

Changing the Definition of Education. On Kant's Educational Paradox Between Freedom and Restraint

Birgit Schaffar

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Abstract Ever since Kant asked: “How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint?” in his lecture on education, the tension between necessary educational influence and unacceptable restriction of the child’s individual development and freedom has been considered an educational paradox. Many have suggested solutions to the paradox; however, this article endorses recent discussions in educational philosophy that pursue the need to fundamentally rethink our understanding of education and upbringing. In this article it is argued that it is incomprehensible to describe an intervention of an educator as a constraint on a child’s actions and that such an intervention would be in need of justification; as Kant and many others after him have done. Educational intervention should not be understood as a restriction of a child’s endeavour to learn, because any educational intervention is educational. Furthermore, it is argued that the notion of restraint is based on the concept of human beings as radically separated which lead to the assumption that education is restrictive per se. In contrast, this article argues that indoctrination, manipulation, and coercion are rather phenomena *within* our educational forms of life. Recognizing the interrelations between human beings should play a constitutive part in the conceptualisation of individual freedom. A bond with others is the foundation upon which a child develops its own identity and an understanding of itself as an agent who can express its own will and takes responsibility for its words and actions.

Keywords Immanuel Kant · Freedom · Educational restraint · Human interrelatedness · Forms of life

Freedom and Restraint: A Classical Paradox

Readers of Immanuel Kant have for the past 200 years been confronted by, as Kant himself writes, “One of the greatest problems of education”: “How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint?”. If the destiny of humankind is to be free and to only

B. Schaffar (✉)
Åbo Akademi University, Strandgatan 2, 65101 Vasa, Finland
e-mail: bschaffa@abo.fi

submit to the individual's own reason, and if the individual is not free from the outset but is in need of care, upbringing and education, then the following question arises: "how to unite submission to the necessary *restraint* with the child's capability of exercising his *freewill*—for restraint is necessary. [...] I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of his freedom, and at the same time I am to guide him to use his freedom aright" (Kant 1900, s. 27).

This tension between a necessary educational influence and an impermissible restriction of the child's individual development is considered one of the primary pedagogical paradoxes. Throughout history this problem has been discussed through the use of a variety of key concepts. Within the Anglo-Saxon debate, we find for example, R. S. Peters, who in (1963) described a difficulty that was in many respects similar but not completely identical under the title: "The Paradox of Moral Education". Further, in the so called "liberal education" it is discussed how people's autonomy can be developed in order to participate in a democratic society and how different goals and values should be presented without limiting the child's own choices (strong/weak autonomy).¹ A question that arises here is whether there can be and ought to be teachers and school systems that are as neutral as possible in order for the child's own choices in life not to be restricted, a priori. In addition, critical theories are concerned with the tools of critical thinking and the assessment of cultural content, and question whether these tools and assessments should already be regarded as restrictive in themselves (broad/thin rationality).² It has often been speculated as to whether education might merely be considered a milder form of manipulation and indoctrination.³

Within the Continental and German-language debate the discussion has with regard to these questions also been closely tied to Kant's initial question concerning free will and education. In recent years there have even been an increasing number of papers, which explicitly use this question as a starting point (e.g., Ruhloff 1975; Miller-Kipp 1992; Cavaller 1996; Kauder and Fischer 1999; Luckner 2003). Generally speaking, one might distinguish between articles that simply highlight the problem that Kant speaks of, and those articles that take issue as to whether the paradox can be overcome or not. Ruhloff (1975), Cavaller (1996), Kauder and Fischer (1999), and Ruberg (2002) argue, for example, that Kant's question only gives the appearance of describing a paradox. Kauder and Fischer (1999, p. 129) writes that Kant himself did not regard the problem as a paradox, but as "soluble on a principal, that is on a theoretical level".⁴ In contrast to this, Winkler (1991) presents the viewpoint that the problem "cannot be solved principally", because freedom and upbringing are directly connected. "Anyone who accepts the one can not deny the other". The paradox can only be overcome empirically. "It resolves itself during the time needed to become an adult" (Winkler 1991, p. 260). Even Ballauff and Schaller (1970), Miller-Kipp (1992), and Schäfer (2004), understand Kant's question as being non-satisfactory and contradictory. A different viewpoint is suggested by Wimmer (2006) who argues that fundamental aspects of education offer resistance when being grasped through theories or concepts. "A paradox is the manifestation of that resistance *in* a theory" (Wimmer, p. 157). Paradoxes become a mystery to our thinking because they lead our thoughts to something that thinking is not able to comprehend; something that is

¹ For a further discussion on this subject see, for example, Winch (2002).

² For a further discussion on this subject see, for example, Cuypers (2010).

³ For a further discussion on this subject see, for example, Masschelein (1998).

⁴ Ruhloff (1975, p. 10) and Kauder and Fischer (1999, p. 125) observe, moreover, that Kant already from a purely philological perspective clarifies the possibility of overcoming the dilemma. Kant does not write "Wie kultiviere ich Freiheit *durch* Zwang?", but writes instead "*bei* dem Zwange?".

enigmatic, outside our frame of references and that is “other” in a broad sense (ibid., p. 158). According to Wimmer, the attempt to resolve a paradox theoretically gives rise to a risk of misrepresenting its true meaning; namely to relate our thoughts to the unthinkable (ibid., p. 145).

Within the Continental discussion, there is generally an attempt to understand Kant’s thoughts on education in relation to his entire philosophical structure.⁵ The debate revolves in these cases around two issues. On the one hand, there is a discussion concerning the degree or extent of the paradox in Kant’s question and in what way the paradox might be resolved (on the level of principle, theoretically, on an empirical level, or not on any of these levels). On the other hand, the problems regarding the paradox give rise to questions concerning whether it is Kant or his editor D. Friedrich Theodor Rink who should be considered to be the author of this work on education (Weisskopf 1970). Though these different approaches to Kant’s discussion on education are valuable, I perceive them to be unsatisfactory given the initial difficulty, because these approaches begin by focusing on the *philosopher* Kant and do not discuss *the pedagogical difficulty*, which he expressed.

The exegetical question (how did Kant treat and solve the paradox, how does it fit into his other writings etc.) and the educational question (how are we to understand an educational process, how is this process legitimised, what kind of moral borders should one be aware of etc.) are interrelated. As is commonly known, Kant’s philosophy has made a deep impact on (Western) philosophical, intellectual and political discussions. The way he conceptualised basic philosophical questions and expressed central assumptions concerning human beings has influenced how several generations have thought and conceived questions, such as, what it means to be a human being, and in what way human beings are both bound together and separated from one another by society. These questions have, therefore, had a strong impact on the development and understanding of education and educational processes. “It seems that the contradiction [Kant’s pedagogical paradox, B.S.] is resting at the heart of pedagogy itself” (Løvlie 2012, p. 110). In this respect it is valuable to discuss Kant exegetically.

Nevertheless, in recent years, various authors have emphasised the need to reflect, in a fundamental way, upon the basic assumptions and principles that have governed our thoughts and discussions concerning education. Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken speculate, for example, in a slightly different context whether it can still be considered productive to reconstruct “the educational classics”—because we no longer seem to confront them with questions that engage us. It may even be the case, following Ricken and Masschelein, that as long as these historical sources play a part in our categorical confusion, they might not be useful anymore (Masschelein and Ricken 2002, p. 98). In a similar manner, I understand Gert J.J. Biesta who, in an article with Raf Vanderstraeten, explicitly does not consider Kant’s pedagogical paradox as a question seeking a solution.

It is important to note that in the modern discourse of education Kant’s question did not get answered but rather got unfolded. This was *not* because one was unable to find an answer to this question, but rather – so I want to argue – because Kant’s question was not so much a question as that it was a *specific* definition of the educational problem, a definition which itself was based upon a specific, individualistic definition of man and his destination (Vanderstraeten and Biesta 2001, p. 10).

⁵ Vogel (1990), for example, discusses the question in relation to Kant’s antinomy of freedom, Cavaller (1996) in relation to Kant’s theory of ethics, and numerous others have discussed the question in relation to Kant’s critique of pure reasoning.

In a similar sense, this article does not focus on Kant's philosophical system and different possible readings. I seek to question one of the basic assumptions in our understanding of education; namely the idea that education is a process between (at least) two different human beings who might be considered as units that exist separately. If we discuss, for example, whether or not the child has an own free will, identity, responsibility or rights *before* he/she meets his/her surrounding, then we are assuming that human beings are radically separated units to which we can attribute certain characteristics. I will not discuss, whether or not this was the original intention of Kant.⁶ In the next sections, I will rather look more closely at the examples that Kant himself gave and develop some of my own examples in order to concretise the educational difficulty that his question expresses. My aim is to illustrate how we are misled into the notion of radical separation and how we might understand the (educational) relation in a different light.

How to Learn What a Knife is

Kant uses the following example in order to show how it is possible to cultivate liberty through force:

Here we must observe the following: - First, we must allow the child from his earliest childhood perfect liberty in every respect (except on those occasions when he might hurt himself – as, for instance, when he clutches at a knife) (Kant 1900, p. 28).

Kant writes that in a situation where a young child reaches out for a knife, which unintentionally lies within its grasp, then a person cannot let the child do as it wishes because it is most likely going to hurt itself. Examples like this have been discussed throughout the history of education and educational theory. A very similar recent example can be found in Dietrich Benner (2001) who says that one would take a hammer from a child who is about to hurt itself, hurt someone else, or is about to damage something (Benner 2001, p. 226). Benner writes that it would not be acceptable to let the child play with the hammer and in so doing risk injury. He says that the intervention of the educator in the actions of the child is “a legitimate exercise of pedagogical force” (*legitime Ausübung pädagogischer Gewalt*) (ibid. p. 220) because the pedagogical intervention avoids a certain action that is dangerous for the child itself or for other people in the child's surroundings (ibid. p. 226).

These examples appear paradoxical because it is obvious that an educator needs to try to prevent dangerous or harmful acts, yet the intervention is also interpreted as an intrusion into the freedom of the child. The question is: How can or should one understand the notion of the child's freedom and, furthermore, what could be described as a restraint of that freedom which is in need of justification.

Both in a Continental (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Kant, Johann Friedrich Herbart) and an Anglo-Saxon (e.g., Alexander S. Neill) context there has been a long tradition of thought in

⁶ Many philosophers during the nineteenth and twentieth Century, (for example the German idealism, existentialism, German and French critical theory) criticised Kant for his chosen starting point in relation to the question of free will and education. The critique often concentrated on Kant's initial principal being the notion of an autonomous subject. Several Kantian schools in philosophy discussed his thoughts in another light. Recent contributions as, for example, Herman (1997), Wood (1999), Gates (2002), Gonzalez (2009) or Roth (2011) discuss whether or not Kant is rather misunderstood as a defender of individualism and show how Kant emphasises the social dimension and the value and importance of interrelatedness in his philosophy.

which “the learner’s own thinking has to be respected, that students must always see the point of what they are learning and be free to pursue their own conceptions of this in their own ways” (Bonnett and Cuypers 2003, p. 326). Therefore, one line of thought concerning examples like Kant’s has often been that this intervention by the parents should be described as a constraint of the child’s freedom because they interrupted the child’s original need to learn or its natural curiosity. Herbart, e.g., solved this problem in his “Allgemeine Pädagogik” (1806/1903) by distinguishing between “governing of the child” (Kinderregierung) and “true education” (eigentliche Erziehung). The governing of the child includes such measures that prevent injuries and conflicts, or as he expressed it, that “create order” (Ordnung schaffen). The meaning of the governing is only *to prepare* a better situation for true education, because it is exclusively education that should take care of the child’s actual substantial *Bildung* (Geistesbildung). This division has long been considered a good way to differentiate between education and mere instruction (Ruhloff 1975, p. 11). Thus, a very common way of solving the practical consequences of Kant’s paradox has been to argue that as long as the intervention is not meant to be educational in itself, but only meant to serve for further educational situations; the constraining of the child’s actions by the parents or the teachers was necessary and legitimate (Benner 2001, p. 222; Fuhr 1999, p. 60; Sacher 1984, p. 282–3).

However, when examining the example more closely it can be discerned that the child actually has learned many things simply because the parents took the knife from it. It has learned that there is a difference between toys and tools, between dangerous and non-dangerous things, and that it is possible to break things with a knife or harm people, and so on. It might be the case that the tendency towards this kind of misinterpretation, which deprives the preventive acts of their own substantive value, is the result of a certain way of thinking when discussing knowledge and learning. If the pedagogical task is to impart knowledge then one has in mind questions such as: “what is it?”, “how do you use it?” and “what is the right thing to do?”; a classical Aristotelian classification of knowledge: *Episteme*, *techne*, and *ethics*. What is overlooked is that knowledge of what something is implies (a) an understanding of what something is not and (b) that epistemic and practical knowledge are not areas that are separable from morality. I will elaborate. Given Kant’s example, one could, in a very general way, say that knowledge of what a knife is means that one can distinguish between a knife and other objects; that one is able to safely divide an apple⁷ and that one knows when to use a knife (e. g. to peel and cut fruit). However, this implies two distinctions: Firstly, one knows when a knife *cannot* be considered as helpful (e. g. when hammering a nail into a wall). Secondly, there is an implicit *moral* insight; to know what a knife is, is to know what one *may* or *may not* do with a knife (e.g., harm one’s younger brother or cut holes in the sofa).

Subsequently Kant’s example describes a situation in which the child has learned important aspects of the concept “knife”. The child’s learning does not happen *despite* the parents’ removal of the knife but *because of* it. If we are to take the claim seriously that the child’s freedom, understood as its original need to learn and explore the world around it, has been constrained, then so far we have not clarified why the intervention of the educator should be described and discussed as a constraint (as Kant and many others after him have done), or as a kind of force or even a form of violence that is in need of justification (cf. Benner 2001, p. 220ff). The actions discussed here, those that prevent injury of the child or damage to objects, are not merely preparatory; they are instructive in themselves.

⁷ In order to make sense of the claim that you *know* what something is, you do not have to be able to practically use the object yourself.

Nevertheless, the question that follows out of this conclusion is whether or not this intervention imparts, what I might want to call, the “accurate” thing to learn. The example of a young child reaching for a knife or a hammer might be an obvious case which will hardly raise any serious objections against the correctness of the educator’s intervention. But think of other everyday-situations. For example, think of the child who wants to play in the cupboard where the pots and pans are kept in the kitchen. He is pulling out the pots, banging the pots, rearranging the pots, banging the pots and replacing the pots in the cupboard, only to do it all again minutes later. Do we have a situation in which a parent should do anything, for example, intervene in the play, forbid or promote it?

Along with my argumentation above, it does not matter what the parent does, anything will be educational for the child. There is no way in which the parent is constraining the child’s right to learn and the child’s curiosity to get to know his surrounding in the very basic sense. The crucial question in this situation seems to be rather, what is the right thing to do as a parent in order to teach the child not just anything but what is accurate to learn. In contrast to the case in which the child is about to harm itself, it is easy to imagine several contradictory opinions about what the parent should do and what the child should learn. Although no direct harm might come of such play, the parent who is not willing to listen to the noise and does not want the bother of the inconvenience of the child playing around with the pots in the kitchen cupboard, might tell the child “no” and by this intervention refuses to allow the child to play in or near the cupboard. This prohibition will teach the child that pots are not to be played with, they are only to be cooked with. While this might be welcomed by a majority as an important social lesson⁸ it can also be argued that this intervention lacks a certain imaginative vision and constrains the child’s creativity.

Throughout every educational process parents and professionals are faced with a wide range of situations that resemble this latter case. Should my 4-year-old son, for example, learn to play soccer, although I am not interested in and do not esteem this skill? However, should he learn to play in order to avoid teasing later in life, simply because other parents in my community choose to teach their children activities that are more conservatively gender-oriented? Should I follow the advice of others and try to persuade my 3-years-old daughter to put her clothes on herself by presenting this situation in the form of a small competition, just because it seems to be important for children to learn to compete in the Western society? Should I force my child to sit straight at the dinner table and to eat with a knife and fork; if so at what age will others start to complain about “bad manners”? Should I vaccinate my child or let him or her be circumcised because my culture defines this as a way to avoid illness, or will this act, on the contrary, lead to the child becoming ill? How should I read the Bible or the Koran to my child when I view myself as a non-believer but still want to familiarise my child with an important aspect of the culture we live in?

These situations confront us with questions that do not have obvious or decisive answers about what the parent(s) or an educator(s) should do. From different points of view different interventions might be described as accurate, preferable, restrictive, dangerous, authoritarian, liberal, child-centred, loving etc. While it seemed obvious what the educator should do in Kant’s example (at least what he/she should do to begin with) we find an ongoing discussion in our immediate surroundings and in society about what is right or wrong for the future generation to know in case of the other examples I have given here. Two consequences should be drawn from this observation:

⁸ Compare even one of Kant’s further examples, in which he argues that the educator should constrain the child’s freedom: “as soon as he screams or is too boisterously happy, he annoys others” and “interfere[s] with the liberty of others” (Kant 1900, p. 28).

1. What we do as educators will show where we stand in the discussion about what the future generation should know and learn. No matter whether we intervene in one way or the other into the child's actions or whether we refrain from doing something at all, the way we as parents and teachers, think, argue and act will be an example for children of how one can reason and find answers to difficulties that we human beings encounter in a shared existence.

Without being able to elaborate on this point in as detailed a manner as it would deserve or require, I want to suggest that we find the core of moral education in this insight. When a frightened parent seizes the knife from the hands of the child then the child most likely becomes aware that the knife is dangerous. "The danger" can of course be understood as a characteristic of the knife that one (in some respect) can have factual knowledge about. However, I would like to suggest that the concept "danger" is a relational concept. Knowledge of the danger of an object is knowledge that it is dangerous *for someone*. This insight is of a moral character because it implies at minimum a general awareness of the differences between an object (something) and a person (someone). Objects can, for example, be broken, but they do not feel pain. People can hurt themselves and become sad when important and cherished items are broken. It is not possible to distinguish between learning to see a knife as something that is dangerous and learning to see other people as valuable. When a child learns in different situations what a knife is then it also acquires, through an interaction with others, an idea of itself as a possible agent, which is an internal connection with a person's responsibility to others. In the words of Lévinas (1999), the child learns to see its own responsibility in the face of others, and to become aware of the moral demand in its relationship with others. To know (epistemologically) that a knife is dangerous implies that it can be asked (from a moral viewpoint) what he or she *wants* to do with the knife. Do I really want to risk harming my younger brother? Thus, moral knowledge, knowledge about what is right and wrong to do, cannot be separated from factual or technical knowledge, which if such was the case would require special teaching situations (cf. Masschelein 2000, p. 611). It is misleading to think that moral education will present itself later in life; instead moral education is implicit in the way we as parents or professionals interact with children and pupils in the many varied situations that we encounter one another.

2. When scholars from Herbart to Benner left the educational aspect of the intervention of the parents in Kant's example aside and argued that it is, and explicitly should be, only preparatory for the true education that should follow, they lack to discuss the moral question that lies within the educational practise. They, too, discuss Kant's paradox as a moral question, but their focus has been on how to legitimate *the very idea* that an educator has to take an educational intervention at all and not the fact that whatever the educator does, it will be a stand in the discussion about what is right and wrong to learn. As a consequence, many of the educational philosophers who have attempted to give an answer to the paradox have tried to find rules and criteria that would lead teachers through the supposedly very delicate balance between the teacher's freedom and the child's freedom and integrity (cf. Benner 2001, p. 222). However, these difficulties cannot be resolved with the help of a theoretical criterion, a categorisation, or with the help of practical rules that *once and for all* help to distinguish between legitimate and non-legitimate acts. The insight, though, that whatever we do in a certain situation will have an educating effect on children, makes those discussions and their distinctions meaningless, because the only question possible is *what* we should teach our children, and not: are we allowed to teach them something *at all*.

In the next two sections I want to discuss this in more detail. The question whether or not we are allowed to teach children anything at all leads the discussion to notions of restraint or of forces that impose something external (another's will, a certain language or certain cultural behaviour) onto the child. Even though the scholars I have quoted stress the necessity and the legitimacy of these kinds of actions, I want to argue that it is unclear why we should describe these educational interventions as restrictions. The fact that there is a tendency to use notions such as restraint and restriction in order to define what an educational process is, reveals that our educational discussion is still based on the image of human beings as beings who live in radical separation from each other.

The Core of the Paradox: Human Beings Seen as Autonomous Units and as a Hindrance to Others

Kant lists some further examples of situations in which one may not leave a child free and might need to exercise force against the will of the child. These examples reveal the freedom that the people have in the environment surrounding the child, and that the child must learn to be aware of these so as to take into account the freedom of others. Kant writes: “as soon as he screams or is too boisterously happy, he annoys others” and “interfere[s] with the liberty of others”. Furthermore, the child must learn: “that he can only attain his own ends by allowing others to attain theirs”, and finally: “we must prove to him that restraint is only laid upon him that he may learn in time to use his liberty aright, and that his mind is being cultivated so that one day he may be free; that is, independent of the help of others” (Kant 1900, p. 28).

In these few lines, Kant mentions some very different phenomena, which he sums up under the German term “Freiheit”. The fact that the English translation has to use different terms, “freedom” or “liberty”, indicates that Kant confronts us with problems that have to be discussed in more detail. What Kant seems to be expressing is both some kind of financial independence, the moral insight that it is wrong to reduce other people to mere means to an end, and learning how to “behave” in general. These forms of “Freiheit” are further distinguished from the kind of wildness that is characteristic of a child at its birth.⁹ Despite all these different notions of freedom/liberty I am not seeking to comprehend/determine how these passages are linked to other ideas that Kant brought to light concerning freedom and liberty. Rather, I would like to focus on the implicit assumptions which one commits oneself to when discussing these educational questions based upon the concept of liberty and restraint.

“Liberty”/“freedom” and the closely related concept “autonomy” entail an idea of a more or less radical non-attachment and non-assertiveness. In the examples given by Kant, it is easy to imagine that people appear, first and foremost, to be individual units that are dissociated from one another and which only at a second stage come into contact with other people. Many philosophers have, since Kant, criticized Kant for his subject-centred starting point in his philosophy; the German idealists of the nineteenth century and the existentialist during the twentieth century (e.g., Lévinas 1999; Sartre 2003; Heidegger 1996), but also many contemporary moral philosophers (e.g., Gaita 1991; Noddings 1984; Nykänen 2002;

⁹ Many contemporary discussions regarding this passage from Kant's works give rise to questions concerning the author's own awareness of these different phenomena. To discuss different questions under a singular concept, as Kant does in this excerpt, increases the risk of misunderstanding the point so that the actual problem remains unclear. For some suggestions in this question, see Schaffar (2009).

Kronqvist 2008). It can be discussed whether or not Kant meant his philosophy to be subject-centred in this radical sense as his critics accuse him of. Yet, my point here is two folded:

On the one hand, it seems as if the idea of a radical autonomy, of liberty and of separateness is so tempting that it lives on in many philosophical¹⁰ and educational traditions of thought. Bonnett and Cuypers observe this in the case of educational theory and summarise in the following manner:

Not only proponents of liberal education, but also defenders of reform pedagogics such as child-centred educationalists (e.g., Neill 1960) and deschoolers (e.g., Illich 1971) start from what they take to be the self-evident principle that children and students are either actual or potential autonomous beings in the *radical* sense. These educational practitioners and theorists certainly do not deny the temporal and factual dependence of autonomy on the impact of other people's attitudes and the larger communal context. But they nevertheless presume that individual children or students remain *in principle* the independent creators of their volitional character as well as their values (Bonnett and Cuypers 2003, p. 335).

On the other hand, I want to argue that although there might be good arguments against the critics who charge Kant for individualism, the question still remains why he and many philosophers and educational theorist after him choose to describe these educational interventions in terms of a restraint or restriction. When we talk about a restraint we refer to a situation in which someone controls over someone else's conduct by holding him/her back from acting, proceeding, or advancing in a certain way that he/she wishes to do. We talk about restrictions both in case someone or something is limiting another person, or in case of a restriction that we lay on ourselves. In both cases the notion of restraint implies the idea of an *external* force to oneself; in the latter the restriction of oneself is understood in a similar way as a kind of *additional* force that has not been a part of our self from the beginning, but has been internalised.

This is why I want to argue that for Kant and the traditions after him, it seems that there are only two possibilities: Either the child stands in the way of the freedom of others, or someone else forces an obligation upon the child.¹¹ There seems to be a fundamental tension between people due to the fact that all, in principle, lay claim to their own freedom and the realisation of that freedom. This tension seems to be impossible to overcome. Consequently, a balance needs to be maintained in the multitude of different interests formed in the inevitable contact with someone else. For this reason, Kauder and Fischer (1999, p. 129)

¹⁰ Christine M. Korsgaard's discussion with two of her critics at the Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophy Association in May 1998 is an illuminative illustration of the kind of exegetical approach I wish to avoid. The problem facing Korsgaard and her critics is that a rational self needs to exist before it is able to accept and subject itself under the moral law, while it is the moral law that constitutes the existence of the kind of rationality which is needed to accept the moral law. "How can I give a law to a self that does not yet exist? How can making a law for someone bring that something into existence?" (Korsgaard 1998, p. 5, quoting Rachel Cohon). Without being able to address this discussion in any detail, I want to express a lingering concern that accounts like this base their starting point on the idea that we in any way could be able to dissociate something "own" or "original" in one person from something or someone external that exists in radical separation from the person. Otherwise the questions what should be considered as existing first, what is the cause and what is the effect in a person's (moral) development are not understandable. In this way I see many Kantian scholars operating with the notion of radical separateness, independently whether they argue for or against there being an agent or having rationality or an identity in the newborn before he/she meets the social world.

¹¹ Cf. Kant's division of the positive and negative submissiveness of a child (Kant 1900, p. 27).

speak of education as a task comparable to that of walking on a tightrope, or of liberty and coercion as a union similar to a Janus face.

If one follows Kant's line of thought and uses descriptions such as "restraint", "restriction", "force" etc., even in combination with adjectives like "necessary" (Kant), "legitimate" (Benner) or "excusable" (Shapiro 1999), upbringing and education *as such* become problematic because one is in fact dealing with a confrontation between two radically separate sides.

Kant put education on an individualistic track, a track in which education became understood as an interaction *between* subjects [...]. As a result, education was viewed either through the perspective of the educator, or through that of the child or student. One cannot say that the unity of the object ('education') entirely disappeared from sight; it rather was treated from a particular perspective (Vanderstraeten and Biesta 2001, p. 10–11).

In case our educational reflection is based on this individualistic track then it is easy to quickly fall into the trap of categorising human relationships in a very crude manner. On the one hand, there is heteronomy, restriction, coercion as a form of dependence between people, which is often rejected without further specification, and, on the other hand, there is autonomy. Autonomy is the freedom understood as the absence of dependence between people and considered to be worth striving for. In this often rather strict dichotomy there is a risk of not taking into account important differences in human interaction. According to such a view, all possible contact with others seems to be turned, generally speaking, into a restraint of the subject by external forces. Lévinas (1999, p. 191) described this subject-centred approach as a "war" between individual liberties.

There is an element here which is important to be aware of when reflecting on our understanding of upbringing and education. From the perspective that human beings are radically separate from each other, even loving devotion and care are considered to be forms of alien influence and would be regarded as equally suspicious as any other form of manipulation or indoctrination. Love and care seem, therefore, to be in as much need of justification as violence and coercion (Frankfurt 1998). Paradoxically this implies that we have eliminated the very distinction between actions that we might find educationally acceptable, necessary or valuable and those actions that we should criticise as restrictive, manipulative or problematic.

I want to argue, that education and upbringing cannot be construed as restrictive *per se*. Indoctrination, manipulation, and coercion are phenomena *within* our educational forms of life, and which need to be discussed *within* that form of life. In this respect it remains unclear what it means to regard education in itself as restrictive. Such a view leads to a paradoxical situation where one seeks justification for something that is actually considered to be necessary. Peter Gardner reaches the same conclusion in a discussion on R.S. Peters' "Paradox of Moral Education" when he writes: "there is no contradiction involved in talking of individuals acquiring habits and being rational, intelligent and fairly spontaneous" (Gardner 1985, p. 44). This is why I think that the notion of restriction as something fundamental and constant in education should be revised.

An investigation into what it in different situations means to say that a child, or an adult, wants something, or to respond to someone as wanting something from us might be more fruitful in understanding what attracts us in these questions¹² rather than attempt to determine whether someone has a will or what kind of will he/she has to begin with. Over

¹² For a closer examination of what I take this difference in perspective to mean, see Hertzberg (1997).

the last few years this insight has taken shape in such phrases as: “*Bildung* as response” (e.g., Masschelein 1996; Biesta 2006). With the help of further examples, the importance of ‘the response of the other’ will be made more tangible in the following chapter. To grow into a form of life (a culture, a social context), is often described as restrictive because the child encounters a context that already bears meaning, even before the child comes into contact with it. Nonetheless, it appears that interrelatedness with others and the authentic answers of others is what constitutes the possibility of developing and being able to speak of an individual’s liberty.

Interrelatedness with Others as an Essential Part of Individual Liberty

To illustrate the argument, let us imagine a child, Lisa. Lisa says “I want to hang a painting on the wall and I already have the knife with me!”. Here one could say that Lisa is expressing her will to hang a painting, maybe by hammering a nail into the wall with the help of a knife. However, apparently she is mistaken about something. Either she does not know that you cannot use a knife (or should not use a knife, except in the absence of much else) to hammer a nail into the wall or she actually wants to peel an apple but is mistaken about the meaning of the words: “hang a painting”. To repeat the point made earlier, it is not a form of abuse or a way of manipulating Lisa’s will when her parents explain to her that it does not work very well using a knife to hammer in nails and that one should instead use a hammer. Similar to the previous example in section “[How to Learn What a Knife is](#)”, Lisa’s parents are teaching her what you cannot do with a knife and at the same time they are explaining something to her about nails and walls. This example illustrates what the later Wittgenstein meant when he said that the learning of language cannot be separated from learning and growing into a form of life (Wittgenstein 1999).

In such a situation parents convey a central aspect of volition; to be able to have and express one’s own will, “persons need to know the possibilities that they face” (Ch. Winch 2002, p. 30). It does not make sense to want something that is conceptually impossible (or meaningless). In other words, although it is possible to say “I want to hammer a nail into the wall with the help of a knife”, as Lisa apparently says, it is necessary to distinguish between the concept “will” understood as an explanation of intent, and, “will” as a wish/desire to do something. In Lisa’s case, one could imagine that she actually wants (desires) to find out how it feels to use a knife to hammer the nail into the wall. However, what is crucial for my discussion is that there appears to be something unreasonable in her words. It is, for example, not usual to speak of using a knife to hit something with (even if it is possible to do so).

It is at this point that the educational debate often veers towards saying that Lisa cannot express her genuine will because the only tools at her disposal are certain cultural expressions, such as language, which already carry with them meanings which are part of the language, prior to Lisa’s usage of them. It appears that what is required of Lisa is to apply her own completely unique will onto a pre-specified, cultural form, which introduces its own heavy influence on her before she is able to find her own means of expressing herself. Within the educational discussion several questions have been raised in regard to this problem:

How can there be an authentic initiation into our cultural heritage? How can one ‘do one’s own thing’ after incorporating the standards of the ‘generalised other’? Moreover, one cannot possibly expect a person to critically assess *all* of his public

inheritance since most of it will remain in the dark and will not ever see the light of rational reflection (Cuypers 2010, p. 198–9).

The problem seems to be aggravated by fact that it is not simply a matter of certain cultural content that is communicated, and which could possibly be reviewed critically and revised later in life. The very tools with which the content might be examined and the ability to think analytically are conveyed through and standardised within each culture. This point has been made clear by, especially, the critical education theory because it points out that there cannot be anything “exterior to the system” (see Ilan Gur-Ze’ev/Peter McLaren). Finally, it might be said, “that usually the very group [e.g., culture, B.S.] which plays such an ambivalent and yet crucial role in my freedom is not the one which I have myself freely chosen. I am a member of such group because I was born into it” (Bauman 1992, p. 23–24).

Reflection is necessary for a moment as to whether there is a need to immediately proceed in this direction. The questions that have been raised here once again already imply a) that we could say something meaningful about a person’s will and character before he or she comes into contact with and is “infected” by the culture, and b) that growing into a linguistic form of life is a kind of encroachment that should be viewed with suspicion. Both these aspects present premature conclusions.

Think again of Lisa. How can we understand my earlier claim that it does not make sense to want something that is conceptually impossible (or meaningless)? This claim is not an indication of the fundamental limitation, which is brought about by our immersion and dependency on the cultural tools which shape our wills and our way of expressing ourselves. What makes Lisa’s desire to use a knife in order to hang a picture on the wall confusing is that it is unclear *for others* what Lisa wants to do and what reaction is expected or could be expected of them in such a situation. Should they support, help, warn, prohibit, or cheer her desire? To say that Lisa is expressing herself in a way that is confusing is not necessarily a way of placing blame on her and demanding that she must submit herself more precisely to the given forms. Rather, to speak of confusion means that there are many possible alternatives for what has actually been meant. To correct a child’s language is not yet, in itself, a sign that one is forcing some cultural perspective on the child. The educational goal of learning to speak “correctly” is not merely to be able to use concepts in a grammatically and semantically correct way. Rather, the children will obtain the opportunity *to be able to express* their intentions in general, or to express their desires in such a way that *others* can understand and react to their wishes in an appropriate way (cf. Laverty 2010, p. 35–37).

Of course, Lisa has not necessarily learned in this very isolated incident what “a knife can be used for” or what it means by: “to hurt oneself when using tools in the wrong way.” Rather, I would suggest, as in section “[How to Learn What a Knife is](#)”, that it is the entirety of all these situations that will “teach” her a way of life that includes: tools, dangerous situations, pictures, broken things, pain and vulnerability, and mortal human beings. “The entirety of all these situations,” signifying nothing less than the life we live among other people. Learning a language in which different concepts already have meaning prior to one’s entering into that language community cannot be separated from growing into a form of life. “To understand a concept is to be able to participate in life with it; to have a sense of the shape that it gives to one’s interactions and activities” (Laverty 2010, p. 34). Nevertheless, what is crucial for this discussion is to see that concepts do bear meaning before we encounter them and that is why we speak of phenomena such as “proper” and “improper” uses of a word. However, the meaning of the

word is not permanently fixed and does not dictate what we are about to say. As Megan J. Laverty elucidated, it is essential to understand that

[e]mpirically speaking, our life using language is not entirely determined (as adherents to the hermeneutics of suspicion assert), but neither is it entirely free (as the Enlightenment thinkers proposed); rather, it is both free and determined which has implications for our understanding of each of these terms. Ethically speaking, individuals have an obligation to speak their words, and listen to those of others, as if they have meaning. [...] To assume that words have meaning does not entail the assumption that their meaning is either unchanging or impersonal” (Laverty 2010, p. 34).

When children learn a language it provides them with a variety of options/tools with which to act, and these alternatives are bound to a culture before the child encounters them, yet it is with the help of these various possibilities to act that the child is able to express him- or herself as individual in a cultural community. Language does not dictate what the child will say, and therein lies the opportunity for new human beings to develop their own understanding of the world which might go beyond the common meaning, experience and concepts of their community (Winch 1991, p. 15).

There is another important point to make about the presence of others in the development of one’s own freedom/liberty. The question “How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint?” seems to be paradoxical because we are inclined to think of a dichotomy between only two possible educational perspectives towards the will of a child. Either we allow the child to have what it wants (which is described as “allowing the child his or her freedom” or that “the child expresses his- or herself in an authentic, original way”) or we prohibit/correct the child (“to coerce,” “violate the child’s wishes”, “force the child into certain cultural forms”). Nevertheless, the distinction that I wish to emphasise here precedes such a dichotomy. It is the difference between taking the wishes of the child into consideration and ignoring them. Both reactions (to allow and to correct/prevent an act) are based on the fact that Lisa’s parents actually see *that Lisa has a will*. They perceive her as someone who *can* desire to do something, though it *in a second stage* appears to be incomprehensible what Lisa wants to do with the knife in her hand. Similarly, the educator in Kant’s first example shows that he or she understands that the child wishes to do something with the knife. It is a dangerous act, which the teacher prevents, not the child’s will. The opposite would be to ignore the child. In such a case, Lisa would say that she wants to hang a painting on the wall with the help of a knife and the parents would not react in any way at all. It would be as if Lisa did not exist.

This means, that when Lisa’s parents correct her language, their intention is not simply to provide her with the means to express herself in a way that is comprehensible to others, it is also done in order to allow her to form an awareness of the fact that she is *someone who has a will*, a will that others, for example, her parents can relate to their own will. This is an important insight, given Kant’s initial question. This scene depicts, the often described but no less difficult, philosophical insight that “The existential identity of a person and his or her self-esteem are not built in a monological, but in a dialogical way” (Bonnett and Cuyper 2003, p. 334). Mainly the existentialists and other philosophical and educational lines of thought (Mead 1934; Buber 2002; Bollnow 1960) have emphasised the essential role that the response of others has in the development of an individual’s self-understanding.

There is, for this reason, a tempting line of thought within discussions that attempt to protect the integrity of the child by referring to a picture of a genuine or an original centre of the child, a view that in turn gives rise to the notion that social and cultural contexts are restrictive or a distortion of the unique individual that the child “is” in the beginning. However, in such a case one is imagining the newborn as a being already aware that it has a real self-will, in a similar manner to that of, for example, an adult who can travel to a foreign country where he or she must learn a new language and new ways of communicating his or her own will (cf. a similar example by Wittgenstein 1999). Conversely, it is only with the help of the (verbal) responses of others in relation to the new human being that makes it possible for a human being to learn that he or she is someone with a possible free will (cf. Biesta 2006, p. 106ff). Kant can actually be understood in a similar way when he writes “[m]an can only become man by education. [...] It is noticeable that man is only educated by man—that is, by men who have themselves been educated” (Kant 1900, p. 6). It is, nevertheless, crucial, as previously stated, to be much more precise when discussing the way in which people are connected with others and how their interrelatedness can be understood, what role it plays, and how it should be understood in different situations and in relation to various questions.

When they are born children cannot choose: who will take care of them, what kind of life they will come to know, which language and which lines of thought they will learn in order to make the world and their surroundings intelligible, which social network they will grow up in, what the opportunities for freedom are in their society, or what more or less visible patterns of repression they will encounter. As Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (1990) draw our attention to, it is certainly one of the most significant experiences in a human being’s life to grow into a community and to learn its forms of life. Nevertheless, when we reflect on education, we need to observe that this does not yet imply that there is a need to seek philosophical justification for this. With regard to this Masschelein speaks of a fundamental “limit-experience” that is part of education, or more generally speaking, a part of human conditions. In these limit-experiences “our meaning-giving capacity (our autonomy) is revealed at the same moment that it encounters its limitation in ‘an-other’ meaning (heteronomy)”.

On the one hand, it is an experience of the limit implied in my belonging to a collective subject, which might deprive me of my personal responsibility, an experience therefore of an obligation to give my *singular* answer or response. On the other hand, it is an experience of the limit of meaning-giving, an experience of being called upon in an unanticipated manner and in a way that could not have flowed internally from our potentialities or intentionalities (and which in this sense was ‘impossible’). It is an experience of being ‘exposed’ to a meaning (an ‘other meaning’) over which one has no say, but to which one has to respond, a ‘meaning’ that therefore takes possession of the subject with no possible escape – a *manicipium* therefore, from which a ‘human’ person simply cannot be emancipated or freed (Masschelein 1998, p. 527).

What is important to notice is that human beings need to learn some way of living in order to develop an understanding of themselves, and in order to be able to live at all. It is first at a second stage, after one has become part of such a life, that questions become relevant about what is a good life, or what is a humane society. These are questions that are asked from *within this life*. Nevertheless, this does not imply that it does not matter how we communicate with or live with children and pupils. In our (educational) forms of life, we

are constantly confronted by situations where we have to answer questions concerning what a good life is and how one should live together with others (within the family, in a classroom, in a society).¹³

Summary

The tension between necessary educational influence and unacceptable restriction of the child's individual development and freedom has long been considered an educational paradox. Ever since Kant asked the question: "How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint?" in his lecture on education, philosophers of education have discussed this dilemma between freedom and coercion in many different ways. Unlike those who through the different discussions have suggested various solutions to the paradox, I have in this article pursued the need to rethink in a fundamental way our understanding of education and upbringing. Both the concept of freedom and the concept of restraint should be reconsidered, because both transpire to be more complex and intricately intertwined than Kant's question, and the educational debate after Kant, suggests. As Biesta points out, Kant's pedagogical concerns are "intimately connected with a political question, namely the question of what kind of subjectivity was needed in the emerging civil society of his time and place—Prussia under Frederic the Great. Kant's argument was that civil society needed subjects who could think for themselves and were capable of making their own judgements" (Biesta 2006, p. 101). To view the idea of *Bildung* from a historical and political perspective allows one to perceive *Bildung* as "an educational response to a political question" (ibid.), which in turn give rise to reconsider the question "what kind of problems [are we] faced with today. [...] What is it that summons our *educational* response? In addition, what is it that summons our educational response *today*?" (ibid., p. 102). I suggest that instead of searching for final answers or definite criteria for what is right and what is wrong in our (educational) life we should enter into dialogue concerning educational questions, in which each one of us is engaged and, therefore, can take issue with regard to the various questions of education by which different positions and forms of life will have a place in the shared life in our society.

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¹³ To avoid further misunderstandings: Of course you might misuse your power and physically and mentally abuse your child as a parent or a teacher, just as communities and ideological systems might exploit people for their own purposes. Even the fact that this is often the case is no real objection to the conceptual connection that I am trying to draw attention to, because my argument is not an empirical one. Cf. the discussion about ignorance and abuse of someone between P. Winch and Phillips in Hertzberg (2001).

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