] But with the Greeks, we can be very precise about the origin of such a theory. Education was primarily a task that was undertaken within a community; it was much more public, and more closely connected to laws of the state. However, there is no trace of a theory predating Plato. The elements of such a theory, however, were of course available much earlier in the form of very general maxims and proverbs. But these only prepare the ground for theory.

These people [the Greeks and Jews] placed great emphasis on external forms of influence; and even though their theory developed later, their education did not lack the characteristics of an art. And it is true for every domain that can be called an art in the narrow sense of the word that practice always precedes theory. Therefore it would be incorrect to say that practice gains its character and specificity

---

3 *Einwirkung* is often translated in English as “influence,” but it has stronger connotations than the English term suggests. It could be also translated as “effect,” “control” or “intervention,” but the very decisive, even deterministic denotations of these terms would be unsatisfactory for Schleiermacher’s text. Schleiermacher generally associates the term “Einwirkung” with the action of the older generation that is directed to the younger, and his text emphasizes that adult action in the life of a young person is ongoing, of many kinds, and does not reliably result in a predetermined outcome.

4 *Bildung* is used by Schleiermacher here for development. *Bildung* refers both to collective and individual growth and development; in both senses, it gives special emphasis to active self-aware engagement in this development.
only through theory. The dignity of practice exists independently from theory. Theory only makes practice more conscious.

We now try to find something more general and formalized in these specific historical observations. It is impossible to think of the individual in complete isolation from others. This is a general fact of experience. At the beginning of life, external influences greatly exceed any internal developmental force. However, if an individual were [already] developed to a certain extent through external influences, we could well imagine him being able to forge his own existence independent from society. However, we cannot suppose that he would flourish intellectually as he would in society. We have to infer from this that those who live within human society will develop much more fully than those who are isolated, even if the isolated individual had more original developmental force within him. Drawing on our conception of the human race, it seems clear that the difference between individuals is never so great that someone deprived of external influence would develop to the same level as one who lives in society. Those scenarios that offer examples of very young children who have been removed from society show that intellectual development is strongly and unfavourably affected. Even though we should not generalize from these isolated instances, and more study is needed, we can still assume the following: Not only would every younger generation lag behind the older, if not for the significant influence of the older, but also every generation would have to start from scratch, and achieve that which was already accomplished before. [In addition,] we could not talk about any kind of development in humankind. In a sense every individual starts life “afresh;” but what matters is how soon he can take part in the advancement of human activity on earth. The more quickly this can occur, the more the forces for the development of the human spirit are aroused. This is already part and parcel of the general moral undertaking. The influence exercised on the younger generation is a part of this moral undertaking[. It is] thus a purely ethical matter.

The more importance we ascribe to this accelerating influence (although it is admittedly not always accelerating in effect), the more important it is in reality, and the more the older generation has already been developed, the less we can leave question of this influence to mere chance. Consequently, we can now see the relation of the theory of education to ethics more clearly, and that it is a theory of an art that is derived from ethics. […]  

Can one Sacrifice One Moment for Another? [51]  

Both goals of education [to develop individuality and community] might coincide, if every pedagogical influence were still a materialization [Ausfüllung] of the moment in the subject to be educated. At the same time, this pedagogical influence calculates its direction regarding the future, and its value consists in what emerges out of it in the future. In the case [of sacrificing one moment for another] this is easily comprehended, since there is no awareness of the state and church in the child at the point where those influences begin. The child therefore cannot desire such a practice that relates only to state, church and so on. However, surely the child desires in every moment some kind of specific activity in life. In all purely pedagogical moments, therefore, something is generated that the child does not desire, meaning that every predominantly pedagogical moment would be an inhibiting one. The unmediated consciousness [of the child] would be entirely abrogated.

The same is the case in relation to the development of individual nature. Even though individuality isn’t completely absent in any given moment, we still need to differentiate between behavior that is an
expression of the personal individuality of the child, and a practice that encourages something to appear that has not yet come into appearance. Also in this relation, the [young] child lives entirely in the present, not for the future, and the child therefore cannot participate in this purpose, and cannot have an interest in it for the development of his or her own individual character.

We therefore must deal with a contradiction regarding these two directions. In both cases, the activity of education appears at every single moment in opposition to the desire of the person to be educated. Every pedagogical influence presents itself as the sacrifice of an present moment for a future one; and it raises the question whether or not we are justified in this sacrifice. From the start, common sense [das allgemeine Gefuehl] refutes that. The clearer it is perceived that the child despises and opposes the education he or she receives, the more everyone holds this education to be harsh, and disapproves of it. It does not matter whether this opposition becomes more or less apparent. The problem remains.

If we consider the matter more theoretically, then it is transformed into an ethical question: Is one permitted to sacrifice one moment of life [52] for another?

All of our life activity manifests consistent opposition to such a practice [of sacrifice]. For example, the act of nourishment, thought of as an act [of sheer animal ingestion] that determines just one moment in time—and nothing else—appears incongruous with human dignity. If one actually sensually enjoys the taste of food and drink, then is better than being defined by mere ingestion—although it is still determined by that which is animalistic. Such an act must not exclusively occupy one moment in time; we associate it with enjoyment and make this moment into one that is also social, and this humanizes the process. This example can stand in the place of many others; we only need to consider its diametric opposite. We can, however, emphasize a more immediate aspect.

Seen in terms of his or her appearance, the human being is governed by constant change, as is everything that in constant change or changes with time. Strictly speaking, the human is not at any given moment the same as he was in a previous one. This also applies to an manifest internal activity as well. If we now consider two moments quite separate in time, namely one from childhood, and another from later in life in which self-conscious activity is most distinctively manifest, then everyone would agree that the two moments are indeed quite different. If we isolate one of these two moments, then we are confronted with a specific [kind of] human existence. This is one which is a part of the whole and is therefore to be supported in our common life and cooperation. In relationship of the whole to the individual, there is a specific ethical obligation to support every moment in life as such. The more completely the essence of a person is manifest in every moment of life, the more complete life itself becomes. This holds because of the relation of this moment to a greater, common realm of human life. If however, one moment is now completely sacrificed for another one in the future, then the ethical obligation remains completely unfulfilled. How can we escape from this disharmony? This becomes even more important and difficult if we consider not only one moment, but a great sequence of moments—the whole period of education. Among a great number of those to be educated, the intended moments [for the fulfillment of the education] are never realized. This is because the time of education is characterized by the highest level of mortality, making the sacrifice of an early moment for a later one any relevance for those who die early.⁵ One might think it helpful to suggest: Even though children may express opposition—to

⁵ The child mortality rate in the part of Europe that is now Germany was 34% in the early 1800s. This means that in Schleiermacher’s time, more than one in every three children born would die before they reached the age of five. (see: https://ourworldindata.org/child-mortality)
whatever degree—against a pedagogical influence [53] aimed at the future, the time would certainly come when they would [in retrospect] consent to it. The assumption is that this later time is privileged, and the positions taken in childhood are to be ignored rather than privileged. And if one were to suspend one’s pedagogical influence because of the [child’s] opposition, then the child or person him or herself would disapprove in the future, and the educator would be held responsible. This reasoning that is used to justify the sacrifice of the moment would be correct only if the child were satisfied with substance of the pedagogical influence. However, one can never know this. And for those who do not reach a time when their consent can be given, the whole justification of the practice [of education] disappears. We therefore must consider another way.

Proceeding from the justification attempted above, we assume that there will be a point and time in the future at which the child will consent to pedagogical practice [as described above]. However, does this time come only when one uses that which has been stimulated through pedagogical influence in one’s job or profession? We must not limit or restrict ourselves to this. To live in in the present moment is only the province of the tenderest childhood. Remembrance of the past and anticipation of the future develop gradually in the same way. The time for [the child’s] endorsement [of the pedagogical influence] will therefore arrive earlier. Just as the future reveals itself to the child in a particular way, the child is able to realize what he or she has to achieve in the future, and as a result, starts to aspire to it. In the same way, he will also desire that education will take the future into account. Presuming that education takes the right path, we would therefore have to say that it will struggle with this opposition primarily at the beginning. And the closer it comes to its end-point, the more it withdraws from any opposition, and at the end, there will be no opposition for it to overcome. If education follows the right path, opposition appears to dissolve and disappear.

But our earlier observation [about the ethical obligation of education] is not eliminated. Because even this initial opposition [of the child] is not a state that can be sanctioned from an ethical point of view. From what has already been said, we only have to gather that the corrective which we require and search out will be something that itself also dissolves and disappears. However, we cannot state at this point that in education as such, the relation to the future can be neglected in any way, since it truly the nature of the pedagogical influence to be oriented towards the future. Inasmuch as we may want to weaken this orientation, we would eliminate the pedagogical influence as such. The only way we can eliminate [54] the contradiction is to decide the matter from an ethical perspective: That life activity, which has its relation to the future, must at the same time find satisfaction in the present; in the same way, every pedagogical moment that is related to the future has to provide satisfaction for the individual as he or she is in the moment. The more these two merge, the more ethically perfect the pedagogical activity becomes. And the less one is sacrificed for the other, the more both moments are able to merge together. If we were to say that pedagogical activity has to be strictly enforced with the most recalcitrant child—so that the child would abandon his or her satisfaction in the present moment for the sake of the future—then education as an ethical activity would be imperfect and morally damaging. If on the other hand, we were to say that in order for the pedagogical influence to be exercised morally without being damaging, pedagogical activity would have to be diminished to the point where satisfaction is granted in the moment. But in this case, we just would have displaced the difficulty and contradiction elsewhere. Or we would have asserted that for pedagogical activity to be morally perfect, it has to be technically imperfect [i.e. without influence].
It is therefore our task to see a unification in which no sacrifice occurs. But this only seems possible when on the one hand, we establish the relation to the future in a way that the moment is utterly and completely satisfying for the child—and as long as the approval to take into account the future moment cannot yet be given because of the child’s limited consciousness of the future; and we would realize this by avoiding everything that—which because it does not intrude into the moment—could excite the opposition of the child. If then, on the other hand, the child gives his or her agreement or consent, and is not opposed to taking the future into account, the satisfaction of the moment is recognized in this act of agreement itself. In this case, the life of the child, even when it is interrupted in a period of education, is one that that is ethically treated as an end [in itself], and the pedagogical influence is the satisfaction of his or her very way of being. Either the satisfaction lies directly in the moment, or in the agreement. All of education is a series of moments of satisfaction, with any one giving way to the next.

But we cannot be silent about the fact that the theory we have just presented appears to suffer from an internal contradiction that must be eliminated. Think of the time in which the child [55] is already aware of the future, but in a way that it cannot take it on fully but sets his or her trust in those who are providing guidance. An intimation of the goal arises in the child. We would then not require anything in our pedagogical practice that would then appear to just provide for the satisfaction of the moment. Pedagogical influence itself offers satisfaction through the way the future is found in the spirit the child. The immediate satisfaction of the moment through the present itself occurs when the pedagogical influence is interrupted. But the life of the child does not consist [only] of numerous moments of education, [i.e.] ones in which the pedagogical influence dominates. Such [non-pedagogical] moments, however, are not part of our investigation.

If now in opposition to the moment in life we consider, we look at an earlier moment in which the future is not yet found in the child, then we cannot assume that the satisfaction is provided through the pedagogical content of the moment. The satisfaction of one’s entire life activity, as it is directly related to a specific moment in time will be the main focus without taking the future into account. According to this, we do indeed have two different periods in this connection [with the child and the future]. Moreover, we cannot overlook that there isn’t a clear and distinct moment in which the future enters into consciousness. It seems therefore as if we would need two different theories. The first one would consist of two parts/aspects: This moment is realized in terms of what offers satisfaction as a preparation for the future, and of what offers satisfaction in the present. The second theory would only have one part or aspect: The moment is realized [only] as the satisfaction of the present. Nevertheless, education should be whole and complete, and every moment, inasmuch as it can be isolated, should be accounted for by the same theory. Moreover, if we consider that these two periods in life [as described above] are not distinctly separated in relation to the fulfillment of our obligation, one and only one theory and theoretical content is to be postulated. How can we now arrive at a solution?

The relationship between the first beginnings and the continuation of education, where there is the assent of the child for the future, cannot be anything other than: what in the process of education becomes separate—the practice that is related to the future and the immediate satisfaction of the present—is not separated at the beginning of education, but inextricable. The separation of these two moments happens gradually. It is a continuous development and presents itself completely when the consent of the child to take the future into account is given [56]. Whether a specific gradation has to be assumed here, or whether education, like life itself, represents a gradual transition, has yet to be seen. Here and now, we firstly have to achieve some clarity about those things in themselves. We call ‘play’ or a ‘game’ in the
broadest sense that which, in the life of the child, offers satisfaction in the very moment rather than being attuned to the future. On the other hand, we call ‘exercise’ the activity that is directed towards the future. If therefore education were to be consistent with the moral goal, our theorem has to be as follows: In the beginning, exercise has to present itself exclusively as play. However, gradually both – play and exercise – become separate to the degree to which the child develops an appreciation for the exercise and rejoices in it for what it is. The latter we have referred to above as the consent of the child.

We also find this theorem implied in the language of the ancients. It is but one and the same word that refers either to exercises which indicate something playful or to those which hint at something more serious. Gymnastics and music [γυμναστική, μουσική] are both: playful and serious exercises, a light exercise and a serious undertaking. In this way and from this perspective, we would have liberated education from any contradiction and would have made it consonant with the common moral obligation. Furthermore, the child would be treated as human in every single moment. However, it remains to be asked whether or not our solution – that in the beginning, exercise has to present itself exclusively as play – is actually possible. This question can be answered as follows. Firstly: Everything we would refer to with the notion ‘play’ or ‘game’, inasmuch it is an activity, can only be an activity consisting of one specific practice or of several related and therefore united practices. Because of that, play activities are already exercises in themselves as it is a law of all human activities that every activity becomes easier through repetition. From what has become easier, one proceeds to something difficult. Imagining play to be in this way progressive, it appears at the same time to be an exercise. Secondly: Every human capacity is something that develops over time. And the human consciousness is complete only if it is of the same character and also contains this [i.e. that thinks of itself as something that develops over time]. It provides satisfaction of present and future at the same time if a person is conscious about this development. In fact, the human begins in a state of non-unconsciousness, and the first occurrences of consciousness are fleeting moments. However, as soon as this imperfect form disappears and moments begin to connect with each other, a certain form of comparison of the more or less connected moments will have to emerge as well. The consciousness has to follow, too, and from here (57) there is consciousness of human capacities as being under development. Inasmuch therefore as play in its design is exercise as well, it is nothing but the complete satisfaction of the consciousness of the child in the present, because while playing, children are conscious of their powers and of the development of their capacities.

of the moment and its relation to the future are one and the same. The closer education comes to its endpoint, the more this identity disappears and both – the immediate satisfaction of the moment and that which is oriented to the future – diverge [rather than conflict].

In this regard, counter-action is obviously only possible where the efficacy of the principle [that has just been introduced] appears to be constraint. If therefore [at a time where there should be an identity of present and future] the satisfaction of the moment and the future orientation contradict within the child to the extent that one may be get sacrificed for the other. In this case, education needs to present itself as counter-action. If both sides diverge [rather than conflict], there is no reason for counteraction.