

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02521-9 - Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart, and Education as Transformation

Andrea R. English

Excerpt

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PART ONE

EDUCATION, DISCONTINUITY,  
AND TRANSFORMATION

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## Chapter 1

### The Moral Dimension of Education

Johann Friedrich Herbart, one of the founders of modern educational theory, is, for the most part, no longer discussed in Anglo-American educational philosophy, and this is at least in part due to John Dewey's critique of aspects of Herbart's work. The neglect of Herbart's work in contemporary educational discourse has, unfortunately, led to a loss of insight into the fruitful aspects of his theory of education. In his central educational work, *The Science of Education*,<sup>1</sup> from 1806, Herbart develops a theory of education that illuminates important distinctions between socialization and education. These distinctions provide a framework for understanding the basis of the educational relationship between teacher and learner as one that entails and cultivates certain forms of discontinuity in learning.

Much of Herbart's thinking about how education differs from mere socialization hinges on the idea that education aims at autonomy, or self-determination, of the learner. In our current postmodern world, the idea of autonomy, as formulated by Enlightenment thinkers, has been criticized as too individualistic, a vision of a rational human being devoid of emotion and lacking a connection to the social world. However, for Herbart, the idea of self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) is connected to the ability to critique not only oneself, one's own thoughts and actions, but also the values and norms that govern society at large. Part of my aim in examining Herbart's standpoint is to demonstrate that self-determination is interconnected with

<sup>1</sup> Johann Friedrich Herbart, "Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung abgeleitet (1806)," in *Joh. Friedr. Herbart's Sämtliche Werke in Chronologischer Reihenfolge*, Vol. 2, edited by Karl Kehrbach, pp. 1–139 (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer und Söhne, 1887), cited here using both the German and the English translation, "The Science of Education," in *The Science of Education, its General Principles Deduced from its Aim, and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*, translated by Henry M. Felkin and Emmie Felkin, pp. 94–268 (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1902). In the following, the German text will be cited as *AP* and the English version as *SE*.

an openness to the other, such that education toward autonomy has to be at the same time conceived of as education toward openness to the other. On this account, self-determination – that is, thinking critically for oneself and not blindly following the authority of others – entails a relation to and understanding of the other; the self-determined individual is one whose judgments take honest account of other human beings and the world around them.

In aiming toward the self-determination of individuals, education, as Herbart views it, takes on moral meaning; its “whole purpose is morality.”<sup>2</sup> The underlying idea of Herbart’s claim that morality is not simply the “highest” purpose but the “whole” purpose of education is that *all* education has an effect on the learner’s ability to think and act according to his or her own judgments; the actions of educators and others in a child’s life either *help* or *hinder* this ability. The central question for philosophers and educators then becomes, which forms of education help and which hinder the learner?

Of course, the answer to this question is never straightforward; it entails a complex understanding of what educating another person involves. This means reflecting not only on the possibilities but also on the limits of what can and should be involved in educating and teaching another person. Herbart began to answer this question by distinguishing his own concept of education from two other problematic notions of education. He opposed, on the one hand, forms of education that he termed “education without instruction” (*Erziehung ohne Unterricht*), or, more appropriately translated, “discipline without instruction,” because when using such models the teacher seeks to “educate” learners by pure disciplinary measures (SE 85–86/AP 11). These modes of interaction hinder the learner’s self-determination because they force the learner to conform to the teacher’s will; they demand blind obedience. On the other hand, Herbart also opposed forms of education that seek merely to transmit knowledge through instruction in subject matter that learners are expected to take in and then regurgitate. On such a concept of education, or, more precisely, “instruction without education” (*Unterricht ohne Erziehung*), learners are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge who

<sup>2</sup> Johann Friedrich Herbart, “Über die ästhetische Darstellung der Welt, als das Hauptgeschäft der Erziehung (1802–1804),” In *Joh. Friedr. Herbart’s Sämtliche Werke in Chronologischer Reihenfolge*, edited by Karl Kehrbach, Vol. 1, pp. 259–74, 259 (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer und Söhne, 1887), cited here using the English translation, “On the Aesthetic Revelation of the World (1804),” in *The Science of Education, its General Principles Deduced from its Aim, and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*, translated by Henry M. Felkin and Emmie Felkin, pp. 57–77, 57 (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1902), translation modified. In the following, cited as ARW.

do not learn to relate this knowledge to their self-understanding and practical judgment.

In each of these concepts we can see that the learner's self-critical judgment is not developed; for Herbart, they fail to fulfill the necessary precondition of self-determination. In the context of the present discussion of discontinuity in learning, we can say that such concepts fail to address a certain kind of discontinuity found in those learning processes which are directed toward critical thinking – an idea I will continue to unfold throughout the book. The former “disciplinary model” forces the will of the teacher on the learner, and the latter “transmission model” forces learners to accept knowledge without providing the basis on which this knowledge can be critically examined, questioned, and related to choices for action. Countering these positions, Herbart developed the idea of “education *through* instruction” (*Erziehung durch Unterricht*). Education through instruction, or *educative instruction*, is one essential part of Herbart's twofold definition of education proper, which includes educative instruction and moral guidance. By examining Herbart's concept of education, we can see that although it entails certain forms of continuity, it also identifies significant forms of discontinuity indispensable to learners' experiences of learning how to make choices for action. Specifically, his concept entails a notion of the learner's *inner struggle* as an educative aspect of moral learning processes. Herbart's idea of inner struggle provides a central thread to both this chapter and the next.

It is important to note that, from a historical standpoint, Herbart's thinking represents a strong break with traditional concepts of education. Herbart's idea of the educator takes into account that modern educators must reckon with the fact that they have to educate someone for an unknown future; the future of the learner can only be decided *by* the learner. In part, Herbart is addressing the historical changes of his time and the opposing notions of education of the *ancien régime*, which assume that the next generation's future is decided by the previous generation. In other words, such notions assume that each individual learner's future is determined by the past, by tradition and socialization.

From a philosophical standpoint, Herbart's thinking also represents an understanding of the human being as essentially capable of independent thinking and capable of learning to decide to act toward the Good. In this chapter, my aim is to introduce readers to the concepts underlying Herbart's theory of education. My analysis focuses on understanding Herbart's concept of the human being as one who is capable of morality. In the first section, I analyze the paradox of education, which we can call the paradox of “autonomy through heteronomy,” or, in German, “*Selbstbestimmung durch*

*Fremdbestimmung*” (self-determination through determination-by-another). I discuss how this paradox represents Herbart’s starting point and a presupposition of his contemplation of both the possibilities and limits of educating individuals who are capable of morality. In the second section I inquire further into Herbart’s understanding of the human being by examining his concept of “perfectibility” (*Bildsamkeit*) as an important limit for educators to recognize, a limit that lies in the fact that we cannot know what each individual is capable of learning. With this concept, Herbart provides the anthropological grounding of education in the idea of the human being as a learning being.

## 1 THE MORAL INDIVIDUAL AND THE EDUCATIONAL PARADOX

In his influential early essay “On the Aesthetic Revelation of the World as the Chief Work of Education,” Herbart defines his notion of the moral individual most concretely when he writes, “the moral man commands himself” (ARW 62). Herbart sees this idea represented in Kant’s Categorical Imperative and seeks to highlight the intersubjective relationship between self and other formulated therein, namely that the Categorical Imperative expresses a judgment of oneself in light of one’s recognition of the other. This comes forth most clearly in Kant’s second formulation: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end.”<sup>3</sup>

In Herbart’s view, the categorical imperative is central to understanding morality. However, the concept of the moral person as one who is capable of judging her own will according to principles of universalizability and humanity sets up a dilemma for educators that Herbart believed Kant did not adequately address. This dilemma lies in the fact that the learner’s ability to judge *for herself* what is good and right needs to be cultivated through education. Furthermore, to cultivate each learner’s ability for self-determined judgment, educators must *influence* the learner’s choices *without* choosing for her and without manipulating her.<sup>4</sup> Herbart’s concern underscores the paradox of education that lies in the fact that education toward autonomy is

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), translated by T. K. Abbott, p. 58 (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), translation modified.

<sup>4</sup> For Herbart’s further discussion of Kant, see SE, and ARW. For a discussion of the limits of Herbart’s view of Kant, see Dietrich Benner and Wolf Dietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, *Herbarts Praktische Philosophie und Pädagogik. Möglichkeit und Grenzen einer Erziehungsphänomenologie* (Herbart’s Practical Philosophy and Pedagogy: Possibilities and Limits of a Phenomenology of Education)

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achieved through heteronomy, or, put another way, an individual's ability to mediate thought and action with reason and judgment is made possible by intergenerational and intersubjective educational relationships.

To address this concern, Herbart argues that educators must understand how individuals make choices. He makes the point that it is not transcendental freedom, but concrete "freedom of choice" that educators need to understand, for that is the only type of freedom on which they can have an influence (ARW 61). Herbart takes a phenomenological approach to analyzing how human beings make choices. Specifically, he inquires into what is involved in one's choice of the Good. His underlying question is: What happens in the moment in which an individual chooses *not* to follow his inclinations or self-interested desires, and instead chooses to act in recognition of and respect for the other? (ARW 62–64). In Herbart's account, in moments of moral crisis, the individual experiences a break with oneself, becomes distanced from oneself, and begins to observe and judge oneself. Accordingly, we can understand the self as divided into two selves, that is, both as a *subject* judging and an *object* being judged. Herbart refers to these two sides of ourselves as parts of our character, one *subjective* and one *objective* (SE 200–01/AP 90–91).

Although Herbart's terminology may seem outdated, the distinction between subjective and objective selves is helpful for understanding his view of moral decision-making processes. The "objective character" comprises all the choices one has made thus far in one's life. This side of oneself is objective because it is already formed through choices that, to a large extent, have become habits and routines. The "subjective character" refers to the reflective self, who judges the objective self, potentially critiques past choices, and creates new rules for future conduct (SE 200–01/AP 90–91). These two sides of ourselves come forth as divided when we are faced with new and unfamiliar situations. If we choose to follow routine, then our past is dictating our choices, such that we are guided by our objective side. If we make a conscious decision to break a habit by deciding to act differently than in the past, then we are following insights of our subjective side.

(Ratingen: A. Henn, 1967). For an examination of Kant's ideas pertaining to moral education and the role of dialogue in teacher-learner interaction that aims to evaluate whether a learner understands the Categorical Imperative, see Walter Okshevsky, "Kant's Catechism for Moral Education: From Particularity Through Universality to Morality," *Philosophy of Education* 2000, edited by Lynda Stone, pp. 94–102 (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2001). Martin offers a valuable discussion of Kant's notion of education in connection to morality; see Christopher Martin, "Education Without Moral Worth? Kantian Moral Theory and the Obligation to Educate Others," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 4, no. 3, 2011: 475–92.

The break one experiences with oneself in moral dilemmas is significant for Herbart because it marks a certain kind of self-self relation; it marks the moment in which one is *at odds* with oneself and finds oneself in the midst of an inner conflict or “inner struggle” (*innerer Kampf*), as I will refer to it throughout this book (SE 200–01/AP 90–91). To understand Herbart’s concept of the moral individual, it is necessary to take a closer look at this concept of inner struggle. When we experience inner struggle, it is because our past decisions come into conflict with the demands of the present situation – thus, our objective side comes into conflict with our subjective side. Inner struggle marks the point at which we can make changes in the way we act in the world. The moment of inner struggle, Herbart notes, is an existential moment that we experience so forcefully that it can threaten “mental” and “bodily health” (SE 204/ AP 93). These moments of inner struggle are not necessarily moral; they can be part of all sorts of decision-making processes in an otherwise inwardly harmonious person. Our inner struggle becomes part of moral decision making when it marks the point at which we have the choice to move away from egoistic actions and move toward actions that respect others. These are the moments in which we ask ourselves, “What should I do?”

To draw out the moral implications of the struggle, Herbart underscores the dialogic aspect of this self-self relation implicit in Kant’s notion of moral judgment. Herbart argues that when an individual is faced with a moral crisis, for example, whether to lie or to tell the truth in a given situation, we can imagine that the “voice of the moral imperative” comes forth in the individual and distinguishes the “worthy and good” on one side and the “common and bad” on the other (ARW 63). This voice arises within the space of self-observation – that is, it arises as part of the subjective side of our character – when we find ourselves in a struggle as to whether to follow self-interested desires and inclinations or to take a new path that respects the other.

Herbart emphasizes that this voice of the moral imperative has nothing necessarily in common with the self it judges. This commanding voice that we hear inside ourselves has a moral aspect, insofar as it is *self-critical* and is informed by ethical ideas. In other words, it is *heard* as a “censor” (*Censur*) – a negative judgment – by the person who is inclined to follow self-serving interests and desires.<sup>5</sup> A person must *learn* to hear this voice, that is, she must learn to hear her own inner censor and follow her own command into action.

<sup>5</sup> ARW 63; see also SE 204–9/AP 92–7, translation modified. In the standard English translation of *The Science of Education*, the German term “*Censur*,” which Herbart uses, is translated at times as inner “monitor” (for example, SE 204). I translate this term consistently as “censor.”



An individual's choice to listen to the voice of the moral imperative and act *against* self-interest and *toward* the other is an act of "inner freedom" (*Innere Freiheit*) that Herbart views as an essential aspect of all human beings and, significantly, one over which educators have influence. The idea of "inner freedom" delimits the moral relation of oneself to oneself, specifically the relation of a person's will to the critical judgment she casts upon her own will.<sup>6</sup> This idea highlights the human capacity for self-reflection that separates human beings from other animals, that is, our ability to make ourselves *inwardly free* from our *inclinations* by restraining ourselves from action, turning inward onto ourselves, thinking critically and judging our inclinations with approval or disapproval. Accordingly, the moral person is able to act against self-centered inclinations and make inner freedom "practical" by acting on one's judgment of the Good. For Herbart, the concept of "inner freedom," together with the concepts of "completeness" or "coming to fullness" (*Vollkommenheit*), "benevolence" (*Wohllwollen*), "right" (*Recht*), and "justice" (*Billigkeit*), form the moral ideas that are central for education that I examine in depth in the next chapter.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See in particular pages 33–36 in Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Allgemeine Praktische Philosophie* (1808), in *Joh. Friedr. Herbart's Sämtliche Werke*, edited by Karl Kehrbach, Vol. 2 (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer and Söhne, 1887), cited in the following as *APP*; see also *SE* 210/*AP* 97–98.

<sup>7</sup> In his theory of education, Herbart states that three central moral ideas are important for guiding the educational processes of learners. He names *Inner Freedom*, as well as *Goodness* (*Güte*, which combines the ideas of benevolence and completeness) and *Rectitude* (*Rechtlichkeit*, which combines the ideas of right and justice.) Herbart combines these moral ideas for educators, which he differentiates in his ethics, on the grounds that learners first learn these concepts in situations in which these ideas are not so easily differentiated; learners then at a later point learn to distinguish conceptually what they had experienced as connected. In Chapter 2, I discuss each of these ideas separately in more detail. Here, it is important to note that I am not keeping with the standard translation (both Felkin and Felkin's translation and Dunkel's translation) of Herbart's idea of *Vollkommenheit*, which, in the standard translations, has been translated as *Perfection*, but I am translating as *Completeness*. This idea is not meant to imply that there is a specific endpoint to be achieved. Rather, it is more aptly translated as I have noted (and as Felkin and Felkin note in their translation) as the idea of "coming to fullness"; see Herbart, *Letters and Lectures on Education*, translated by Henry M. Felkin and Emmie Felkin, p. 107 (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co. Ltd., 1898), and Harold B. Dunkel, *Herbart and Education*, pp. 32–33 (New York: Random House, 1969). Also, I translate the last idea *Billigkeit*, "justice," slightly differently than in the standard translations. Felkin and Felkin translate *Billigkeit* as equity/retribution (see Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Letters and Lectures on Education*, p. 107), whereas Dunkel translates this idea as requital/recompense (see Dunkel, *Herbart and Education*, pp. 32–33). In an earlier essay, I translated Herbart's moral idea of *Billigkeit* as "equity," but find "justice" to be more accurate. See Andrea English, "Critical Listening and the Dialogic Aspect of Moral Education: J. F. Herbart's Concept of the Teacher as Moral Guide," *Educational Theory*, 61, no. 2 (Special Issue "Philosophical Perspectives on Listening," edited by Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Megan Laverty), 2011: 171–89.

Cambridge University Press

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Herbart's concept of the struggle in moral decision-making processes points to the meaning of discontinuity in moral learning as an experience of a break with oneself. This form of discontinuity is significant for understanding the idea of education toward self-determination: the struggle marks the point at which there is an *opening* in an individual's experience, a *space* in which she has the *choice* to break with her past choices and act differently in the future. Only on account of this discontinuity in learning does one's choice to think and do otherwise arise; for Herbart, it is a precondition for learning in the realm of morality that educators can and must support.

Implicit in Herbart's analysis of the moral individual is the idea that to be moral, one must listen to oneself in a particular way – namely, one must listen to the commands of one's own *inner censor* in the context of moral dilemmas. This draws on the moral sense of the notion of listening-to-oneself reminiscent of the *daemon* that comes to Socrates as a voice telling him what not to do.<sup>8</sup> In these moments, we can say that we begin to listen *inwardly* and begin an inner dialogue of the sort that phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels describes when he states that in inner dialogue, “the speaker breaks away from his past and commands himself to act differently in the future.”<sup>9</sup> Taken in this way, the idea of a person *listening to an inner voice as an inner censor* connects to the idea of human beings as self-questioning and learning beings who can question their own motives and call into doubt their plans for action. The idea of the human being as one capable of learning is captured in the notion of perfectibility (*Bildsamkeit*), which I examine next.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, “Apology”, in *Plato Complete Works*, translated by G.M.A. Grube, edited by John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson pp. 17–36. (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). On this idea, see also in particular chapter 9, “Solitude, Silence, Listening,” in Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish, *Education in an Age of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2000); see also Dietrich Benner, “Kritik und Negativität. Ein Versuch zur Pluralisierung von Kritik in Erziehung, Pädagogik und Erziehungswissenschaft” [Critique and Negativity: Towards the Pluralisation of Critique in Educational Practice, Theory and Research], *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 46, 2003: 96–110; and, for an expanded English-language version of that article, see Dietrich Benner and Andrea English, “Critique and Negativity: Toward the Pluralisation of Critique in Educational Practice, Theory and Research,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 38, no. 3, 2004: 409–28; see also the response to this article in Rosa Nidia Buenfil Burgos, “Negativity: A Disturbing Constitutive Matter in Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 38, no. 3, 2004: 429–40.

<sup>9</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, “Sich-sprechen Hören. Zur Aufzeichnung der phänomenologischen Stimme” (Hearing Oneself Speak. Sketch of a Phenomenology of the Voice), in *Deutsch-Französische Gedankengänge*, p. 96 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), translation mine.