

The Discourse of German *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* – A Contextual Reconstruction

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The framework of German educational discourse of the twentieth century is so-called geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik, or education as one of the humanities or arts rather than as a science. It triumphed around 1925 in the second half of the Weimar Republic. This article outlines in three steps the core elements of this educational discourse. First, it shows that the mode of thinking of the exponents of geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik was dualistic in a traditional Protestant manner. They juxtaposed empiry and Geist, plurality and unity, and outward and inward, and they favoured the inward unity and coherency of Geist. The contextual analysis shows, however, that the dualistic thought schema was virulent not only among German educationalists and philosophers, but also found strong expression in novelists and essayists like Thomas Mann, or the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Rudolf Eucken. Mainstream thinkers criticised the plural systems of Western democracy and capitalism – first and foremost, however, American democracy and capitalism – which were seen to epitomise both of these “un-German” movements. The true German nature was thought to be an inner spiritual life, which was originally religious and through the course of history came to characterise the whole of German life and thought. It was believed that this spiritual inner life was revealed best by German art, particularly German music. This resistance to empiricism led, and this is the second step, to two analogous notions of the totality or wholeness of the individual and the nation. Man is not understood to be merely an individual, but more importantly a “personhood” (Persönlichkeit), which was described as an inward spiritual life that arose through effort and self-cultivation, or Bildung. In addition to this inward personhood, however, the conception of “nationhood,” a national spiritual life as Volksstaat, or the ethnocultural nation as detached and distinguished from the political sphere, is seen as important. The individual person can perfect himself only in the framework of the typical characteristics of his Volk – the German Volk. Western democracy and plurality are seen as an atomistic “aggregate of individuals” and juxtaposed against the German concept of the ethnocultural Nation, the Volk community composing an organic unity that transcends the individual. Bildung is the spiritual formation of integrated, cultivated personalities who would orient themselves to the Volk community. In the curriculum of true education, along with the German language the study of Heimat becomes the fundamental element. In contrast to specialised subjects, the contents of Heimat would reflect the organic in the world, the totality of life: in the Volk and in the spiritual-mental unity within the Persönlichkeit. The two constructions – deepest roots in the tradition of the Volk on one side, and highest inner spirituality in the personality on the other – resulted in education that had to oscillate between lowest and highest and, through this, had to lose sight of empirical, that is, social and political, dimensions. This is the third step that the present article wants to address. The true understanding of education, according to the exponents of geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik, puts social and political issues in their only proper place: inside the inner

personality. Politicisation of the German person had to take place in the context of *Volksstaat*, not in democracy. To be free meant the embedding of the individual into the harmonious beauty of the whole. This notion created a social and political vacuum between the lowest denominator or totality of the Germanic people and the highest whole or totality of the Germanic personality, so that education had to be given the attribution – one that continues to be variously described and affirmed in education research in the German-language realm up to the present day – that education is autonomous, independent of social or political context. This was based on the term *Bildung* – the inner ideology set against a pluralistic world. Autonomy means insisting on the inner freedom of man, on his inner coherency, and his will. In the midst of the confusing simultaneous demands of society on youth, educational autonomy is believed to be a means of assuring human unity and wholeness; it serves a protective dam to contain the danger of persons being ripped apart or pulled hither and yon. With its goal of awakening a unified spiritual life against the modern plural democratic world, the true educational community becomes crucial.

In Germany today, there is an ongoing discussion of a goal that falls under the catchword of *internationalisation*. It is interesting to note that there are practically no voices speaking against this objective, which we would expect if the call to internationalisation were more descriptive than normative and if internationalisation were the standard rather than the exception. However, that is not the case, for *national grammars* continue to determine the educational discourse of the present. National contexts still form the framework of and shape research. I would like to illustrate this by example of the German tradition, where this tendency has been particularly pronounced.

The framework of German educational discourse of the twentieth century is *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, which triumphed around 1925 in the second half of the Weimar Republic on the basis of various successful strategies (in organisational, institutional, and literature/journalistic areas):

- the establishment of education as one of the humanities in the philosophical faculties of the universities and, with this, the rejection of education as an empirical science;¹

¹At a conference in May 1917 in Berlin, it was determined that teachers' education would take place outside the universities, for education was not considered to be purely "scientific", meaning not philosophical enough. The very few chairs established in the universities in the 1920s were held by exponents of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, who were believed to be close to the major German philosophical tradition. See: Bernhard Schwenk, "Pädagogik in den philosophischen Fakultäten. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der 'geisteswissenschaftlichen' Pädagogik in Deutschland", in: H. Haller & D. Lenzen (eds.), *Wissenschaft in Reformprozessen. Aufklärung oder Alibi?* (Stuttgart, 1977), pp. 103–131; Peter Drewek, "Die Herausbildung der 'geisteswissenschaftlichen' Pädagogik vor 1918 aus sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive", in: A. Leschinsky (ed.), *Die Institutionalisierung von Lehren und Lernen* (Weinheim, 1995), pp. 299–316. See also Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, "Pädagogik für Krieg und Frieden. Eduard Spranger und die Erziehungswissenschaft an der Berliner Universität, 1913–1933", in: K.-P. Horn & H. Kemnitz (eds.), *Pädagogik Unter den Linden* (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 191–226.

- the dominance of *geisteswissenschaftlich* discourse in educational journals, foremost in the journal *Erziehung*, which was put out by the Mandarins of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*: Aloys Fischer, Theodor Litt, Herman Nohl, Eduard Spranger, and Wilhelm Flitner (editors of the journal; their influence continues on to this day);
- the codification of the knowledge of the field in manuals, such as the *Handbuch für Pädagogik*;
- the bundling of scientific studies in the series edited by Herman Nohl, the “Göttinger Studien” (1923–1939; 32 vols.);
- the series of textbooks edited by Elisabeth Blochman, Herman Nohl, and Erich Weniger, the *Kleine pädagogische Texte* (1930–1973; 43 vols.)²

As to content, the strategies were based on historical constructions like the following:

- the *Deutsche Bewegung*, or German Romantic Movement, around 1800, with its ideal of *Bildung*. The *geisteswissenschaftliche* educationalists held in unison that Johann Gottfried Herder represented the starting point and Johann Gottlieb Fichte the climax of the movement. Eduard Spranger (and many others) constructed Wilhelm von Humboldt as *the* theoretician of this movement (Spranger 1910);³
- an interpretation of the diverse and varying streams of thought in the New Education that homogenises them into something that is taken to be the precursor of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*.

From the normative perspective, the *geisteswissenschaftlich* paradigm of education bases upon:

- philosophical orientation towards German Protestant metaphysics, the metaphysical view of *Geist*;
- political orientation towards German Romanticism and, therefore, scepticism regarding democracy;
- scepticism about modernity as a whole and modern science in particular;
- the assertion of the autonomy of education from social, economic, and political contexts.

In the following, I would like to outline in three steps the discourse of *geisteswissenschaftlich* education, or education as one of the humanities or arts rather than as a science. By discourse I do *not* mean a more or less coherent scientific system of topics and methods, or paradigm, as Thomas Kuhn described it. What we find instead is a rather diffuse conglomerate of divergent positions – having a common denominator of politicised, histrionic, and aestheticised slogans – that

²Many of the textbooks published in the first years were republished in the 1960s, some of them several times even.

³Eduard Spranger, *Wilhelm von Humboldt und die Reform des Bildungswesens* (Tübingen 1910). A second edition was published 1960 and a third in 1965 – with some supplements, but without any modification of the content.

transcend scientific borders to both incorporate and reinforce dominant mental dispositions and movements in society. Precisely because of its fuzziness and lack of conceptual clarity, we will see that the discourse was easily and widely adaptable.

Dualisms

In the early 1920s, Alfred Vierkandt, one of the founding fathers of the German Sociological Association, published *Der Dualismus im modernen Weltbild*.⁴ Vierkandt wrote that, based on predecessors Hegel and Schopenhauer, modern thought from 1900 had undergone a shift from the old, theistic *Weltanschauung* to a “dualistic” world-view.⁵ The new way of thinking broke away from rationalism and turned to life (*Leben*), which is characterised by central dualisms between “an animalistic-biological world and a world of the spirit or soul (*Geist*)”.⁶ Despite the fact that the soul world had its own laws, it was also causally determined by the conditions of the empirical world, because *Weltanschauungen* are always “personal forms of a general view that is collective in nature” – or in other words, *discourse* as I use it here. Vierkandt went on to say that the dualism of the time was expressed in philosophy, art, culture, and spiritual life. He then distinguished between a higher and lower stage of human being, between culture and civilisation, the rationalism of pure reason and the rationalism of understanding, individualism as autonomy within society and individualism as a “state of atomistic disintegration and decomposition”.⁷

Vierkandt’s analysis of contemporary, and foremost German, thought was very accurate, as is shown by the development of *geisteswissenschaftliche* education, which is indeed based on dualistic thinking. The dualisms show up in concentrated form in an essay by Herman Nohl in 1926, *Die Einheit der Pädagogischen Bewegung*,⁸ which is probably the shortest, most succinct summary of the *geisteswissenschaftlich* doctrine. The dualisms are:

- Empiry and *Geist*;
- Plurality and Unity;
- Outward and Inward.

The juxtaposition is between plural, external reality versus the inward unity of *Geist*, or mental-internal unity. This distinction is descriptive as well as normative, because it favours the inward unity of *Geist*, and it is not original. It was already discussed in the context of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking in Germany, in the German Romantic Movement. In the essay, Nohl examines the debates on education law that were unleashed at the School Conference (*Reichsschulkonferenz*) of the Weimar Republic in 1920. He writes that the chaos, tumult, disunity, and inconsistency of the debates reflect broader political and social debates and *appear*

⁴Alfred Vierkandt, *Der Dualismus im modernen Weltbild* (Berlin, 1923).

⁵Ibid., pp. 5ff.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

⁷Ibid., pp. 87–90.

⁸Herman Nohl, “Die Einheit der pädagogischen Bewegung”, *Die Erziehung*, 1 (1926), pp. 57–61.

to suggest that, in a Platonic sense, there is no internal coherency to them. Even if we go beyond all politically motivated discourse, says Nohl, there still remains a multitude of educational movements that appear to be just as incompatible. If we look at these reform movements merely from the outside, all that we perceive is an “educational revolution” that falls apart into seemingly independent concepts. Nohl calls this a false, “external” conclusion that he counters with the following apodictic hypothesis: *If these diverse educational movements represent something that is true and alive, then there must be an ultimate unity among them.* The notion of truth that Nohl mentions refers to the idea of truth in German philosophy at the time; it is non-empirical and stands in explicit contrast to the pragmatic idea of knowledge as dependent upon experience. The contemporary conception of life (*Leben*), which was common by 1900, was also not empirical, as it is in modern science, but instead expressed the notion of the mystic-holistic experience of life, which Wilhelm Dilthey, Nohl’s teacher, had contrasted against the natural sciences. The unity that Nohl proposes to discern in the diverse reform movements from 1900 onwards is the “unity of a new ideal of the German man”.⁹ This not only homogenises the multifarious forms of New Education, but also narrows them down *nationally*. Nohl thus trims and cuts New Education to allow it to be utilised for the development of a national doctrine of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*.¹⁰

The dualistic thought schema is virulent not only among German educationalists and philosophers. Probably no one at the time put more concisely the nationalistic loading of dualism than the highly regarded novelist and essayist, Thomas Mann, who identified the German character with a spiritual-apolitical attitude. Mann wrote that the difference between *Geist* and politics encompasses the difference between culture and civilisation, soul and society, freedom and the right to vote, art and literature. For Mann, Germanness is culture, soul, freedom, art, and *not* civilisation, society, the right to vote, literature.¹¹ Mann and others criticised Western democracy and capitalism – first and foremost, however, *American* democracy and capitalism, which were seen to epitomise both of these “un-German” movements.¹² Mann even viewed democracy as identical with materialism or capitalism,¹³ and he attacked all three, noting that politics in general was “un-German” or even “hostile to Germany”¹⁴, because the Germans, in their philosophy of life, were a “Folk of life”.¹⁵ To Mann, this notion of life was the most German, most Goethe-like, and in a religious sense, the very highest conservative notion,

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Jürgen Oelkers, *Reformpädagogik: Eine kritische Dogmengeschichte* (Weinheim, 1989); Jürgen Oelkers & Fritz Osterwalder (Eds.), *Die neue Erziehung: Beiträge zur Internationalität der Reformpädagogik* (Bern, 1999).

¹¹Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993), p. 23, also pp. 160ff., 240, 248 [Original edition: 1918].

¹²Georg Kamphausen, *Die Erfindung Amerikas in der Kulturkritik der Generation von 1890* (Weilerswist, 2002).

¹³Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, pp. 233, 346. Diverging from the majority, Mann modified his hostile attitude towards democracy after 1921. In 1933 he escaped to Switzerland.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 21–22, 29, 256, 268.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 76, 181–182.

whereas democracy stood in contradiction to Christianity and was a traitor to the Cross.¹⁶

With this, Mann is representative of the mainstream of the German academic community, which was, according to Fritz K. Ringer, in a state of decline from 1890 to 1933.¹⁷ Another mainstream voice is Werner Sombart, sociologist and national economist, who described the First World War as a war between the commercial and the heroic ethos¹⁸ and the West as having the soul of the petty shopkeeper while Germans had the soul of the warrior. This dualistic comparison was commonplace at the time and was used practically word-for-word by the German philosopher, Max Scheler.¹⁹ What is remarkable is that Germany was the leading economic power in Europe at the time of the First World War. Nevertheless, only the states to the West were reproached with materialism. This discrepancy between German economic prosperity and German ideology, or between matter and *Geist*, was not, however, due to a lack of knowledge about Germany's national economic potency. Instead, the contradiction was consciously nullified by a further dualism, inward purity and outward corruption. This shows up clearly in the work of Rudolf Eucken, New Idealist philosopher of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Eucken acknowledges that Germany – like France, England, or America – had experienced tremendous economic growth in the nineteenth century. The crucial difference according to Eucken, however, is that this development did not corrupt the Germans' true *character*: "Have we then fallen away from our own selves when we turned to the visible world, when we developed our forces on land and water, when we took the lead in industry and technology? Have we thus denied our true, inner nature?" Eucken asks, only to respond, "No and once again no!"²⁰ That true nature, which according to Eucken differentiates the Germans from the rest of the nations, is an *inner spiritual life*, which was originally religious and through the course of history came to characterise the whole of German life and thought. German philosophy, Eucken says, is essentially different from all other philosophies; it is *not* merely self-orientation in the *given* world, but, rather, a bold attempt to understand the world from *inside* ourselves; it creates great masses of thought, monumental systems, and with these systems it attempts to penetrate the visible world, and even to turn it into an invisible one.²¹

Eucken believed, with Thomas Mann, that this spiritual inner life could be seen in German art and particularly in music.²² Mann sees art, dualistically, as the opposite of politics²³ and Germanness, or the Germanic character, as equivalent to

¹⁶Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁷Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

¹⁸Werner Sombart, *Händler und Helden: Patriotische Besinnungen* (München–Leipzig, 1915), p. 5.

¹⁹Max Scheler, *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* (Leipzig, 1915), pp. 94–95.

²⁰Rudolf Eucken, *Die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung des deutschen Geistes* (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1914), p. 8.

²¹Ibid., pp.12–13.

²²Ibid., p. 13.

²³Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, pp. 301ff.

art.²⁴ Music and the German character became welded together with the music of Martin Luther; music became a form of morals.²⁵ For Mann, art is the expression of *Bildung*, which is a term coined by Goethe and particular only to the Germans,²⁶ that refers to the cultivation, the forming of the inner spiritual life of man.²⁷ It is thus no surprise that Mann sent his children to *Landerziehungsheime*, the country schools founded by German educators based on the concepts of New Education,²⁸ or *Reformpädagogik*, which in Germany emerged from pietistic motives²⁹ on a religious basis.³⁰ It was in this context that Eduard Spranger, professor of education and philosophy in Berlin and a prominent member of the *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, belittled John Dewey's work, which he reduced to education that was merely economic and technical. He assessed this as vastly inferior to the "latitude (breadth) of German education".³¹ For Spranger, Dewey's work represented – in stark contrast to the higher ends woven into the German mind – a despicable kitchen and handyman utilitarianism that had to be countered by the "theory of the ideal *Bildung*".³²

²⁴Ibid., pp. 106, 129ff.

²⁵Ibid., p. 311.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 497–498.

²⁷Ibid., p. 249.

²⁸The model was Cecil Reddie's Abbotsholme. The German theologian, Hermann Lietz, was a teacher at Abbotsholme in 1896 and wrote the educational novel *Emlohstobba* (anagram of Abbotsholme). In 1898 Lietz founded the first German *Landerziehungsheim*. In contradiction to Lietz's anti-Semitism and nationalism, the *Landerziehungsheime* to which Thomas Mann sent his children were more "democratic", at least in the German interpretation. The background of these democratic schools was the belief that in the innermost region of every person we find the basis for the harmony of every community. Harmony, found in the (Protestant) soul, is the basis of this "democratic" concept, not freedom or plurality.

²⁹Fritz Osterwalder, "Der Erzieher als nationaler Prophet. Nation, Seele, Kind und Entwicklung – liberale Theologie als Kontext deutscher Reformpädagogik", in: Tobias Rülcker & Jürgen Oelkers (eds.), *Politische Reformpädagogik* (Bern, 1988), pp. 125–150.

³⁰Meike Sophia Baader, "Erziehung als Erlösung: religiöse Dimensionen der Reformpädagogik", *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie*, VIII (2002), pp. 89–97.

³¹Eduard Spranger, "Brief an Georg Kerschensteiner vom 14.3.1915", in: Ludwig Englert (ed.), *Georg Kerschensteiner [–] Eduard Spranger. Briefwechsel 1912–1931* (München–Wien, 1966), p. 30.

³²Eduard Spranger, "Brief an Georg Kerschensteiner vom 22.3.1915", in: Englert (ed.), *Georg Kerschensteiner [–] Eduard Spranger*, p. 37. Spranger represents the mainstream of (German) philosophy of his time. The differences between pragmatism and the traditional philosophy became manifest during the Third International Congress for Philosophy in 1908 in Heidelberg, Germany. At this conference there was one section discussing the nature of "truth". Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller, an Oxford professor, read a paper on the rational notion of truth (*Der rationalistische Wahrheitsbegriff*), and A.C. Armstrong, from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, spoke on *The Evolution of Pragmatism*. The discussions following the two papers show, however, how deep the gap was between a pragmatic and a dualistic understanding of "truth." To the Continental (and even to some American, non-pragmatic) philosophers, truth understood not as *Geist*, timeless and eternal, was not acceptable (Elsenhans, Theodor [ed.], *Bericht über den III. internationalen Kongress für Philosophie zu Heidelberg 1. bis 5. September 1908* [Heidelberg, 1909], pp. 726ff.).

The Analogy of Two Totalities: Inner Personhood and National *Volksstaat*

The Construction of the Two Totalities

In Germany, the resistance to empiricism in combination with a tendency that Dewey rejected as the *Quest for Certainty* led to two analogous notions of totality or wholeness. Mann, writing on belief, once again offers a concise formulation of the way in which the empirical social dimension was marginalised in favour of the moral perfecting of both the individual and the nation as a religious vision: The “personal ethos” is primary, preceding the social ethos.³³ Man is not a mere social being, for he is also – in a dualistic manner – a metaphysical one. For that reason man is not merely individual, but, more importantly, “personhood” (*Persönlichkeit*),³⁴ which meant an inward spiritual life that arose through effort and self-cultivation, or *Bildung*. Here Mann uses a concept that was also central in liberal Protestant theology regarding salvation from the deep *fin-de-siècle* crisis. The concept of *Persönlichkeit* was highly attractive to the educationalists, and it became popular through a widely received book, *Die Persönlichkeits-Pädagogik*,³⁵ written in 1897 by Ernst Linde, one of the opponents of Herbartianism. Mann writes that man is not only a social being, but also a metaphysical being, the German being a metaphysical being first of all.³⁶ In addition to inward personhood, however, the nation, or the “emergence of nationality from religious elements, the national idea as a religion,” also takes precedence over the political and social dimensions of man.³⁷ Because the Absolute cannot be politicised, writes Mann, it is important to follow Kant and separate and distinguish spiritual, national life from the political sphere³⁸ and to speak not of democracy, but of *Volksstaat*,³⁹ or the ethnic nation, the community that shares an ethos. The solidarity of all such spirits is itself, however, not a product of the mind, but, rather, solidarity that emerges “organically” from the homogeneity of the form of being.⁴⁰

In agreement with Mann, Sombart writes that each individual person can perfect himself only in the framework of the typical characteristics of his folk.⁴¹ Marianne Weber, wife of the famous sociologist, Max Weber, writes in 1916 about the outbreak of the war that everyone felt lifted out of themselves as they became one with the greater whole.⁴² The grudge was directed against democratic plurality and the “levelling, atomising spirit of the Enlightenment, against the sciences that were becoming differentiated and specialised and their international dimension”.⁴³ True individuality is not the individuality shown by persons who seek their own

³³Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, p. 518.

³⁴Ibid., p. 240.

³⁵Ernst Linde, *Persönlichkeits-Pädagogik: ein Mahnwort wider die Methodengläubigkeit unserer Tage; mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Unterrichtsweise Rudolf Hildebrands* (Leipzig, 1897).

³⁶Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, p. 274.

³⁷Ibid., p. 518.

³⁸Ibid., p. 262.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 237, 263.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 314–315.

⁴¹Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 140.

⁴²Marianne Weber, “Der Krieg als ethisches Problem”, in: *Frauenfragen und Frauengedanken* (Tübingen, 1919), p. 158.

⁴³[Julius Langbehn], *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig, 1891), pp. 1ff.

advantages, writes Sombart,⁴⁴ but, rather, by the German who serves Germanness,⁴⁵ who has been raised to “heroic idealism”.⁴⁶ Western democracy is seen as an atomistic “aggregate of individuals” and juxtaposed against the German concept of *Nation*, which is “a folk community composing a unity”, the “deliberate organisation of something transcending individuals”, to which single individuals,⁴⁷ who are *Persönlichkeiten* (who have cultivated personhood), belong as parts. Sombart concludes that in addition to this orientation towards the concept of the whole, the fact that there should be a continuing, firm commitment to raise strong, unique, self-contained personalities, who are after all the most wonderful credit to the *Volk*, is self-understood.⁴⁸ For Eucken, the principle of the inner spiritual life as the “whole of personality” is what gives the Germans their “world historical importance”,⁴⁹ for it forms the “last dam holding back the mud slide of commercialism”.⁵⁰ Exploring the soul of the German, the philosopher Paul Natorp distinguishes “true” or “full,” e.g. “German individuality” from the merely contingent individuality that he associates with particularity.⁵¹ He thus stigmatises the West as “civilisation” and “society,” while the Germans alone are considered to be a *Volk* of “culture” and “*Gemeinschaft*”.⁵² According to Natorp, democracy in Germany means something different than in all other nations. To the Germans democracy is not connoted with multiplicity or plurality, but with the “allness of the *Volk* comrades”. Only such an understanding deserves to be called “true democracy”, demanding social economy and social education, whereas he names Pestalozzi, the “essentially German Swiss”,⁵³ as an antetype. Whatever seemed to fit into the German national ideology was adapted and interpreted as German; whatever seemed to be foreign was strictly rejected: “Internationalisation? The devil with it . . . We understand all foreign peoples, yet none understand us, and none *can* understand us . . . They do not understand us, but they sense our vast spiritual/mental superiority. . . . So let us Germans in our times go through the world proudly, with heads held high, in the secure understanding that we are the folk of God”.⁵⁴

Völkisch (National) Totality as the Fertile Ground for the Forming of the Personality

A decidedly nationalist education theory in Germany goes back to the year 1806, the end of the “Holy Empire” through Napoleon. Nationalist in the German-language realm in the 1800s meant education directed to a community, an ethnic folk, bound by a shared language and customs. For the Germans, the *Nation* was not

⁴⁴Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 113.

⁴⁵Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, p. 5.

⁴⁶Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 113.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁹Eucken, *Die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung des deutschen Geistes*, p. 22.

⁵⁰Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 145.

⁵¹Paul Natorp, *Die Seele des Deutschen*, (Jena, 1918), p. 52 [second volume of: *Deutscher Weltberuf. Geschichtsphilosophische Richtlinien*].

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵⁴Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, pp. 132ff.

the real state, the German Reich, but, rather, the linguistic cultural community. It was no coincidence that after 1890, the works of Fichte, Arndt, and Jahn, the most prominent representatives of that educational tradition, were now once again being widely read and cited, but this time in a more pronounced nationalistic context, where *völkisch* came to connote the specific German folk and was often linked with Anti-Semitism. This development can be illustrated quite graphically in the changes in the way that national holidays were staged and presented to educate the *Volk*.

National celebrations at the Hermann monument in 1841, 1875, and 1909 serve as an example. Hermann is the falsely Germanised name for Armin, the Cheruscan prince who defeated Roman legions at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D. This legendary defeat effectively cast the Romans out of Germania. The historian Tacitus honoured Armin in the *Annals* as the liberator of Germania; ever since, “Hermann” has been the most famous figure of early German history. In 1909, the 1900-year anniversary of the battle was celebrated. In contrast to the national celebrations of 1841 and 1875, this particular occasion served, as historian Charlotte Tacke has discovered, the “propagation of national and *völkisch* ideologies”,⁵⁵ by portraying a harmonious and distorted picture of early German history and deliberately refraining from including contemporary political statements.⁵⁶ Earlier national celebrations of Hermann had emphasised visions of societal coexistence; in 1909, however, the point was to plant in the people’s imagination the idea of a historically legitimate national society that should no longer be seen as bound by geo-spatial borders.⁵⁷ And, in contrast to the two earlier national celebrations, this time there was involvement of the rural, agrarian folk in order to propagate the idea of the *völkisch* unity of the national society, unity that could not be changed through history and unity despite the social classes defined by occupation (farmers, artisans, bourgeoisie, nobility).⁵⁸ This 1909 celebration of the *völkisch* unity of the Germans even overcame the traditional division of roles between the genders, according to which woman’s role is in the home and man’s role is in the outside world. The national mobilisation⁵⁹ required women as brides and mothers. “Reproduction within marriage, the rearing of children, in particular the rearing of sons to be warriors and members of the Volk community, care of the wounded and the sick, as well as upholding the masculine war morale . . . were given historical legitimacy and established as the duties of women within national society”.⁶⁰

Just a few years later, at the start of the First World War, this attitude leads Sombart to define the double, gender-specific, nationalistic goal of education: “Wide-hipped women to bear hardy warriors; strong-boned, wiry, courageous men with stamina to be fit for war”.⁶¹ The bourgeois women’s movement sought after *Volk* unity

⁵⁵Charlotte Tacke, “Die 1900-Jahrfeier der Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald 1909. Von der ‘klassenlosen Bürgerschaft’ zur ‘klassenlosen Volksgemeinschaft’”, in: Manfred Hettling & Paul Nolte (eds.), *Bürgerliche Feste* (Göttingen, 1993), p. 209.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 212.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 215.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 217.

⁶⁰Loc. cit.

⁶¹Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 121.

explicitly.⁶² Although the martial rhetoric of wartime receded during the Weimar Republic, the *völkisch* orientation, which assigned a central role to women, remained strong. Herman Nohl, lecturing in October of 1932, refers to the common perception that Germany was in a state of crisis. His premise is that “our German destiny” was being decided in the areas east of the Elbe, for the glamorous big industry could only build upon the “foundation of the strength of the *Volk*”. Nohl therefore demands the re-agrarianisation of Germany,⁶³ which together with the “will towards settlement” is no longer merely an economic issue, but instead the “elementary release of our national powers that have been dammed”.⁶⁴ The power of the *Volk* is not a question of “industrial captains and party leaders”, but bases upon the people, the “settler and his wife”, and is ultimately an educational, that is, a “social educational or “national educational” question⁶⁵ in which women play a central role. For Nohl, the “lifting up of the *Volk*” and the “establishing of the *Nation*” will essentially depend upon the extent to which “female energies” could be increased. To this end, Nohl envisions two supporting roles: “female village helpers” who will support “women, those plagued creatures of the world”⁶⁶ and kindergarten teachers, for it is in kindergarten that children learn the German language “in the early years, when language and mythos grow in the soul, which will guide the subsequent development of the child and the adult”.⁶⁷ The “spiritual/mental health” of Germany⁶⁸ will ultimately depend upon the “possibility of a healthy family and neighbourhood life in the country,” which fosters in the village community the inner life, strength, and energy that makes each person proud and firm.⁶⁹ For Nohl, mother-housewife is the supporting pillar of the family, and the family is the actual life cell of the *Volk*. Only when these cells are effective and joyful actors is the *Nation* unsurpassable.⁷⁰ Klafki, who with Johanna-Luise Brockmann recently published a study on the relationship between *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* and National Socialism, finds it important to emphasise that Nohl should not be branded simply as a forerunner of National Socialistic education (Klafki & Brockmann 2002, pp. 31ff.).⁷¹ I agree; however, I also

⁶²Ulrike Prokop, “Die Sehnsucht nach der Volkseinheit. Zum Konservativismus der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung vor 1933”, in: Gabriele Dietze (ed.), *Die Überwindung der Sprachlosigkeit. Texte aus der Frauenbewegung* (Darmstadt, 1979), pp. 176–202.

⁶³Herman Nohl, “Die sozialpädagogische und nationalpolitische Bedeutung der Kinderfürsorge auf dem Lande”, in: *Landbewegung, Osthilfe und die Aufgabe der Pädagogik* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 43.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁵Id., “Die Erziehungs- und Bildungsarbeit auf dem Lande und insbesondere im Osten”, in: *Landbewegung, Osthilfe und die Aufgabe der Pädagogik*, (Leipzig, 1933), p. 84.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁷Nohl, “Die sozialpädagogische und nationalpolitische Bedeutung der Kinderfürsorge auf dem Lande”, p. 49.

⁶⁸Nohl, “Die Erziehungs- und Bildungsarbeit auf dem Lande und insbesondere im Osten”, p. 84.

⁶⁹Nohl, “Die sozialpädagogische und nationalpolitische Bedeutung der Kinderfürsorge auf dem Lande”, p. 47.

⁷⁰Nohl, “Die Erziehungs- und Bildungsarbeit auf dem Lande und insbesondere im Osten”, p. 93.

⁷¹Wolfgang Klafki & Johanna-Luise Brockmann, *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik und Nationalsozialismus. Herman Nohl und seine “Göttinger Schule” 1932–1937* (Weinheim, 2002), pp. 31ff.

do not think that this is the crucial point. I find it more significant that Nohl, in the context of the fundamental dualisms, saw the economic, political, and social world in a pejorative sense. He was able to find meaning only through extolling *Volk* life and apolitical education. Through their brisk rejection of Western democracy, industry, and science, the *geisteswissenschaftliche* educationalists also robbed themselves of other, meaningful alternatives and the opportunity to develop a new language of education. The inevitable consequence of this could only be adaptation to the new power relations after 1933. In a letter to Erika Hoffmann in May 1933, who had written to Nohl expressing her uncertainty regarding a National Socialist group of pupils within the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Nohl admonished, “If only you could stand as a teacher before these young girls, who indeed have the understandable right to make swastikas. I am pleased with every pupil who can participate in this wholeheartedly”.⁷² We find the same uncertainty and helplessness in Eduard Spranger, who wrote an article on “The individuality of conscience and the state” (*Die Individualität des Gewissens und der Staat*⁷³) in the first three months of 1933 – at the time Hitler became Reichskanzler (30 January) and the Nationalsozialistische Partei gained 44% of the election votes (5 March). Spranger seems to feel uncomfortable with what he calls a sort of demonic possession of the *Volk* (*Volksdämonie*) – but he does not have any but a very unhappy historical German alternative. “We must not drown within a demonic possession of the *Volk*, but we have to hang on to Fichte’s belief in the *Volk*”. According to Fichte, the national movement after 1806 had shown the divine element in the German *Volk*, the origins that deemed it worthy of taking form and going out into the world. “That is why”, Spranger cites Fichte, “the divine will break forth from this *Volk* one day again. It is from this belief that the consuming flame of higher love of the Fatherland blazes up – that patriotism that envelops the nation as a mantle of the eternal”.⁷⁴

Personhood and Volk Education

The education of the *Nation* or *Volk* was not understood to be totalitarian education by the state, but, rather, as the fertile ground for *Bildung*, the spiritual formation of integrated, cultivated personalities who would orient themselves to the *Volk* community. The supremacy of the German people and the Germanic personality according to this view lies in the qualities they were claimed to possess: naturalness, simplicity, unspoiled-ness, and innocence. This – and here is the crucial point – makes a relationship between the two totalities, the person and the *Volk*, part and parcel of education. No *Volk*, says Eucken, the philosopher, has ever been as concerned with the self-contained person, and no *Volk* has ever understood childhood as insightfully as the Germans. Eucken believes that this competency comes from the ability to “understand empathically the soul of the child”, an ability that he attributes to the Germans alone. This means, says Eucken, that in the inner

⁷²Cited in *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷³ Eduard Spranger, “Die Individualität des Gewissens und der Staat”, in: *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, 22 (1933), p. 171–202.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 202.

soul of the German person something childlike, simple, natural has been maintained.⁷⁵

The double, analogous totality pattern, which at one and the same time frames and leaves out the empirical world, can already be seen in Nohl's 1926 essay on the unified education movement. He tries to show that the purpose of *all* the different strings of the New Education movement is to strive to overcome the one-sided schooling of the intellect, "mere" intellectual training, in favour of *total* education, meaning, as Nohl adds, education that is conscious of the community, or more precisely, the "ideal of a *Volk* community". The task, says Nohl, is to provide an educational organisation that develops unified humanness, that makes the person *whole*, and at the same time fosters the *unity of a higher form of life in the Volk as a whole*, which is at risk of being lost through the process of modern specialisation. For Nohl, the salvation of the German *Volk* from the dangers of the modern world, with its plurality and division of labour, lies in educating youth to the higher spiritual life of the idea, in teaching them that they must always consider the *whole*, from which the meaning of life comes, so that the *Volk* can blossom as a unified higher spiritual life in a higher form of community. Nohl believes with no uncertainty that it is this educational work on the totality that will rescue the German people from the pitfalls of the pluralising world. He writes that the future of the German people depends on this endeavour, that future that it is the fortune and responsibility of every German educator to contribute towards.⁷⁶ This corresponds exactly to thoughts that Nohl had expressed immediately after the First World War, while he was still stationed in Belgium, in the foreword to a collection of essays. His words expressed the mood of the mainstream of all educators of the time: "There is no other cure for the misfortune of our Volk than the new education of its youth, raising them to joyful, courageous, and creative achievement".⁷⁷ Almost twenty years earlier (and therefore long before the First World War) Eduard Spranger lamented the "inner corrosion" of Germany to an industrial state or social democracy or even anarchy – and promoted Fichte's ideal of a "closed national *Bildung*".⁷⁸ In 1920, Spranger repeated that there was only one way out of the political corrosion of the German *Volk*: the establishment of an educational parliament mandated to discuss educational matters autonomously and free from any direct linkage with politics or economy. Spranger knows that there will never again be a uniform *Weltanschauung*. However, he does not turn, as a consequence, to pluralism and democracy, but, rather, to a "higher spiritual power" that is superior to any *Weltanschauung* and to which education has to lead young men.⁷⁹

The way in which this formative discourse impacted the administration of the schools is revealed in the new organisation of teacher training in 1925. The constitution of the Weimar Reich had introduced four years of general primary

⁷⁵Eucken, *Die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung des deutschen Geistes*, p. 13.

⁷⁶Nohl, "Die Einheit der pädagogischen Bewegung", pp.60f.

⁷⁷Herman Nohl, "Vorwort", in: *Pädagogische und politische Aufsätze* (Jena, 1919), p. 4.

⁷⁸Eduard Spranger, "Gedanken zur Pädagogik", in: *Eduard Spranger. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, Heidelberg 1973, p. 201 [Original edition 1902].

⁷⁹Eduard Spranger, "Die Bedeutung der wissenschaftlichen Pädagogik für das Volksleben", in: *Eduard Spranger. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, Heidelberg 1973, pp. 267f. [Original edition 1920].

school for all children in 1920. In a 1925 memorandum, the Prussian Ministry for Science, Art and Education states that the goal of the reorganisation of primary school teacher training in Prussia is to train teachers to be teachers (*Bildner*) of the *Volk* and child-rearers (*Erzieher*) of the *Volk* with a high consciousness of real life. Teacher training should base upon strong roots in native *Volk* tradition⁸⁰ and strive towards a many-sided education, rather than the mere accumulation of knowledge. Teacher training should become the guardian of *heimatlich* (or native) nature and culture and *heimatlich* (native) *Volk* traditions (*Heimat* meaning the native homeland). This would produce teachers capable of contributing towards the promotion of healthy German *Volk* character and culture that is down-to-earth and embedded in tradition.⁸¹ In other words, the aim should be to rear teacher personalities that are suited and willing to serve the community,⁸² to rear the “*Führer* and *Erzieher* personality”.⁸³

Along with the German language, *Heimat* had become the fundamental element of the curriculum of true education. Eduard Spranger, one of the most influential theoreticians of *Heimat*, saw in *Heimatkunde* (or the study of *Heimat*) the chance to overcome the increasing specialisation of school subjects. In contrast to specialised subjects, the contents of *Heimat* reflect the organic in the world, the totality of life.⁸⁴ As it can not be dealt with using one science alone, says Spranger, it is the purest example of a totalising science,⁸⁵ a schooling in the concept of totality that we need in order to liberate ourselves from the mental-spiritual fragmentation of the present.⁸⁶ Here again, this totality is seen in a double manner: in the unity of the *Volk* and in the spiritual-mental unity within ourselves.⁸⁷

Bildung in a Social Vacuum: The Autonomy of Education

The constructions of deepest roots in the tradition of the *Volk*/highest inner spirituality in the personality resulted in an education that had to oscillate between lowest and highest and, through this, had to lose sight of empirical, that is, social and political dimensions. It is in this form that the *history of education* was constructed and its high point seen as the German Romantic Movement around 1800. In this context, a *theory of Bildung* was developed.

Here again Thomas Mann is representative of the thinking at the start of the twentieth century. In the frequently cited *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, Mann is proud to stress in 1918 that the German concept of education lacked the political element⁸⁸ as he rearticulates the long-established idea that the Germanic essence and the notion of *Bildung* is apolitical and antidemocratic. Referring to Goethe,

⁸⁰ *Denkschrift des Preussischen Ministeriums für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Bildung: Die Neuordnung der Volksschullehrerbildung in Preussen* (Berlin, 1925), p. 7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Eduard Spranger, *Der Bildungswert der Heimatkunde* (Leipzig, 1943), pp. 22f. [Original edition: 1923].

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, p. 103.

Mann writes that the “democratisation of the means of education” is the only and bitterly necessary corrective to the emerging democracy. The true understanding of education puts social and political issues in their only proper place: inside the inner personality.⁸⁹ Education, says Mann, is the forming of human beings, and never will the German spirit view “human beings” exclusively or even foremost as “social human beings”.⁹⁰ Politicisation of the German person has to take place in the context of *Volksstaat*, not democracy, for only so can the German people fulfil the “tasks of supremacy”.⁹¹ In this same period Sombart formulated the German understanding of freedom. He writes in 1915 that freedom in the German sense means mainly to be liberated from the intolerable slavery of public opinion, or in other words, from the true democratic institution. To be free means the embedding of the individual into the harmonious beauty of the whole.⁹²

In this social and political vacuum between the lowest denominator or totality of the Germanic people and the highest whole or totality of the Germanic personality, education had to be given the attribution – one that is variously described and affirmed in the research in the German-language realm up to the present day – that education is autonomous. This was based on the term *Bildung* that had been cultivated in the second half of the eighteenth century as a result of a depoliticised and *inner* reception of Shaftesbury.⁹³ At that time already, *Bildung* was aimed against Western *Civilisation*, targeting France in particular. *Bildung* became the epitome of the German Romantic Movement around 1800. On the basis of the concept of *Bildung*, then, *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* crystallised out of the context of the clutter and uncertainties surrounding the education law of the Reich.

The idea of the autonomy of education gained its ideological power out of the often heated parliamentary and school policy debates on the education law. The debates were interpreted as a reflection of a *Volk* community torn apart by democracy, and it was to be the job of education to rebuild that community. Wilhelm Flitner wrote as editor of the journal *Erziehung* in 1928 that it was not the task of educators to take sides, or in other words, it was not the job of educators to make people capable of engaging with democracy. Education must instead be oriented towards the higher world of the whole, the true *Volk*. As to the controversy between democracy and the authoritarian state, educators should look exclusively to a higher instance for orientation: the true community.⁹³ In Flitner’s understanding, this is the true *Volk*, the invisible Church, the true Community, whose contents are legitimate if they have a place in the inward spiritual world of the Person. It is in this that the autonomy of education lies when we examine the societal dependencies.⁹⁴ Flitner does not negate the necessity of tension in political life, but it means merely that education has some intrinsic laws that must not be

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 251.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 236.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 264f.

⁹²Sombart, *Händler und Helden*, p. 124.

⁹³Rebekka Horlacher, *Bildungstheorie vor der Bildungstheorie. Die Shaftesbury-Rezeption in Deutschland und der Schweiz im 18. Jahrhundert* (Doctoral dissertation, Zurich, 2002).

⁹⁴Wilhelm Flitner, “Zum Begriff der pädagogischen Autonomie”, in: Ulrich Hermann (ed.), *Wilhelm Flitner. Gesammelte Schriften. Band 3: Theoretische Schriften* (Paderborn, 1989), p. 244 [Original edition: 1928].

denied, for that would mean abandoning educational responsibility.⁹⁵ Politics is external – meaning that it is controversy and plurality – and its limits lie where the inner freedom of the duty of education begins.⁹⁶

One year later, in 1929, Erich Weniger, who studied under Nohl, placed a double emphasis on the autonomy of education. That autonomy was, first, a part of the modern atomisation process into different cultural areas, and, second, it must be strictly upheld because it came under attack from these other autonomous cultural areas. Weniger described this as tragic, because education was the greater means of upholding man's freedom and dignity.⁹⁷ The autonomy of education came to the fore in three areas: in the educating behaviour of the educator, in educational institutions, and in science.⁹⁸ Weniger found the first area to be the most significant, because autonomous educational practice was not dependent upon education's status as a science, but was merely fostered or hindered by it.¹⁰⁰ Weniger bases this idea on one of Nohl's statements in his essay in *Erziehung*: The teacher is not merely a contractor providing services to the family, the state, or the church. He serves his own higher idea, namely, the mental and physical development of children, which is supposed to cultivate the organs of a higher life.¹⁰¹ This was in no way a new idea; it had its origins in *Reformpädagogik*. In the foreword to a collection of texts called *Vom Kinde aus*, the editor, Johannes Gläser, writes in the name of the Educational Commission of the Friends of the Fatherland School and Education Department in Hamburg (*Arbeiten des pädagogischen Ausschusses der Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens zu Hamburg*) that he rejects anything that is demanded of education for the purposes and aims of the state, church, party, or the trades. Education is about "undisturbed growth"¹⁰² so that the whole of the child's soul can be sustained.¹⁰³

Just as the Progressive Education movement had deemed children and youth "holy", *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* was based on the premise that it was "immediate to God". This was in analogy to the historian Ranke's by then famous dictum that, while every epoch has its particular tendency and its own ideal, every epoch is a manifestation of the will of God; is "immediate to God". This meant that the individuality of history was the expression of divine providence. Similarly, then, education always meant acting as the "child's advocate" against the diabolical demands of society. Weniger writes that the powers in life seek in youth successors, servants, and holders of office; they seek total possession. But autonomy means

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 244.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 248.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 252.

⁹⁸Erich Weniger, "Die Autonomie der Pädagogik", in: *Die Eigenständigkeit der Erziehung in Theorie und Praxis* (Weinheim, 1952), p. 72 [Original edition: 1929].

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁰²Johannes Gläser, "Vorwort", in: *Vom Kinde aus. Arbeiten des Pädagogischen Ausschusses der Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens zu Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1920), p. 9.

¹⁰³Id., "Vom Kinde aus", in: *Vom Kinde aus. Arbeiten des Pädagogischen Ausschusses der Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens zu Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1920), p. 14 [Original edition: 1919].

insisting on the freedom of man, on his inner agreement and his will. In the midst of the confusing simultaneous societal demands on youth, educational autonomy is a means of assuring human unity and wholeness; it is a protective dam to contain the danger of being ripped apart or pulled hither and yon. It is here that the *Persönlichkeit* of the teacher, or child-rearer, makes his crucial contribution.¹⁰⁴

The weak theoretical foundation of the argument forced *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* to fall back on historical constructions. The catchword of child advocacy led naturally to the elevating of Rousseau as the first hero of educational autonomy. In 1929 and 1930¹⁰⁵ Georg Geissler, who was part of the circle around the editors of the journal *Erziehung*, published a monograph and a collection of texts on the autonomy of education. Both works begin with Rousseau and then move on, via Pestalozzi, to a treatment of only German authors up to the present. Rousseau was named the “founder of educational autonomy”, who had caused a complete shift in education by considering the “whole man” and “man himself in his totality”.¹⁰⁶ Here the focus is on three factors in the true essence of education: pupil, educator, and objective value. The educator is responsible for transmitting to the pupil – taking into account the “whole person” – *not* primarily scientific knowledge of the empirical world, but, rather, a world of ideas and values so that the “subjective totality of the pupil” can evolve.¹⁰⁷

By the close of the Weimar Republic, the concept of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* had matured to the extent that it could be codified effectively by Nohl and Pallat’s *Handbuch der Pädagogik* and could take on paradigmatic character. Whereas many, diverse authors contributed to the *Handbuch*, the most important contributions closely followed the line taken by the editors of the journal *Erziehung*. The first essay in the first volume was dedicated to the *Theory of Bildung*; the second addressed the *History of Bildung and Its Theory*. This *History*, which was the cooperative effort of several authors, did not begin with the Greeks, but instead introduced the topic with a long digression on “The Germanic Character” by Friedrich Naumann, one of Nohl’s colleagues in Göttingen. Nohl himself wrote the conclusion to the history, “The Educational Movement in Germany”, which once again homogenised all variations in the educational reform movement in Germany and thus created the premise that allowed the *theory of Bildung* to appear to follow logically. In other words, this construction of history served as the basis of argumentation for the *Bildung* theory. With all this, it may not astonish you to learn that these two essays subsequently appeared in book form in 1935 and, by 2002, had been published in a total of eleven editions. Still today, this book is regarded as one of the most important educational works of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸

Nohl’s programmatic essay on the theory of *Bildung* contains all the elements of this *geisteswissenschaftliche* theory. First, following Dilthey, the author examines the “Possibility of a General Theory” and, after analysing the various founding theories, declares the field to be an expanse of rubble and ruins. For Nohl, the correct

¹⁰⁴Weniger, “Die Autonomie der Pädagogik”, pp. 82f.

¹⁰⁵Georg Geissler, *Das Problem der pädagogischen Autonomie* (Langensalza, 1930).

¹⁰⁶Id., *Die Autonomie der Pädagogik* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 9–12.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 78ff.

¹⁰⁸Klaus Peter Horn & Christian Ritzi (Eds.), *Klassiker und Aussenseiter. Pädagogische Veröffentlichungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hohengehren, 2001).

approach is to start out from the education reality, which for him is in no way empirical, but instead idealistic. Each cultural area, says Nohl in a Platonic fashion, is led by “its own idea”, and this idea is the *phaenomenon bene fundatum* that must constitute the starting point for the scientific theory.¹⁰⁹ Nohl does not elaborate on why this is so.

Logically, Nohl now moves on to treat the “autonomy of education” and asserts that the state, politics, economy, and the parties seek to instrumentalise education as an executive organ that carries out their aims. In the face of the horrible struggle of these powers and world-views, says Nohl, we must reinforce the autonomy of education that the *theory of Bildung* demonstrates. The act of educating, or the pedagogical relationship, stands at the centre of this autonomy, which has been possible in Germany only since Rousseau’s discovery of childhood and its transmission by Pestalozzi. Its goal is the education of the whole man.¹¹⁰ From this, writes Nohl, the pedagogical community (*Bildungsgemeinschaft*) becomes the core of education. It is the most intensive form of human relationships. The educational community has as its goal the “awakening of a unified spiritual life”, a “personal spirit [*Geist*]”. In these polarising times, we need the model of the educator-personality, Nohl continues, for the more scattered or incomplete that education is in a particular time, the more important it is for the pupil to see in the unified humanness of his educator a representation of the higher life.¹¹¹ Thus, the goal of the autonomy of education is *Bildung*, which starts out from the dualisms and seeks personal totality. As Nohl puts it, *Bildung* is the subjective way of existing in a culture – the inner form and spiritual posture of the soul, which takes on, through its own powers, everything that comes to it from the outside towards forming a unified inward life. It is this inward spiritual life that shapes every utterance and every action.¹¹² Therefore, as Nohl sums up, this approach is possible only in a state that has a comprehensive *Volksbildung*. Nohl concludes from his discussion of *Volksbildung* that only in an educated life of the Volk does the individual also achieve this unified shaping and forming.¹¹³

Outlook

It is not by accident that the 1998 *Philosophers on Education*¹¹⁴ edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty does not contain a single reference to the philosophising German educationalists. The fact is that the tradition was obviously not compatible with international discourse at all, for hardly any of the works have been published in English or French translation – although some have appeared in Finnish and

¹⁰⁹Herman Nohl, “Die Theorie der Bildung”, in: Herman Nohl & Ludwig Pallat (eds.), *Handbuch der Pädagogik*. Erster Band: *Die Theorie und die Entwicklung des Bildungswesens* (Langensalza, 1933), pp. 12–13.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 15–17.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 21–22.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹⁴Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Philosophers on Education. New Historical Perspectives* (London, 1998).

Japanese.¹¹⁵ This omission does not mean that *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* is merely an insignificant relic of the Weimar Republic, however. After 1945, Nohl, Spranger, Flitner and Weniger once again held key chairs/professorships in the German Federal Republic and founded a school that remained virulent even long after the declaration in 1968 of the end of an epoch.¹¹⁶ The issue is not whether the discourse continued to develop in a linear or consistent fashion. The important point is that Herman Nohl, for example, is still today described in an affirmative manner in large studies such as Dorle Klika's habilitation dissertation,¹¹⁷ that *Persönlichkeit* continues to be used as an educational concept with positive connotations, that the autonomy of education is still presented affirmatively,¹¹⁸ and that even the most recent historical treatments still focus almost exclusively on German authors from the late eighteenth century to the present.¹¹⁹

Upon this background, the attempts most recently to internationalise research in education are a welcome development.¹²⁰ However, what needs to be examined first may well be nationalisation, not internationalisation. Recently, a survey within the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft* (German Society of Education) asked participants what they saw as the 100 most important publications of the twentieth century in the field of education. The results showed that thirty of the works named were first published outside Germany. And yet, what Klaus Peter Horn finds "astonishing" is *not* that this is such a small number, but that it is so *large*.¹²¹ Even though repulsive *völkisch*-national arguments have long disappeared from educational discussion in German books and journals, it is noteworthy that there is very little reception of the international discussion in Germany – both in historical and theoretical research; educational sociology is very weakly represented; and the issue of education and democracy is a marginal one. Pragmatism is

¹¹⁵Jürgen Oelkers, *Die Internationalisierung der pädagogischen Theoriebildung*. (Manuscript, Zürich, 2002).

¹¹⁶Ilse Dahmer & Wolfgang Klafki (eds.), *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik am Ausgang ihrer Epoche – Erich Weniger* (Weinheim, 1968).

¹¹⁷Dorle Klika, *Herman Nohl: sein "Pädagogischer Bezug" in Theorie, Biographie und Handlungspraxis* (Köln, 2000).

¹¹⁸Gertrud Schiess, *Die Diskussion über die Autonomie der Pädagogik* (Weinheim, 1973); Bast, Roland, *Pädagogische Autonomie: historisch-systematische Hinführung zu einem Grundbegriff der Geisteswissenschaftlichen Pädagogik* (Bochum, 2000).

¹¹⁹Dietrich Benner & Herwart Kemper, *Quellentexte zur Theorie und Geschichte der Reformpädagogik* (Weinheim, 2000–); Dietrich Benner & Herwart Kemper, *Theorie und Geschichte der Reformpädagogik* (Weinheim, 2001–); Jürgen Reyer, *Kleine Geschichte der Sozialpädagogik: Individuum und Gemeinschaft in der Pädagogik der Moderne* (Hohengehren, 2002).

¹²⁰Peter Drewek & Eckhardt Fuchs, *Internationale Rezeption und Internationalisierungsprozesse in der Erziehungswissenschaft im deutsch-amerikanischen Vergleich 1871–1945*, <<http://dRwww.sowi.uni-mannheim.de/ew3/drewek.html#DFG-PROJEKTE>>; Marcelo Caruso & Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (eds.), *Internationalisierung: Semantik und Bildungssystem in vergleichender Perspektive [Jürgen Schriever zum 60. Geburtstag]* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002).

¹²¹Klaus Peter Horn, "Abbild oder Zerrbild? Ergebnisse der Befragung zu den 'pädagogisch wichtigsten Veröffentlichungen des 20. Jahrhunderts'", in: Klaus Peter Horn & Christian Ritz (eds.), *Klassiker und Aussenseiter. Pädagogische Veröffentlichungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hohengehren, 2001), p. 29.

practically non-existent, educational concepts from analytical philosophy (such as from the work of Scheffler¹²² or Peters¹²³) are missing entirely.¹²⁴

Internationalisation is the decisive claim for progress within educational discourse. As a precondition, we need to understand our own traditions, our own *languages*. That is why the history of any discipline is so important. “To discover from the history of thought that there are in fact no such timeless concepts, but only the various different concepts which have gone with various different societies, is to discover a general truth not merely about the past but about ourselves as well”; to learn from the past by distinguishing between the necessary and the contingent is to learn “the key to self-awareness itself”.¹²⁵ In the 1920s, George Herbert Mead already knew about the contexts of ideas when he wrote, “Popular education and economic opportunity sprang naturally from its [the American] social attitude and its geographical situation. It was the distillation of the democracy inherent in Calvinism and the Industrial Revolution at liberty to expand and proliferate for a century without the social problems which beset it in Europe. The American pioneer was spiritually stripped for the material conquest of a continent and the formation of a democratic community”.¹²⁶ Internationalisation does not mean blind adoption of foreign concepts. It means international discussion among scholars who are historically self-aware of their own traditions, not in order to defend them, but – on the contrary – to allow different or foreign arguments to be understood.¹²⁷

¹²²For example, Israel Scheffler, *The Language of Education* (Oxford, 1960).

¹²³For example, Richard S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London, 1966).

¹²⁴I am talking about the mainstream of the discourse. There are exceptions, of course. To name three: Jürgen Oelkers, Harm Paschen, and Peter Drewek.

¹²⁵Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas”, in: James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, 1988), p. 67.

¹²⁶George Herbert Mead, “The Philosophies of Royce, James, and Dewey in their American Setting”, in: A.J. Reck (ed.), *Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 374–375 [Original edition: 1929/1930].

¹²⁷Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960). See, for example, *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie*, 9/1 (2003).