

Alienation: The foundation of transformative education

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Abstract

Nothing reveals the differences between an internal (i.e., inherently pedagogical) reflection on educational processes and an external (i.e., derived from a philosophical, sociological, psychological, theological or other perspective) more clearly than the differing attitudes towards alienation. Looked at from outside a pedagogical context, alienation appears only negative, deserving nothing but contempt and rejection; examined from inside a pedagogical framework, it proves to be a *conditio sine qua non*, the process through which transformative education is possible. This article juxtaposes both perspectives in order to defend the conviction that within educational reflections, only an inherently pedagogical, i.e., positive, understanding of alienation is persuasive, whereas other approaches by definition either are outside of pedagogical reflections or belong to a kind of metaphysical thinking that nowadays seems rather outdated. This paper forms part of a Special Issue titled 'Beyond Virtue and Vice: Education for a Darker Age', in which the editors invited authors to engage in exercises of 'transvaluation'. Certain apparently settled educational concepts (from agency and fulfilment to alienation and ignorance) can be radically reinterpreted such that virtues can be seen as vices, and vices as virtues. The editors encouraged authors to employ polemics and some occasional exaggeration to revalue the educational values that are too readily accepted within contemporary educational discourses.

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INTRODUCTION

There might be no other concept that more clearly reveals the difference between an Anglophone approach to discussing education and a more European-continental educational approach than the concept of *alienation* (German: *Entfremdung*, French: *aliénation*). The fact that *alienation* seems to have only negative connotations for most contemporary Anglophone educationalists shows how Anglophone educational discourse understands itself. Within this tradition, 'education' is often not regarded as a discipline in its own right, but as a field of enquiry, which does not exist independently but as an assemblage of theorems and their related evaluations derived from different disciplines (e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology, history). In the absence of a distinctively pedagogical frame of thinking, *alienation* tends to be perceived as either a sociological or philosophical concept that describes a social pathology (i.e., the marginal status of social groups and their members); a psychological concept that often (but not always) refers to a mental pathology (i.e., an unhealthy conflict with oneself or with others); or a theological concept that refers to the Fall (i.e., a metaphysical flaw of humanity itself). Derived from these discourses, *alienation* can be regarded as nothing but negative by educationalists.

Moreover, contemporary *Philosophy of Education* (i.e., the discipline within the field of Education Studies that would predominantly engage with conceptual discussions) developed (arguably through, e.g., Scheffler, Peters, Hirst and others (Beck, 1991)) predominantly as *Analytic Philosophy of Education* whose 'literature was never really detached from the historical tradition of philosophical writing, though it may have drawn rather selectively from it' (Oancea & Bridges, 2011, p. 53). It can be argued that only relatively recently has this tradition broadened its view by engaging with continental traditions of philosophy.¹ Consequently, Analytic Philosophy of Education has tended to overlook the educational discussions of those who were generally not considered philosophers at all, namely, the authors gathered under categories like *German Idealism* and *Neo-Humanism* (in English, more often than not, without much distinction called *Romantics*). As such, a concept like *Bildung* escaped the attention of the educational Anglophone world for quite some time, and with that, it tended to miss the imaginative way in which the likes of Humboldt, Fichte and Hegel introduced a positive idea of *alienation* (i.e., *Entfremdung*) as part of the process of *Bildung* into educational discussions.² As this article will go on to argue, it might be more correct to say *re-introduced* for *alienation* has always been an important part of educational conceptualisations, a fundamental process—at least as long as such conceptualisations were actually interested in the pedagogical process and not just in the ethical discussions around it. As Brian Simon pointed out as long ago as 1978:

[T]he study of education has manifestly suffered from subordination to disparate modes of approach and methodologies deriving from fields quite other than education which have simply been transferred to the educational sphere, and which, once there, have tended to maintain their own distinctive languages and approaches, to pursue their own ends. (Simon, 1978, p. 4)

As stated above, pedagogy was appropriated by sociologists, theologians, psychologists and philosophers. In light of those accusations, *alienation* as a concept in pedagogy needs to be re-evaluated. As will be shown, some dimensions of a notion of *alienation* can, under certain conceptual conditions, be saved in genuinely psychological discussions. Many other aspects of a notion of *alienation*, however, have suffered the fate of all essentialisms: They dissolved into thin air, and with it, many of the all-too-easy accusations that are usually levelled against *alienation* in *educational* discussions.

To develop this argument, the first section of this paper will discuss the philosophical roots of the notion of *alienation* as it is usually used in educational discussions, followed by a presentation of what could count as the latest critique of

those theories, by Rahel Jaeggi, which also offers a reformulated theory of *alienation*. Questioning Jaeggi's concept, the next section will show how such an approach proves *alienation* to be part of a therapeutic—and therefore decidedly not pedagogical—discourse. This will prepare for the entering of the pedagogical realm. For this to be possible, a genuine *pedagogical* realm has to be constituted first, before an exploration of Humboldt and Hegel can then show how, within such a horizon, *alienation* becomes a positive aspect of education. That this is not without its ambiguities will be illustrated in the last step of the argument. Here, a discussion of Plato, Bollnow and Ludolph of Saxony will explore the opportunities, but also the risks, of an education that is thought to be facilitated by moments or even periods of *alienation*.

THE NEGATIVITY OF ALIENATION: A METAPHYSICAL DREAM

Alienation in Education

To begin, it might be worthwhile looking at the way *alienation* is treated in educational discussions. Examples of that are legion, but for now, two quotes should suffice:

Alienation in this untechnical but nonetheless useful sense is what concerns me—*alienation* as a condition in which one has lost or been denied, by virtue of the kind of society one inhabits or the education one has experienced, the self-understanding a flourishing life requires. ... Their *alienation* is represented in the sheer artificiality of stone statuary with its negation of all that is natural and given to us by virtue of our shared humanity. (Callan, 1994, pp. 38–49)

But while it is an important step towards a real humanization, democratization in itself is unable to solve one of the most fundamental problems in self-formation—the problem of *alienation*. The reproduction of *alienation* in the mode of life and in the mental attitudes of the individual is to a considerable extent promoted by socialization... In so far as pedagogy is primarily concerned with the child's socialization, rather than with bringing the whole wealth of world culture within the child's reach, the reproduction of *alienation* gains a foothold in the education system. (Lebedeva, 1993, p. 98f.)

It is not difficult to detect the sense of urgency and despair that befalls both authors here in view of what they perceive to be a lamentable state of *alienation* that haunts modern forms and processes of education. Whereas the purely theological reading may have somewhat fallen out of fashion, the sociological, metaphysical and psychological reading of *alienation*—based on Rousseau and Marx (as shown below)—is very much alive here. Understood as some sort of personal distance—disconnectedness of either the individual nature of a person, the nature of all humanity, the naturally just or right place within the social fabric of labour and institutions—*alienation* seems to be the one fundamental negativity against which the success (or failure) of all education has to be measured. Speaking in a foreign tongue, and not—as, for example, Herbart demanded—with intrinsically pedagogic concepts (Herbart, 1896, p. 83), educationalists cannot free themselves from the chains welded by such words—words whose weight will eventually and inevitably pull them down, silently (or not so silently) drowning in the depths of the ocean of history. Let us take a closer look at this drowning.

Critique of Alienation

No concept has been more powerful in defining the character of early Critical Theory than that of *alienation*. For the first members of this tradition the content of the concept was taken to be so self-evident

that it needed no definition or justification; it served as the more or less self-evident starting point of all social analysis and critique. ... Today this shared assumption strikes us as strange, for it seems as though these authors, above all Adorno, should have realized that the concept rested on premises that contradicted their own insight into the danger of overly hasty generalizations and hypostatizations. (Honneth, 2014, p. vii)

Honneth's characterisation seemingly leaves no doubt that *alienation* as a concept has lost its appeal—at least in its traditional form. What are those 'hasty generalizations and hypostatizations' that he is talking about?

For the concept of *alienation* ... presupposes, for Rousseau no less than for Marx and his heirs, a conception of the human essence: whatever is diagnosed as alienated must have become distanced from, and hence alien to, something that counts as the human being's true nature or essence. (Honneth, 2014, p. vii)

Central to such discussions is a distinction between the original or natural state of human beings in particular and humanity in general and its real social existence—the incongruence of both then labelled as a state of *alienation* that either needs to be avoided from the outset (Rousseau), or that needs to be overcome somehow to re-install the apparent original or appropriate state of self-identical being—in an act of true revolution, i.e., a turnaround (Marx).

To appreciate this criticism (without being able to recollect the whole history of this notion as laid out by Schmid, 1984), one has to look at both influential understandings of *alienation*. In his two discourses, Rousseau opens up the horizon of human history that has degenerated from a natural state to a corrupt social state (Rousseau, 1750, 1755). He is aware that the assumed degeneration of humanity also taints the very investigations he is about to undertake, but despite such shortcomings, Rousseau risks a speculation about the way in which humanity lost the right way. As is well known, he describes the process of degeneration as the ongoing process of socialisation, i.e., of the foundation and expansion of human society—in opposition to the more or less free communal life people would live without such socialisation. The main characteristic of the degenerate social life is what Rousseau refers to as a loss of oneself or estrangement from oneself, i.e., the fundamental structure of *alienation* (Buck, 1981). The source of such *alienation* is to be found in the comparative existence that humans live in a social life. Far from being self-sufficient, people depend on the opinion of others for their own identity, their own sense of self—the fundamental and self-sufficient *amour de soi* is replaced with *amour-propre*. This diagnosis of the modern social self introduces the very idea of the ideal self as coherent self-identity, as self-sufficiency—an ideality the modern self has lost in the moment it began to socialise, to organise itself as society in which self-identity is dependent on the other. This signifies a rupture at the heart of the self that ceases to live an *authentic* life but is marred by *inauthenticity*. Herein lies the origin of the classic understanding of *alienation* as self-estrangement.

Rousseau's answer to the problem lies in two visions: the vision of the *Contract Social* (Rousseau, 1762a) as a form of society in which such self-estrangement does not occur, and the vision of *Émile* (Rousseau, 1762b) in which we are presented with a development of self that—through the right kind of education—is able to avoid an incoherent self-identity in the first place and that delivers the kind of self-identical people who could enter the contract social. It is important to emphasise that Rousseau does not offer a solution to save contemporary society through educational changes—he is quite pessimistic with regard to such an enterprise. What he offers is not a remedy for a degenerate society, but a vision of a society that has avoided degeneration in the first place. In actual fact, he is quite pessimistic about the potential to realise such an ideal society through reshaping what exists now. Indeed, his rejection of an idea of Original Sin (Rousseau, 2013) and his modern conception of human history as quasi open-ended and undetermined also include a denial of an eschatology, i.e., a human history that consists in moving forward to regain what once was lost. Here, education is not presented as an instrument to regain paradise, but as an instrument that seeks to avoid losing it in the first place. Once lost, it cannot be reinstated through education. It was left to those who followed in his footsteps to establish such concepts of education. Unlike Rousseau, it was especially the Romantics who saw

in Aesthetic Education a remedy to cure the illnesses of modern society and to restore the self-identical self (Buck, 1984). From Schiller to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Shelley, we see Aesthetic Education to be the instrument of an eschatology that envisions a 'circuitous journey' of human development that brings us back to our paradisiac beginnings (Abrams, 1971). Interestingly, we also see Marx in this Romantic eschatological tradition.

Unlike Rousseau, Marx clearly sees a circular development of human history in which humanity regains its original state of being. Starting with a society of harmonious communal life, i.e., primitive communism, this harmony gets lost in history through changing modes of production that yield a certain form of *alienation*, but eventually it is restored through a revolution in which the original communism is re-established, albeit in a higher form. Capitalism is self-alienating inasmuch as it denies the individual access to the fruits of their labour that, as exteriorisations of oneself, not only could be a way to understand oneself, i.e., to guarantee access to oneself, but would also mean to refashion external nature into something of oneself, thereby integrating self and world into a whole; the privatisation of property and means of production alienates people from themselves and the world in general, and it will be the inevitable, revolutionary and eschatological return to communism (on a higher plane) that will sublimate this form of self-*alienation*:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being—a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (Marx, 1977, p. 96f.)

The man estranged from himself is also the thinker estranged from his essence—that is, from the natural and human essence. His thoughts are therefore fixed mental forms dwelling outside nature and man. (Marx, 1977, p. 154)

As can be seen in both Rousseau's and Marx's concepts of *alienation*, the estrangement consists of a distance from something that is taken to be more original, more essential, more natural. Indeed, such dreams of an essential nature work on three levels: on the level of humanity as a whole, on the level of society or groups in societies and on the level of the individual—or, in other words, with regard to the Universal Generic Subject, to the Social Generic Subject and to the Individual Subject. Following theological, or gnostic, structures in which the Fall of humankind as a whole is re-instantiated *in* and has to be reversed *through* each individual person, the revolutionary process has to revolutionise the individual to revolutionise the groups and the whole species. However, unlike in theological considerations where the event of revolution is largely an act of grace that lies beyond the power of humanity and its members, seemingly secular theorems (if such a hasty distinction might be allowed here) see in such a distinction of states the opening for a distinctly human history shaped by human decisions. Here, the revolution is the result of genuine human decisiveness that embarks on the journey to overcome the Fall in the guise of modern society. That is, of course, problematic on many accounts (Bauer, 2007).

First of all, one might doubt that there is indeed an essential nature of humanity as a whole—at least not an essence that would also determine a specific history of humankind. This is, of course, not a modern insight. Already the Enlightenment (e.g., Rousseau) denied a prescribed future for humanity. Embracing the idea of an open progress that was still formulated within a framework of apparent values that did allow for criteria to actually speak of *progress* (and not just of *change*), one was hesitant to formulate a definite goal for this kind of open development. Indeed, human history now became not a path towards the realisation of a specific goal but a continuous and unending expression of the

potentiality of an otherwise unknown human nature (Humboldt, 2000). Of course, even this apparently open view of human development cannot untie itself completely from its theological roots. The eschatological spectre keeps haunting even the strongest secularism, and, e.g., Herder, can at once call upon the openness of human history, and on the godlikeness in which humans were created and which they, therefore, should regain. Whether or not speculations of a revolution were indeed meant to stage a 'return' to a long-lost past, or the Golden Age, is of no relevance here (and discussions around Rousseau's understanding of the 'natural state' are legion). Despite the fact that modern philosophical, biological, social, etc., anthropology has maybe been successful in offering a variety of discourses on the *conditio humana*—only to be challenged, of course, by Posthumanist accounts of life—nothing is left of an essentialist concept of humanity that would somehow prescribe what we should do and in which direction we might develop (or change). Once nature and culture have been differentiated—the latter being the realm of human decisiveness—then nature cannot serve anymore as an undoubtable criterion for the evaluation of cultural decisions (Kenklies, 2015); once we believe in decidability, we have to accept arbitrariness and historicity. We might decide to act in certain ways, and humanity might develop in certain ways—but not because there is something in our 'nature' that forces us to walk this way.

In relation to the Social Generic Subject, it was Habermas who pointed out that classic Marxist thought seems to forget occasionally that characteristics like class-consciousness, class-interest and class-activity are not genuine natural entities but fictitious assumptions:

But it [i.e. Marx's argument] was not sufficient for an extrapolation from the class struggle situation of that day to the structure of history as a whole. In this the rationale cannot be found for the acceptance of the theological framework, within which alone the history of the world presents itself as history—a story—with a beginning and an end, in such a way that Marx can summarily comprehend it as a history of class struggle. In short, Marx's argument does not itself validate the anticipatory conception which enters into the way the philosophy of history poses its question as such, and which universalizes the contemporary phenomena of crisis into the totality of a world-historical crisis structure. (Habermas, 1973, p. 249)

He concludes:

The philosophy of history creates the fiction of historical subjects as the possible subject of history, as though objective tendencies of development, which actually are equivocal, were comprehended with will and consciousness by those who act politically and were decided by them for their own benefit. From the lofty observation post of this fiction the situation is revealed in its ambivalences, which are susceptible to practical intervention, so that an enlightened mankind can elevate itself then to become what up to that point it was only fictitiously. (Habermas, 1973, p. 252)

Social groups (or classes, if one still wishes to, almost anachronistically, use this concept in its classic form for contemporary societies (Friedman et al., 2021; Savage, 2015)) are not predetermined in any way to strive towards a specific goal; the teleology of social groups is as temporary as the teleology of humankind—governed by a fleeting interpretation of ourselves. It will not be an expression of an essence or nature of such groups or classes. Humankind might not be where it wants to be (if one were pretentious enough to make such universalising claims), and some social groups might describe their state of being as rather undesired—but neither is alienated—they simply do not like the way they exist in a given moment of time, and there is no convincing way to 'metaphysicise' such an opinion or feeling.

It is undoubtedly not surprising now to see the traditional idea of *alienation* also being criticised in relation to individual beings. Rousseau's idea that in contemporary society the individual is somehow distanced from its own self and that the actual self would consist of some sort of self-identical self becomes as questionable as Marx's assertion that the capitalist self is alienated from its own self, i.e., the fruits of its own labour, in comparison to the true communist self that manages to relate to the world in harmony with its own natural essence. One of the latest attempts to save the

notion of '*alienation*' for theoretical debate does indeed include a criticism of such ideas of a juxtaposition of an essential selfhood (which has, of course, persevered in philosophical debates) with an alienated self: Rahel Jaeggi (2014) develops her rejection in a discussion of Marx and Heidegger.

Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Alienation

Before she begins her critique, Jaeggi explores the different ways in which the term '*alienation*' is used nowadays. She concludes, that

as varied as the aforementioned phenomena might be, they provide an initial sketch of the concept of *alienation*. An alienated relation is a deficient relation one has to oneself, to the world, and to others. Indifference, instrumentalization, reification, absurdity, artificiality, isolation, meaninglessness, impotence—all these ways of characterizing the relations in question are forms of this deficiency. A distinctive feature of the concept of *alienation* is that it refers not only to powerlessness and a lack of freedom but also to a characteristic impoverishment of the relation to self and world. ... Diagnoses of *alienation* in their modern form always concern (for example) freedom and self-determination and the failure to realize them. Understood in this way, *alienation* is not simply a problem of modernity but also a modern problem. (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 5f.)

Her criticism now is directed at two aspects inherent in the critical notion of *alienation*.

First, Jaeggi criticises the eschatological model of history so often found in *alienation* discourses. Based on a liberal theory of ethics, it appears to be inconceivable that there would be

objective criteria that lie beyond the 'sovereignty' of individuals to interpret for themselves what the good life consists in. ... It would seem, then, that the concept of *alienation* belongs to a perfectionist ethical theory that presupposes, broadly speaking, that it is possible to determine what is objectively good for humans by identifying a set of properties or a set of functions inherent in human nature—a 'purpose'—that ought to be realized. (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 28f.)

According to Jaeggi, such criteria are not at our disposal, and the little we know about the similarity of humans in relation to their biological needs does not outweigh the abundant variety of forms of life (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 30).

And second, based on post-structuralist insights, she denies that essentialist ideas of self-identity are indeed self-identical, coherent and authentic. In reference to Althusser, Foucault and Butler, Jaeggi would deny that *alienation* can be described as a phenomenon in relation to an essential subject:

If the subject, as this view would have it, is both *subjected* to the rules of power and at the same time *constituted* by them (as a desiring and acting subject), then the distinction that *alienation* critique requires between self and what is alien, between an unrepressed (or undistorted) subject and a repressive (or distorting) power, is no longer tenable. The normative standard of the autonomous subject, which is capable of being transparent to itself as the author of its actions, is then called into question. *Alienation* critique appears to have lost its standard or, expressed differently, *alienation* becomes constitutive and unavoidable. (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 31; emphasis in original)

Interestingly, Jaeggi does not want to completely relinquish a concept of *alienation* to describe certain negative phenomena of modern societies. It will be instructive for the following pedagogical discussions to see how she constructs a notion of *alienation* that seemingly manages to avoid the essentialism she criticises in all other concepts of *alienation*.

The starting point of this reconstruction is Ernst Tugendhat's *formal* conception of *psychological health*, which does not rely on a specific content of desires or wishes to be fulfilled, but on the guarantee of a certain process of willing that has to respond to the question 'whether we have ourselves at our command in what we will' (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 34). From here, Jaeggi introduces a formal criterion for *alienation* or its absence:

This criterion is, in the first place, *formal*: it concerns the *How*, not the *What*, of willing. That is, I need not will anything in particular; rather, I must be able to will what I will in a free or self-determined manner. It is not necessary, then, to identify a 'true object of willing,' but only a certain way of relating, in one's willing, to oneself and to what one wills. ... Second, this criterion is *immanent*: the criterion is the functional capacity of willing itself, a claim posited by the act of willing itself. ... [I]nstances of *alienation* can be understood as obstructions of volition and thereby—formulated more generally—as obstructions in the relations individuals have to themselves and the world. (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 34; emphasis in original)

With this account, we now seem to have a concept of *alienation* that could be used in educational contexts as a critical notion. However, as it seems, Jaeggi took only parts of a post-structuralist critique seriously. The other, more psychoanalytically influenced insights seem to have left no trace. Although the distance from essentialist musings about the true nature of humans and humanity is refreshing, it remains somewhat surprising to see the renewed proclamation of the possibility of self-knowledge. With Tugendhat, Jaeggi seems to propose that we can know that it is indeed *us* who will, that we are *free*, and not constrained, in *our* willing. Both criteria, freedom of our willing and knowledge of the subjectivity of our willing, are more than problematic. Neither are probably freedom or unfreedom in this sense empirical facts that can be known (and I might be forgiven for not presenting here the extensive discussion around notions of freedom), nor can we be certain why we actually desire what we desire, or why our willing is the way it is. As Judith Butler has pointed out in her Adorno Lectures (Butler, 2003), each subject finds itself as subject entangled in relations that precede the subject itself, and each attempt of the subject to establish itself in a narration of self is ultimately blind to the very origin of this story. We cannot ultimately tell who we are and why we are as we are, and why we do as we do; we ultimately cannot account for ourselves. In relation to Jaeggi's concept of *alienation*, this means that we cannot ultimately know who is willing, and why we are willing as we do. In that sense, *alienation* cannot be a criterion for describing, let alone criticising certain conditions of human life. We might always or never or just occasionally be alienated—however, our ultimate self-ignorance leaves us with little assurance about matters of fact.

Leaving out more obvious sociological or philosophical discussions around concepts of self that deliberately embrace self-*alienation* or self-estrangement as a necessary or fundamental structure of (modern) identity (Lacan, Ritter, Marquard, Plessner and Gehlen), we finally make the step into the pedagogical realm. However, before we discuss pedagogy, one possible discourse needs to be mentioned in which a concept of *alienation* might play a role: psychology.

Indeed, with Tugendhat, we have already entered this discussion, and it was indeed interesting to see that Jaeggi relied on more psychological insights to develop a concept of *alienation*. The list she offered as possible usages included phenomena that would usually be dealt with in psychological terms: detachment, depersonalisation and meaninglessness—all those are, of course, phenomena that need to be taken seriously (if maybe not under the category of *alienation*). They do represent states of being of an individual that are often deemed undesirable as they are experienced as negative. As such, they can, and probably even should, become matters of interest for psychological discussions and treatments. However, this is exactly the point: If they are seen as pathological, then they demand a therapy—and not education. In the light of a sharp enough distinction between therapy and education (see below), *pathological* states of being are by definition to be addressed through therapy, whereas education would address those states of being that are seen as not pathological but more or less 'normally' *deficient* or *malleable* or *improvable* states of being which may be regarded as 'normal' stages within human development (i.e., the opposite of *pathological*—whatever that may mean in any given era or society) and for which to overcome, people envision support and guidance, i.e., education (whereas therapy usually is perceived within an eschatological framework, i.e., a model of lost and hopefully regained paradise). Of course, such a distinction needs a clear awareness of a conceptual difference between

therapy and education. It is, however, of no small significance that one can find discussions of such treatment of pathologies especially in psychoanalytically inclined theories and practices.

As we have seen, from a sociological or philosophical point of view, one has to embrace certain forms of more or less outdated essentialist positions to be able to use *alienation* as a critical category in general, and in educational discourses in particular. From a psychological point of view, phenomena often referred to under a category of *alienation* do ultimately ask for therapy, not education. What remains to be discussed is the possibility of using *alienation* as a concept in education. However, for this to be possible, one has to admit that there is a genuine educational perspective—a perspective that frames its view of the world in educational, not in sociological, philosophical or psychological terms. And indeed, under such a perspective—which is governed by a developed definition of education (Kenklies, 2020) (whose discussion represents the self-reflexivity of Education Studies as an independent academic discipline)—*alienation* not only does become an integral part of education but also proves to be part of many acknowledged educational theories and practices. To introduce such a perspective, we have to step back again to observe how *alienation* was indeed discussed educationally in the 18th and 19th centuries. We have to step back to see Humboldt and Hegel.

THE POSITIVITY OF ALIENATION: EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

From a Pedagogical Point of View

In previous debates, *alienation* was discussed in philosophical, sociological and psychological terms. In such perspectives, *alienation* described a deficient state of being that would need to be overcome. Whether or not this overcoming was then seen as an inevitable result of human history, or as something that needed additional support, e.g., education or therapy, to be realised, depended on the specific Philosophy of History (of humankind or an individual person) one would like to embrace. Most certainly, this is the perspective in which educational discussions frame *alienation*, as can be seen in the exemplary quotes shown above: the overcoming of *alienation* as a goal of educational endeavours.

This relates closely to philosophy of education debates that, in their self-understanding as philosophy ‘applied’ to education, would perceive especially Ethics as the subsection of philosophy that contributes especially to discussions around educational goals or objectives and ethical aspects of educational methods (others might be epistemology, which contributes, e.g., to a theory of learning, and aesthetics, which contributes, e.g., to discussions around experience in education). Leaving such a predominantly philosophical perspective, a distinctively educational perspective would view educational processes as genuine processes that can be described and distinguished from other processes (with structural, not solely ethical criteria) and which through this distinction regulates what would be included and excluded from a disciplinary discourse. Proceeding from a definition of education like ‘[e]ducation therefore is the deliberate attempt to engage with the relations someone has in order to change and improve those relations; education is about initiating, guiding, supporting, directing of learning and (trans)formation’ (Kenklies, 2020, p. 618; emphasis in original), one would need to ask: where in the processes defined here would a phenomenon like *alienation* play a role, if it cannot and should not be used to generate a justification for (historically arbitrary) goals and objectives of education? Or, in other words, if a concept of *alienation* as described in sociological, philosophical or psychological terms has nothing to add to educational discussions, can a genuinely educational discussion open a space for *alienation* in education? And, if so, does *alienation* keep its negative aura, or may it be even possible to describe it as a positive, perhaps even a necessary part of educational processes?

Such a perspective does not preclude listening to ‘philosophers’ or ‘sociologists’ or ‘psychologists’. On the contrary, it can invite all of them—and, of course, all other theorists—to contribute to a genuine theory of education that now offers a conceptual framework in which every theorem may find a place. Keeping this in mind, revisiting Humboldt and Hegel will prove to be fruitful.

Rehabilitation of Alienation in Pedagogy

Looking at Humboldt's theory of *Bildung* (Humboldt, 2000), one realises very fast that he describes *Bildung* as a process in which a person improves his/her relation to the world as a whole and to everything and everyone in it (including oneself):

At the convergence point of all particular kinds of activity is man, who, in the absence of a purpose with a particular direction, wishes only to strengthen and heighten the powers of his nature and secure value and permanence for his being. However, because sheer power needs an object on which it may be exercised and pure form or idea needs a material in which, expressing itself, it can last, so too does man need a world outside himself. From this springs his endeavor to expand the sphere of his knowledge and his activity. (Humboldt, 2000, p. 58)

In other words, Humboldt's process of *Bildung* is indeed a process of education as defined above (Kenklies, 2018). What is interesting now is a detail in Humboldt's description of the process that remains often ignored. In his attempt of *Bildung*, a person is driven to

reach beyond himself to the external objects, and here it is crucial that he should not lose himself in this *alienation*, but rather reflect back into his inner being the clarifying light and the comforting warmth of everything that he undertakes outside himself. To this end, however, he must bring the mass of objects closer to himself, impress his mind upon this matter, and create more of a resemblance between the two. (Humboldt, 2000, p. 59)

As we can see here, *alienation* is an integral part of the educational process: one has to alienate oneself from oneself in order to reach out to the world (i.e., taking the risk of losing oneself in the process), to then come back transformed (this 'return' is specific to Humboldt; Hegel's theory of *Bildung* will not make use of such a trope); the self has to be risked for it to grow and transform. Without the risk that is ingrained in *alienation*, transformation cannot occur.

In a much more complex way, we see the same principle at work in Hegel's concept of *Bildung* as revealed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977). Throughout the book, it becomes clear that *alienation*—as self-estrangement and as externalisation—is the driving force upon which the development of consciousness towards self-understanding rests. 'Pain ..., self-estrangement, homelessness in the world, the anguished awareness of one's nothingness, are necessary moments to be lived through by the individual consciousness, as well as the universal Geist, that it may ascend to higher levels' (Greene, 1966, p. 367f.). The individual consciousness has to experience *alienation* to be encouraged to better understand what it is to rise from being-in-itself to being-for-itself and ultimately to being-in-and-for-itself. '[C]onsciousness must externalise itself, have itself as an object, so that it knows what it is, in this way [it] exhausts all its potentialities, becomes entirely its object, wholly discloses itself and plumbs and reveals its whole depth' (Hegel, 2003, p. 80f.). Of course, *alienation* does not guarantee this kind of development. Once externalised, consciousness can fail to realise that the object is indeed an expression of its subjectivity—thereby failing to understand that it is at once subjective and objective, i.e., in-and-for-itself. However, consciousness' *alienation* does represent a *conditio sine qua non* for its development, its *Bildung*. And it was the early Dewey who—still very much under the influence of Hegel—detected the relevance of those conceptualisations for the types of education that are actually worth talking about; he concurred that personal experiences of *alienation* are of educational importance, especially for young people, and that institutionalised education should even offer the opportunity for such experiences:

One thing, then, that a University education should do for a man is to rid him of his provincialisms. ... [T]he voyage one takes in entering college life is a voyage to a far port, and through many countries

foreign in space, in time, in manner of speech and thought. If such travelling of the spirit does not remove the narrow and small cast of one's opinion and methods it is failing of its aim. The Germans call the period of youthful culture a period of 'self-*alienation*', because in it the mind gives up its immediate interests and goes on this far journey. ... But all this ought a man to expect from his college course. Its name is Freedom. (Dewey, 1890, p. 27)

And, looking at this tradition, it might not come as a surprise to see the same structure in Gadamer's account of the hermeneutic experience as the foundation of self-transformation: 'To be in a conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another' (Gadamer, 1985, p. 110).

Coming to see *alienation* as an integral part of education—thereby rejecting the aura of negativity, which is a mere relic of considerations external to an educational perspective—one cannot fail to recognise the same structure in a variety of theories and practices of self-(trans)formation. *Alienation*, as self-estrangement, self-objectivation and self-externalisation, is a fundamental part of educational transformation. A brief exploration of three examples of concrete theories and practices will draw attention to this intimate connection of *alienation* and education while shedding a closer light on this relationship.

Transformative Alienations

Plato's Perigoge

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows. (Plato, *Republic*, 515c)

Those words from Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* (Plato, 1888) may well signify the single most important moment in traditional European concepts of education: it is the moment in which the prisoner is forced to painfully acknowledge that the truth as known so far about him/herself and the world is a mere illusion, and that a radical and comprehensive change of perspective is necessary to embark on the journey to discover the real truth. This later is called *perigoge*—the complete turnaround of the soul and a reorientation of desire towards the eternal:

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good. (Plato, *Republic*, 518c)

What is distinguished in this way are two forms of personal change: (1) a change that follows a logic of addition and (2) a change that follows a logic of replacement. Whereas the first change represents a quantitative increase, e.g., in knowledge, opinion or ability, it is the second change that Plato is referring to here: a change that is not a quantitative addition, but a qualitative substitution. *Perigoge* then is less a condition of mere additive learning, but the condition for a complete transformation of a person. In this respect, the pain, the detachment, the negation of everything that accompanies *perigoge*, represents nothing less than an event of *alienation*, in which the self is estranged from everything and everyone held dear to this point; it is in this moment that the desire that moves us reverses its direction by

finding pleasure in the eternal rather than the fleeting world. It is no simple act, it certainly is not painless or easy. It is accompanied by anger, loss, disorientation and detachment.

In this way, *alienation* is the *conditio sine qua non* of a personal transformation, and with Plato, we are reminded that true transformation indeed cannot happen before one is prepared to abandon cherished truths, before one is not prepared to risk everything—especially oneself—to perhaps be reborn and renewed. And to emphasise again, the concept of *alienation* is relevant here not as a metaphysical foundation based on which one could differentiate between two states of being—the metaphysical way of opening up a horizon within which (educational) teleology and progress—i.e., the formulation of an educational goal—become conceivable (as it is arguably the case in relation to the Platonic theory of ideas which were somehow present in the eternal soul only to get lost in the moment of birth—an event that now enables a formulation of the educational process as a process of reclaiming paradise). The concept of *alienation* is relevant here as the foundation for conceiving personal transformation in general (independent from the actual educational goals set in this particular context). The concept of *alienation* is not part of a discussion of educational goals, but part of a conceptualisation of the educational process as such. However, it is the negativity and the danger related to this process that deserves further consideration. Looking at Bollnow's discussions of educational crises may help to sharpen the view here.

O.F. Bollnow's Crisis

In his discussion of 'discontinuous forms of education' (Bollnow, 1959, translations my own), Bollnow discusses the formative effects of existential crises. His analysis identifies three aspects of existential crises: (1) a crisis is an interruption of the continuity by which everyday life is characterised, and as such they enjoy a heightened visibility; (2) the crisis connects two distinctly different periods of life, whereby the order and logic of the preceding period break down and are almost completely terminated, and it is this destruction that makes the experience of a crisis as painful as it makes the overcoming of it enjoyable; and (3) that the crisis itself appears to be not simply an interruption of a continuum, but an invasion of the totally alien, which is not bound by the temporal and modal limits of what it destroyed and what it allows to arise, and which rules ruthlessly before it disappears again and gives way to something new, and as such, it is during the crisis that all that was valid and all that will be valid again is of no relevance and has no meaning (Bollnow, 1959, p. 30f.). Those moments of crisis are to be found in different spheres of life: they might take on the form of an illness that leaves a person changed, or an intellectual crisis in which meaning and truth are challenged to an extent that a complete reorientation is needed to overcome such a phase of disorientation and insecurity.

There can be no doubt that in looking at Bollnow's concept of crisis, we are looking at an experience of *alienation*, in which the world and the self fall into chaos—a chaos out of which something new arises. The difference, according to Bollnow, between a more material crisis, like illness, and a more spiritual or mental crisis lies in the extent to which the person is capable of working towards a resolution of the crisis. Whereas the transformation in the first kind of crisis is the effect of the endurance with which someone has mastered the period of abandonment, in the latter, it is the personal commitment and determination that induce the change and that therefore is the foundation of transformation (Bollnow, 1959, p. 33f.). Despite such differences, Bollnow concludes that

in general, every new life begins with a crisis. And it seems as if the order of such a new life never becomes possible through one's own free decision, but always only by transitioning through a crisis, i.e., always only then when the former life has become indefensible or unsustainable and a person in this way is forced into a decision, against their own will. (Bollnow, 1959, p. 34f.)

Important now is Bollnow's suggestion of how one should treat crises in education. 'Every crisis as event is characterised by a fundamental undecidability of an Either-Or' (Bollnow, 1959, p. 37). In other words, a crisis might be mastered, and it might give way to something better—or it might not. It might give way to repetition of the old, or, even

worse, might inflict complete destruction. Given the insecure outcome, Bollnow denies the right of educators to induce this decidedly dangerous and painful experience (and we have to remember: it is only an intentional attempt to change someone that is considered to be education here). As a positive outcome is not guaranteed, nobody has the right to push someone else over the edge in that way (as can be seen, ethical considerations can find a place in a structure that was defined as educational before). 'A responsible educator should never be allowed to assume the role of fate' (Bollnow, 1959, p. 38). In other words, for Bollnow, nobody, no educator, no philosopher and no priest is allowed to induce *alienation* in the name of a greater good. Especially philosophers tend to feel they have the unequivocal right to thrust people into the abyss of uncertainty, and here, as in all other places, is the road to hell paved with many good intentions. However, from an educational point of view, the uncertainty around educational endeavours demands extreme caution and humility—and, keeping Bollnow's warning in mind, a very good justification for even trying to use *alienation* as a method to 'help' other people to transform (and so-called Pedagogies of Discomfort do exactly that: they find, or at least claim to have found, justifications for using crisis-inducing *alienation* as educational method while preserving an air of hesitation).

Given these pedagogical hesitations, the next example points towards a way in which *alienation* as a method and an important part of an educational transformation might be better justified: as part of an educational process that is led by oneself, i.e., as part of a process of self-education.

Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*

Looking with Bollnow at the ethical question around causing *alienation* within educational endeavours to exploit the fluidity accompanying it—a risk that needs a specific sort of justification in the light of its possible, maybe even probable, failure—it is worth investigating how *alienation* has indeed been used in practice with an intention to transform. With Plato, a use of *alienation* as an instrument to induce intellectual change, questionable or not, came in sight; in the following, a model of self-induced self-*alienation* through divination will be presented that goes beyond a mere intellectual puzzlement and confusion but embraces a momentary, but more or less complete silencing of self to achieve transformation.

Vita Christi (Life of Christ) (Ludolph of Saxony, 2018)—an extensive description of the life of Jesus Christ—, also known as the *Speculum Vitae Christi (Mirror of the Life of Christ)*, completed in 1374, is the most important book of Ludolph of Saxony (c. 1295–1378). Having some predecessors, Ludolph's volume became hugely influential for the development of the Christian devotional-meditative practices not only of the so-called *Devotio Moderna* but also of Ignatius of Loyola (McGrath, 1999). Ludolph describes the purpose of this book as follows:

Through frequent and assiduous meditation on his [Christ's] life, the soul learns to know him, to love him, and to have confidence in him; in this way we can resolutely resist foolish and passing things, scorning them and treating them with contempt. (Ludolph of Saxony, 2018, p. 51)

The *Imitatio Christi* based on the *Meditatio Christi* is then the instrument for salvation. However, it is of relevance how Ludolph describes the actual act of meditation:

As you read the narrative, imagine you are seeing each event with your own eyes and hearing it with your own ears. ... Although these accounts describe events that occurred in the past, you must meditate upon them as if they were taking place now... Read what once happened as if it were happening here and now. Put past deeds before your eyes as if they were present; you will experience them more deeply and more happily. (Ludolph of Saxony, 2018, p. 56)

What Ludolph describes here is an act of divination, of wilful self-*alienation*: 'By virtue of their loving meditation on the life and sufferings of Christ, their souls do not seem to be in their own bodies but in Christ' (Ludolph of Saxony, 2018, p. 52). In consciously reliving the life of Christ, the meditating person leaves behind their self to live the life of Jesus Christ.

As one of the various models of contemporary devotional practice (Palmer, 2020), Ludolph's account of devotion is much more than an intellectual meditation on the life of Christ: Ludolph prays that 'the devotee should be empowered to visualize and experience continually all those things that Christ suffered, not just in order to be a participator in Christ's suffering and sorrow, but also in his tranquillity and consolation, which implies rest in peace in the after-life' (Palmer, 2020, p. 113). In the momentous reliving of the life of Christ, the meditating individual is asked to leave themselves, their own concerns, feelings and desires behind to actually feel 'as' Jesus Christ—a temporary *alienation* that is thought to result in a lasting reshaping of a person's character according to the model of the saviour, a temporary *alienation* that induces a personal transformation.

In this emphasis of a predominantly affective divination, Ludolph represents a shift in meditative practices: 200 years earlier, Richard of St Victor, following St. Augustine (Rotenstreich, 1963), characterised the whole process as a much more intellectual adventure inasmuch as it is the meditation that results in *excessus* or *alienatio mentis*: 'The *alienation* of the mind happens when the mind loses the remembrance of things present and, transformed by divine action, acquires a state of the soul, that is alien and inaccessible to human effort' (cited after: Baier, 2009, p. 329). One might be justified in seeing here a difference that has already been present with Aristotle and Plato. Whereas Richard of St Victor seems to follow Plato's *periagoge* in emphasising a more intellectual *alienation*, Ludolph seems to be more on the side of Aristotle who envisions the audience of a tragedy to identify with the hero in an act of imaginative divination in order to feel the same pity and sorrow that befalls the tragic hero (Poetics 1452b; see also Jauss, 1974)—of course with the difference that Aristotle would hope for this to have a cathartic effect, whereas for Ludolph, pity is not something to be overcome but to be embraced as a cardinal Christian virtue. Continuous and repeated experiences of self-*alienation* in such meditative acts then are the path to bring forth a continuous life as *Imitatio Christi*; self-*alienation* becomes the method of the attempted transformation. And inasmuch as those alienating and therefore transformative experiences are deliberately induced, they can be called self-education.

Again, just as in Plato, we are looking at two ways in which *alienation* plays a role in this context. And just as with regard to Plato, we might be well advised to question the metaphysical notion (which helps to formulate the goal of those educational processes: godlikeness as a goal to regain the prelapsarian state of being) while accepting the educational notion of *alienation* as part of the didactic setting, as a condition of transformation. *Alienation* is not the concept that (philosophically or theologically) justifies an educational goal, but a concept that (educationally) describes the condition of transformation. It may not be too difficult to see the path that leads from here to general discussions of the role that the divinatory imagination (aroused by works of art, e.g., literature or movies) plays in the transformation of persons: identifying with a literary hero, getting lost in invented worlds and othering oneself in role-plays—all of this has long been accepted as fundamentally transformative, and there might not be a more joyous way of observing those effects than reading Michael Ende's *Neverending Story* (1979) whose different levels at once present transformational processes through alienating intellectual and emotional identification of the internal reading hero, and make those experiential for the external reader her/himself at the same time.

As can be seen, the three authors discussed here accept moments or periods of *alienation* as necessary, albeit not sufficient, conditions for personal transformation. Two of them (Plato and Ludolph of Saxony) also use a theological or philosophical idea of *alienation* to formulate and justify a goal for this transformation—from a somehow deficient state of being in *alienation* to a (metaphysically determined) 'naturally unalienated' state of being. In this kind of argument, both are related to Rousseau and Marx, as shown above, and both may therefore be criticised in the same way. However, all three of them also recognise *alienation* as part of the very process of personal transformation. Here, *alienation* is the logic that allows for the conceptualisation of the change itself; here, *alienation* is the moment in which an old self is questioned, destabilised and abandoned (with all the risks that are involved in such a step) to allow for a new self to

emerge. As part of the fundamental structure of personal transformation, *alienation* becomes an indispensable part of transformative education.

ALIENATION AS THE FUNDAMENTAL NOTION OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION: A CALL FOR DANGER

Many other examples could be given for ways in which people have used the concept of *alienation* to describe processes of educational transformation. Notions like *disruption*, *interruption* or *the negative in education* are as much notions of self-*alienation* as are concepts like *displacement*, *desubjectivation* or *un-selfing*. They all refer to *alienation* as a necessary condition of educational transformation—as a condition of a true and thorough personal renewal, as a condition of an individual renaissance. As such, *alienation* is an indispensable concept to describe transformative processes in educational discourses; thus, *alienation* constitutes the fundamental core of transformation. It is only within metaphysical, philosophical, sociological or psychological discourses that *alienation* takes on a negative meaning. From the perspective of a reflexive educator, *alienation* is not a vice, but a risky virtue for which to cautiously hope we cannot cease when aspiring for true transformations. *Alienation* remains the greatest hope for educators, and the greatest challenge. Much can be won, and all can be lost, but without the journey into the unknown that takes us away from ourselves, our world, our friends and our homes, there cannot be transformation (Kenklies, 2020). A dangerous undertaking, but nothing in true education is without danger, without risk. Safe education is either boring, —or indoctrination in the name of an eternally ungrounded good.

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ENDNOTES

¹The claim that Analytic Philosophy of Education developed separately from Continental philosophy admittedly relies on the questionable Analytic/Continental division within philosophy more generally. It should be noted that some Anglophone philosophers of education have been deeply influenced by this Continental approach, not least Dewey.

²This article cannot discuss *Bildung* in any detail, though interested readers may find the following of interest: Horlacher (2017).

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