

Kant's method of teaching philosophy

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Kant's emphasis on the importance of education theory and the method of teaching philosophy will be introduced in several steps in this article. Firstly, it describes the importance of the ability to think freely, secondly, it introduces Kant's zetetic method presented in *his Announcement of the Programme of Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766* and, thirdly, it aims to present Kant's method of teaching and his educational theory in the complex system of his cosmopolitanism.

I. Sapere aude!

When we want to explore the importance of the education process for Kant, it can be helpful to start with Kant's writing *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, published in 1784, in which he characterizes Enlightenment as "*Sapere aude!*" and introduces the idea in the following way: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another"¹ (*WA*, AA 08: 35)². According to Kant, many people prefer immaturity because it is easier to be guided by someone else and they do not need to make any effort nor be afraid of danger. Immaturity has become almost man's second nature and people were not able to use their own understanding, because they were never allowed to make the attempt (*WA*, AA 08: 35). Kant calls for a reform in thinking – representing man's step towards maturity – which needs understanding for its realization. At the same time Kant states that

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¹ Translation in: Kant, I.: *Political Writings. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. 2nd Edition, transl. by H. B. Nisbet, ed. H. S. Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 54.

² Kant's works are cited in accordance with Akademie-Ausgabe (AA), Berlin 1900ff.

humanity has not achieved the age of enlightenment yet and reason has not fully developed yet. However, its great potential can help man with his self-formation in the flow of history and can become a capacity in future when people will be capable of enlightenment. However, it can be a very long process to a stage of improvement because people seem not to be “taught” how to think.

In this writing Kant describes the situation of his present day. People have the potential to use reason freely but it is extremely hard for them, and thus the stage of complete enlightenment can be approached in small steps only. The problem is also connected with two types of use of reason which Kant distinguishes: private and public use of reason. He writes: “[b]y the public use of one’s own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of *it as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*. What I term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular *civil* post or office with which he is entrusted.” *WA*, AA 08: 37). For enlightenment it is necessary to have freedom to use reason publicly in all matters because only this can bring enlightenment among human beings, and when someone uses his reason as a man of learning, by that he declares that it is a matter of growth, education and improvement. It is then not about gaining knowledge but it is such a use of reason which enables man to shape social world. This is an ambitious aim to be achieved by mankind and in another essay dealing with the topic of the use of reason *What is Orientation in Thinking?*, published in 1786, Kant shows how the belief in reason enables us to orientate our thinking. Kant writes:

do not deny reason that prerogative which makes it the greatest good on earth, namely its right to be the ultimate touchstone of truth. To think for oneself means to look within oneself (i.e. in one’s own reason) for the supreme touchstone of truth; and the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is enlightenment. [...] To employ one’s own reason means simply to ask oneself, whenever one is urged to accept something, whether one finds it possible to transform the reason for accepting it, or the rule which follows from what is accepted, into a universal principle governing the use of one’s reason. (*WDO*, AA 08: 146).³

To use reason freely is crucial, and to have the freedom to use it publicly is a necessary condition to be able to orientate our thinking. The next part of the article will show, as stated by M. Ruffing (2011), that the fact that we possess understanding means much more than the fact that

³ Translation in: Kant, I.: *Political Writings. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. 2nd Edition, transl. by H. B. Nisbet, ed. H. S. Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 249.

we are “rational beings” because the complex disposition of “reason”, if it is formed and exercised in an enlightened way, enables us to be moral beings. The man is thus always challenged to “Selbstdenken” and Kant’s “Sapere aude!” does not only focus on strengthening knowledge and education in traditional sense but also on creation of moral self-understanding (Ruffing, 2011, p. 214).

II. The zetetic method of teaching

Both essays *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* and *What is Orientation in Thinking?* were published in mid-1780s, twenty years after Kant’s *Announcement of the Programme of Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765—1766*. This announcement is a very important document explaining a method how to teach students to gradually become men of *understanding*, men of *reason* and finally men of *learning* which can at the end help to enlighten the whole era. In the next part of the paper we will concentrate on this document in which Kant explains zetetic method, being a *new way of teaching*, based on enquiring, investigating and exploring. The announcement of the programme of lectures shows how seriously Kant treated his profession of a lecturer.⁴ He not only wanted to instruct young students in the state of research in various fields of science, but he saw his duty in helping them to achieve enlightened understanding, which means on the one hand, self-understanding, and on the other hand, understanding of the world as such.

The situation in methods of teaching motivated Kant to present his lectures for the winter semester 1765—1766 differently. According to his announcement of the programme for lectures, the appropriate method

⁴ Despite the fact that Kant was not a theoretician of education but rather an active academic lecturer, he commented on the issues of pedagogy, education and methodology. Some memories of his students were preserved in the form of reports of his students. Ludwig Ernst Borowski, one of Kant’s early biographers, e.g., wrote: “Equipped with all the knowledge necessary for the discipline in which he was to lecture, he appeared in his lecture hall with the most unassuming modesty — always reminding us that he would not teach philosophy, but rather how to philosophize, etc. [...] To think for oneself — to investigate for oneself — to stand on one’s own feet — were expressions he uttered constantly.” [1804, 84, 188]; “Of course, a lively attentiveness was always required. Without this his lectures couldn’t be understood, and one would get lost.” [1804, 85]; “... it was necessary to pay close attention to his lectures. The gift that many teachers have to make the concepts and material completely clear for everyone, to make themselves understood, even by students who would skip class or be distracted, by repeating himself using different expressions, and essentially to force these students to understand, was clearly not Kant’s. Everything must be carefully noted, as is only reasonable.” [1804, 185-86]. Available online, retrieved from <http://users.manchester.edu/FacStaff/SSNaragon/Kant/Lectures/lecturesPedagogy.htm>

for teaching philosophy should be *zetetic* method – or the method of *enquiry*. He adds that the philosophical writer, or teacher of philosophy, or the instructor, is not to be regarded as the paradigm of judgement but he should be taken “as the occasion for forming one’s own judgement about him, and even, indeed, for passing judgement against him. What the pupil is really looking for is proficiency in the method of reflecting and drawing inferences *for himself*” (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 307). The method in philosophy is very specific, nature of philosophy is different from other types of knowledge, in philosophy there is no common standard and, in addition, it will never adapt itself to market or fashion (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 308). Based on this, Kant proposes his programme of lectures on metaphysics, logic, ethics or moral philosophy and physical geography.

Kant explains that *metaphysics* should be taught at the end of the course as it is the most demanding discipline. Eager students at the start of the course continuously disappear and the lecture rooms are later empty. Thus he suggests presenting these issues at the end of the series of lectures. After a brief introduction he suggests beginning with empirical psychology which is a metaphysical science of man based on experience, then continuation with corporeal nature – which is drawn from cosmology, then inorganic things, differences between mental and material beings and at the end rational psychology (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 308–309). *Logic* represents a science of two kinds for him: the critique and canon of *sound understanding* and the critique and canon of *real learning* (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 310). Next discipline, *ethics*, has, according to Kant, a special fate: it resembles a science and enjoys the reputation for being thoroughly grounded and it does it with even greater ease than metaphysics – despite the fact it is neither of them. The reason for this appearance is that the distinction between good and evil in actions, and the judgement of moral rightness, can be known, easily and accurately, by the human heart through what is called sentiment, and that without the elaborate necessity of proofs. His method here is based on the explanation and considering historically and philosophically what *happens* before specifying what *ought to happen*. Then he focuses on *man* by whom he means the unchanging *nature* of man, and his distinctive position within the creation (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 311). Next part of this course is the subject of *physical geography* because students, according to Kant’s previous experience, lacked any adequate knowledge of historical matters probably due to their lack of experience. Geography is a very wide term, so he has decided to use the term physical geography but this does not deal only with physical features of

the earth but also with other parts of the subject, which he considers to be of even greater general utility. The discipline then covers *physical, moral and political geography* and he concentrates on the features of nature, man, and states and nations throughout the world (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 312–313).

The ability to think for oneself and to achieve the enlightenment is a complicated and demanding task of teaching. Kant emphasises the proper (zetetic) method of education of students and adds: “[t]here is always a certain difficulty involved in instruction of young people, and it is this: the knowledge one imparts to them is such that one finds oneself constrained to outstrip their years.” (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 305).⁵ It means that while instructing young people, teachers do not wait for their understanding to become mature, but they want to give them knowledge which can be, by normal circumstances, understood only by minds which are more practised and experienced. Teachers want students to learn something they are not prepared to understand. Teaching philosophy should follow a different path and Kant derives it from the natural progress of human knowledge. Kant advocates the process that should be based on developing understanding by experience first (to attain intuitive judgements and then concepts), followed by employing reason (to understand the grounds and consequences of the concepts), and finally, *understanding* these concepts as parts of a whole by means of science (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 305). And it is the role of the teacher to develop in his pupil the abovementioned man of understanding, then the man of *reason*, and finally the man of *learning* (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 305). Even if the student is usually not able to reach the final phase and become the man of *learning*, this process has an advantage, because the student will still have benefitted from his instruction – Kant says he will become more experienced and more clever – and adds that if not for school, then at least for life. The problem is that this method is very often used in a reversed form, it means, that the pupil “picks up a kind of reason, even before his understanding has developed. His science is a borrowed science which he wears, not as something which has, so to speak, grown within him, but as something which has been hung upon him” (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 306). The intellectual ability is corrupted by the delusion of wisdom – there are people who have studied a lot but display little understanding. This was something that Kant warns of

⁵ Translation in: Kant, I.: *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755 – 1770. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. 2nd Edition, transl. by D. Walford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, p. 291.

when saying that academies send more people out into the world with their heads of inanities (*abgeschmackte Köpfe*) than any other public institution (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 306).

The question is how to change it by the means of philosophy. Kant's suggestion is: "it is not *thoughts* but *thinking* which the understanding ought to learn. The understanding ought to be *led*, if you wish, but not *carried*, so that in future it will be capable of walking on its own, and doing so without stumbling." (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 306). He adds: "[t]he youth who has completed his school instruction has been accustomed to learn. He now thinks that he is going to *learn philosophy*. But this is impossible, for he ought now to *learn to philosophise*" (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 306). Not much has changed from the times of Kant's words: students think that they learn philosophy, which in fact means that their learning is reduced to a historical type of learning – they deal with history of philosophy, they learn about famous personalities, schools, periods or doctrines and they absorb what is given, available, or as Kant says, they learn what may be assimilated. But teaching philosophy (i.e. philosophising) in this way is impossible because, as Kant says, there is no book saying "look, here is wisdom or knowledge you can rely on" (*V-Anth/Fried*, AA 25.2: 307) and he is talking about a betrayal and deception of the trust of students.

In this context Kant emphasises the role of teacher who must be a master of their field. The teacher must also be patient in his communication with students and Kant himself aimed to fulfil these criteria in his profession of a lecturer (Kyslan, 2015, 83–84). In pedagogy lectures Kant says that "[e]verything in education depends on establishing the right principles throughout and making them comprehensible and acceptable to children" (*Päd*, AA 09: 493) The role of teacher is thus crucial in developing understanding and cultivating the character of students and the zetetic method of teaching provides a challenge for teachers who shall stimulate students in *thinking for themselves*.

III. Cosmopolitan Education

Pursuing Kant's main idea of philosophy of history – which is the idea of perpetual peace – the importance of education which helps people to overcome their mental immaturity is obvious. Kant's philosophy of history is a vision of society where cosmopolitanism is the result of growing enlightenment and the aim of the method of teaching philosophy is related to the idea to approach perpetual peace. This can,

however, be done only if people understand the importance to orient towards future. Kant says that the good in the world arises from good education and that “the design for a plan of education must be made in a cosmopolitan manner” (*Päd*, AA 09: 448). At the same time he criticizes parents and princes who do not care about *Bildung* (moral formation) of children, because parents want children to get on well in the world and princes use them as instruments for their own designs (*Päd*, AA 09: 448). This behaviour means a problem in approaching the ideal aim but without education it will not be possible.

The overall progress of mankind can only be achieved in human species developing from one generation to another and Kant says it can be achieved only by means of education (*Päd*, AA 09: 441, 444). Thus, education process, consisting of four stages – discipline, civilization, cultivation and moralization, is a necessary part of progress of mankind oriented towards future in which Kant believed in his philosophy of history. The role of education is very important in this process of approaching the ideal because “[t]he human being can only become human through education, he is nothing except what education makes out of him” (*Päd*, AA 09: 443). To approach this ideal is very difficult and Kant is aware that the progress towards it will not be linear and it can never be fully guaranteed. In the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* he warns that we are not morally mature yet and that there also must be a careful process in moral formation of citizens:

Wir sind im hohen Grade durch Kunst und Wissenschaft cultivirt. Wir sind civilisirt bis zum Überlästigen zu allerlei gesellschaftlicher Artigkeit und Anständigkeit. Aber uns für schon moralisirt zu halten, daran fehlt noch sehr viel. Denn die Idee der Moralität gehört noch zur Cultur; der Gebrauch dieser Idee aber, welcher nur auf das Sittenähnliche in der Ehrliche und der äußeren Anständigkeit hinausläuft, macht blos die Civilisirung aus. So lange aber Staaten alle ihre Kräfte auf ihre eiteln und gewaltsamen Erweiterungsabsichten verwenden und so die langsame Bemühung der inneren Bildung der Denkungsart ihrer Bürger unaufhörlich hemmen, ihnen selbst auch alle Unterstützung in dieser Absicht entziehen, ist nichts von dieser Art zu erwarten: weil dazu eine lange innere Bearbeitung jedes gemeinen Wesens zur Bildung seiner Bürger erfordert wird. Alles Gute aber, das nicht auf moralisch=gute Gesinnung gepropft ist, ist nichts als lauter Schein und schimmerndes Elend. (*IaG*, AA 08: 26).

According to G. Cavallar (2015), Kant’s cosmopolitanism has three basic features – it is embedded, dynamic and pedagogical. Cavallar explains its embeddedness as a part of Rousseau’s heritage and it is also present in Kant’s cosmopolitan right. The dynamic element is connected

with the final aim of the human species as a basis for cosmopolitanism and Cavallar claims that this is present in Kant's understanding of moral formation (*Bildung*) as the key means through which individuals, as well as the human species as such, approach their ultimate end of their existence. This is their moral vocation (*Bestimmung*), the development of their natural predispositions proportionally and purposively. Cavallar explains that the education of human species can be achieved only in a "cosmopolitan manner" and aptly adds that Kant's approach is designed in the form of an ideal where moral formation would coincide with cosmopolitan formation and it would revolve around universalised maxims: the enlarged conduct of thought, a proper comportment of mind and a moral character. (Cavallar, 2015, 18).

Similarly to cosmopolitan theory according to which cosmopolitanism is understood as result of growing enlightenment, Kant refers to an outline of a theory of education as a noble ideal which also does not have to be realized immediately, but it must not be considered to be chimerical (*Päd*, AA 09: 444). This idea is for him a concept of perfection and to quote Munzel, "[i]t is just this nature of an ideal normative concept that allows the pedagogical activity to surpass its own existing state and that of the human affairs around it" (Munzel, 2003, 61). Kant's method of teaching philosophy is a method of teaching *philosophizing* or *thinking* because the aim of this *new method of teaching* is to cultivate reason and to cultivate moral character, gaining knowledge or teaching thoughts are not the main aims. It will be possible if students are led by someone who is able to help them in this difficult task. Parents, teachers, tutors can influence their children or students, they can shape their development, they can inspire them and help them not only to develop their rational capacities but to form their moral character in a cosmopolitan manner. Cosmopolitan values should be taught, they can help students to form their own moral characters and become good citizens (in the republican form of government). It then goes hand in hand with human natural propensity towards freedom (*Päd*, AA 09: 442) with one more important task of education which is the problem to teach students how to use their freedom and to realize that their independence is also connected with the question "how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use ones freedom" (*Päd*, AA 09: 453). This seems to be a challenge also for education and teaching philosophy nowadays.⁶

⁶ The article was presented at a conference on education at the Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, on May 8, 2015 and it is part of the research project VEGA 1/0238/15 *Kant's Ideas of*

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Abstract: The article focuses on Kant's emphasis on the importance of education, especially teaching philosophizing, in the development of moral character of an individual who is at the same time able to think for oneself. The Enlightenment motto "Sapere aude!" is discussed in the first part of the article as it represents the groundwork for teaching students to philosophize (not philosophy, which is impossible to teach). The ability to think for oneself is an important issue in Kant's Announcement of the Programme of Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765—1766 in which he explains the zetetic method of teaching and describes his plan of lectures on metaphysics, logic, doctrine of virtues and physical geography – all of them being based on a new way of teaching that plays an important role in shaping and cultivating the character of students. The last part of the article aims to show Kant's educational method incorporated in his cosmopolitan theory.

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