Problematising Critique in Pedagogy

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Following the Enlightenment, the concept of ‘critique’ broadened and acquired a political denotation, in which the expression of opinion alone could itself be already considered critique. This meaning of ‘critique’ expresses acknowledgement of men as equal, free and rational. This broad concept of critique, however, also tends to negate certain more technical and specific forms. This paper goes back to conceptions of critique introduced by Kant and developed in an educational perspective by the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp. Kant’s concept of critique concentrated on the conditions of possibility of judgemental powers, resulting in a transcendental critique of Reason. Natorp applied this conception of transcendental critique to education. Though Natorp relates education to society as a whole, his concept of critique does not uncover the social determinants of educational views but holds on to a transcendental critical idea of critical judgement that is not completely socially determined. Consequently, in the transcendental critical approach, the critical function of Reason is given priority over any political vision. This results in a conception of critique that primarily questions validity claims, stressing rational testing as opposed to other sources of validity, such as traditional or religious authority. The transcendental critical programme, further developed in twentieth-century Germany, still endorses the implied denial of the possibility of deriving the validity of propositions from experience. It can be distinguished from Karl-Otto Apel’s brand of transcendental critique by its refusal to assume any primary criterion for critical judgement, in the manner of Apel’s ‘ideal communicative community’. Consequently, this programme cannot result in any positive conception of education. Its main contribution consists in exposing those presuppositions of educational views and practices that function as a priori ideas as conditions of the possibility of their justification. Though not denying the value and relevance of positive educational conceptions, this transcendental critical approach primarily aims at preventing metaphysical foundational questions from being forgotten or dogmatically fossilised.
I A SPECIFICALLY PEDAGOGICAL INTEREST IN CRITIQUE?

It is by no means self-evident that the concept of critique should in any particular sense be connected to pedagogy.1 Though few will doubt that critique can occur in pedagogical contexts—whether within processes of education (for example in the form of the learners’ criticism of their educators) or in the form of external criticism (for example, directed at the performance of education and teaching in view of the expectations of a civil community as regards the behaviour, skill and knowledge, interest and commitment of its younger generations)—this, however, does not distinguish critique as a specifically pedagogical issue. In analogous ways, patients occasionally criticise their doctors, clients their lawyers and customers the goods purchased, the producers or the vendors. Analogously, a civil community’s health-care system can be decried as over-expensive for external, economic reasons; politicians as corrupt for moral reasons; the economy as badly managed for political reasons; or the range of information and entertainment offered by the media as deficient and primitive, as measured by the quality standards of intellectuals.

In these contexts, critique is a universal term expressing any kind of displeasure about the real or imaginary imperfections of something under any possible discretionary aspect. There seem to be no particular objects that more than others enjoy the privilege or suffer the fate of being exposed to criticism. Nor does the present-day common usage of the term privilege any particular aspects of critical judgement, so that one could conclude that, for example, complaining about faults from a pedagogical point of view—that is, in the interest of education and Bildung2—fulfils the concept of criticism better than, for example, critical evaluation in the course of product-testing does.

The common non-expert concepts of education and so-called educational institutions do not even give rise to the expectation that education should, at least particularly, aim at raising critical awareness. First and foremost, pedagogical practice is expected to develop whatever forms of functionality the civil community requires for its continued existence and development. Since these are to be learned, they are not supposed to be subjected to criticism. Consequently, schools have to build up qualifications, to stabilise ideological, political or religious conviction systems from generation to generation, to discipline adolescents according to given lifestyles, position them in the system of employment, personalise and socialise them for communicative and co-operative practices, and in these respects they are not expected to induce criticality. This is but a small selection of the overpowering functions of institutionalised education documented by historical-empirical research (cf. Ballauff, 1984).

However, neither common linguistic usage nor prevailing non-expert expectations of pedagogy are authoritative. They provide some insight into historical reality, but they do not indicate the boundaries of what is reasonable or acceptable.
The universal understanding of critique and criticality prevailing today, along with the assumption of a natural right to criticise, is a result of modern age developments in Europe. The European humanism of the Renaissance re-introduced the ancient Greek ‘art’ of judgement (= critique; cf. Mittelstraß, 1984) into the disciplines of philology, logic and aesthetics. Critique was an expert method of judging and improving texts, of the logical analysis of judgements and the legitimisation of comparative value-judgements in literature and the fine arts. Since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of criticism and critique has passed the limits of these disciplines to become generally applicable (Röttgers, 1982, p. 655). Criticism and critique are no longer restricted to the Bible and the classical works of antiquity, but can be applied to all spheres of society and the state. With Kant’s critiques of Reason, criticism finally covers even the faculties of judgement and thinking, the employment of Reason itself, and installs itself in its place. Criticism becomes the key operation of the Enlightenment: ‘Our age is the age of criticism’, Kant wrote in 1781. Everything had to be subjected to it, including religion and legislation, if they were not to ‘become the subjects of just suspicion’, but instead to ‘lay claim to sincere respect, which Reason accords only to that which has stood the test of a free and public examination’ (Kant, 1956, A XI).4

As long and insofar as critique is understood as an artificial method of judgement, its employment is attached to conditions that refer back to pedagogical processes. Only the eruditi, the experts in their respective fields, were capable of sophisticated criticism. Apparently not before the second half of the twentieth century did the conception of criticism as something available to the unsophisticated become prevalent and universally acknowledged in (German) usage. One could even say that critique has become a universal ‘concept of obligation’ that nobody can evade without running the ‘danger of a legitimation deficit’ (cf. Röttgers, 1982, p. 675). At the same time the quality standard is lowered or even completely dropped. To be critical—to be able, allowed or supposed to express one’s own judgement—becomes a matter of course, something that seems to be unconditionally tied to the sociocultural status of being human. In the process of this development, critique loses its teeth, so to speak. Or it initiates a spiral of meta- and meta-meta-critique that finally induces weariness and leads to a change of subject.

How this fading of the concept of criticism and critique could have come about is a rather complicated question. The crucial historical factor that triggered the universalisation of critique was the Enlightenment (cf. Jan Masschelein’s contribution to this volume). But today’s trivialisation of the employment of critique (in democratic societies) certainly does not correspond to its initial position. For Kant, for example, there was no doubt that the critical employment of Reason could only be the result of a disciplining, cultivating, civilising and moralising educational process, which tied the liberation of adolescents to their ‘subjection’ under a ‘juridical constraint’ (cf. Kant, 1968, p. 711). The human being’s emergence from natural and self-imposed minority or
tutelage (Unmündigkeit), as it is expressed in the critique of the Enlightenment, was tied to powerful oppositions. To make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another required courage (cf. Markus Rieger-Ladich, 2002, especially pp. 422–453). In present-day use of the idea of criticism, most of the tension of this relationship seems to be lost. One hypothesis that might explain this loss is the following.

The de-disciplinisation and trivialisation of critique have been brought about by a particular political conception being superimposed on other conceptions and drawing attention away from them. This political conception is perceptible in Kant’s above quoted remark on the ‘age of criticism’. He combines the observation that criticism has become the historically decisive factor of his time with the idea that everything that deserves sincere respect must be subjected to free and public examination. Besides religion, which can no longer legitimise its claim to respect by referring to its ‘sacredness’, it is particularly ‘legislation’ that is no longer exempted from criticism on grounds of its ‘authority’. The political thrust in the usage of the term is thus obvious, even though this does not fully cover Kant’s conception of criticism.

In the present-day trivialised usage of ‘criticism’ and ‘critique’, the relation of criticism as practised by the individual to ‘public examination’, that is, the question of what can be universally acknowledged, seems to be lost. The right to criticise has acquired the status of a conditio humana in democratic societies, unconditionally granted to everybody. Even to hold an opinion in the first place can be regarded as a form of criticality. Forming opinions, though, even by traditional pedagogical standards, does not require any sophisticated educational efforts. Human beings just do hold opinions. In a particular political sense, however, it is indeed comprehensible why mere expressions of opinion should be acknowledged as relevant, as forms of critique. If the political perspective actually includes all members of a civil community, then a deviant opinion held by an individual that, as it were, only claims the individual’s membership in the community and his being threatened with exclusion from it, can be understood as critique. This does not yet touch upon the question of whether critique can actually go beyond judgements in the shape of opinions (cf. Held, 2000).

Under this aspect, the more common and at the same time more shallow employment of criticism and critique is a sign not only of superficial or deficient education, but also of a historical achievement of political critique—the establishment of a human condition appropriate to democracy. The problem shifts to the dominance of this political conception of critique as a general right to hold and express opinions, and to the lack of differentiation brought about by this development. In fact, the political-democratic privilege of being in some respect critical even by merely living within a civil community and expressing one’s own opinion, no matter whether borrowed or original—once the hard struggle to achieve it has fallen into oblivion—is accompanied by an ease that is alien to all sophisticated forms of criticism. The civil right to criticise, granted as an unconditional gift, can encourage the inclination to avoid or reject
laborious and sophisticated forms of critique. As a general tendency, this leads toward their elimination, to some degree of standardisation, maybe also to automatisation, which combine to bring it into line with the desire for performativity (cf. Lyotard, 1986). The observation that currently even superficial education seems to be losing its disciplining effect supports this view. As an example to illustrate this, one might take the critical student who in a university course exercises his civil right to pursue his well-being by complaining of having been exposed to the presentation of a well-prepared paper for a whole hour (cf. Gruschka, 2001/2, pp. 18ff.).

Fundamentally this touches on the question of how sophisticated forms of critique, which in turn depend upon an artificial pedagogy, relate to an unsophisticated right to critique in the political form sketched above. This problem relates to a discourse that reaches back to the beginnings of elaborated educational theories in the works of Plato. In the following, I will discuss this in a historically later constellation, at the height of the classical modern age.

II A MODEL OF THE RELATION BETWEEN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS

Historically situated before so-called Critical Theory, around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Paul Natorp (1854–1934) in his Sozialpädagogik (1974) and other works presented a pedagogical-philosophical theory that has appropriately been labelled ‘emancipatory pedagogy’ (cf. Jegelka, 1992). The inspiring potential of Natorp’s contribution to the problem in question has not been fully realised; on the contrary, since the 1920s it has more or less fallen into oblivion—partly as a consequence of the triumphant progress of hermeneutical Reason, but also because of its harsh incompatibility with dictatorial political conceptions of order. Natorp takes up the ‘age of criticism’ and in particular Kant’s attempt to apply critique to Reason itself, an approach that he traces back to ancient scepticism, but especially to Socrates and Plato.

Natorp’s pedagogical approach is related to Critical Theory of the kind that has become influential since the 1960s—mainly in the doctrine of knowledge-guiding interests (Jürgen Habermas)—insofar as both conceive the concept of pedagogy with regard to the problem of the social whole. It is in this sense that Natorp accentuates the term ‘social education’, by which he does not designate a separate domain among other pedagogical specialisations. Rather, the theory of pedagogy as a whole is confronted with the problem of the social whole. Natorp deems it necessary to emphasise its social character solely in order to point out the difference between his approach and the misguided individualistic tendencies of his time. Their defects, in turn, in his view do not lie in their pursuit of the liberation of individuality and their efforts to enhance it pedagogically. The defect of individualistic pedagogical approaches lies in the fact that even extreme injustice in a class-based society is ignored so that the
individual’s conscience is soothed even as he profits from the injustice. Completely isolated human individuals are an abstraction, as is a society independent of the individual person. In this respect, individualistic approaches are paradoxical. The reason for this paradoxicality lies in a too narrow perspective focused on the cause of pedagogy. The urgent ‘practical’ tasks of educational theory are used as a ready pretext to conceal the contradiction and to avert a broader perspective. The immediacy found in the educator-learner relationship, the teacher’s closeness to the pupil, one’s personal experience of education are more convenient fields in which to search for the original character of education than are the inevitably abstract concepts that a theory designed to look at the whole must develop.

The connection between Natorp’s approach and Critical Theory is grounded in their respective ways of theory building. Both start out not with a pre-conceived awareness of being integrated in a social whole, but in considering this very fact as a fundamental problem, whereas other pedagogical approaches, which otherwise may not be uncritical either, in this respect maintain a blind spot or a flawed view. Both approaches also resemble each other insofar as they regard the social whole as fundamentally structured by three main functions: the function of life-renewing work and economy, the function of life-securing organisation (legislature, administration, regulation, government and so on) and the function of cognition striving for truth and broadening knowledge. Jürgen Habermas established an analogous distinction between the ‘technical’, the ‘practical’ (interpretative/hermeneutic) and the ‘emancipatory’, that is, critical cognitive interests.

The difference between the two approaches lies in their respective conceptions of criticality. From the point of view of Critical Theory, ideological criticism is the leading paradigm in the conception of critique. For Natorp, the transcendental critique of Reason is more far-reaching and decisive, which, however, does not preclude ideological criticism. In the founding paper of Critical Theory, Max Horkheimer wrote: ‘Reason cannot become transparent to itself as long as humans act as parts of a [social] organism devoid of Reason’ (Horkheimer, 1981, p. 28). The distorting effect of social determination extends into the concepts and categories of conception. Ideological criticism aims at furnishing proof of this distortion and along with this at liberation from its decisive influence. Under the aspect of transcendental critique of Reason asserted by Natorp, a possible objection against this approach is that critique will lose its truth claim if the power of ideological distortions are assumed to be total—that is, if Reason, being part of a defective social context, can only form distorted judgements. Or, to put it the other way round: the truth claim of ideological criticism depends on the presupposition of at least a rudimentary faculty for Reasonable judgement independent from social deformations, which means that ideological criticism in turn must be limited and not be conceived as the all-embracing form of critique. This point has been expounded in detail in an earlier paper and need not be repeated here (cf. Ruhloff, 1983, and Dietrich Benner and Andrea English’s contribution to this volume).
In the present context, the focus of attention is on the relation between the political and the pedagogical conceptions of critique. Natorp, in his theory of social key functions, assigns to ‘educational activities’ (bildende Tätigkeit) primacy over the activities of government and economy. The function of ‘educational activities’ in a society is to ensure that Reason becomes a decisive factor in man’s social existence. The objective of social Reason is a ‘more satisfying arrangement of social orders’. Its expression is ‘social criticism’. ‘In the ideal case, any economic work and any social regulation [that is, politics] would be but means to the final end of Menschenbildung (human education)’ (Natorp, 1911, p. 99). The historically concrete struggle aims at facilitating the ‘independence’ of ‘institutionalised education and Bildung’ from ‘any alien, economic or political force’ and thus at ensuring that everybody can equally participate in each of the key functions and share the outcome of the corresponding activities (Natorp, 1920, p. 10).

Critique, on this model, is assigned the exposed role of a superordinate function of Reason, which is situated on the same logical level as the problem of pedagogy. Critique reveals the difference between that which is or seems to be and that which is ‘right’, ‘good’ and in this sense ‘possible’. Both the ontogenetic and the phylogenetic processes of Bildung—in which terms the development of Reasoning can be reconstructed—are kept going by this very difference in the shape of the distinction between the state of humanness and the idea of humanity. In relation to the human race, education’s historical project, as Kant expressed it, refers to the idea of the ‘perfection of human nature’. For human Reason, being a finite Reason limited in itself, restricted to spatio-temporal, physical boundaries and dependent on experience, self-critique, the critique of one’s own efforts, projects, practices and social institutions, becomes the only chance of progress towards what is better. And this is all that is possible: an ever-relational progress towards the better, a permanent openness of Bildung in this sense, whereas an absolute, doctrinal answer to the question of what characterises perfection is beyond reach.

Progress towards the better (Bildung), however, cannot be conceived of solely as the critique of past achievements. Rather, the concept invariably implies an idea that Natorp, especially in his late work, expounds: that of a productive, ‘poietic’, inventive, creative and non-intentional human faculty of the same origin (cf. Natorp, 2000). This is of high pedagogical relevance because it precludes a universal conception of humanity from becoming the standard for the assessment of learners or the sole guideline for their instruction. On this productive faculty depends the acknowledgement of the other person as an independent individual sharing in the state of humanity. In this respect, individuals are not subjected to a determinative judgement that subsumes the particular and especially the particular person under a general concept; nor are they called upon to adopt such a concept as their sole standard of judgement. They are, as it were, not merely educated. Rather, they are given the freedom to assess themselves and especially their performance in reflective judgements, to search for an as yet undetermined universal, to pursue their own Bildung.
by broadening the concept of humanity, as Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed (cf. the concept of Bildsamkeit in Benner, 2001). The particular nature of ‘educational activities’ (bildende Tätigkeiten)—which include arts and sciences, provided these are not from the outset limited to practical purposes—and the postulate of their autonomy against economic and political constraints are grounded in the twofold critical and ‘poietic’ faculty.

In contrast to the minimum standard of the democratic-political condition, which assigns even expressions of opinion the status of critique, the concept of critique in the pedagogical context sketched above represents the optimum standard. At its historical peak this includes a penetrative understanding of the knowledge and skills, of the orders of discourse in human culture, within which the critical judgement is passed. Critique under the aspect of the theory of Bildung aims at ‘not being governed in a certain way and at a certain price’ (Foucault, 1992, p. 12). It aims at not having to follow any truth claim without previous examination. The political orientation of critique does not necessarily include this concept. Critique under the aspect of the theory of Bildung, on the other hand, does not preclude political criticism. Rather, it can only gain social acceptance if criticality towards being governed is permitted; and without reflection on its social conditions of possibility it would lose its practical sense.

But this is a rather abstract way of defining the relation between the different concepts. How the political-practical concept of critique and the concept oriented towards the problem of truth can mesh with each other, without the one being sacrificed for the other, is a question I consider as yet unanswered. Christopher Winch, in his contribution to this volume, expands on one particular aspect of it. In the remaining part of my paper, it remains in view only indirectly. Instead I will put the main focus on a line of reasoning in contemporary pedagogy that lays pointed emphasis on critique as oriented towards the problem of truth and provides the background for putting the question of critical pedagogy in a different way.

III TRANSCENDENTAL CRITIQUE AND SCEPTICISM

Critique problematises the validity of something. It subjects validity claims to rational examination. Thus it is directed against the decisiveness of other sources of validity. Tradition, habits and customs, ‘sacredness’ and ‘authority’ are examples of such questionable sources of validity. If, as Kant stated in his time, everything has to be subjected to criticism, then validity is never, as a matter of principle, self-evident; that is, nothing is valid merely because it is obvious, or has been put down in writing, or is asserted by somebody. In view of the universal claim of critique, though, traditions and the like have no unconditional validity, no validity in themselves. Nevertheless, a critical
examination may well concede to traditions, habits, etc., even to authorities and sacred objects, some justification in human existence. The crucial difference is whether or not the validity of something is evident on universally acknowledgeable, Reasonable grounds, whether something is considered as ‘evident’ before, and independently of, rational examination or after, and on the basis of, argumentative revelation of its meaning, function and status in human life. Critique’s claim to universality is grounded on the principle that everything that claims validity is or can be—and in cases of doubt must be—subjected to the condition of human rationality. The dependency of critique on commonly shared language games, which Wittgenstein brought to our attention, can serve as a counter-argument against this approach only if it is connected with the idea of a pure, ahistorical, new beginning or with the idea that everything at once and completely could and should be called into question without acknowledging the contingent conditions that form the ground on which critics also stand.7

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, presented general grounds for this rational reservation to which everything that is and claims acknowledge is subjected: ‘The I think must accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought; in other words, the representation would either be impossible, or at least be, in relation to me, nothing’ (Kant, 1956, B132).8 Our thinking—human understanding—is an original synthetic faculty for the synthesis of the given manifold into a unity. On its forms of connection, which are not given to human understanding by intuition, nor can be derived from experience, is based the ‘possibility of objective cognition’ (Ebbinghaus, 1990, p. 11). This, however, is not necessarily to be read as an apotheosis of human subjectivity. The emphasis lies on the presupposition of the combining function of thought, which is independent of experience. It does not lie on the ‘I’. This is why Kant can replace the ‘I’ with a ‘He, or It, who or which thinks’, and equate it to an ‘X’ (Kant, 1956, B 404).9 The framework he establishes is compatible with the perception of the human being, the ‘subject’, as contingent (cf. Ricken, 1999, p. 61–104, esp. 103f.). The crucial point in the present context is that the enabling function of Reason (beside the given intuition) is a problem that requires particular attention. This problem is not already solved by what is given, but its solution influences the decision of what can be considered as an ‘object’ in the first place. Thus it crucially affects the assertion and critique of validity claims.

Kant called his investigation of the enabling but also limiting conditions for the cognition of objects of all kinds ‘transcendental’. Transcendental investigation is not immediately concerned with objects, but with the ‘mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible a priori’ (Kant, 1956, B25).10

During the second half of the twentieth century, a modified form of Kant’s approach became relevant for a programme of ‘transcendental critical’ cognition in theoretical pedagogy. It maintained Kant’s thesis that the truth of theoretical-pedagogical assertions and pedagogical practices
could not be derived from experience, no matter how thoroughly examined and well-proven such experience might be (cf. Fischer, 1989, p. 68). Both commonplace and scientific pedagogical experience-based assertions are inevitably influenced by a priori conceptions, which maintain their claim to correctness, for example, on the basis of a precedent conception of learning, instruction, adolescence, etc. It is likewise impossible, though, to include these a priori conceptions in a purely pedagogical science of Reason and to determine the concept of pedagogy definitively and as a normative guide, in the way that, in the context of Neo-Kantianism, this was most recently attempted by Alfred Petzelt in the course of his respected project of a pedagogy of principles (cf. Petzelt, 1964). If it is impossible cogently to determine an anticipatory rational concept of pedagogy, even taking into account the theoretical insights of Wittgenstein’s notion of language-games, then what remains to be done in view of this problematic situation is to determine and examine the a priori presuppositions of pedagogical concepts, practices, methods and attitudes on a case-to-case basis. The following general formulation describes this task for a scientific philosophy: it is concerned with the

situation- and problem-adequate determination of the hic et nunc required conditions of possibility of a situation explaining the validity of something. This is not a procedure that aims at installing in its due position any empirically given particular, but one of establishing if-then-connections in a way that is open to rational scrutiny. In concrete terms, this means investigating the presuppositions for a certain X. Going beyond Kant, one might say: neither any natural phenomenon nor any law or theory form an exception from this. They, too, are tied to presuppositions, and if those are not laid open, they are not fully understandable, but in the final step of grounding remain irrational, that is, decisionistically accepted doctrines. The presuppositions hold a priori, whether or not the subject knows them; and otherwise the question of apriority would make no sense (Funke, 1979, p. 173f.).

Wolfgang Fischer started out from this objective and expounded it in numerous single analyses in the sense of a philosophy located within pedagogy. The meaning of transcendental critique in this context differs from the ‘transcendental critique’ that has recently been discussed with reference to Karl-Otto Apel. One of the distinguishing factors is that a finally grounded criterion for critique, for example, in the shape of an ideal community of communication, is not presupposed (cf. Biesta and Stams, 2001, pp. 61ff). Instead, the specific importance of transcendental critique is explicitly considered to lie in its exposing, through its interrogation of, the ‘finality claim’ (Letztheitsanspruch) that is invariably implied in the pretention to validity of concrete pedagogical doctrines, practices, (scientific) methods and attitudes. The criticality lies in laying open an as yet unnoticed dependency of pedagogical assertions and intentions on presuppositions, which annuls the claim to definitive validity of these assertions and intentions, leaving them but a relative justification open to discussion. Frieda Heyting’s paper (this volume) on the relativity of
critique touches upon this issue from a different perspective. Language critique, which separates that which is meant ‘from the cinders of unclear talking and implausible argumentation’, affects such operations (Fischer, 1989, p. 80).

Kant had conceived the ‘sceptical method’ as a presupposition and indispensable auxiliary to his version of the transcendental critique of Reason. The function of a form of scepticism ‘essentially peculiar to transcendental philosophy’ in his view consisted in examining contradictory assertions as to whether the ‘object of the struggle is not a mere illusion’, which each party ‘strives in vain to reach’ (Kant, 1956, B 451, 452). The unbiased sceptical examination should reveal the ‘point of misunderstanding’ on which the struggle of mutually exclusive dogmatic propositions of Reason focuses and that the critique of Reason following on from scepticism conclusively resolves.

With the shift of meaning of the term ‘transcendental’—‘that is, away from a finally grounding science of a priori or principle . . . and towards an examination of factually crucial, concrete-Reasonable presuppositions and conditions that have always already been involved in the game played, and on which the explicit or implicit . . . validity claim of assertions in pedagogy and educational science is based’—‘the statute of the sceptical’ also changes (Fischer, 1996, p. 22f.).

When the focus is no longer on an a priori of pure Reason, nor on the ahistorical pedagogical concept of Reason, but on a priori rational conceptions that have found their way into concrete- and thus experience-dependent rational pedagogical concepts, then the horizon-broadening form of scepticism that Socrates seems to have been the first to practise again receives due attention (cf. Ruhloff, 1999). It combines with transcendental-critical argumentation, as an operation of equal status to which it is neither instrumentally subordinated nor super-ordinated. Displaying neither a ‘superior attitude’ nor the agnosticism of an ignoramus (Fischer, 1996, p. 23), scepticism calls into question the relational a priori context of Reasoning exposed by critique, confronts it with possible alternatives, maybe refutes it in particular cases, for example, by inserting it into a more far-reaching, though also non-definitive argumentative context—in short, assigns it to further consideration. In summary, this means: ‘Sceptically-transcendental-critically, in the present case the pedagogical claim is put in its place and confronted with the ignorance attached to it’ (Fischer, 1996, p. 24; for the broader context cf. Schönherr, 2003).

IV THE PROBLEMATIC EMPLOYMENT OF REASON

This connection with Socratic scepticism leads to a concept of critique that does not include any particular practical-pedagogical option. It has been called an ‘intransigent theory’ and related to Adorno’s dictum that ‘self-criticism of Reason is its very own morality’ (Meyer-Drawe, 1988). The relevance claim of this critical-sceptical form of knowledge within
pedagogy consciously confines itself to ‘preventing fundamental metaphysical questions as such from being lost sight of as such or from falling victim to dogmatic sintering’. This also implies ‘keeping the ground open to new pedagogical ideas’ (Fischer, 1996, p. 25). Yet, it is not up to criticism and scepticism to decide which pedagogical approach is the right one. If criticism is understood in this sense, and if pedagogy is regarded as a precisely defined task and practice, then there is no ‘critical pedagogy’ in the strict sense, but only criticism before, and after and within pedagogical practices. This in certain respects corresponds to the idea touched upon in the context of Natorp’s model that critique is accompanied by an independent productive faculty that as such is not subject to critique, although in its particular productions it may become one. Critique is compatible with this ‘poietic’ faculty particularly if and insofar as it does not pass an anticipatory judgement on the insufficiency of human Reason in general, but only on the insufficiencies of historically concrete rational attempts. An essential result of Kant’s critique of Reason is maintained in this: a finite Reason, as in its human form, can only achieve valid knowledge if it refers to experience. This, however, does not mean that theoretical pedagogy is absorbed in empirical educational science. It merely means that the philosophical, critical and sceptical facets of its theory must come up against experience and cannot form a separate speculative project.

As theories, criticism and scepticism remain tied to the intentio obliqua. Against this background, pedagogical projects characterised by ‘poietical’ intention and their corresponding practices are not to be labelled critical in an absolute sense. They follow in intentione directa a definitely fixed concept of pedagogy, Bildung, education, instruction, learning . . . , which, in following, they cannot simultaneously call into question. A further consideration supports this thesis: if pedagogy necessarily involves initiation into a given cultural world, involving the acquisition of a certain level of knowledge and skill, it can be connected with criticism but cannot exclusively occur as criticism. Pedagogical concepts with an intention and an architectonic in which the task of initiation is set, as it were, in parenthesis—that is, in which it is performed with the intention of bringing into action criticism and scepticism—can be subsumed under the title ‘pedagogy of the problematic employment of Reason’. Their social dimension can be brought into mind by referring to Natorp’s model. As a continuation of this I consider the recently presented proposal, developed with reference to Hannah Arendt, the object of pedagogy be conceived as an argumentative ‘struggle’ for a common world transcending the generation gap (cf. Meder, 2001). This conception of the object of pedagogy draws attention to the fact that in pedagogy—indeed independently from the idea of a phylogenetic progress towards the better, which nevertheless is not deprived of its meaning—there is Reason for the ongoing transformation and critique of its concepts because pedagogy must respond to the birth and the demands of ever other, non-interchangeable human beings, though it has no general basis in the form of an anthropology of the human being to rely on.
Since the beginnings of reflective pedagogy, the rational struggle for a common world has been in danger of falling under the influence of a reductionist, economistic concept of the world, and especially of human existence in the world, a threat that has intensified in recent times. The ‘learning society’ is one form of this reduction (cf. Masschelein, 2001). A number of indicators suggest that in present-day social reality, an interpretation of the structure of pedagogical concepts that is dominated by the defining power of the economy is gaining acceptance (cf. Lohmann, 2002). The grounding relation between pedagogy, politics and economy sketched out with reference to Natorp is thus reversed. Criticism is then set into a socially established conceptual framework within which it functions as an operation of the efficient improvement of commercial services, alias ‘educational consumer goods’. The processes of domestication involved in this are discussed by Helmut Heid in his contribution to this volume.

The differentiation of the concept of critique, its connection to scepticism and the maintaining of its accessing of problems—its problematical ambiguous usage in pedagogical practice—are responses to this situation. The alternative is a usage in which critique is reduced to a place-holder for a final solution still to be found—a usage in which the very property of criticality itself becomes ossified.

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NOTES
1. Translator’s note: Since the text was originally written in German, the reader should keep in mind that both ‘criticism’ and ‘critique’ are translations of the German term Kritik. Though not synonymous in English, they are interchangeable in some contexts, and the decision to use the one rather than the other does not indicate the intention to mark a specific distinction. Moreover, the fading of the concept in common usage, as it is problematised in this paper, is more evident in the German term, which embraces both Kant’s ‘critique’ and today’s common idea of ‘criticism’ as a general attitude of finding fault with something.
2. Translator’s note: The term Bildung is left untranslated because it covers a broader concept than the term ‘education’, which today would be regarded as roughly equivalent. According to the context, it can carry cultural and moral implications, qualities included in the Greek term paideia. For an in-depth discussion of this term and the related concept, see Jörg Ruhloff’s ‘The problematical employment of Reason in philosophy of Bildung and education’ (in Heyting et al., 2001).
3. Translator’s note: The term ‘Reason’ is capitalised to distinguish it as the translation of the Kantian term Vernunft, and to distinguish it from the the idea of reason as ‘cause’ or ‘argument’.
5. The translation was taken from Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, 1996), p. 17.
6. Translator’s note: ‘Scepticism’ in this case is a translation of the German term Skepsis—which implies a sceptical attitude—and not of Skeptizismus, the established philosophical position.
7. I wish to thank Stefan Ramaekers, whose critical objections to my paper at our group’s symposium at the University of Leuven drew my attention to this point. That ‘our most foundational beliefs escape our attention’, as Ramaekers says with Wittgenstein, I readily grant as an adequate description of our given situation. Anyone speaking in this way, however, must have taken into view some fundamental convictions. And since not everyone shares the same convictions—although at the same time in a social context the convictions of the one are apt to infringe on those of the other person—and if, furthermore, none of these convictions can be assigned the status of truth in an absolute sense, the Socratic way of living in the problematic consciousness of one’s own ignorance might be more adequate than Wittgenstein’s therapy of philosophical unrest.

8. Translation: see note 5, p. 94.


10. Translation: see note 5, p. 38.

11. Translation: see note 5, p. 258f.

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