

Bildung as Formation of Mindedness in Hegel's Philosophy

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Nowadays *Bildung* has become an internationally prominent term. It seems to have a particularly strong appeal for contemporary philosophy of education, for the concept of *Bildung* in its various modifications always entails an ideal of human development, an ideal that can serve as normative orientation for formal education.

But explorations of *Bildung* in contemporary philosophy of education only occasionally and superficially reference Hegel's conception of that term. Systematic and detailed reconstructions of *Bildung* are also missing from the now flourishing general research on Hegel. This is astonishing, since Hegel's conception of *Bildung* offers deep and rich insights not only into the mechanisms and ends of human development, but also into its social and pedagogical prerequisites. Probably nobody before Hegel and nobody after him has rooted *Bildung* so deeply in the individual's relations to social institutions and other individuals. At the same time, *Bildung* is, for Hegel, not merely an adaptation to the external demands of the social environment. Quite on the contrary, *Bildung* is a movement towards the freedom of a self-realizing subjectivity. This dialectical figure, in which one becomes an individualized subject only when firmly embedded within the objective social world and not by transcending it, is what makes the originality and actuality of the Hegelian story of *Bildung*.

Generally speaking, Hegel conceives *Bildung* as formation of mindedness¹ understood as one's ability to make both one's own subjective desires and values, and the objective matters that she encounters, intelligible, and ultimately to give a conceptual form to these desires,

values, and matters, or, in other words, to articulate them conceptually. He develops this understanding of *Bildung* mainly in three different works: first in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, then in the speeches he gave as rector of a gymnasium in Nuremberg between 1809 and 1815, and finally in the *Philosophy of Right*. In this article I shall focus, for space reasons, only on Hegel's considerations on *Bildung* in the *Philosophy of Right*. My main reason to do so is that in this late work Hegel's conception of *Bildung* reaches its most mature and clear form.

In Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*,² *Bildung* figures as a central dimension of the mind's transition from the natural ethical life of the family to the mediated and objectivized ethical life of the civil society. As I show in the first part of this article, the main feature of civil society is that it is built up from autonomous individuals who transform their needs and drives in a rational and communicable way—that is, who direct their action and thinking toward the principles of formal universality and freedom. From *Bildung* being a process of the individual's transition into the ethical life of the civil society follows that *Bildung* can be specified as the development of one's ability to self-elevate to universality—an inference I elucidate in the second part. In the following section I show that the ability in question is ultimately the one to articulate oneself conceptually and at the same time to conceptualize the ethical norms and rules that structure the public realm. Neither “child-centred” nor “canon-orientated” pedagogies are capable to foster this ability. Rather, a dialectical teaching that mediates between subjective life-worlds and the objective world of concepts could fulfil that task. Finally, I elucidate that, according to Hegel, the simultaneous conceptual self-articulation and conceptual understanding of the world is “hard work” that takes place not only in theoretical contemplation, but also in practical activities such as labor and social action.

THE ETHICAL LIFE IN CIVIL SOCIETY
AS THE FRAMEWORK OF *BILDUNG*

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) as an identity between the particular (subject) and the universal (substance).³ However, this identity is not just given; it is, rather, a result of a dialectical process that goes through three different stages of ethical life: family, civil society, and state.⁴ The transition of the subjective spirit from its unmediated identity with the natural ethical substance of the family to its rationally mediated identity with the conceptualized ethical substance of the civil society is precisely what figures as *Bildung* in the *Philosophy of Right*.

According to Hegel, the family (and the extended family of a people, of a *Volk*) is the unmediated natural spirit, within which there are no separated singular persons but rather an unmediated identity between them; persons figure only as parts of the whole. Love and emotional unity are what matter in this form of ethical life.⁵

Unlike the family, the civil society is organized upon the principle of autonomous individuals who are particular ends in and for themselves. Every individual here figures as a unique and concrete person who is to be understood as a “whole of needs and as a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness”.⁶ Thus, every person in the civil society aims to satisfy needs which are unique in their entire personal structure because contingency and the particular subjective will are central moments of that structure. After all, the development of my needs is not entirely naturally determined, but rather dependent on my contingent biographical experiences as well as on my will to give way to some needs and to block others.

However, a second principle is also constitutive for civil society, and this is the principle of the interrelation between particular citizens through the “form of generality” (*Form der Allgemeinheit*).⁷ In order to

satisfy her needs, the particular person has to collaborate with her fellow citizens, and so has to (indirectly) work for the common wealth.⁸ But to be able to collaborate in that way, the person has to make individual needs accessible and understandable for others who are particular persons themselves with their own particular needs, free wills, and specific worldviews and knowledge. That is why the person has to reflect on and then articulate her own and the other's needs, wishes, and beliefs in a rational, non-particularistic way to participate in the constitution of a public and universal discursive realm. *Bildung* in the sense of formation of subjectivity consists precisely in the ennobling of unmediated singularity and natural existence to universality through the universalistic *transforming* of one's needs and incentives. We shall now take a closer look at precisely what this ennobling means.

BILDUNG AS SELF-ELEVATION TO UNIVERSALITY

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, in Hegel's understanding of *Bildung* as "elevation to universality"⁹ we face the most synthetic expression of the meaning of that term, for this understanding "[c]overs the entire essential character of human reasonableness" and grasps "[t]he universal essence of human *Bildung* to make oneself into a universal minded being".¹⁰

We can distinguish with Gadamer between two different meanings of the (self-) elevation to universality. According to the first meaning, this self-elevation consists of one's realizing one's own subjectivity as something, which one shares in an identical way with all other human beings in a form of universal human substance that transcends all differences between particular subjects. According to the second meaning, this self-elevation consists of one's taking others' concrete perspectives into one's own actions, desires, experiences, and beliefs.¹¹

Taking the perspectives of particular others to oneself, on one hand, and trying to conceive oneself as a universal human being, on the other, is obviously not the same. Gadamer himself is fully aware of that difference when he asserts that seeing one's own self and one's own private ends with the eyes of others is a kind of non-conceptual universality which is not a matter of argumentative elaborating of a fixed yardstick for determining and classifying the particular phenomena of one's own and others' subjective wills. And Gadamer insists that self-elevation to universality should not be understood as a conceptualization of self (and the world), but rather as a cultivation of a universal hermeneutical openness for the points of view of "possible others."¹²

However, the attempt to conceive of universality in a non-conceptual way seems to be a completely "un-Hegelian" enterprise, since for Hegel the concept is not only a (possible) form of expression of universality, but rather the *only* reality that the universality could have.¹³ Hence, when Hegel describes *Bildung* in terms of a subject determining its "knowledge, will, and action" in a universal way,¹⁴ he actually asserts that *Bildung* requires conceptual transforming of subjective particularities. After all, the concept is precisely about reaching an identity between the particular and the universal.¹⁵

This identity is in two respects different from the hermeneutical bridging between my particular views and the particular views of others. First, to have a concept of a class of objects means to identify some general characteristics of these objects, characteristics that remain identical and independent from the differences between the single objects of the class, thus transcending these differences. So, the self-consciousness consists of the subject understanding its own self first as a pure and universal "I," who realizes herself in particular objects. In this way, human beings constitute themselves as singular and unique subjects through a synthesis

between their universal pure subjectivity and the particular objects of their will.¹⁶ This synthesis presupposes the subject having a concept of the self as an entity different from any particular expression of the self and that transcends the differences between any particular perspectives on the world. Second, concepts are systems of argumentative inferences coming into being in judgments. To put it simply, there are no concepts without judgments.¹⁷ Thus, as far as Gadamer's universal openness for others does not necessarily entail judging, that is, argumentative evaluation and generalization of the views, values, and norms of the others,¹⁸ it contradicts Hegel's account of universality.

Now, the conceptual articulation of one's own "knowledge, will, and action,"¹⁹ that is, one's self-elevation to universality, obviously presupposes one's openness to the standpoints of others, but it should not be reduced to this openness. Confronting alternative opinions, values, and practices helps one to problematize one's own opinions, values, and practices and to ask oneself whether they are true and right, as well as whether one's needs that might stand behind them are understandable to others and compatible with their needs. A person who does not possess this kind of openness would barely be able to overcome the initially private, immediate, and natural character of the contents of one's consciousness and will. However, if this confrontation with alternative views and values is not accompanied by one's pursuit of truthfulness and rightness of opinions, values, and actions, it will not lead, according to Hegel, to one's self-elevation to universality, for without this pursuit these opinions, values and actions cannot be brought about into a conceptual form.

To sum up, for Hegel, the shortest and most synthetic description of *Bildung* is the subject's self-elevation to universality. This self-ennobling is only the back side of the formation of one's ability to participate in the public life of modern society, a participation that requires the indi-

vidual to articulate her desires in universal forms. One's self-ennobling to universality can be understood as a conceptual articulation and transformation of one's opinions, values, courses of action, and needs. This articulation and transformation take place in judgments and arguments that presuppose an openness to alternative standpoints, and regard not only the subjective elements of the individual's consciousness and will, but also the objective rites and norms of the ethical form of life (*Sittlichkeit*). This is so because the conceptual transformation of one's own values and norms is inseparable from the conceptual transformation of values and norms in general, for this transformation entails addressing which norms and rites the individual lives with could be rendered as "true" and/or "right." Thus, actors' self-ennobling to universality leads not only to their transcending of the unmediated naturalness of their individual existence, but also to the transcending of the initial unmediated naturalness of their common form of life.²⁰

This transcendence has in both forms some far-reaching pedagogical implications.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF *BILDUNG*

To my mind, the most instructive passage for understanding the specific meaning of Hegel's concept of *Bildung* and its pedagogical implications is Section 187 of the *Groundwork of the Philosophy of Right*. That passage reads in the English translation of S. W. Dyde as follows:

Culture or education²¹ is, as we may thus conclude, in its ultimate sense a liberation, and that of a high kind. Its task is to make possible the infinitely subjective substantiality of the ethical life. In the process we pass

upwards from the direct and natural existence to what is spiritual and has the form of the universal. — In the individual agent this liberation involves a struggle against mere subjectivity, immediate desire, subjective vanity, and capricious liking. The hardness of the task is in part the cause of the disfavour under which it falls. None the less is it through the labour of education that the subjective will itself wins possession of the objectivity, in which alone it is able and worthy to be the embodiment of the idea.²²

What is particularly striking in that passage is that, according to Hegel, *Bildung* as “liberation of a high kind” entails struggle and “hard work” (“*harte Arbeit*”)²³ against the mere subjectivity of manners, immediate desires, subjective vanity of the feeling, and capricious liking. How could we understand this claim?

According to Hegel, *Bildung* liberates in the sense that it brings the human individual “upwards from the direct and natural existence to what is spiritual and has the form of the universal.” This liberation is not possible if the person stays trapped in individual particularities that are not universalizable and that resist conceptual mediation and articulation. Such abstract, non-conceptual particularities are not only the immediate desires, but also the simple subjectivity of the manners, the subjective vanity of the feeling, or capricious liking. If the central goal of formal education is to make *Bildung* possible, it should aim at a person's liberation from these non-conceptual particularities. This aim, I argue, is compatible neither with a child-centered pedagogy nor with a canon-oriented one.

We can describe child-centered pedagogies as focusing exclusively on children's particular experiences and as ascribing to all children a natural desire to have new experiences and thus to learn. What is crucial here

is the postulation of an immediate ability to regulate one's own learning spontaneously. Generally speaking, for child-centered pedagogues, children's spontaneity is thought of as a "natural" freedom, of which most adults are no longer capable.²⁴

Quite on the contrary, according to Hegel, *Bildung* is the *development* to freedom and not merely the expression of a freedom that is already there, which is endowed naturally in the child. This development requires mediation of the elements of the subjective will with objective meanings, that is, with conceptual claims and inferences that have an objective, trans-personal status, and that are thus initially external to the particular domain of experiences of the child.

This does not mean, however, that *Bildung* should be understood as an initiation into a more-or-less fixed canon of a "high culture." For Hegel, engagement with classic literature and language as well as with sciences and arts is not done for the sake of continuation and reproduction of a cultural heritage whose components are supposed to have intrinsic value. It is, rather, a necessary *medium* for bringing the subjective "knowledge, willing, and action"²⁵ to a form of universality, that is, to conceptual articulation. Thus, it is not cultural traditions and disciplinary canons that a *Bildung*-supportive teacher must ultimately address, but the needs, opinions, values, and desires of the students. However, the teacher must address those elements of the subjective will *in order* to develop them into objective conceptual contents and to make them available as objective conceptual contents for the self-consciousness of the students.²⁶ This development is the "hard work" of *Bildung*—of reaching freedom within civil society as a rational ethical lifeform that is mediated by economic mechanisms and political institutions.

THE HEGELIAN VS. THE ELITIST AND CULTURALIST
UNDERSTANDINGS OF *BILDUNG*

The interrelated moments of individuals negating and transcending their immediate social environment, on one hand, and of self-universalization, on the other, are crucial for both theoretical and practical *Bildung*. In fact, Hegel only occasionally discriminates explicitly between both, although in the gymnasium speeches he singles out a kind of alienation that is specific only to the theoretical *Bildung*—namely, an alienation from one's immediate feelings and experiences in the imaginative encountering with the remote ancient world.²⁷ On the contrary, the alienation of practical *Bildung* would take place not in the imagination or in contemplation, but in the material practices of labor and social distribution of goods.

What is essential for both forms of *Bildung* is the individual's giving a universal (and conceptual) form to her needs and values. In the theoretical *Bildung*, this universalistic trans-*forming* of the self occurs in the mediation of the individual's needs, desires, and values by hypothetical thinking that is a common feature of humans as minded beings.²⁸ On the level of the practical *Bildung*, this self-transformation proceeds within individuals' participation in what Hegel calls the "system of needs"²⁹—a system of co-operative satisfaction of existing needs and the emergence of new needs within the modern division of labor. In this system, one can satisfy one's needs only if one relates them to the needs of the other society members, and only if one produces goods for the needs of others in order to receive, in return, the goods one needs. This system requires one to make one's and others' needs intelligible. In addition, it motivates the emergence of new, "non-natural," or "social" needs in the individual—such as, for example, the need to hold private property—that have an abstract, universally exchangeable value and serve as source of social recognition.³⁰

This conception of *Bildung* as a process of self-universalization rooted in everyday social practices of production, exchange of goods, and satisfaction of dynamic needs of the agents sharply contradicts the currently widespread culturalist and elitist understanding of that term. According to this understanding, *Bildung* is an appropriation of a canon of classic “high culture” *for its own sake*. Therefore, a *Bildung*-supportive schooling should serve the continuation of that canon and the reproduction of a cultural and intellectual elite that safeguards it—and *not* the preparation of the students for everyday life in the civil society with its system of socially organized labor and political institutions.³¹

To be sure, Hegel strongly emphasizes the educational relevance of classical languages and literature. This leads some authors to the conclusion that Hegel, too, understands *Bildung* largely as initiation into the “high culture.” So, Asger Sørensen claims that *Bildung* for Hegel is mostly about studying of “high culture,”³² and that *Bildung* therefore “[s]eems to be reserved for the upper strata of the society,”³³ which are not involved in productive labor.

I believe that this interpretation of Hegel’s conception of *Bildung* is misleading for the following reason. As I already mentioned, for Hegel, teaching classical ancient languages and literature is *not* an end-it-itself but a *means* to help students to build up a sound self-identity that should enable them to come to terms with the highly complex and ambivalent social world in which their real life takes place. We face this “subjectivist” justification for the educational worth of classical languages and literature in Hegel’s very pointed claim that everyone who does not know the works of Classic Antiquity lives without knowledge of beauty. The beauty that Hegel means here consists of the substantial unity between spirit and nature.³⁴ This is a unity in which the spirit finds its natural and clear form—and this makes the spirit spontaneously free and cheerful

in its existence.³⁵ By contrast, the spirit in modernity is characterized by the alienation of the spirit from its (social) existence and by the sharp, almost unbridgeable discrepancy between its substance and its forms of expression.

Thus, the “alienation light” through studying ancient literature and imaginative living in the remote ancient world—a living which is something very different from the abstract and superficial knowing of that world³⁶—is an alienation from the alienated modern social world. This *alienation from the alienation* provides students with the experience of a harmony between essence and existence, between content and form, a harmony which is lost in modern society. Here the individuals face the central social structures and institutions first as outer and oppressive entities in which they cannot actualize themselves in their mindedness, and to which their consciousness relates in a truly schizophrenic way. It is precisely the re-actualization of the ancient world that empowers students to overcome in their process of *Bildung* the alienation from and the fragmentation of their actual lives and minds. For, according to Hegel, the separation from ourselves that occurs when we are putting ourselves in the lives of the ancient Greeks entails also all of the needed departing points and paths for returning to ourselves, but to ourselves in accordance with the “truly universal essence of the spirit.”³⁷ In other words, teaching the Classical Antiquity should help the students perform their self-elevation to the universality, and this in turn should enable them to reconcile with the highly individualized modern civil society and to become subjects of that society.

CONCLUSION

According to Hegel, *Bildung* should be understood as a development of mindedness that advances in the form of conceptual self-artic-

ulation. It is initiated by an individual's transition from the ethical life of the family to the one of civil society. This conceptual self-articulation concerns not only an individual's desires and ideals, but also communal and cultural ethical beliefs and values which the individual "naturally" internalized in the course of her socialization and upbringing. Neither "child-centred" nor "canon-orientated" pedagogies can foster the conceptual self-articulation in question. This task could be rather fulfilled by a kind of dialectical (or perhaps better: "Socratic") teaching that addresses the elements of students' subjective wills (needs, desires, and values) in order to develop these elements into objective conceptual contents and make them available as such contents for the self-consciousness of the students. Only through this development could the individuals reach the status of subjects within the rational ethical lifeform of the civil society. This is the end of *Bildung* in the Hegelian version of that term. This end can be reached only with the help of formal education which mediates between the subjective life-worlds of the students and the objective world of concepts.

1 I borrow the term "mindedness" from Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard. According to both authors, mindedness should be understood not as metaphysical entity, or as a kind of "immaterial thing," but rather as practical achievement which consists in the development of the human capacity to act on the base of reasons, to be responsive to reasons and to hold oneself and others to reasons. See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14, 34. See also Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760 – 1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268, 280. As we will see later on, "reasoning" and "conceptual articulation" are for Hegel ultimately one and the same thing.

2 I use *Philosophy of Right* as a generic term for both Hegel's *Groundwork of Philosophy of Right* and his "Lectures from 1821/22" on the philosophy of right, both of which I use in this article.

3 See Georg W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (*G. W. F. Hegel Werke* 7) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1821/1986), 305.

- 4 See Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 306; see also Georg W. F. Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts. Vorlesungen von 1821/22*, ed. Hansgeorg Hoppe (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1822/2005), 158–160.
- 5 Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, 159.
- 6 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 339.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 340.
- 9 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Bildung,” in *Hegels Theorie der Bildung. Band II (Kommentare)*, ed. Jürgen-Eckardt Pleines, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1986), 136.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., 136–141.
- 12 Ibid., 141.
- 13 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (Berlin: Holzinger, 1817/2014), 126f.
- 14 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 343.
- 15 See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 126f.
- 16 See Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, 43–45; Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 54f; Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 126–128.
- 17 See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 129f.
- 18 Gadamer, “Bildung,” 141.
- 19 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 343.
- 20 See Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 345.
- 21 “Culture and education” is to be understood as a translation for *Bildung*, which stands at that place in the original German text.
- 22 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 158.
- 23 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 344.
- 24 See Albert Hegel, “Politische Progressivität als sozialromantische Regression,” in *Schulische Bildung in der Krise. Aufsätze zur Öffnung von Schule, Umweltbildung und Selbstregulierung*, eds. Albert Ilien (Hannover: Universität, 1994), 90–96.
- 25 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 343.
- 26 Consider, for example, the case of a *Bildung*-supportive teacher in philosophy or ethics who discusses the topic of justice in the classroom. Such a teacher will be in the first place empathetic towards students’ everyday intuitions about justice and experiences with injustice, and she will treat these intuitions and experiences as points of departure for her teaching. At the same time, however, she will link them to theories of justice, so that the experiences and intuitions of the students can be conceptualized, that is, transformed to reflective conceptual knowledge that claims objective validity.
- 27 Georg W. F. Hegel, “Gymnasialrede am 29. September 1809,” in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Studienausgabe in 3 Bänden, Band I.*, eds. Karl Löwith and Manfred Riedel (Hamburg: Fischer, 1809/1968), 35.
- 28 See Hegel, “Gymnasialrede am 29. September 1809,” 36; Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 352, 360.
- 29 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 346–353.

30 See Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 346–353; Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, 181–192.

31 See for example Manfred Fuhrmann, *Bildung. Europas Kulturelle Identität* (Stuttgart: Reclam 2002), 47–52, 65–73.

32 Asger Sørensen, “Bildung in Hegel’s Phenomenology. Acute Alienation and Education,” in *Los Retos de la Filosofía en el Siglo XXI. Actas del I Congreso Internacional de la Red Española de Filosofía*, ed. Cinta Canterla, vol. IX (2015), 67.

33 Sørensen, “Bildung in Hegel’s Phenomenology. Acute Alienation and Education,” 66.

34 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I (= Werke 18). Auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845 neu editierte Ausgabe*, eds., Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2014), 176.

35 Hegel, “Gymnasialrede am 29. September 1809,” 33.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.