

## The Community Spirit in Rousseau, Fichte, Pestalozzi

Alfred Baeumler, *Bildung und Gemeinschaft*, 1943

The more one studies Pestalozzi's practical effectiveness and teaching, the more magnificent appears his breakthrough through individualism. With the blindness of genius, out of his own soulfulness, the Swiss achieved something similar in his field to the East Prussian Herder. Just as Herder freed us from the individualistic thinking of the Enlightenment and taught us to feel and recognise culture as a product of the *folks*, Pestalozzi taught us to feel and see education as an education not only *for* but also *through* the *community*. In this sense, we can call Pestalozzi the Herder of pedagogy.

Humanism and the Enlightenment are rightly called "pedagogical" movements. Our present-day interest in schools, in learning and teaching, in instruction and education stems essentially from these intellectual movements. However, the *narrowing of the pedagogical problem* that makes the theory of education one of the most unpleasant and unfruitful chapters in the humanities also stems from these movements. From its origins in humanism and the Enlightenment, the theory of education suffers from a false approach. Erasmus and Vives, Comenius and Ratke are certainly reformers of the school and bold innovators in didactics, but they leave the essential questions untouched. Pestalozzi, on the other hand, is not a mere reformer of the school, but a revolutionary of education. He frees pedagogy from its overgrowth by didactics and places it on its own feet. His discovery of *community* as the basis of all education signifies the detachment of educational theory from the shackles of individualism and the gaining of the only possible fruitful approach to educational science.

Of course, it is not Pestalozzi who enjoys the fame of this liberation to this day, but *Rousseau*. In "Emil" one sees the foundation book of the newer pedagogical science. Here one thinks one finds the thoughts that not only had a revolutionary effect on their time, but also determined the approach to the pedagogical problem right up to us. From Rousseau onwards, the education of the individual to become a "human being" through the planned development of the physical and mental powers that lie dormant in him until he is integrated into human society - this is supposed to be the programme of all education and the key to pedagogical theory. This has been repeated countless times, and countless times Pestalozzi's genius has been sinned against. For it is not Rousseau but Pestalozzi who is the real revolutionary in the history of educational science. Rousseau only overcame one

side of the Enlightenment; precisely in the decisive point, the author of “Emil” remains completely caught up in the Enlightenment. Pestalozzi penetrates to the depths and destroys Enlightenment thinking in its approach.

Through Rousseau, education has been freed from the tutelage of the book; the right of childhood and youth has been seen and affirmed by him; likewise the right of the body and manual labour. These may be important discoveries in the field of education. But we are concerned with the principle. Is Rousseau the discoverer of the true realm of education, as liberal history has repeatedly presented it to us, or does his pedagogy merely represent the culmination of the individualism of the Enlightenment in its final phase brought about by him?

Rousseau’s historical importance is based on the fact that he put an end to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. It is usually assumed that rationalism and individualism are so closely connected that the end of one must also mean the end of the other. This is not the case. There is a rationalistic and an irrationalistic individualism. Rousseau does not abandon the individualistic thinking of the Enlightenment when he substitutes feeling for reason. What is thus achieved is merely an individualism in a new, more dangerous form. Individualistic rationalism is replaced by individualistic sentimentalism, the strict rule of reason is replaced by the anarchy of the heart that feels only itself and impetuously desires its happiness. Reason still has its standards and its forms; but the unleashed heart knows only itself and its formless arbitrariness. Rousseau’s “liberation” does not lead to a new, deeper bond, but to dissolution. This is why Rousseau was able to become the philosopher of the French Revolution, which did not find the measure in itself, but had to be brought to a halt from outside by General Bonaparte.

Rousseau’s philosophy is without binding principle - so how could his “Emil” contain the right pedagogical approach? Rationalistic individualism is replaced by irrationalistic individualism – and this is even more dangerous than the former!

In “Emil”, three different types of education are distinguished. The individual is educated by nature or by people or by things. The education of nature is not dependent on us, that of things only in certain respects, and also that through man is only conditionally in our hands. The real educator is the connection between nature and things. The educator does not have to educate, but only to see to it that nothing is done that could disturb the educational work of nature. When the word “nature” is used, any idea of natural *human* community must be kept away. “Nature” only means the context of forces and events in which man is placed; the

result of education should be that he ultimately finds himself in a correct relationship to nature.

Rousseau's "nature" is a completely impersonal educator; the connection of nature and things, through the repercussions of which he comes to realise his own strength and weakness, is an inhuman one. Human community is not contained in any form in Rousseau's approach. Emil is an orphan, he stands outside all relationships and ties. The only human relationship in which he is shown from the beginning, that to his educator, remains completely undefined, shapeless and cool. This educator stands *next* to the actual events, he only supports and explains what happens by itself. Neither the family nor the men's association have an effect on Emil. The other person only becomes significant for him at the moment when his sexuality awakens. He encounters them in the form of his lover. The detailed description of puberty therefore marks the decisive turn in the structure of the whole. Of course, the appearance of Sophie does not change anything fundamental. The upbringing is complete. Emil, who has been formed into a "human being" without humans, becomes a husband and father and thus a citizen.

Emil grew up not only in outer solitude and silence, but also in complete inner solitude, in a socially empty space, as it were. If he nevertheless ends up as a *citizen* in accordance with the demands of Rousseau's main political work ("The Social Contract"), this is not a contradiction from a purely intellectual point of view, for life in human society is and remains for Rousseau the goal of education. His Emil is educated away from the human community, but still *for* life in the community. This is precisely the peculiar paradox of Rousseau's approach to the philosophy of education: only outside the community (of today) can one educate for the community (of tomorrow). Education for the true, *future* community is to be made possible through separation from the corrupt, *present* community.

What remains unanswered here is the question of whether it is at all possible to educate a person *for* the community outside of community life. How is a person who has never had the experience of community supposed to grow into the community? The isolated egoist can become a family egoist through marriage, but not a person in the community all at once. Without the experience of community from a young age, education for community is not possible. Rousseau's system is the system of consummate egoism. All his appeals to the compassionate heart cannot conceal the fact that individualism reaches its peak here and leads itself ad absurdum. The complement to this extreme individualism is an equally extreme collectivism, as we find in Rousseau's concept of the state.

Fichte draws a completely different pedagogical conclusion from the same historical-philosophical premise: that the present is completely corrupt. He also

separates the generation to be educated in the spirit of a new age from the older generation, but he still lets the children grow up under the care of their teachers in an institutional community.

But Fichte's significance for theoretical pedagogy is not to be found in his conquest of the concept of community for educational science. Fichte approaches the problem of education from the point of view of the *ideal task* set for the new generation. In this way, he finds and shapes the concept of the *nation* as a historical community of descent that is at the same time a community of pure spirits, whereby Fichte is essentially concerned with proving the *spiritual character* of this community, but not with proving the independent significance of a concrete community as such. And there is no mention of an educational effectiveness of the community. Finally, education in Fichte is more an education for the spiritual community than an education *through* the community. Not one of the two concrete forms of community (family and male alliance or clan and following) appears in Fichte's system of education. In their place is the purely rational construction of an educational institution that unites children of both sexes under the supervision of teachers.

Originally and before all education, Fichte believes, lies in the human being that which makes education possible in the first place. Morality cannot be brought into the child if it is not already in the child. The purest form of this morality, however, is the instinct for respect. For Fichte, the basis of all moral education is not sensual love of children and parents, as Pestalozzi assumes, but the drive for mutual respect.

According to this, the human being does not develop into a full human being in life within the community through mutual taking and giving, but living together with others is only the consequence of a ready-made, as it were preformed morality. The instinct for respect has no actual development; its content is always the same. It changes in appearance, but not in essence.

Thus, although Fichte accepts the relationship between man and man as the basis of all moral education, he does not understand man as a being developing morally within the community. As a result, the community as the prerequisite for moral development recedes completely into the background in pedagogical theory. The concept of the nation is not derived by Fichte from the concept of the community, as strange as this may sound to us today. Fichte knows nothing of the fact that man only *grows* into a real human being in the community. Mutual respect is something great, but the human relationships of a living community are by no means exhausted in mutual respect. Much more elementary processes than that of mutual respect make up the basic layer of the life of the community. Because

Fichte ignores all these processes, he cannot build up his concept of the nation from below, but must construct it from above.

*Pestalozzi*, on the other hand, does not know the concept of nation in the Fichtean sense. His concept of the folk is merely a social one. For Pestalozzi, “folk” means quite vaguely the “lower” folk that must be helped, not the political folk, the closed nation. Pestalozzi’s path to pedagogy does not lead through the philosophy of history and the historical appearance of the nation, but through the *experience of educating youth*. And for him that means: through the experience of a living community.

It is the close community of the home, of the family, of parental and child love that Pestalozzi has exclusively in mind. His concept of community never departed from this narrow starting point. The temporal nature of this peaceful, idyllic concept of community is easy to recognise, and its critique can be given without difficulty in the age of the great nation states. For pedagogical theory, however, it is not decisive from which sub-district of the community Pestalozzi started, but rather the fact that he started at all with the real community of the family - that was a real revolution - and secondly, in which way he conceived his approach.

In the consciousness of posterity, Pestalozzi lives on as the creator of the method of elementary education, i.e. as a didactician. A tragic misunderstanding! It was precisely that which lay before all didactics that was important to Pestalozzi, both as a practitioner and as a theorist. It became difficult for him to give adequate expression to his greatest and most important thought, and perhaps it is only today that we can fully understand how simple and correct the approach of Pestalozzi’s pedagogy is.

It was a very simple insight that Pestalozzi wanted to express. All teaching, no matter how successful, is without value and meaning if it does not take place within the framework of a living community. Training of the intellect and the will leads to nothing but a thousand empty skills if the human being does not at the same time develop morally. But this he does only under the breath of love. “The error was great and the deception immeasurable,” says Pestalozzi, “that one believed that I seek the formation of the human nature through one-sided head education, I seek it through the one-sidedness of arithmetic and mathematics; no, I seek it through the all-sidedness of love.” The life of the heart precedes all correct knowledge and ability, and without the development of the powers of the heart all development of the spiritual faculties is of no use. Therefore the child can be morally educated only in the circle of home life. “The child loves and believes before it thinks and acts, and the influence of home life stimulates and

elevates it to the inner essence of the moral forces which presuppose all human thought and action...”

The point at which Pestalozzi begins is therefore that layer of elementary experiences and experiences which link the child with mother, father and siblings. Love” - the word Pestalozzi uses to describe all these experiences - is not a one-off early state of experience, but something that is permanently essential to the human being, something that actually makes him a human being. It is the task of the educator never to detach the methodically guided teaching from such situations that call upon the child’s power of love. Only in a continuous exchange of loving give and take is the child able to develop as a moral being. Nothing would be more disastrous than a didactic approach that undertook to educate the human being without this elementary education through love (which we can call an *emotional* education). It would result in a mechanical puppet, not a living human being. “Faith and love are the be-all and end-all of natural, and therefore elementary, education in humanity. Spiritual education and art education are only subordinate means of education and only in this subordination are they able to contribute to the harmony of our powers and to the balance of them among themselves.

Pestalozzi is the first pedagogue who understood the human being not as an isolated, finished person, but as one who first develops in the community. He is the first to consider a *real life-circle*, a community *reality*, as the first and most important thing in all education and teaching. He approached the questions of didactics with true passion, and in doing so he got lost in the strangest trains of thought. He has never underestimated the importance of teaching methods. At the same time, however, he has always assigned teaching the place where it alone can have its beneficial effect. *Education must always be built into a living community* – this is Pestalozzi’s decisive insight, the teaching he left to the generations of teachers after him. Only when the “basic forces” that make it possible for people to live together in the family are alive and active can intellect and will develop without harm.

Pestalozzi’s pedagogy therefore distinguishes the *means of development of the basic human powers from the means of training and instruction in knowledge and skills*. The means of development of the basic forces are always the same and proceed from eternal laws; the means of training and instruction are as different as the objects of the world to whose knowledge and use our forces are applied. These are subordinate and subordinate to them. This means not only the primacy of the irrational over the rational, of the heart over the mind, but it means the primacy of the reality of life over all teaching and over all knowledge and ability

of the individual. The deepest meaning of the priority of the reality of life over the method, however, is the priority of the community over the individual.

This priority is not to be understood as if community and individual were separable from each other and as if the latter had to be valued more highly than the former. That would be an external, mechanistic way of thinking. Community and individual belong together and form a whole. Priority of the community means (in Pestalozzi's language) priority of love, and that means: priority of the forces that establish the immediate life of the community over all abilities and achievements of other kinds, even those that constitute the pride of the individual.