

KANT ON PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF CRITIQUE

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Abstract. *In Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766, Immanuel Kant outlined his views of how philosophical education ought to be conducted. According to him, the method of instruction in philosophy should be zetetic, which means that students should first learn to philosophize rather than (as they typically expect) to learn philosophy, that is, that learning how to think for oneself ought to be preferred over learning particular philosophical systems. Kant argued for this view by claiming that philosophy at his time was not yet a complete discipline, and accordingly, that there was no philosophical book which might be said to contain definite solutions to the main philosophical problems.*

Given that the claims above had been stated in 1765, and that later on (in the 1780s and 1790s in particular) Kant thought that he had practically solved (or resolved) all the important philosophical questions, it is interesting to see whether his views of philosophical education remained the same, even more so because at that time he still claimed (for example, in Critique of Pure Reason and according to some transcriptions of his lectures) that his age was the age of critique and therefore it had to be seen what will come of it. I argue in this paper that there are good reasons to believe that Kant's aforementioned claims are compatible and that the continuity of his thoughts on these things can be preserved.

Key words: *Kant, philosophical education, critique, the age of critique.*

1. KANT'S GENERAL VIEWS OF EDUCATION

It is common to say that Immanuel Kant was one of the most influential philosophers in history, given that he framed many interesting debates in philosophy and proposed inspiring solutions and strategies of dealing with various philosophical problems. Apart from being important in disciplines like metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics,

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logic, political philosophy and anthropology, his views of education have also been widely discussed in the philosophy of education to this day.

Today we know about Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy* (Kant 2007a), his book on higher education *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Kant 1996), the texts in newspapers in which he promoted Basedow's educational reforms (the so-called *Dessau Philantropinum*; Kant 2007b, 2007c), while many of his thoughts on education can be found in other writings and transcriptions of his lectures (in his lectures on logic, in particular, which will be mentioned in due course) and correspondence (Kant 1967; cf. Mueller 2019). His views on philosophical education were most explicitly presented in his *Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766* to which special attention will be paid in due course.

Beside doing research, Kant had extensive teaching experience, first by working with children as a tutor for a short period of time, and later on with students as a university professor [he gave private lectures on various (not just philosophical) topics and finally, in 1770 he was appointed Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Königsberg (see Kuehn 2001 for more details)].

Before presenting Kant's views on philosophical education, let us briefly sketch his views on education in general. According to Kant, “education is an art, the practice of which must be perfected over the course of many generations” (Kant 2007a, 441). This means that although corresponding scientific knowledge is required in order for someone to be a good teacher, additional skills are required as well. Since the art of education presupposes corresponding scientific (experimental) knowledge, it should be governed by experts. Thus, Kant believed that the assessment of educational reforms should be pursued in light of the development of the human race.

Education was one of the most puzzling phenomena for Kant primarily due to the fact that a man is taught by a man, not by an infallible being, which makes it difficult to have any clue on how first parents had taught their children in the absence of a suitable textbook. Relating to this, Kant says:

“The human being shall make himself better, cultivate himself, and, if he is evil, bring forth morality in himself. If one thinks this over carefully, one finds that it is very difficult. That is why education is the greatest and most difficult problem that can be given to the human being. For insight depends on education and education in turn depends on insight. For that reason education can only move forward slowly and step by step” (Kant 2007a, 441).

Another puzzle about education relies on the fact that, on the one hand, Kant thought that the autonomy of a person was considered to be a highly appreciated goal that should be achieved by corresponding educational practices, while, on the other hand, he was well aware of the fact that the whole process is pursued under constraint, especially in early childhood. These constraints consist in giving instructions on what children should not do (disciplining or what Kant sometimes called “negative formation”) as well as in giving instructions on what they should do (what he called “positive formation”; see, for example, Kant 2007a, 446, 456). As it will be seen in the succeeding sections, similar problems concern philosophical instruction as well.

The puzzles above reveal a potential tension within Kant's philosophy of education since, on the one hand, the autonomy of a person is mostly related to morality, and we know that moral duties are, according to Kant, considered to be universal, while on the

other hand, he himself assessed educational reforms within the context of the development of the human race. That is probably why some Kant scholars are more willing to get a grasp of Kant's philosophy of education in the light of his moral philosophy, while some others think that his views of the philosophy of history are more relevant here (see, for example, Roth and Surprenant 2012; González 2011 for more details).

2. ON THE ZETETIC NATURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUCTION

Now, let us turn to Kant's views on *philosophical* education.¹ These views are presented most explicitly in Kant's *Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766*, which goes far beyond being an official document, since a brief look at it shows that it is practically an essay on how he saw philosophical education at that time. Here, it is worth mentioning that during the 1765–1766 winter semester Kant gave private lectures on metaphysics, logic, moral philosophy, and physical (moral and political) geography (the last of which he described as the “history of the present state of earth”).

When it comes to philosophical education, Kant first noticed that it starts at some age of maturity², which means that students who take philosophical courses already know how to learn many subjects, such as grammar, mathematics, history, biology, and the like. In view of the last fact, students who take philosophical courses typically expect that they should learn philosophy at the outset. However, according to Kant that is wrong, since the outcome of such an enterprise would be a mere learnedness, which means that in that case students would be enabled to just repeat sentences of great philosophers, declaim arguments for and against certain philosophical views without being able to critically examine those views. For that reason, Kant thought that attenders of his philosophical courses first should learn to philosophize, which means that they should be enabled to critically examine proposed views and theories³. In Kant's words, students “should be led, but not carried” (Kant 1992a, 292). They should primarily learn to think instead of learning the thoughts of other philosophers. This means that the method of instruction in philosophy is *zetetic*.^{4 5}

Now, let us see on what grounds Kant supported his view stated above. His main argument (presented in the *Announcement*) runs as follows (Kant 1992a, 293):

¹ Kant's more general views about humanities are addressed in Shell 2000; 2012.

² Here, it is worth mentioning that Graf Dohna-Wundlacken, who later on became *Obermarschall* of Prussia, had attended Kant's courses on metaphysics and other subjects when he was fourteen years old (he also made valuable transcriptions of those lectures; see Ameriks and Naragon 1997, xxxvi–xxxvii), while Albert Einstein first read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* when he was only thirteen years old (Palmquist 2010, 54). Today, they would probably be counted as too young to get into Kant's philosophy.

³ Here, it is worth recalling that Kant drew the distinction between critique and doctrine. Related to this, he said (Kant 1992b, 253): “When the rules of judgment precede the passing of judgment, then it is called a *doctrina*. When the passing of judgment precedes, [it is called] critique”.

⁴ Kant explicitly referred to the Greek word *zetein* here. This word is usually connected with Pyrrhonian skepticism (see, for example, Forster 2008), but it is also used many times by Socrates (see, for example, Magrini 2018, 34, 37, 64, for more details).

⁵ Here, it is worth mentioning that in a recently published paper, Sandra Zákutná also briefly sketched Kant's view of philosophical instruction, by emphasizing its zetetic character and putting it in the context of Kant's practical philosophy (his views of the philosophy of history, cosmopolitanism, and the like; see Zákutná 2021 for more details). However, my paper is more focused on the continuity of Kant's thought concerning the nature of philosophical instruction as such (see the next section).

“In order, therefore, to be able to learn philosophy as well there must already be a philosophy which actually exists in the first place. It must be possible to produce a book and say: ‘Look, here is wisdom, here is knowledge on which you can rely. If you learn to understand and grasp it, if you take it as your foundation and build on it from now on, you will be philosophers’. Until I am shown such a book of philosophy, a book to which I can appeal, say, as I can appeal to *Polybius* in order to elucidate some circumstance of history, or to *Euclid* in order to explain a proposition in mathematics – until I am shown such a book, I shall allow myself to make the following remark”.

In other words, Kant thought that (unlike in some other scientific disciplines) we are not in possession of a pertinent textbook of philosophy, in which we could be informed about definite solutions to the main philosophical problems and therefore to be taught by reading it. However, this gives rise to the following question: given that Kant's *Announcement* was written in 1765, sixteen years before the publication of his major work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, did he change his mind over time (for example, after publishing the very book in 1781 and later on)? It seems reasonable to pose such a question because in *Critique of Pure Reason* and his later writings Kant became confident in that he practically solved (or resolved) many interesting philosophical questions. For example, when he spoke about transcendental dialectics, which concerns metaphysical disputes about the immortality of the soul, the nature of the universe and the existence of God, he was convinced that his results are “completely certain” (Kant 2004, 82–83). Likewise in ethics, Kant famously thought that only categorical imperative could provide a satisfactory foundation of universal morality (Kant 1999). And so on.

Bearing this in mind, it is worth examining whether Kant started to think that he finally wrote corresponding textbooks of various philosophical disciplines that could be used with the same level of certainty that he (as we have seen in the passage quoted above) had already assigned to Euclid's and Polybius's works. Could he, for example, in 1800 [when his *Logic* (prepared by Gottlob Jäsche) were published] say something like this: “If you want to learn metaphysics, read my *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*; if you want to learn moral philosophy, read my *Critique of Practical Reason* and related writings; if you want to learn logic, read my recently published manual; and so forth”?

An affirmative answer to the question above would amount to the claim that the later Kant held that the method of philosophical instruction should not be considered zetetic anymore⁶. However, I argue in the next section that Kant did not change his mind on these issues over time.

3. THE CONTINUITY OF KANT'S THOUGHT

In this section, arguments for the continuity of Kant's thought about the nature of philosophical instruction will be provided. It will be argued that even after publishing his major works in the 1780s and 1790s, Kant continued to believe that instruction in philosophy should be zetetic.

⁶ It seems that this is a view of Michael Forster, who explicitly connects Kant's view of the method of philosophical instruction with Pyrrhonian skepticism (see Forster 2008, 18 for more details).

At the very beginning, let us see how Kant characterized the time in which he lived. In *The Vienna Logic*, when speaking about metaphysics, he says: “This is the age of critique for this study, and the time is near when its building will be torn down and a wholly new one will be built on the ruins of the old” (Kant 1992b, 264). A more modest claim can be found in *The Jäsche Logic* (published in 1800 and based on Kant's lectures in 1790s)⁷: “This is the age of critique for this study, and it has to be seen what will come of the critical attempts of our time in respect to philosophy and in particular to metaphysics” (Kant 1992c, 544). Although this is a bit surprising, given that it is widely held that *The Jäsche Logic* was written later than *The Vienna Logic*, it supports the claim that Kant did not change his view of how philosophical instruction (at least in the case of metaphysics) ought to be pursued.

As it was mentioned in the previous section, physical geography was one of the subjects taught by Kant in the 1765–1766 winter semester. He explains why this subject is important for future philosophers (Kant 1992a, 298):

“Right at the beginning of my academic career, I realized that students were being seriously neglected, particularly in this respect: early on they learned the art of subtle argumentation but they lacked any adequate knowledge of historical matters which could make good their lack of experience”.

Kant (1992a: 300) continued by claiming that he wanted to avoid Isocrates's situation, who once had said: “What I know is not suitable to the occasion; and that which is suitable to the occasion I do not know”.

Likewise, Kant thought that in moral philosophy (and practical philosophy in general) empirical information should not be neglected. Here is what he said in his *Announcement*: “In the doctrine of virtue I shall always begin by considering historically and philosophically what *happens* before specifying what *ought to happen*” (Kant 1992a, 298).

Passages like these shed a better light on the importance of empirical knowledge for building a philosophical system and depart from how Kant's views on metaphysics are sometimes understood. Namely, at the very beginning, Kant was considered to be a philosopher who tried to destroy metaphysics⁸, while it is a commonplace that later on many counted his transcendental philosophy as too speculative in view of his conviction that transcendental (formal) conditions of our experience cannot be studied empirically since they themselves make experience possible.⁹

However, Kant's views about philosophy can be considered compatible with what is now usually called naturalistic metaphysics (see, for example, Ladyman and Ross 2007 for more details), that is, a metaphysics based on scientific results. It seems that some famous scientists, such as Werner Heisenberg, understood Kant in that way. Related to this, Heisenberg (1958, 33–34) said that Kant “frequently did what at root amounted to drawing philosophic consequences from the developments in science since Newton's time”. Other parts of Kant's philosophy are also closely related with corresponding

⁷ There are well-known worries about to what extent Kant's *Logic* corresponds to Kant's own thoughts, given that Jäsche wrote the manual based on Kant's annotations and various transcriptions of his lectures (see, for example, Boswell 1988 for more details). Nonetheless, the quoted sentence above does not seem to be problematic since Kant had already said in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* that “our age is the genuine age of criticism” (Kant 1998, 100).

⁸ That is how, for example, Moses Mendelssohn understood Kant's views of metaphysics (see, for example, Mendelssohn 2011, xix).

⁹ That is how Kant's transcendental philosophy is typically understood by empiricists (see, for example, Schlicht and Newen 2015).

scientific results at that time: for example, Kant thought that the second part of his *Critique of Power of Judgment*, in which teleology was addressed, was influenced by Johann Blumenbach's views about the formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*; see, for example, Richards 2000). Moreover, some interpreters argue that Kant's philosophy was not just based on prevailing scientific views at that time, but it was also aimed at reforming those views in some respects (such as, Newtonian views of the nature of space and time; see, for example, Palmquist 2010, 48).¹⁰

Another reason why it seems that Kant did not change his mind concerning the nature of philosophical instruction is reflected in that fact that he continued to think that both *critique* and *consensus* within the philosophical community are prerequisites for any well-pursued philosophical inquiry.¹¹ Here is what Kant said in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998, 643):

“Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings, and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. ... The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back”.

Furthermore, it is a commonplace that Kant neither built up his transcendental philosophy on intellectual intuition, nor on common sense, but rather searched for the best (or the only) explanations available. That is evident from how he dealt with the problems of ethics, teleology and metaphysics. This, of course, additionally supports the view that philosophers should be trained to critically examine philosophical theories (rather than taking them for granted), because the evidential base could undergo various changes over time.

To sum up. There are good reasons to believe that Kant continued to think (from 1781 onward) that the method of instruction in philosophy should be considered zetetic because, on the one hand, philosophers should always be prepared for possible changes in science to make building up corresponding philosophical systems possible, while, on the other hand, critique is an essential part of scientific (and philosophical) inquiry so that the acceptance of a proposed theory within scientific (or philosophical) community rests upon an agreement among its members who should always be considered autonomous persons.

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¹⁰ When it comes to biology, it might also be argued that Kant's view of *Bildungstrieb* differs significantly from Blumenbach's own understanding of that concept (see Richards 2000, for more details; cf. van der Berg 2014, 127).

¹¹ Relatedly, it is worth mentioning that in his *Announcement* Kant described his century as “a sociable century” (Kant 1992a, 299), while in the announcement of his courses on physical geography he referred to “the rational taste of our enlightened times” (Kant 2012, 388).

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KANT O FILOZOFSKOM OBRAZOVANJU U DOBA KRITIKE

U svojoj Najavi programa predavanja u zimskom semestru 1765–1766. godine, Immanuel Kant je u kratkim crtama predstavio svoje viđenje toga kako bi nastava filozofije trebala da izgleda. Po njegovom mišljenju, metod nastave filozofije bi trebao biti zetetički, što podrazumeva to da studenti filozofije prvo treba da nauče da filozofiraju, umesto da (kao što se obično očekuje) uče filozofiju, ili, drugim rečima, njihov prioritet bi trebao biti taj da nauče da misle svojom glavom pre nego da uče neki poseban filozofski sistem. Kant je opravdavao svoje viđenje filozofske nastave time što je ukazivao na to da u njegovo vreme nije postojala knjiga iz filozofije za koju bi se moglo tvrditi da u sebi sadrži konačna rešenja najvažnijih filozofskih problema. Imajući u vidu to da je on taj stav izneo 1765. godine, a da je kasnije (1780-ih i 1790-ih) Kant za sebe smatrao da je, praktično, rešio (ili razrešio) najvažnija pitanja u filozofiji, zanimljivo je ispitati to da li je Kant protokom vremena izmenio svoje mišljenje u pogledu prirode filozofskog obrazovanja, tim pre što je on i tada tvrdio (na primer, u svojoj Kritici čistog uma) da njegovo doba jeste doba kritike, te da stoga tek treba videti šta će iz njega proizići. U ovom radu se brani teza da postoje dobri razlozi za to da se smatra da su pomenute Kantove tvrdnje međusobno uskladive, i da je, sledstveno tome, kontinuitet njegove misli u pogledu prirode filozofskog obrazovanja ostao očuvan.

Ključne reči: *Kant, filozofsko obrazovanje, kritika, doba kritike.*