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FROM *HOMO EDUCANDUS* TO *HOMO ÆSTHETICUS*: KANT ON EDUCATION

PAULO JESUS

THE strength and weakness of the committed enlightenment of Professor Kant and his disciples lies in this surface paradox: in the kingdom of nature there is a being whose nature cannot be completely developed by nature, a being whose real nature is freedom, that is to say, a being which needs an 'artificial' or 'artistic' effort to unfold his nature. This species of being is mankind as constituting to itself its absolute beginning as well as its absolute end. The strength of this position consists in the ultimate synthetic unity tying nature and education through a certain naturalisation of freedom. As for its weakness, one can point out the ontological temptation of an aesthetic self-comprehension that seduces inevitably every free subject and encourages him to divide time and history, 'to divide in order to rule'. In man, the development of nature is not reducible to generation, but it implies production. For man is not a natural given; he does not appear to himself as an originally 'ready-made' work of nature. Instead, he finds in himself nothing but the «natural readiness» (*natürliche Fertigkeit*) that has to be cultivated and exercised so that his natural organic system of virtual powers can convert into an organic unified system of actual performances. Let us elaborate on this issue where Kant's reflections on education¹ convoke his critical thought.

1. ENLIGHTENMENT: THE AGE OF *HOMO EDUCANDUS*

«Man is the only being who needs education».² «Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him».³ One could daresay that nature does not provide man with his nature but only with the capacity of *producing his nature according to his nature*. Man or, more simply, the free self («the self-positing self», in Fichtean terms) consists in the self-production of a «work of art» (*Kunstwerk*). This involves a free constructive «development» (*Entwicklung*), an autonomous and progressive «exercise» (*Übung*), and an endless process of «formation» (*Bildung*), which in the last analysis coincides, unsurprisingly, with the historical process of enlightenment. Man must *become* and *be* himself by himself. Furthermore, the complete accomplishment of his ontological vocation requires nothing but this *historical becoming* and eventually this *ideal manner of being* himself *by* and *for* himself – this *idea of pure Selfhood* (*Selbstheit*) putting eternity at the centre of time, and necessity at the centre of history. The rational self is exactly the original place where the *idea of the self* be-

¹ See I. KANT, *Über Pädagogik*, hrsg. von D. F. Rink, AA IX 437-499. As for the English translation, see I. KANT, *On Education (Über Pädagogik)*, transl. by A. Churton, London, Thoemmes Press, 1992.

² «Der Mensch ist das einzige Geschöpf, das erzogen werden muss» (AA IX 441; transl. p. 1).

³ «Der Mensch kann nur Mensch werden durch Erziehung. Es ist nichts, als was die Erziehung aus ihm macht» (AA IX 443; p. 6).

comes *self-activity*. It follows that education means development and «enlightening» means educating, leading a free being from passivity to activity, or from an inferior degree of activity to full activity, to perfection – the highest degree or intensity of being. Needless to say, conscious efforts to lead someone from «virtue» to action do not require any violence against his nature. To educate (*e-ducere = er-ziehen*) is not *contra-natura*. Quite the opposite, it is the knowledge and the love of the educable nature that lays the firm foundation of the art of educating. Hence, here art must meet nature. In other words, education is merely the servant and the guardian of the developmental dynamics intrinsic to human nature. Education is essentially «good» because it pursues the good, to the extent that to educate is to facilitate the realisation of nature and to aim at the complete accomplishment of nature, favouring its morphogenetic tendency that moves from hidden «germs» (*Keime*) towards open fructification. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Kant, in keeping with Rousseau, discourages the educational use of artificial tools, since these would restrict freedom, and only freedom – only the free exercise of one's own powers – makes possible their full development.¹ The way in which education *cultivates* nature gives rise to a being that is entirely, from both an extensive and intensive point of view, what it is, like the analogical model of the «English garden» where art consists in permitting that nature be itself, in contrast to the *de-naturalising* architecture of the «French garden».

We argue that Kantian writings on education and on its natural and historical role are to be read from the angle of his critical thought and especially from the angle of the third *Critique*. For education is better understood if considered in the light of the highest *a priori* law that makes nature intelligible, namely the law that establishes self-organisation in every natural being, by subordinating mechanism to teleology, efficient causality to final causality.² Thus, on the one hand, every creature must be inhabited by a natural tendency towards the «complete and finalised development of all its natural dispositions».³ Whereas, on the other hand, the paradigmatic rule or «scheme» (*Schema*) of all natural systems is to be found in the system of reason itself, given that reason enjoys an architectonic unity as well as an intrinsic power of self-development.⁴ It ensues that «nature has wanted man to draw entirely from himself everything which surpasses the mechanical order of his animal existence, and for him not to take part in any happiness or perfection except what he has created himself by his own reason independently of instinct».⁵

The rational nature of the self is a system of «dispositions» (*Anlagen*) waiting for their realization, which depends entirely upon his own «efforts» (*Bemühungen*,

¹ «Generally speaking, it would be better if fewer instruments were used and children allowed to learn more things by themselves. They would then learn them more thoroughly [...]». «All these artificial contrivances are the more hurtful in that they run counter to the aim of Nature in making organised and reasonable beings; for Nature requires them to keep their freedom, in order that they may learn how to use their powers» (AA IX 462-463; transl. pp. 42, 44).

² See *KU*, § 80, AA v 417 ff.

³ «Alle Naturanlagen eines Geschöpfes sind bestimmt, sich einmal vollständig und zweckmässig auszuwickeln» (*IaG*, AA VIII 18).

⁴ Reason in itself as well as the operations of the understanding (presented in the table of categories and unified by a «rational thread», that is, the idea of whole) forms an organic system. Let us observe that there is a striking structural analogy between the description of the «table of categories», the system of reason» and a «natural end»; see *KrV*, AA III 83-84, 93, 538-539; *KU*, §§ 64-66, AA v 369-377.

⁵ «Die Natur hat gewollt: dass der Mensch alles, was über die mechanische Anordnung seines thierischen Daseins geht, gänzlich aus sich selbst herausbringe und keiner anderen Glückseligkeit oder Vollkommenheit theilhaftig werde, als die er sich selbst frei von Instinct, durch eigene Vernunft, verschafft hat» (*IaG*, AA VIII 19).

Bestrebungen). Education exhibits the most excellent and necessary way in which those efforts of «self-development» must be realised. Therefore, education (*Erziehung*) is necessarily at the heart of enlightenment, and by the same token every «enlightened individual» conceives himself essentially as an educator, although every educator must also be submitted to the infinite process of education – the *Aufklärer* is never fully *aufgeklärt* but he is rather always embedded in the infinite process of *Aufklärung*. Moreover, no individual can accomplish his perfection, given that the *idea* of a complete development of his all human gifts does not represent an attainable empirical state of affairs. Instead, it functions as a regulating idea and a sort of attractive force or organising principle within human reason, providing it with a universal plan and a final object that unify the virtually infinite process of full development – whose *idea* demands an infinity of generations in the history of our species. Mankind is united under the *idea* of a community of destination, a community of infinite efforts to «develop» entirely from itself all that nature has «enveloped» within itself. The natural history of man consists in the epigenetic adventure of reason to attain a perfect agreement with its own idea of itself.

This epigenesis of reason coincides with education, which constitutes an infinite chain of cumulated «research» (*Versuche*), «exercise» (*Übung*) and «teaching» (*Unterricht*).¹ Education (*Erziehung*) comprises, according to Kant, four anthropological stages. Firstly, education is simply a negative action, that is, «discipline» (*Disciplin*, *Zucht*)² or «disciplination» (*Disciplinierung*),³ which aims merely at «restraining wildness» (*Bezähmung der Wildheit*)⁴ or controlling our animal «independence of law» (*Unabhängigkeit von Gesetzen*).⁵ Secondly, education is «culture» (*Cultur*). «To become cultivated» (*cultivirt werden*), through «information» (*Belehrung*) and «instruction» (*Unterweisung*), means the «acquisition of ability» (*Verschaffung der Geschicklichkeit*), ability being the «possession of a faculty» (*Besitz eines Vermögens*) or the actualisation of a natural power.⁶ Thirdly, education involves *civilisation* (*Civilisierung*), that is, the learning of social norms in order to be a valuable citizen.⁷ Finally, education is «moralisation» (*Moralisierung*),⁸ since only under the unity of a supreme end can there be real rationality in our actions. Now, the «ultimate end» (*Endzweck*) of all possible ends, the unity of the human system of abilities is nothing but the *good* in itself – «the supreme good» (*das höchste Gut*). Perfection requires a perfect matter (one's fully developed abilities) organised according to a perfect form (the systematic unity of one's developed abilities), and this can only be achieved if there is a supreme unifying force. The pursuit of Goodness for Goodness' sake supplies us with such a self-unifying and self-organising force/law that assigns to each particular ability its *right* place both in the system of all subject's actions and in the system of all universal history. In this respect, Fichte has rightly identified the Kantian *höchste Gut* with «the perfect agreement of a rational being with himself» (*die vollkommene Uebereinstimmung eines vernünftigen Wesens mit sich selbst*),⁹ that is, the merging of lawful necessity with

¹ *IaG*, AA VIII 18-19.

² AA IX 442, 449; transl. pp. 3, 18-19.

³ AA IX 451; transl. p. 21.

⁴ AA IX 449; transl. p. 18.

⁵ «Unruliness [*Wildheit*] consists in independence of law [*Unabhängigkeit von Gesetzen*]. By discipline men are placed in subjection to the laws of mankind, and brought to feel their constraint» (*ibidem*, p. 442; transl. p. 3).

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 449-450; transl. pp. 18-19.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 450; transl. pp. 19-20.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ J. G. FICHTE, *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, in IDEM, *Sämtliche Werke*, VI, p. 299.

self-activity, *Sollen* with *Sein* in the pure self which wants the good simply *because* he wants it, his freedom being absolutely determined by his rational spontaneity. Let us emphasize that the pursuit of the *good* is the development of one's being according to one's *idea* of wholeness of being, in which unity, truth, goodness and beauty appear as one and the same end.

The spiritual vocation of enlightenment is to load this *idea* of reason with an efficient force of (self)-attraction in order for reason to fulfil itself and agree with itself. The *telos* of natural history in general as well as that of human natural history in particular is full being, full activity. That is why, in a word, enlightenment is the age of *homo educandus*, the age in which freedom is the necessary destination of freedom; *Selfhood* being the pure form of freedom and the evidence of a meta-reflexive and meta-phenomenological absolute spontaneity. *Homo educandus* goes together with the pure *I am*, the act that signifies and produces the positive unity of *myself*, from which derives the *idea* of a complete system of acts belonging to the same *self*. The anthropological conception of a *homo educandus* depicts man as the activity of producing the *idea* of his own fully developed active powers and the effort of activating these powers according to his *idea*. Educability rests on self-educability or self-activity – otherwise one would not pass from natural generation to finalised construction. Only through activity can the self be educable, for activity alone guarantees that the *idea* gains an absolutely free «forming force» (*bildende Kraft* or *Bildungskraft* – the indisputable *a priori* protagonist of the third *Critique* that subjugates *bewegende Kraft*).¹ Education is essentially *pro-natura* in that education embraces nature: the educational history of man follows the natural history of an «organised and self-organising being, a natural end» («organisirtes und sich selbstorganisirendes Wesen, ein Naturzweck»),² which is at once his own cause and effect, his own means and end. Thus, education deploys the main systematic strategy of rational self-organisation, and proves that man does not belong to the kingdom of simple «motion» but to that of active «formation».

2. THE ART OF EDUCATION: EPIGENETICS AND HEURISTICS

Since human natural powers remain naturally undeveloped, man *must* be educated; and since nature provides him with *reason* and *freedom*, man *can* educate himself. Indeed, reason contains the capability of conceiving the *idea* of the complete system of human natural powers, and freedom offers the practical counterpart of that rational idea, the capability of producing by himself the actions through which the undeveloped powers are actualised according to an idea. Man becomes himself by his own free efforts. His natural powers *lie* dormant in himself like *seeds and dispositions* (*Keimen und Anlagen*), and *develop* progressively *at the moment of their exercise* (*bei Gelegenheit der Erfahrung*),³ this exercise being *free* and not *instinctive*. Through instinct, development is naturally necessary; it does not require productive efforts, historical creativity and trans-generational learning. In its natural state, the animal nature of man does not become human nature. Nature assigns him such a self-developmental task. And yet there is also necessity in the development of human powers, to the extent that through exercise a power is necessarily transformed into ability.

¹ See for instance *KU*, §§ 64-66, *AA* v 369-377.

² *Ibidem*, §. 65, *AA* v 374.

³ *KrV*, *AA* III 91.

In a sense, however, this necessity is, so to speak, merely *local* or *atomic* because it concerns nothing but the development of isolated powers, whereas the full development of human powers with their optimal relationships appeals to the guidance of a *global* or *holistic* necessity, expressed by the *idea* of systematic unity that must give rise to a *plan* of systematic exercise. The *idea* of the system of human abilities portrays human perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) to which the «idea of education» must correspond, given that education is nothing but the progressive «perfecting of mankind» (*Vervollkommnung der Menschheit*). Indeed, should this perfecting rely merely upon the developmental occasions that natural experience offers sparsely to man, he would have a mechanical and arbitrary development of his powers; at best, he would be able to develop his animal powers fully. Nevertheless, the development of his human powers would remain fundamentally partial and disorganised because there is no harmony in the development of our skills without the guidance of the *idea of their organic whole* or of *their systematic unity*. The possibility of true education supposes the possibility of the true idea of the educable being, since the perfecting of man is not realizable without an *a priori* science whose object is exactly the accomplishment of human perfection. Before becoming a historical task, human perfection must be a science. Education appears then as the translation of the science of human perfection into the art of human perfecting. A transcendental theory of education is needed in order to establish an accurate coherence between anthropology and pedagogy, that is, between the system of «all man's natural gifts» (*alle Naturanlagen im Menschen*) and the praxeological system, that is, the educational system of actions that activate those dormant gifts.¹

Two fundamental pedagogical principles seem to intertwine here. These could be called the epigenetics and the heuristics of human reason. Both principles magnify the role of activity as the prime condition for education, and both of them are of paramount importance in Kantian critical philosophy. Firstly, one can easily measure the force of an epigenetic principle, borrowed from biology and also present in the first *Critique* to explain metaphorically the acquisition of categories² as well as in the third *Critique* to explain the production of a «natural end» (*Naturzweck*).³ The theory of epigenesis defends a conception of development based on constructive interaction between an organism and its environment, and refuses therefore the superficial disjunction opposing an endogenous to an exogenous developmental principle.

There are many germs [*Keime*] lying undeveloped in man. It is for us to make these germs grow, by developing his natural gifts in their due proportion, and to see that he fulfils his destiny [*Bestimmung*]. Animals accomplish this for themselves unconsciously. Man must strive to attain it, but this he cannot do if he has not even a conception [*Begriff*] as to the object [*Bestimmung*] of his existence.⁴

Secondly, the epigenesis of a rational being demands a rational guide. This need of education for «a concept of human destiny» (*einen Begriff von seiner Bestimmung*)⁵ or for «the idea of an education, which will develop all man's natural gifts» (*die Idee einer Erziehung, die alle Naturanlagen im Menschen entwickelt*),⁶ designates such a heuristic principle.

¹ AA IX 444-445; transl. pp. 8-9.

³ See *KrV*, § 81, AA V 421-424.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

² See *KrV*, § 27, AA III 127-129.

⁴ AA IX 445; transl. pp. 9-10.

⁶ AA IX 444-445; transl. pp. 8-9.

Since the development of man's natural gifts [*die Entwicklung der Naturanlagen*] does not take place of itself, all education is an art [*Kunst*]. Nature has placed no instinct in him for that purpose. The origin as well as the carrying out of this art is either *mechanical* [*mechanisch*] and without plan, ruled by given circumstances, or it involves the exercise of *judgment* [*judiciös*]. [...] If education is to develop human nature so that it may attain the object of its being, it must involve the exercise of judgment. Educated parents are examples which children use for their guidance. If, however, the children are to progress beyond their parents, education must become a study [*Studium*], otherwise we can hope for nothing from it, and one man whose education has been spoilt will only repeat his own mistakes in trying to educate others. The mechanism of education must be changed into a science [*Wissenschaft*], and one generation may have to pull down what another had built up.¹

It follows that the Copernican revolution must be applied to the realm of education. Without the guidance of an *a priori* concept of human perfection, education is entirely blind and becomes a chaotic trial-and-error venture developing human abilities in a totally rhapsodic or mechanical way that can only produce either an imperfect man (if human powers are partially or non-proportionally developed) or even a corrupted man (if the nature of human powers is violated). That is why Kant welcomes the creation of experimental schools: they dare base their educational practice on a rational concept regarding the nature of the subject they want to educate. An efficient Copernican revolution in the realm of education requires the absolute autonomy on the part of the educator and on the part of the educating institution. For there is no truth without freedom and there is no freedom but in the light of truth. If education is to develop a free being – a being who is what he is only *because* he is –, then education must enjoy the same quality of being: absolute self-determination, absolute auto-telic power. Only an education self-supplied with a teleological plan can unite truth and freedom within man, an education founded on universal «principles» (*Grundsätzen*), which are articulated in an *a priori* science.² The perfect development of human nature will be accomplished when man achieves a perfect inner coherence among all his actualised powers. Then, education will have produced the beauty of a perfect work of art, and thereby will have put man in agreement with himself. All human actions will belong to a systematic unity forming an organic whole ruled by a hierarchical principle of proportional and purposeful unity. Let us note that Kant insists on the oriented character of the exercise of mental faculties, that is to say, they must be trained in a relational way according to their differential degrees and functions within the cognitive system. For instance, an inferior mental faculty (like memory, attention or imagination) must not be more developed than a superior one (like understanding, judgment or reason) and, even more important, inferior mental faculties must be trained as being subordinated to the superior ones.³ In short,

¹ AA IX 447; transl. pp. 13-14.

² «Under the present educational system man does not fully attain to the object of his being [*den Zweck seines Daseins*]; for in what various ways men live! Uniformity [*Gleichförmigkeit*] can only result when all men act according to the same principles, which principles [*Grundsätzen*] would have to become with them a second nature [*zur ändern Natur werden*]» (AA IX 445; transl. p. 9).

³ «With regard to the free cultivation of the mental faculties [*die freie Cultur der Gemüthskräfte*], we must remember that this cultivation is going on constantly. It really deals with the superior faculties [*obern Kräfte*]. The inferior faculties must be cultivated along with them, but only with a view to the superior; for instance, the intelligence [*der Witz*] with a view to the understanding [*Verstand*] – the principal rule [*die Hauptregel*] that we should follow being that no mental faculty is to be cultivated by itself, but always in relation to others;

perfect education produces a perfect work of art and a perfect work of art has the organic perfection of a real «work of nature». Truth, goodness and beauty merge together in man as long as education or culture attains the perfect development of nature and becomes therefore a new nature. The fulfilment of human nature will be attained when education converts man into a perfect work of art, when «Perfect art becomes second nature» (*Vollkommene Kunst wird wieder zur Natur*).¹ However, this end remains a regulating idea, a guide for infinite action.

3. THE CIRCULARITY OF EDUCATION AND THE ROMANTIC HYBRIS

Although it tends to perfection, education is inevitably imperfect and endless because man educates man, one generation is educated by the previous one; whereas perfection would demand an educator superior to man and superior to human conditions of existence, capable of educating us, so to speak, by taking the stance of the end of universal and natural history. In fact, God would be the only possible educator able to lead man to perfection, God would be the only foundation for a positive and complete historical improvement.² Now, real education occurs within a circle of imperfection: only someone who is always still being educated can be educator.³ Moreover, the idea of perfection that guides every educator changes according to education: this *idea* is not unconditioned but supposes that very condition that it wants to create. Education demands an *insight-idea* and the *idea-insight* demands education.⁴ The paradox is that education wants to produce a radically new future but its idea of the future comes from the past. Consequently, if man does not have an idea of his future perfection that comes, to a certain extent, *from the future*, then man cannot be sure of being capable of perfecting himself and he cannot *a fortiori* aspire to a radically new future. History would then be more likely to oscillate ‘end-

for instance, the imagination to the advantage of the understanding. The inferior faculties [*untern Kräfte*] have no value in themselves; for instance, a man who has a good memory [*Gedächtniß*], but no judgment [*Beurteilungskraft*]. Such man is merely a walking dictionary. [...] Intelligence [*Witz*] divorced from judgment [*Urtheilskraft*] produces nothing but foolishness [*Albernheiten*]. Understanding [*Verstand*] is the knowledge of the general [*Erkenntniß des Allgemeinen*]. Judgment [*Urtheilskraft*] is the application of the general to the particular [*Anwendung des Allgemeinen auf das Besondere*]. Reason [*Vernunft*] is the power of understanding the connection between the general and the particular» (AA IX 472; transl. pp. 70-71).

¹ AA IX 492; transl. p. 108. See also AA VIII 117-118.

² See SF, AA VII 93.

³ «It is noticeable that man is only educated by man – that is, by men who have themselves been educated. Hence with some people it is want of discipline and instruction on their own part, which makes them in turn unfit educators of their pupils. Were some being of higher nature than man to undertake our education, we should then be able to see what man might become. It is, however, difficult for us accurately to estimate man's natural capabilities, since some things are imparted [*lehrt*] to man by education, while other things are only developed [*entwickelt*] by education.» (AA IX 443; transl. p. 6).

⁴ «Man must develop his tendency towards the good [*Der Mensch soll seine Anlagen zum Guten erst entwickeln*]. Providence has not placed goodness ready formed in him, but merely as a tendency and without the distinction of moral law. Man's duty is to improve himself; to cultivate his mind; and, when he finds himself going astray, to bring the moral law to bear upon himself [*Sich selbst besser machen, sich selbst cultiviren und, wenn er böse ist, Moralität bei sich hervorbringen, das soll der Mensch*]. Upon reflection we shall find this very difficult. Hence the greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education. For insight [*Einsicht*] depends on education [*Erziehung*], and education depends on insight. It follows therefore that education can only advance by slow degrees, and a true conception of the method of education can only arise when one generation transmits to the next its stores of experience and knowledge, each generation adding something of its own before transmitting them to the following» (AA IX 446-447; transl. pp. 11-13).

lessly' between progress, regression and stagnation – but without any universally reliable standard these concepts would also be meaningless. Kant believes that the circle of education is actually a spiral of development and he explains the reality of this spiral appealing to nature: man possesses a natural «tendency towards the good» (*Anlage zum Guten*),¹ man tends naturally to use his freedom and his reason. That is why Kant holds that the self-enlightenment of a public is inevitable: enlightened individuals should naturally appear among that public and should begin enlightening other individuals.² The self-moralisation of mankind encompasses a certain degree of necessity. «Progressing continually towards the better» (*beharrlich zum Bessern fortschreiten*)³ proves to be as inexorable as any natural phenomenon. This natural miracle takes place in reason; it belongs to the constitution of reason as long as reason is able to form an idea of man and history whose universality surpasses the contingency of all possible particular states of human development. As the possibility of education, reason is invested with god-like qualities, namely non-temporal spontaneity and knowledge of the world teleonomy. In order to explain the progressive movement of history Kant makes reason escape historicity. Through reason, the idea of the final end of history and nature becomes necessarily a free activity.

The non-temporal and non-historical autonomy of reason has inspired a more radical way of breaking the inescapable circle of education or the chain of cultural transmission. Let us call this the *romantic dialectics of enlightenment*, which unleashes a «self-misconception» (the misconception of oneself as pure self-productive spontaneity *ex nihilo*) that invites one to live his life as if it were a work of art. This is the romantic notion of the self-forming «supreme artist» that H. Arendt denounces in her *Rahel Varnhagen*⁴ as a manner of *ignoratio crassa* concerning the relationship between truth and poiesis, reality and fiction, poetical biography and political history. In line with Arendt, we maintain that the «enlightened» project of a «new education» (*neue Erziehung*), as Fichte names it in his *Speeches to the German Nation*⁵ paves the way to such an extreme non-historical self-understanding because it intensifies the purity of reason and freedom. The «new education consists in the rational and reliable art (*Kunst*) of forming (*bilden*) the pupil to pure morality (*zu reiner Sittlichkeit*); pure morality meaning the most excellent kind of «legality», that is, «something first, independent and autonomous that lives from its own life» (*ein erstes, unabhängiges und selbständiges da, das aus sich selber lebet sein eigenes Leben*).⁶ Pure morality implies pure rationality: to become purely moral is to become purely rational, and thus «to make

¹ *Ibidem*.

² «Dass ein Publicum sich selbst aufkläre, ist eher möglich; ja es ist, wenn man ihm nur Freiheit läßt, beinahe unausbleiblich. Denn da werden sich immer einige Selbstdenkende sogar unter den eingesetzten Vormündern des großen Haufens finden, welche, nachdem sie das Joch der Unmündigkeit selbst abgeworfen haben, den Geist einer vernünftigen Schätzung des eigenen Werths und des Berufs jedes Menschen selbst zu denken um sich verbreiten werden» (WA, AA VIII 36). ³ SF, AA VII 93.

⁴ «To live life as if it were a work of art, to believe that by 'cultivation' one can make a work of art of one's own life, was the great error that Rahel shared with her contemporaries; or rather, it was the misconception of self which was inevitable so long as she wished to understand and express within the categories of her time her sense of life: the resolve to consider life and the history it imposes upon the individual as more important and more serious than her own person.» (H. ARENDT, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, London, East and West Library, 1957, pp. xi-xii).

⁵ See J.G. FICHTE, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, VII, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1971, pp. 257-502: namely the second and third speeches, pp. 280-311.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 296.

progress not without plan and at random» but rather «according to a firm rule».¹ Moreover, this rule is within the pupil in such a way that the «art of educating» is always sure of the success of its «work of art», for to be educated is to be endowed with the capability of acting «according to one's own law» (*nach seinem eignen Gesetze*):²

As sure as man has reason, he is his own end [*sein eigener Zweck*], that is, he is not because he must be something else, but he is absolutely because *He* must be: his mere being is the ultimate end of his being or, that which means the same, man cannot without contradiction ask for any end to his being. He is *because* he is [*Er ist, weil er ist*]. This character of the absolute being, of the being willing himself [*des Seyns um sein selbst willen*], is his character or his destination, to the extent that he is merely and solely envisaged as a rational being.²

«New education» is nothing but the project of converting rational beings to their own rationality. Instead of an indefinite process of *becoming* themselves, «new education» wants the impossible: the fulfilment or the full being of being. «Be once for all what you are», «be the ground of your being», and you will be necessarily free:

All formation/ education [*Bildung*] endeavours to the presentation of a firm, determined and permanent being [*eines festen, bestimmten und beharrlichen Seyns*], which now does not become any more, but is and cannot be anything else except like that how it is. Were it not to endeavour to such a being, then it would not be formation, but rather a purposeless play; were it not presented such a being, then it would not be accomplished yet. [...] [W]ho has such a firm will he wants what he wants for all eternity [*für alle Ewigkeit*], and can no longer want differently from the way he always wants; to him freedom of will has faded into necessity.⁴

Thus, to be educated and moralised is to want what I want simply because I want it, to want what I want necessarily and eternally, and this is necessarily to want the good. For the good arises from absolute activity, while evil is only a lack of being or, that which is the same, a lack of activity. The new human being who emerges as a «work of art» from this «new education» seems to be the pure self whose permanent and necessary act of «self-position» (*Selbstsetzung*) constitutes the essence of reason, as it is described in Fichte's *Doctrine of science (Wissenschaftslehre)*,⁵ The passage from Fichte to Romanticism is to be found partly in the self-as-process-of-purification (*Reinigung*), and partly in the self-as-process-of-construction (*Construction*). The former is characterised by the ignorance of tradition, experience and language, as Hamman's⁶ metacritical reflections have emphatically denounced; the latter fills this emptiness by becoming to himself his own tradition, experience and language. Novalis is here a key figure in that not only does he link explicitly Romanticism to Fichte (holding that «to romanticise» is *Fichtisiren*),⁷ but he also insists on the neces-

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Ibidem*.

³ J. G. FICHTE, *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vi, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1971, pp. 295-296.

⁴ IDEM, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vii, pp. 281-282.

⁵ See for instance IDEM, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, hrsg. von E. Fuchs, Hamburg, Meiner, 1994, pp. 19-20, 29-32, *passim*.

⁶ See J. G. HAMANN, *Vom Magus im Norden und der Verwegenheit des Geistes*, Düsseldorf, Parerga Verlag, 1993.

⁷ «Es wäre wohl möglich, dass Fichte Erfinder einer ganz neuen Art zu denken wäre – für die die Sprache noch keinen Namen hat. Der Erfinder ist vielleicht nicht der fertigste und sinnreichste Künstler auf seinem Instrument – ob ich gleich nicht sage, dass es so sey – Es ist aber wahrscheinlich, dass es Menschen giebt und geben wird – die weit besser Fichtisiren werden, als Fichte. Es können *wunderbare Kunstwerke* hier entstehn – wenn man das Fichtisiren erst artistisch zu treiben beginnt» (NOVALIS, *Logologische Fragmente*, § 11, in *Schriften 2. Das philosophische Werk 1*, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1981, p. 524).

sity of self-poetics.¹ «To live life as if it were a work of art» consists precisely in the conjunction of passionate ignorance with hallucinatory construction for my own truth and freedom sake; which, in Rahel Varnhagen's paradigmatic case, has led to a complex refusal, denial and even lie regarding herself and her Jewish origins – the most hideous lack of respect towards oneself, according to Kantian standards. It appears now self-evident how *homo educandus* can change his ethical stance and become a *homo aestheticus* who creates himself as if he emerged *from nothing*. Nevertheless, *homo aestheticus* cannot be reduced to a simple ethical betrayal of the «perfecting agreement of myself with myself». Rather, it must be envisaged as an ambivalent style of being, for it can mean both the negation and the supreme realization of *homo educandus*; this only depends on the purposeful way in which «lived experience» (*Erlebnis*) is *aesthetically* transformed. Here, *life* meets *aesthetics* in the sense that an aesthetic type is *pragmatically* adopted. The *ethical dimension* acquired by this aesthetic self-formation (*Selbstbildung*) is not easily determined. Indeed, how can one find a robust criterion to determine or assess «the agreement of myself with myself»? In other words, how can one compare – from a self-poetic perspective – the ethical quality of radically different aesthetic types such as Abraham's faith, Socrates' irony and D. Juan's uneasiness? Is there any commensurate principle able to guide *homo educandus* through this aesthetic labyrinth? There's no doubt that Kant's notion of perfection relates back to a universal anthropological foundation, and thereby comprises the full accomplishment or actualisation of a universal set of anthropological virtues that form an organic unity. However, given the common experience of inner asymmetry between one's own «virtues» and the contingency of their epigenetic development, not to mention the cultural drive to scepticism towards *Ideas* in general, any strong notion of perfection – like Kant's – tends to be considered nothing but another possible aesthetic type. Unsurprisingly enough, *aestheticism* has been intimately blended with nihilism. Though even the nihilist concedes that life collapses without (illusory) beliefs. Likewise, all education collapses without a shared belief on a concrete aesthetic type or ethic project of anthropological perfection.

¹ «Der Anfang des Ich ist bloss *idealis*. – Wenn es angefangen hätte, so hätte es so angefangen müssen. Der Anfang ist schon ein späterer Begriff. Der Anfang entsteht später, als das Ich, darum kann das Ich nicht angefangen haben. Wir sehn daraus, das wir hier im Gebiet der *Kunst* sind – aber diese künstliche Supposition ist die Grundlage einer ächten Wissenschaft die allemahl aus *künstlichen Factis* entspringt. Das Ich soll construirt werden. Der Philosoph bereitet, schafft künstliche Elemente und geht so an die Construction. Die *Naturgeschichte* des Ich ist dieses nicht – Ich ist kein Naturproduct – keine Natur – kein historisches Wesen – sondern ein artistisches – eine *Kunst* – ein Kunstwerck» (NOVALIS, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, § 76, *Schriften* 3. *Das philosophische Werk II*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1983, p. 253).

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