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Schleiermacher's educational theory as a social concept of *Bildung*

Schleiermachers Erziehungstheorie als soziales Konzept von *Bildung*

*This contribution discusses Schleiermacher's educational attempts as a social concept of *Bildung* by focusing on his writings of the first two decades of the 19th century. It is argued that, despite the fact that Schleiermacher shares some of the educational principles of German tradition, such as the subdivided school system, his emphasis on education as a social fact, his recognition of humans as fundamentally social beings and his notion of national education underline the differences between his concept of education and the German tradition of *Bildung*, which was a conglomerate of notions of introspection, self-reflection and inwardness and a means to liberate education from social constraints. This historical reading allows for Schleiermacher's reflections on education and *Bildung* to be seen as something much larger than merely a contribution to the "right" understanding of education and *Bildung* or to the establishment of education as an academic discipline. They become one specific answer to the much-discussed question of the role of education and schooling in early 19th century.*

Dieser Beitrag diskutiert Schleiermachers Erziehungstheorie als ein Entwurf einer sozialen Bildungstheorie, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf seinen Schriften der ersten beiden Jahrzehnte des 19. Jahrhunderts liegt. Schleiermachers Betonung der Bildung als soziale Tatsache, seine Anerkennung der grundlegenden Geselligkeit jedes Menschen und seine Vorstellung von nationaler Erziehung unterstreichen die Differenzen zwischen seinem Verständnis und dem klassischen Verständnis von Bildung als Ausdruck von Introspektion, Selbstreflexion und Innerlichkeit und als ein Weg, Bildung von sozialen Zwängen zu befreien, obwohl Schleiermacher einige Vorstellungen wie etwa das gegliederte Schulsystem mit der deutschen Tradition teilte. In dieser historischen Kontextualisierung sind Schleiermachers Überlegungen zu Bildung und Erziehung weit mehr als nur ein Beitrag zum "richtigen" Bildungsverständnis oder zur Etablierung von Bildung als akademische Disziplin. Sie werden zu einer spezifischen Antwort auf die viel diskutierte Frage nach der Rolle von Erziehung im frühen 19. Jahrhundert.

Keywords: Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, educational theory, sociability, Bildung
Schlagworte: Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, Erziehungstheorie, Geselligkeit, Bildung

In 1810, amidst the time of the French occupation of Prussia, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was appointed director of the *Wissenschaftliche Deputation* (Scientific Deputation), which was the advisory board for the Ministry of Education in Berlin. At that time, there was a broad discussion about the fundamental reformation of elementary and secondary education, and the corresponding curricula were being drafted. The debates accompanying these developments were highly controversial, as education and schooling had become key policy issues for the political parties in Prussia. In 1816 – after the “liberation” from the French troops (1813) and the Congress of Vienna (1814/15), in the wake of what came to be called “Restoration” – the advisory board was dissolved. Research has characterized this dissolution as a step backwards in the process of secularization and as a setback for compulsory schooling, both of which had aimed at pure, non-utilitarian education of all (intellectual) powers of the students. Moreover, it was claimed that the dissolution of this advisory board had re-opened the divide between academia and the (political) administration and cut off mass schooling from scientific progress. Accordingly, these developments are interpreted to have led to a situation in which the attempts of the advisory board to establish a “public sphere” – comparable to the French model which allowed for a discussion of schools and educational affairs – were thwarted (Fuchs 2008, 489; Beljan/Ehrhardt/Meier/Virmond/Winkler 2017, LIV). Following this interpretation of those historical events, Schleiermacher's educational attempts and its related theory are seen in a political context in which Schleiermacher stands for progressivism, while the political opposition signifies the conservative counterpart (see Fuchs 2008, 479f.).

Starting from this historiographical assessment, this paper deals with Schleiermacher's writings of the first two decades of the 19th century, discussing his educational attempts as a particular utterance of the German concept of *Bildung* rather than placing them in a dualistic political frame between progress and conservatism. As a rule, the concept of *Bildung* represents a conglomerate of ideas of individual perfectibility, completeness and aesthetic harmony of the soul, all together contributing to debates on the “essence” and the “particularity” of education; besides, it is always understood as being in sharp contrast to ideas of usefulness or “mere knowledge” (Horlacher 2016, 7-44). As *Bildung* was associated with the aesthetic harmonization of the soul, which was to be achieved through the encounter with ancient art and philosophy, learning and mastering Greek and Latin were seen as a crucial part of the higher education curriculum, which in turn had a socially stratifying effect: learning Latin and Greek was only possible for a small minority. This prioritization severely limited the significance of the natural sciences and of technical knowledge, which, in contrast to the significance of the educated soul (*Bildung*), were understood to be inconsistent with the true German national character.

In contrast to this, Schleiermacher based his educational theory on a notion of human sociability, thus taking “empirical” facts as conditions of life into account. In doing so, Schleiermacher's educational attempts can be read as a contribution to the question of the role of education and schooling for the emerging nations seeking to become nation-states. Seen from this perspective, it is assumed that Schleiermacher's emphasis on education as a social fact, his recognition of humans as fundamentally social beings and his notion of national education underline the differences between his own concept of education and the German idea of *Bildung*, regardless of the fact that Schleiermacher shared some of the educational principles of German tradition, such as the subdivided school system or the educational value of the ancient world.

To be sure, Schleiermacher's concept of education and *Bildung* did not prevail in the long run, but an inward, religiously underpinned reading of *Bildung* did, which governed not only the (German) discourse about *Bildung* but also the related discourses about education, instruction, teaching and schooling. Hence, Schleiermacher's reflections on education and *Bildung* cannot be discussed within this dominant historiographic tradition, but must be seen as a unique (German) answer to the much-discussed question of the role of education and schooling in early 19th century Germany, a place and time in which education and schooling came to be seen as crucial in the making of future citizens (Tröhler 2016) and were linked to ideas and concepts of national, liberal and vocational education. In his deliberations, Schleiermacher did not follow a "philanthropic-enlightened concept of utility", nor did he promote a "neo-humanist educational concept" – the two "traditional" historiographic classifications of late 18th and early 19th century educational theory – as an ideal for public schooling; he rather advocated a – in the horizon of his time – liberal concept of the state in which education was seen primarily as a task of the private sphere (Schleiermacher 1814/2002, 130ff.). Public education, however, had by all means a place when it was about "creating a higher potency of the community and its consciousness" (ibid., 142; see Ehrhardt 2019, 87). Thus, Schleiermacher's educational theory is explored precisely in this intersection of nationhood, statehood and the demands of public education. It unpacks the "traditional" reading of Schleiermacher's idea of *Bildung* and contextualizes it within the Prussian debates about public schooling as a part of national education and educating future citizens. In this understanding, the subdivided school system became a strategy to address different target groups of schooling adequately and to teach them the relevant knowledge and skills for their future lives as national citizens. Devaluing this concept as "conservative" must therefore be considered a presentism which does not take sufficient account of historical contexts.

The contribution starts with an outline of the historical context in which Schleiermacher felt called to think and lecture about education. In the first section, the so-called Prussian reform policy around 1800 is of particular interest, as it aimed at both elementary and secondary schools, included teacher training, and generally pursued the objective of reforming the Prussian state through education and schooling. These policies were not least triggered by numerous societies, which were also responsible for an increasing number of publications on educational and school-related issues, as will be shown in the second section. These societies encouraged a certain notion of sociability which Schleiermacher took up in his writings. The third section discusses some early 19th century drafts for national education and positions Schleiermacher in these discussions. These debates are of importance because the keyword "national education" was used not least to propagate a nationwide, state-organized elementary education, which, however, was not understood as a value per se, but as a possibility of (re-)establishing the German nation, respectively a national feeling or national consciousness necessary for it. Subsequently, the fourth section focuses on the debates on general and/or vocational education, whereby these discussions, especially in the German and Prussian context, were linked to the question of the pupils' social status. The concluding fifth section summarizes the debates and positions Schleiermacher's ideas on education within the debates on (liberal) education (*Bildung*), vocational and national education, whereby his notion of sociability turns out to be important for his particular understanding of education as *Bildung*.

1 School reforms in Prussia

Not only in the German states was the long 18th century characterized by an increasing number of publications on educational and school-related issues (see Oelkers/Tröhler 2014; Horlacher 2021). These discussions were accompanied by the question of whether the state should play a role in matters of education and schooling and if so, which. These debates were – towards the end of the 18th century – carried out under the keyword of “national education”. The term “national education” referred to the definition of what a “nation” as a cultural and ideological entity is, or to the definitions of “the German”, “the French” or “the English”, serving as distinguishing characteristics of the various “nations” and encompassing the “entire people”.¹ The hopes for education and schooling related to the debates on national education seemed to materialize in Prussia after the death of Frederick the Great (1712-1786), under the reign of his nephew, King Frederick William II (1744-1797), as the new king started to give financial support to the various school reform projects (Jeismann 1996, 77).

One year after the new king's coronation (1786), Karl Abraham von Zedlitz (1731-1793), the minister for the church and schools, submitted various *Vorschläge über das Schulwesen in den königlichen Landen* (Proposals About the Schools in the Royal Lands), which suggested the establishment of a higher authority for the administrative body of the schools and presented a plan for the reorganization of the entire school system (Zedlitz 1787, 98). One crucial task of the new authority was to supervise and regularly evaluate the existing schools so as to enable them to meet the constantly changing requirements (ibid., 101). One of these requirements was the subdivision of the school system into three different tracks for the purpose of “making people better and usable for their civic lives” (ibid., 102). It was considered “unfair to let the farmer grow up like a beast” and “let him memorize phrases which are never explained to him”. It was also deemed a “folly to educate the future tailor, carpenter or grocer in the same way as a future consistorial councilor or school principal; teaching Latin, Greek and Hebrew to everyone, and entirely omitting the knowledge they need” (ibid., 102f.). The goal was to offer separate school types for farmers, for the middle class (*Bürger*) and for scholars, using different curricula and thus meeting everybody's respective professional needs in the best way possible. This concept is usually labeled as “estates school” or “enlightened utilitarian education”, as it helped to pre-form individuals for their future roles in society and to secure an estates-based system of social order (e.g. Berg 1980, XIII; Brachmann 2008, 465ff.; Fuchs 2008, 479f.). Social mobility was not an intended outcome of schooling, nor was schooling conceived as a system which allocates social status to the individual's merit (see e.g. Labaree 2020). Hence, *Bildung* as a concept for individual perfectibility and individual advancement through education was not intended. On the contrary, schooling was strongly based on social “usefulness”, whereby “usefulness” was combined with an improvement of the current living situation and employment opportunities of a large part of the population which had to deal with significantly changing economic conditions. Offering a

1 This paper uses the term “German nation” rather than “Prussian state” despite the fact that before 1871 there was no such thing as the “German nation-state”. Nevertheless, the idea of a German nation and of the essence of this concept is older than its political existence. In fact, it had been discussed since the late 18th century. Although the “German nation” remained an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) until 1871, the discourse about national education and schooling, aiming to build a nation, involved the term “German”. However, it referred to a language-based cultural space, to Germany as a “cultural nation” (*Kulturnation*), rather than a geographically defined territory.

specific track of schooling for a specific part of the population was in fact first and foremost a social improvement and an expression of progress. Only a presentist perspective would call it “conservative”.

In accordance with the tasks of the rural population the related curriculum contained religion, reading and mechanics, and also some knowledge of natural history and biology. These subjects were not only intended to help with cattle breeding and agriculture, but also to prevent farmers from explaining cattle plagues and crop failure as “witchcraft” (Zedlitz 1787, 104), instead of seeing them in a “reasonable” or “enlightened” way, i.e. as incidents which may be explained by science. The widespread alcohol abuse was to be tackled with “dietetic-medical rules”, and the “knowledge of the state constitution” served to facilitate contacts with the authorities (ibid.). First and foremost, however, “industrial activities” were to be exerted in these schools, i.e. spinning, straw plaiting and the like, by which the adolescents – besides getting practice of useful activities – could be kept away from debauchment (ibid., 105). Thus, schooling was also a governmental task aimed at improving people’s material welfare (and – in a mercantile logic – the government’s welfare). Additionally, it was necessary to establish actual teacher training seminars (ibid., 106), guarantee the implementation of the provided curriculum and pay graduates adequate wages which would allow them to make a living through their main occupation (teaching) instead of having to seek additional income (see Horlacher 2020).

Whereas the first part of Zedlitz’s proposals – concerning the establishment of a school authority – was followed up under his successor, pastor Johann Christoph von Woellner (1732-1800), an economic patriot and a sceptic of Enlightenment, the second part of his proposals – the establishment of a tripartite school system – was left unrealized for the time being (Neugebauer 1985, 191ff.). At the end of the century, Woellner’s successor, minister Julius Eberhard Wilhelm Ernst von Massow (1750-1816), resumed school reforms, at least within the Lutheran schools of Prussia (Schneider 1996, 135f.). Massow’s explicit viewpoint was that schools were responsible for the education and instruction of children. He also made a connection between the quality of education and the “welfare” of a state and maintained that this objective was only to be achieved by “national education” (ibid., 136). While the widespread introduction of rural schools and respective teacher training was put into practice after 1806 – an expression of a broad consensus on the need for improved rural schools – a larger debate arose regarding the right balance between liberal and vocational education; a debate to be continued throughout the 19th century, permanently linked to the idea of *Bildung* (Horlacher 2016, 45ff.).

2 Societies as triggers for social change

The 18th century is also characterized by the emergence of numerous societies which were responsible for an increasing number of publications on educational and school-related issues. One consequence of their various activities was the fact that people from different social classes and vocational contexts started to meet and interact within these societies; a fact which was not least encouraged by changing economic conditions, also leading to political unrest, the French Revolution being the most prominent example.² Apart from their polit-

² In Switzerland for example, the Helvetic Revolution led to a complete reorganization of political responsibilities, to the replacement of the old order by a central government, the introduction of the metric system and a single currency, the abolition of the existing allegiance and the dissolution of the tithe-based tax system. However, these

ical outputs, these numerous societies were first and foremost a place for social interaction and social exchange between various social groups; a fact which also triggered the demand for advisory books for appropriate behavior.³

One of the hotspots of this kind of sociability were the various salons in Berlin, mostly run by wealthy and educated Jewish women like Henriette Herz (1764-1847) or Rahel Varnhagen (1771-1833). They were also the places where actors, scholars and noble offspring met (Lowenstein 1994, 104ff.). One of the members of these salons was Friedrich Schleiermacher, a close friend to Henriette Herz, who transformed his experiences as a member of these intellectual communities into an essay titled *Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens* (Attempt of a Theory of Sociability), originally published anonymously 1799 in a Berlin Journal (*Berlinisches Archiv der Zeit und ihres Geschmacks*), having no significant impact. This essay was not just a theoretical consideration on sociability or an empirical description of the social life of Berlin salons, but an attempt to combine ideas and experiences of social exchange and to describe a desired form of social communication and social coherence (Rieger-Ladich 2019, 62).

In his *Attempt of a Theory of Sociability* Schleiermacher starts from the assumption that all educated human beings strive for purpose-free sociability as one of the highest and most noble objectives. "The one who is only thrown back and forth between the worries of domestic life and the affairs of the bourgeois life approaches the higher goal of human existence only the slower" (Schleiermacher 1799/2000, 15). Free sociability offers a possibility to broaden one's mind, to interact with different experiences and various meanings, making them "neighborly" and thus familiar and to one's own (ibid.). This kind of sociability was considered to be free of any social constraints, untouched by social realities and thus enabling the moral purpose of free conviviality (ibid., 16). But – and this is important to notice – such sociability was considered to be inexistent yet, being, however, an objective which every single human being must work towards every day; Schleiermacher's *Attempt* was thus seen as a theoretical guideline to reach this practical objective. Sociability was understood as a "natural trend" to be kept alive by social interactions; not a stable condition, but a constantly changing state, to be enlivened by individual activities (ibid., 18). Thus, instead of depending on the vocational status of the single human being, "real" sociability focuses on the "educated person", while this kind of *Bildung* is achievable for every human being (ibid., 28).

Even if Schleiermacher argued for free interaction between reasonable people who educate each other (ibid., 15), – a concept with striking parallels to considerations which had been formulated in the English context at the beginning of the 18th century (Klein 1994) –, this concept was in fact quite exclusive, as it applied just to some parts of society and was not achievable for all. Nevertheless, it has to be marked as more "social" than for example Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767-1835) notion of education as *Bildung*, which focused exclusively on the inner formation and perfectibility of the human being and did not take processes of social exchange into account. According to Humboldt, education as *Bildung* was "an object that makes possible the interplay between its receptivity and its self-activity." Therefore, the human being "seeks to transform scattered knowledge and action into a

revolutionary changes did not last very long, as the conservative political forces and traditions were too powerful. Moreover, the scarcity of money in the new government did not help to popularize the social and political changes among the people either (Church/Head 2013, 132ff.).

3 See e.g. Adolph Knigge's *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (*On Human Relations*, 1788).

closed system, mere scholarship into scholarly Bildung, merely restless endeavor into judicious activity” (Humboldt 1793/94/2000, 60). All these activities were possible without the prerequisite of social embeddedness.

3 Schleiermacher and national education

Although the subject of “national education in Prussia” is normally linked to Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s (1762-1814) *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (*Addresses to the German Nation*, 1808)⁴ (see Johnston 1990, 49ff.; Levinger 2000, 97ff.), Fichte was not the only one and certainly not the first one to deal with the subject of “national education” in Prussia.⁵ Johann Friedrich Zöllner (1753-1804), a Berlin pastor who was appointed to the *Oberschulkollegium*⁶ by Massow in 1800 and who had, in 1783, initiated the question of “What is Enlightenment?”⁷, had already written an extensive treatise on this subject in 1804, titled *National-Erziehung* (National Education), which had been reviewed by Schleiermacher in the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (General Literary Journal of Jena). In this treatise, Zöllner dealt with “education as such” and with “national education”, concentrating principally on “public educational establishments” (Zöllner 1804, 5). Zöllner deemed three concepts to be decisive for national education: language, origin and shared convictions, whereby the aspect of language was also to become a central concept in Schleiermacher’s educational considerations (Frost 2006). In his review, Schleiermacher not only regretted the lack of a second part of Zöllner’s treatise, in which he had intended to specify the general deliberations of the first part (Zöllner had died in September 1804), but he also recognized many issues worthy of further discussion (Schleiermacher 1805/1995, 5).⁸

However, much more explicitly than in his review of Zöllner’s *National Education*, Schleiermacher expressed himself in his lecture *Über den Beruf des Staates zur Erziehung* (On the State’s Profession to Educate), which he held before the Prussian Academy of Sciences in

4 In this much-discussed publication, which was based on Fichte’s lectures at Berlin University, Fichte postulated, among other things, a “new education” which would help the nation – after the defeat against Napoleon and the associated losses of eastern and western territories, as well as the loss of the status as a major power – to regenerate and regain its splendor. Whereas previously, education had mainly been “the education of a particular class”, Fichte claimed to have developed in his *Addresses* a “national education” (Fichte 1808/2008, 19), which no longer reproduced traditional social conditions, but produced “new people” who were oriented towards the future.

5 The debate on “national education” was by no means a uniquely German or Prussian issue. In France for example, minister Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) emphasized “national education” in a *Mémoire* addressed to the King, arguing for a national system of education to gain social harmony (Turgot 1775/1844; see also La Chalotais’ *Essai d’éducation nationale*, 1763; *Discours de Monsieur Mirabeau l’aîné, sur l’éducation nationale*, 1791; *Le Plan d’Education de Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau*, 1793). Rather, it must be assumed that the German response to the French plans to introduce a system of national education was a concept which was based on much weaker state structures and institutions and which did not include the ambition of reaching freedom and equality amongst the citizens.

6 The *Oberschulkollegium* (literally: Board of Secondary Schools) was the predecessor institution of the Educational Department (*Sektion für den Kultus und den Unterricht*, founded in 1809) within the Prussian Ministry of the Interior.

7 This question became famous because of Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) answer in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784.

8 In addition, Schleiermacher interpreted the publication as an expression of the official Prussian view on the reformation of public schooling, i.e. of Massow’s planned school reform, since Zöllner had been a member of the *Oberschulkollegium*, the board in charge of developing “a general plan of education and instruction for all schools in Prussia” (Patsch 1995, XXX).

December 1814. In this text Schleiermacher attempted to clarify the relationship between the state and formal and non-formal education and discussed when and for what purpose the state was allowed to take over educational tasks at all. Schleiermacher did not deduce this clarification from ideal(ist) principles, but tried to – comparable to his considerations in his *Attempt of a Theory of Sociability* – base it on the historical, social and cultural reality of his environment. Schleiermacher hereby assumed that although all European states were dealing intensively with the issue of education and schooling, the concrete organizational forms and the hopes and expectations associated with them were quite different. Whereas for some people education was a means to “awake from a long-lasting dullness and crudeness”, for others, education and schooling was a way to preserve the status quo (Schleiermacher 1814/2002, 127). These empirical findings now led Schleiermacher to the actual question of his lecture, namely the question of the role of the state regarding education and schooling (ibid., 128). Schleiermacher did not answer this question historically or normatively. Instead, he claimed to clarify it systematically by classifying different types of “states themselves and the perspectives which they had been able to assume”. Thus “a means to the understanding of the different theories” was to be offered, and “how one theory could perhaps be applicable under such circumstances and the other among others” (ibid., 130). The question of the relationship between the state and education was thus detached from a historically, empirically and socially bound conditionality and answered “in principle”, whereby this answer was not intended to be elaborated exhaustively in terms of content, but as a generally valid guideline for concrete answers in different historical settings.

The starting point of Schleiermacher's considerations was the assumption that the state and education as such were two non-congruent concepts, since the state refers to the relationship between adults, whereas education refers to the one between generations (ibid.). The state itself could be understood in two different ways, namely as a state which limits itself to the protection of freedom and the prevention of abuse (ibid., 131), i.e. a night watchman state as it had been advocated in 1792 by Humboldt, or as a state with a “creating, forming and guiding power”. The latter, the active notion of the state, was closely connected with the purpose of education, because “everything that man has to do on earth” shall “be created ... through the state and it [shall] form and guide the entire activity of man” (ibid., 132). The extent to which the state interferes with education or regulates it varies historically. Adapted to Prussia's concrete situation, Schleiermacher thought that the state had to withdraw from direct educational activities and make sure that direct governmental influence declined in favor of “educational” institutions or agents.

Schleiermacher also differentiated between private and public education, although he did not associate this differentiation primarily with the state, but with the social interactions of individual families or social groups with each other, which varied from case to case. Therefore, the more visible the social interactions between families were, the more “public” was the corresponding education (ibid., 135). Thus “public” was not necessarily linked to the state, but denoted the degree of social activity which differentiates public from private. Subsequently, Schleiermacher was interested in the question of how such variable forms of social interaction, each of which implied different forms of education, could be harmonized in a public context. This question also addressed the concept of the nation, as Schleiermacher asked how two cultural entities which are independent from each other can be merged into a new, comprehensive unit (ibid., 138).

In the case of Prussia, a state which had yet to define and consolidate itself, these considerations meant that the state had to be responsible for education if it did not want to take the risk of having “the love for the clan and district antagonize the love of the homeland and the people” (ibid., 142). Schleiermacher also pointed to the fact that responsibility for schooling must be transferred from the church to the state, because the church “tied its endeavor to connect people within a higher spiritual unity to the personal feeling of the individual and to the most general feeling of human nature, without playing a substantial role in the formation of a greater national unity” (ibid.). The church was seen as a competitor in the efforts to build state loyalty. The feeling of national unity had to be established by education first; it had in fact to be turned into an “innate” feeling, which could be achieved by public schools being open to both sexes. Thus, even if education was yielded to institutions or agents specifically responsible for this task, the state did not withdraw from normative questions about the aim and purpose of schooling – on the contrary. Schleiermacher explicitly assigned this task to the state authorities in order to guarantee peoples’ adequate moral behavior.

In Schleiermacher’s view, the basis as well as the limitations in the relationship between education and the state were defined in the establishment of “a higher potency of society and of its conscience” through education. In his view, no other justifications or purposes were admissible. Unlike Zöllner, Schleiermacher did not argue for national education from an economic perspective but based his deliberations on social preconditions of social interactions (see Schleiermacher 1813/14/2017, 259). However, in contrast to Fichte, who had also argued that a particular national consciousness was to be created by education, Schleiermacher did not connect this national consciousness to national salvation or rebirth. He rather understood national consciousness as a prerequisite for a state which was no longer a state of classes offering different school types for different social classes, but a state which was “modern” in the sense that it defined itself as a “national state”, establishing the nation through schooling.

4 Vocational or liberal education?

Even though the national state had replaced the estate-based state – a fact which also changed the demands toward schooling – school was not necessarily associated with the idea of a school “for all”; quite the opposite was true and here, the concept of *Bildung* comes into play again. The question of the “right” organization of schools and the curricula relevant for them was highly controversial, and these debates were often conducted under the heading of the relationship between vocational and liberal education, the concept of liberal education being closely associated with terms like “universal”, “fundamental”, “purposeless”, and thus with *Bildung*.⁹ The question associated with the terms “vocational” and “liberal” was whether (and to what extent) vocational education was a specification of liberal education, or, in contrast, whether liberal education was to be understood exclusively as a preparation for academic training and thus a marker of social difference. In general, the dominant discourse in Prussia associated liberal education to academic and mainly *non*-vocational and *non*-useful concepts, while Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s (1746-1827) notion of *Allgemeine Menschenbildung* (literally: general human education) as liberal education, for example, did not conceive liberal education as an antonym of vocational education but as a term for a universal, or

9 These debates also tie in with the school reform discussions which were held in Prussia since the end of the 18th century (see part 1).

“psychological”¹⁰ understanding of liberal education. Pestalozzi's ideas were repeatedly and quite positively referred to in the papers of the Scientific Deputation (e.g. Schleiermacher 1814/2917, 122), and the Prussian ministry dispatched so-called *Eleven* (students) to train in the Pestalozzian method.

However, the question of vocational versus liberal education had not been answered by Schleiermacher's definition of the relationship between the state and education as a framework for his concept of national education. Concretely, the question which remained unanswered was the extent to which the national education preferred by Schleiermacher was in fact conceived as an education based on the estates system, since Schleiermacher's school was segmented into different school types, which were not to be understood as particularized, future-oriented vocational training, but as educational programs reproducing the estates system and thus offering liberal education as *Bildung* in the “traditional” sense instead of *Bildung* based on an empirical notion of sociability. Answers to these questions are offered by two of Schleiermacher's statements in the context of his work as a member of the Scientific Deputation: first, in *Entwurf der wissenschaftlichen Deputation zur allgemeinen Einrichtung der gelehrten Schulen* (Draft of the Scientific Deputation for the General Establishment of Learned Schools) of September 3, 1810, and second, in Schleiermacher's comment of July 10, 1814 to Johann Wilhelm Süvern's (1775-1829) *Gesamtinstruktion* (Overall Instruction) of February 7, 1813.

In his preliminary remarks to the *Draft for the General Establishment of Learned Schools*, Schleiermacher emphasized regulation and strict surveillance of these higher schools, since the current quality, based on random and individually motivated efforts of certain protagonists, was no longer sufficient. He claimed that state regulation was a good option to increase the quality of schools and instruction. However, – and this is important to be noted –, the educational discussions and the subsequent suggestions for improvement generally dealt with elementary education instead of academic education, although Schleiermacher assumed that developments which proved to be convincing in the field of elementary education would soon also gain a foothold in the learned schools (Schleiermacher 1810/2017, 109). Following these considerations, Schleiermacher stated that school no longer “simply aims at teaching the youth a certain mass of knowledge or practicing skills mechanically”, but that schools also had to promote the “development of the intellectual powers” (ibid., 110), which applied in particular to the learned schools, since these were intended as a preparation for university (ibid., 111). Ensuing this purpose, the learned schools were to restrict themselves to those lesson contents which may be described as “universal”, meaning contents which “want to elevate to science” or which do not refer to a concrete subject-matter. “Everything which could give them a reputation of being specialized in one or another

10 Pestalozzi had developed his notion of *Allgemeine Menschenbildung* as a concept for a harmonious, efficient and easy-to-learn educational practice in a book entitled *Die Methode, eine Denkschrift* (The Method, a Memorandum), where he formulated a plan for “psychologizing the teaching of humans” (Pestalozzi 1800/1998, 103). Here, “psychologizing” meant two things: first, that teaching should take into account “the nature of [the child's] mind,” which is to say that there should be an awareness of what today would be called cognitive developmental psychology; and second, that the social situation of the future adult should be taken into account when the child is being taught, which is to say that one should teach to individual “situation and circumstances.” This two-fold adaptation of teaching to the cognitive as well as the social dimensions of life was supposed to produce “inner satisfaction” (ibid.) in the educated individual. Teaching is to be attuned to the “nature of mind” and to promote the development of the individual creative forces, as they are the basis on which progress is built.

particular estate must be removed from the learned schools” (ibid., 112). Thus, the learned schools were not oriented towards any particular form of economic utility or professional ability, but towards a concept of liberal education, which was considered as explicitly free of purpose and thus as fundamental and universal.

Teaching at learned schools was to include both the classical languages and science, i.e. history, geography, natural science, description of nature and mathematics, since all these subjects were to be understood as a preparation for a philosophical university education. This curriculum was also important because the learned schools were simultaneously intended as higher schools for the cities, which meant that the curriculum had to meet the expectations of merchants and traders, i.e. people who were rooted in the “cultivated world” (ibid., 116). Although the classical languages were considered as a “self-evident” part of the curriculum of the learned schools, their indispensability is further explained. Schleiermacher argues, that a man who only knows his native language would remain “a *glebae adscriptus*¹¹ in his mental state”, i.e. remain attached to his origins. Even if the study of contemporary foreign languages was not to be neglected – in this case French, as it was the most common foreign language in the Prussian context –, the examination of the classical languages turned out to be of particular importance. Since they were not determined by political circumstances, they were the only means by which “a pure judgement of taste” could be achieved (ibid.). Thus, also Schleiermacher’s concept of education tied beauty, or aesthetics – a central dimension of education as *Bildung* – closely to the curriculum of the learned schools.

Four years later, in 1814, right after the German Campaign had ‘liberated’ Prussia from Napoleon’s rule, Schleiermacher was asked to comment on the *Overall Instruction*¹² for the entire Prussian school system, which had been put together by Johann Wilhelm Süvern (1775-1829), Prussia’s minister for educational affairs. Schleiermacher disagreed with two aspects in Süvern’s concept: the “value of the classical languages” and the “relationship between the educational institutions of lower order and the lower departments of the institutions of higher order” (Schleiermacher 1814/2017, 234). In accordance with his ideas of 1810, Schleiermacher wanted the classical languages to be taught exclusively at those schools which were preparing the young for a university career, since, in his view, the classical languages could only prove their educational worth in those who regularly studied the works of the classical authors. All other pupils would benefit sufficiently from the contents of these writings if, for example, they “merely” encountered them in history lessons (ibid., 235). In order to make the educational content of ancient languages fruitful, an intensive

11 The term “*glebae adscripti*” (literally: those who belong to the clod) was used in the Roman Empire to describe persons whose social status was located between the free men and the slaves. They were not allowed to leave their estates without the consent of the lord of the manor. This status was also passed on to their descendants. In the Middle Ages, the term was used to refer to villeins and bondmen and also generally to those persons whose profession or other circumstances tied them to their current situation.

12 Süvern, then Prussian State Councilor of the Educational Department, had joined the two drafts of the *Hauptinstruktion über die Einrichtung der öffentlichen allgemeinen Schulen des preußischen Staates* (Main Instruction on the Establishment of the Public General Schools of the Prussian State) and Ludwig Bernhard Christoph Natorp’s (1774-1846) *Besondere Instruktion über die Einrichtung der Elementarschulen* (Special Instruction on the Establishment of Elementary Schools) to a *Gesamtinstruktion über die Verfassung der Schulen* (Overall Instruction on the Constitution of the Schools) and submitted them to the Department on February 7, 1813, with the request that they be passed on to Schleiermacher for appraisal (Beljan/Erhardt/Meier/Virmond/Winkler 2017, XLVII).

and long-term examination of the language itself was required, as it was considered to have educational potential per se.

Schleiermacher's second criticism was aimed at the equality of the learned schools and the upper section of the urban schools. He contradicted this firmly, stating that not only did the lesson plans used in these two school types differ considerably, even with regard to equal subjects, but that, above all, these two schools represented entirely different objectives. Therefore, a pupil attending a school type which was not appropriate for his future profession would actually receive an unsuitable education (ibid., 238). Having said this, Schleiermacher disassociated himself from his 1810 *Comment*, in which he had stated that assimilating the curricula of the learned schools to those of the urban schools was at least partially possible. Now, he advocated a clear, institutional separation of school types, justifying the differing curricula with the requirements and expectations of the school type (university) or professional field (urban and elementary schools) they were preparatory for. Like Zöllner, Schleiermacher clearly argued in favor of a highly subdivided school system. Additionally, this system focused on a future perspective for its students that varied from case to case, which is why the curricula also had to differ considerably. Liberal education in the sense of "free" development of the intellectual possibilities was reserved for grammar schools or *Gymnasium*. Although the pupils of the urban schools were confronted with similar learning contents, these were used rather as a means, and on elementary school level they were even described as "pretense". Only in *Gymnasium* was the scientific form conceived as a purpose (ibid., 239).

5 Conclusion

These insights into Schleiermacher's reflections on education and schooling, which essentially refer to writings between 1805 and 1814, provide a multi-faceted picture of two major themes of his time: national education and the question of vocational versus liberal education, whereby in the case of Prussia these debates always revolved around the notion of *Bildung*. While Schleiermacher's views differed distinctly from both an "enlightened" (useful) and a "romantic" (idealistic) concept in terms of national education, he argued in agreement with a Prussian majority opinion when it came to the question of liberal and vocational education, as well as with respect to a clearly segregated curriculum for the three different school types. He also shared the conviction of regarding education through aesthetics, which in its pure form could only be conveyed in the *Gymnasium*. However, Schleiermacher's idea of education and schooling cannot simply be understood as a formulation of the "German education theory" centered around the traditional understanding of *Bildung*. In his assumption of the social conditionality of education and his statement on the roles of education and of the state, he differed from an idea of education and schooling which considered education (and *Bildung*) in absolute terms instead of seeing it as a historical and empirical fact. For Schleiermacher, education (and *Bildung*) was a concrete activity in a specific social, societal and temporal context, which had an "ultimate ethical purpose" and a teleological orientation (see Brachmann 2002, 26).

Thus, instead of labeling Schleiermacher's educational theory as progressive or conservative (as a teleological historiography suggests), it might be much more interesting to read Schleiermacher's positions as contributions to a debate revolving around the question of how the nation could be shaped through education and schooling and how this shaping should be

mirrored in the school curriculum, be it vocational or liberal. In fact, in his strong support of a clearly tripartite school system or his conviction that the classical languages contained a special educational potential, he shared many educational-philosophical convictions of his Prussian contemporaries. However, he differed from the convictions which later became predominant in German-language educational historiography by linking education to political and social events and trying to justify education non-idealistically. Thus, Schleiermacher cannot be integrated in a debate on educational theory concerning itself with *Bildung*, nor can he be separated from it. Within the debates about education and schooling in the first decades of the 19th century, he must rather be understood as a voice which shared certain convictions with some of his contemporaries while disagreeing on others. But – and this might be Schleiermacher’s unique selling point – he combined his educational theory with a certain notion of sociability, and thus an empirical foundation which does not correspond to the later dominant discourse in Germany. Given the Lutheran framing of the German education discourse (Tröhler 2011, 164ff.), it comes as no surprise that Schleiermacher’s notion of education and *Bildung* could not prevail. Even if he was a theologian, he grew up in a reformed, protestant (Calvinist instead of Lutheran) pastor’s family and was educated at the University of Halle, a pietistic foundation and in Schleiermacher’s time a center for historical criticism, i.e. the *historical* reading of the Bible (Neugebauer-Wölk 1994; see e.g. Crouter 2005). Hence, combining sociability with education seems to be a reformed protestant tradition, as for instance the example of Pestalozzi indicates (see Tröhler 2013). Thus, the various attempts to merge the tradition of *Bildung* with social concepts of education turn out to be difficult endeavors, as cultural traditions of concepts last very long and are difficult to modify, even if there are – on the conceptual level – good reasons to do so. Concepts as cultural specifications of general ideas (see Llanque 2017, 182) are might be the turtles of the history of ideas: slow, stubborn, and surprisingly long-living.

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