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Political *Bildung* in the Context of Discipline, Instruction, and Moral Guidance*

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) is considered the founding father of the science of education. In this article, I will try to show that Herbart sees the promotion of political *Bildung* as the task of discipline, instruction, and moral guidance, and that his work presents important components of a theory of political *Bildung* within an educational setting. According to Herbart, the political relationship to self and the world relates to issues that not only affect the lives of some but of a majority of people. But it is not people's collective life as such that is the point of orientation for the political relationship to self and the world, but only the collective life where problems have arisen. According to Herbart, politics results from a conflict about the question as to how to regulate people's collective life. While discipline, by providing the basic preconditions for instruction and moral guidance, makes merely an indirect contribution to political *Bildung*, the two latter forms of education – instruction and moral guidance – serve as the actual means by which political *Bildung* is achieved.

Keywords:

politics, *Bildung*, education, government, instruction, moral guidance, modern society, perspectivity, rules of orientation, differend, uncertainty, self-determination, many-sidedness of interest, morality, strength of character

1 Introduction

Johann Friedrich Herbart was born in Oldenburg in 1776 and died in Göttingen in 1841. After studying under Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) in Jena, he worked as a private tutor in Switzerland from 1797 until 1799 when he moved to the University of Göttingen. In 1809, he was appointed to the chair previously held by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in Königsberg, where he remained as a professor of philosophy and education for twenty-four years before returning to the University of Göttingen in 1833. During his time in Königsberg, Herbart published mostly on psychology and philosophy. Prior to that, he had already written important works on education, in which he took issue with Kant's philosophy for being an inadequate reference point for educational thought and practice (see Herbart 1804/1908, 58ff.) while adhering to the notion that the "one and the whole work of education" is to help develop "Morality" (ibid., 57).¹ In 1806, Herbart published his treatise *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aims*, in which he urges the science of education to use "intrinsic conceptions" and cultivate "an independent mode of thought" (Herbart 1806/1908, 83). Since then, Herbart has been considered the founding father of the science of education.

Herbart's disciples are called "Herbartians." Authors such as Karl Volkmar Stoy (1815-1885), Tuiskon Ziller (1817-1882), Otto Willmann (1839-1920) or Wilhelm Rein (1847-1929) have variously picked up on and developed Herbart's theories. Subsuming the resulting theories under the term "Herbartianism" is possible only at the cost of considerable simplification (see Coriand, Winkler 1998). In the nineteenth century, Herbartianism had a major influence on the training of teachers in Europe, and its concepts spread throughout the world. For this and other reasons, Herbart's work has had major international impact, as has been shown by numerous studies on its reception in a wide variety of countries, including the United States (see Lorenz 1997). American philosophers and educationists, most notably William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952), closely studied Herbart's work and further developed his ideas (see English 2007; Prange 2006).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Herbart was one of the most frequently cited authors in the writings of European and American educators, psychologists, and philosophers (see Adams 1898; Compayré 1907; De Garmo 1895, 1896; Felkin 1906; Gockler 1905; Hayward 1904; Leary 2000; Mouxion 1894, 1901; McMurry 1903; Williams 1911). His work continues to receive a lot of attention today, most notably in Russia (Zajakin 2004, 2009), Poland (Stepkowski 2010), Hungary (Bicsák 2012), Austria (Hopfner, Gerdenitsch 2009), Italy (Moro 2006; Pettoello 1988, 1991), Belgium (Martens 2009), Finland (Siljander 2012), Japan (Dobashi, Marsal 2007; Suzuki 2012), and China (Liou 2006, 44ff.). In the United States, there has been a renewed interest in Herbart's mathematical psychology (see Boudewijnse, Murray, Bandomir 2001).

Both during his lifetime and for a long time after his death, Herbart was considered to be one of the most eminent scholars. His work has significantly influenced

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the so-called “foundational crises” in the sciences that led to the evolution of a modern understanding of logic, mathematics, psychology, and other disciplines. Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), the founder of modern logic, pointed out that he would not have developed his groundbreaking insights, had it not been for Herbart (see Frank 1993; Gabriel 1997; Sullivan 1991). In the field of mathematics, it is noted that modern mathematics would have been unthinkable without Herbart (Banks 2005; Huemer, Landerer 2010; Scholz 1982). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) have variously referred to Herbart’s work in their efforts to advance the field of psychology. Freud, for example, took up Herbart’s notion of a “threshold of consciousness” and of the significance of pre- and unconscious mental ideas, while Wundt, through his engagement with Herbart’s ideas, helped psychology evolve into a scientific discipline.

In order to bring the work of Herbart and his successors into a productive dialogue with current debates and discourses, the International Herbart Society was founded in 2005. Its mission is to preserve an awareness of the problems and issues that find expression in the writings of Herbart and the Herbartians, and to develop them further with a view to current and future challenges.²

In this article, I will try to show that Herbart sees the promotion of political *Bildung* as the task of discipline, instruction, and moral guidance, and that his work presents important components of a theory of political *Bildung* within an educational setting. I will demonstrate that Herbart’s notion of “political *Bildung*,” when viewed systematically, can be seen as an original answer to the situation of perspectivity typical of modern societies. To do this, I will first explain some current self-descriptions of modern society (section 2). Next, I will define the forms of education that Herbart differentiated and described as “discipline” (*Regierung*), “instruction” (*Unterricht*), and “moral guidance” (*Zucht*). The focus here will be on what Herbart sees as the purpose of instruction, namely to support the development of “many-sidedness of interest” (section 3). In the third section, I will look at Herbart’s definition of political interest, or men’s political relationship to self and the world (section 4.). On this basis, it will then be possible to describe discipline, instruction, and moral guidance as the means by which political *Bildung* is achieved. The focus here will be on clarifying the term “political *Bildung*” within the framework of Herbart’s educational thinking (section 5).

2 Modern societies: Individual and collective life in a situation of perspectivity

Modern societies are defined by an irreducible *perspectivity* (see Anhalt 2010a). By this we mean a space where men, when looking at issues, are confronted with a multitude of perspectives without being able to determine and single out the one “right” perspective

(see Rucker 2013a, 242ff.). When broken down into its components, the perspectivity of modern society is a situation

- that encompasses a multiplicity of heterogeneous worlds, which form contexts for men’s orientation and
- which relate to each other by way of “different,”
- as a result of which people find themselves in a state of uncertainty (*Haltlosigkeit*),
- in which they search for orientation.

2.1 Worlds of orientation

Modern society consists of a multiplicity of heterogeneous worlds of orientation. *Worlds of orientation* are the social contexts in which people judge, act, and communicate: law, science, religion, art, business, ethics, education, politics, etc.

Every context is governed by constitutive and regulative rules of orientation. Constitutive rules specify what counts as a social context in which people orient themselves. The sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) describes these kinds of rules as distinctions: A person who wants to find his bearings in the world of science has to be guided by the distinction between “truth” and “untruth.” In contrast, a person who operates in the world of ethics needs to be guided by the distinction between “good” and “bad.” For the field of law, yet another distinction is the constitutive one, namely that between “justice” and “injustice” (see Luhmann 2012, 2013). In contrast, regulative rules define how people judge, act, and communicate within a given context. For example, a Christian conduct of life is not constitutive of the world of religion, just as a liberal conduct of life is not constitutive of the world of politics. Rather, they are regulative rules of orientation within the world of religion and politics, respectively, to which there are always alternative religious or political rules.

When people go by specific rules, they take positions and thus adopt perspectives on issues. For example, a person who goes by the constitutive rules of an economic context, takes an economic perspective on an issue. An issue is thus constituted as an economic issue. The particular issue, however, can also be viewed from an alternative perspective – for example, an aesthetic perspective –, which makes it possible to see aspects that would not be visible from a different perspective.³

2.2 Differend

In democratic societies, not all rules of orientation are prescribed. People are instead given the opportunity to lead self-determined lives, as long as they comply with the existing laws, in whose making they in turn participate. According to Jürgen Habermas (*1929), the citizens of a state are not just the addressees of the law but at the same time the authors of the rules they give themselves to organize their collective life. The philosopher Karl Raimund Popper (1902-1994) calls a “society in which individuals are confronted with personal decisions” an “open society” (Popper 1971,



173). The fact that people seize the opportunity to define their own positions means that, in open societies, every public debate on an issue is made up of a multiplicity of perspectives.

The interplay of perspectives is irreducible, since open societies do not admit of determining the one “right” perspective, thereby identifying all other perspectives as “wrong.” The constitutive and regulative perspectives of social contexts are thus in a *different*. A term coined by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), “different” denotes a “case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments” (Lyotard 1988, xi). To disentangle the web of perspectives, it would take a rule that makes it possible to determine the “right” order of perspectives. In a world of multiple perspectives, however, every rule to determine the “right” order of perspectives can also be confronted with alternatives, so that the question of the “right” rule of orientation arises anew.⁴

2.3 Uncertainty

In a situation of different, people’s lives hold the possibility and necessity to choose between alternative perspectives. Every decision taken precludes alternatives that would also have been possible (see Berger, Luckmann 1996).

Since decisions in favor of certain rules of orientation are thus contingent (see Luhmann 1992), people living in a situation of perspectivity operate in a state of uncertainty (see Anhalt 2010b). Uncertainty does not mean that people in modern society are no longer guided by rules. Rather, there are countless rules, many of which contradict each other, but all of which are simultaneously valid. As a result, there are no longer any rules in modern society that provide all people with safe and firm guidance. The question as to the only “right” rules of orientation rather marks an unsolvable problem, which people can deal with in their individual and collective lives, but for which there can be no definitive solution.

2.4 Search for orientation

In this sense, modern man is engaged in a search for orientation (see Anhalt 2010a). Elmar Anhalt (*1964) uses this term to describe the search for rules that guide people’s judgments, actions, and communications to help them cope with the situation of perspectivity in an ever-changing environment. Since we do not know for certain what rules are “right” for all and should be complied with, the search for orientation is a permanent problem, for which there are no definitive rules, and thus a fundamentally unfinishable process where every found “certainty” (*Halt*, literally: (foot)hold, support) serves as a contingent point of departure for the further individual or collective search for orientation. In this sense, modern man is denied the possibility to take up a position that

might offer firm support, immune as it would be to being challenged from a different perspective.

3 “Many-sidedness of interest”

According to Herbart, the purpose of education is to support the development of morality (see Herbart 1804/1908). In light of this definition of purpose, Herbart distinguishes three forms of education, each of which fulfills specific functions to help develop morality. Herbart calls these forms discipline, instruction, and moral guidance. *Discipline* performs the function of establishing “a spirit of order” (Herbart 1806/1908, 96). We would speak of discipline, for example, when a teacher admonishes a student to stop talking with her neighbor and return her attention to what’s going on in class. In this sense, discipline helps make instruction and moral guidance possible. For Herbart, *instruction* has the purpose of supporting the development of a “many-sided interest” (see *ibid.*, 122ff.). Finally, helping develop “moral strength of character” is the work of *moral guidance*. While instruction, according to Herbart, helps children and young people gain insights and form their own opinions with the aid of a third factor – for example, through dealing with the topic of “unemployment” –, moral guidance helps people act on their insights and opinions. For example, if the students define for themselves that unemployment, seen scientifically, is rooted, among other things, in social inequality, if they decide that this might be morally problematic and thus require political action, one measure taken by moral guidance could be to help students make this position public, for example by way of a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

In order to define what Herbart means by “political *Bildung*,” it is most of all necessary to clarify his term of the “many-sidedness of interest.” The term “interest” is used by Herbart in its original Latin sense of “inter-esse,” meaning “to be between.” By “interest” he means that individuals take up a position *in relation to their individual and collective lives*. Anticipating that modern man’s individual and collective life takes place within many and diverse worlds of orientation, Herbart called this fact the “subdivision of ways of life” (Herbart 1810/1964, 76).

For Herbart, instruction should enable the learner to develop “susceptibility, easy empathy with judgment and sensibility for everything that can be called human affairs” (Herbart 1919, 507). Through instruction, learners are to develop into people with many-sided interests who take up their own positions within the many and diverse worlds of orientation and who are capable of assessing issues in an interplay of perspectives.

During instruction, issues are explored in the context of many and diverse perspectives. “Many-sidedness,” wrote Herbart, “ought to multiply (...) the person” (Herbart 1913, 175). Depending on one’s perspective, it is possible to grasp different aspects of an issue. Herbart here talks



about the “variety of objects,” as distinct from their “number” (Herbart 1841/1913, 85), with “variety” denoting the wide range of aspects of an issue. If we take, for example, the issue of abortion, we can differentiate between moral, economic, scientific, political, and religious aspects. Herbart thus initially defines many-sidedness as a feature of issues. “Objectively speaking,” the term of many-sidedness denotes a “diverse content of what we imagine and feel” (Herbart 1913, 175).⁵

Instruction is to prompt men to actively deal with, and take a position on, issues that affect their individual and collective lives within the context of many and diverse perspectives. “Interest means self-activity. The demand for a many-sided interest is, therefore, a demand for many-sided self-activity” (Herbart 1841/1913, 60). Self-activity in dealing with specific aspects of an issue results in the “many-sided man” (Herbart 1913, 175) who is capable of determining rules for himself and of acting on these rules within the framework of many and diverse social contexts. For this reason, Herbart defines many-sidedness not only as a feature of an issue, but also as a feature of a learning individual. “Subjectively speaking,” Herbart writes, the term of many-sidedness refers to a “human trait” (ibid.).

Instruction helps people develop rules to orient themselves in a world of many and diverse perspectives; thereby are created “parts in the individual,” and “the personality” develops into “a unity composed of many parts” (ibid.). Developing rules of orientation thus leads to a differentiation of the relationship to self and the world. Herbart calls this process “the culture of the circle of thought” (Herbart 1806/1908, 100). The “circle of thought” is where man reflects on himself and the world and develops rules of orientation.

According to Herbart, it is the work of instruction to help develop a circle of thought with many and varied dimensions. During instruction, people are urged to actively deal with issues in light of the multitude and diversity as well as the interplay of perspectives in order to “traverse in all directions the realms of human thought” (ibid.) and to “cultivate (...) a large circle of thought closely connected in all its parts” (ibid., 92).

4 Politics: Regulating people’s collective life which has become problematic

According to Herbart, political interest is a specific form of the relationship to self and the world. To explain what he means by that, I would like to cite a passage from Herbart’s 1806 *Science of Education*, where he gives a succinct statement of his understanding of the term “politics.” Stating that “the conflicting claims of humanity extort the social spirit of order out of sympathy” (Herbart 1806/1908, 135), Herbart describes “social sympathy” as follows:

“If sympathy simply affects the affections it finds in human minds, follows their course, enters into their

varieties, collisions, and contradictions, it is merely a fellow feeling. (...) But it can also abstract the varied affections of many men from the individuals, it can seek to reconcile their contradictions, it can interest itself in the welfare of the whole, and then again distribute this interest in thought amongst the individuals. This is *social* sympathy. It disposes of the particular, that it may attach itself to the general. It requires exchange and sacrifice, opposes actual emotions, and imagines possible better ones in their place. This is the attitude of the politician” (ibid., 134ff.).

Herbart here defines political interest as “social sympathy.” The political relationship to self and the world relates to issues that not only affect the lives of some people, but people’s collective life. But it is not people’s collective life as such that is the point of orientation for the political relationship to self and the world, but only the collective life where problems have arisen. This is the case, for example, when established rules of interaction are being challenged and subject to criticism. Where people judge, act, and communicate in order to solve problems in their collective life, they constitute the world of politics. Politics is thus the world of orientation that governs people’s collective life where problems have arisen.

Politics for Herbart is not limited to the state. The state is a set of institutions whose job is to regulate people’s collective life that has become problematic: “The state may be One, but it is a unity of the interaction of as many different elements as possible” (Herbart 1810/1964, 77). In the state, political judgment and action have been made permanent, since regulating people’s collective life is a permanent problem of society. Politics, however, is not limited to the state. For Herbart, the object of political *Bildung* is not just politics within, but also outside of the state (see Herbart 1808/1964, 387).

The necessity of politics results from a conflict about the question as to how to regulate people’s collective life. The conflict arises from the fact that people take up different positions or perspectives when it comes to the question of how to properly regulate their collective life. Therefore, it takes judgment and action that is designed to “reconcile [the] contradictions” that result from the “varied affections of many men” (Herbart 1806/1908, 134).

A “spirit of order” is essential to the world of politics. This spirit “gives laws” (ibid., 135) and thus serves, at least temporarily, to order people’s collective lives. By “order,” I mean a temporarily stable state in people’s collective life based on collectively shared rules of orientation. In a state of disorder, it is necessary for people to submit to collective rules of orientation to restore order to people’s collective life. Since, in a situation of perspectivity, the “right” rules governing people’s collective life are not known, there is always the possibility that the rules will be challenged again in the



future. In Herbart's words, political issues are "matters (...) that will always remain open to debate" (Herbart 1838/1964, 31).⁶

Given this description of the political relationship to self and the world, how shall we define political *Bildung* as well as discipline, instruction, and moral guidance as media of political *Bildung*?

5 Political *Bildung*

While discipline, by providing the basic preconditions for instruction and moral guidance, makes merely an indirect contribution to political *Bildung*, the two latter forms of education – instruction and moral guidance – serve as the actual means by which political *Bildung* is achieved. Herbart explicitly defines *Bildung* as the aim of instruction and moral guidance (see Herbart 1806/1964, 111), whereas discipline, as I have already shown, merely serves to create order. To put it succinctly: "*Bildung* and non-*Bildung* – that is the contradictory opposite that separates actual education from discipline" (Herbart 1814/1964, 166).

In the following discussion, I hope to clarify the term "political *Bildung*" within the framework of Herbart's thoughts on education. Political *Bildung* as defined by Herbart encompasses the process by which learners self-actively deal with political issues and develop an ability to judge and act, which makes it possible for them to politically orient themselves by self-determined rules in the world of politics within the framework of political ideas. In this sense, men are not formed (*gebildet*), but form themselves within an educational setting. They take an active part in their *Bildung*.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe the key components of political *Bildung* by means of instruction and moral guidance:

- Based on the anthropological condition of men's political indeterminacy and
- the social-theoretical condition of the ignorance of the "right" rules of political orientation in world of multiple perspectives,
- political *Bildung*, according to Herbart, must be defined as an open process,
- in which active learners define for themselves their rules of orientation in an interplay between concentration and reflection on the one hand and within the framework of political ideas on the other hand
- and, by acting on these rules, develop moral strength of character.

5.1 Indeterminacy

Herbart's definition of political *Bildung* by means of instruction and moral guidance is based on the anthropological condition of the political "indeterminacy" (*Unbestimmtheit*) of man (Herbart 1841/1964, 69). By "political indeterminacy" he means that the rules of political orientation are not given by nature but learned. It is man's ability to learn – or, to use

Herbart's term, man's *Bildsamkeit* (ebd.) – that constitutes man as an active learner not determined by nature.⁷ Men are not determined by nature to follow specific rules in the world of politics. By virtue of their *Bildsamkeit*, they rather have available unfathomable possibilities to develop a political relationship to self and the world. Conversely, individuals are only capable of learning their own political position because it is not determined by nature. Men's political indeterminacy and their ability to learn are thus two sides of the same coin.

5.2 Ignorance of rule

Herbart's description of political *Bildung* not only has an anthropological basis, but also a basis in social theory, namely in the condition of a fundamental ignorance of rules in the situation of perspectivity which is typical of modern societies. This ignorance does not only apply to the relationship between the different social contexts, but also applies within the political context. Given the multitude and diversity of offers, it has become impossible to give a convincing reason for the only "right" rules of political orientation. In a situation of perspectivity, any attempt to define the only "right" rules can be confronted with alternatives, without making it possible to give reasons for what constitutes men's "actual" political position.

Given that we do not know the "right" political positions in a world of multiple perspectives, it is no longer convincing, according to Herbart, to positively define men's political relationship to self and the world and, based on that, develop a definition of political *Bildung*. In light of men's political indeterminacy as well as their ignorance of the "right" rules of orientation, political *Bildung* for Herbart is rather a process open to the future.

5.3 Openness

Given the impossibility to define the only "right" political position in a situation of perspectivity, Herbart considers it an "unreasonable demand" of instruction and moral guidance "to educate youth for the machinery of our states" (Herbart 1919, 515). Rather, "right education" is the education "that does not care about the state, that is not excited by political interests," but that "wants to educate everybody only for himself" (Herbart 1810/1964, 77). Herbart does not say what rules of political orientation are essential for men; for him, defining these rules is the active learner's own responsibility. When a learner takes on this task, he will develop his own position to "look out (...) in his way on the world and on the future." Finding their own position allows humans "to get on with the world and themselves" (Herbart 1806/1908, 258) in their own way. In the process of political *Bildung*, we are "only bound by the law of our own choice which we prepare by careful thinking and judgment and perfect by our decision" (Herbart 1807/1964, 260). Active learners are not bound by choosing only between those political rules that are



presented to them. Rather, they are also able to choose *not* to choose between given alternatives and instead develop their own alternatives to the rules of political orientation offered by the world of politics.

Political *Bildung* thus develops a dynamism that is open to the future (see Rucker 2013b). By openness, we mean that political *Bildung* is not geared towards rules of political orientation that are determined a priori. What rules active learners define as essential for themselves is rather decided in the interplay between concentration and reflection on political issues.

5.4 Interplay

Herbart describes an individual's educational engagement with a political issue as interplay between "concentration" and "reflection." For Herbart, concentration on a political issue is a basic requirement for reflection. Conversely, reflection on an issue serves as a starting point for the learner's concentration on further political issues. Concentration on a political issue means to "withdraw awhile from all other thoughts" and to accord it "suitable attention" in order to understand the issue's aspects both individually and in relationship to each other (Herbart 1806/1908, 124). In reflection, active learners take a reflective approach to the issue at hand. Herbart describes reflection as an "inner world" where individuals "step outside the stream of time and are able to forget the moment" (Herbart 1825/1964, 155f.) in order to take a political position based on the knowledge they have acquired through concentration.

Determining one's position is achieved by means of developing rules of political orientation and therefore is neither given nor final. Active learners define for themselves what rules of political orientation they deem essential while also remaining open to future transformations of their political point of view. The starting point for such transformations are not least other political circles of thought that may disrupt one's own circle of thought: "That he may be free from his embarrassing confinement within his habitual circle of thought, he enters the sphere of other opposing opinions" (Herbart 1806/1908, 268). Such disruptions present the active learner with the task to search for new rules of orientation, without holding out the prospect of a political circle of thought that would be immune to future disruptions.

5.5 "Welfare of the Whole"

An active learner develops rules of political orientation by self-actively examining political issues within the framework of the difference between "good" and "bad." He "opposes actual emotions, and imagines possible better ones in their place" by interesting himself in "the welfare of the whole" (Herbart 1806/1908, 134). For Herbart, the "welfare of the whole" defines a successful social order. The "welfare of the whole" is the moral framework for the judgments, actions, and communications of active learners within the world of

politics. Herbart describes this framework with the aid of five original, or primary, ideas of political orientation, which he calls the ideas of

- the "legal society,"
- the "system of rewards and punishments,"
- the "system of administration,"
- the "system of culture," and
- the "animated society" (see Herbart 1808/1964, 385ff.).

Together, the ideas of political orientation describe a social order that is guided by the principle of respect for human dignity.⁸ These ideas do not provide a concrete definition of what the "welfare of the whole" means; rather they formulate the assignment that men first have to seek and find what constitutes the "greatest possible sum of the welfare of the whole" (ibid., 387) in a process of mutual coordination.⁹ Only when people judge, act, and communicate in the context of the ideas of political orientation, will they create what Herbart calls an "animated society" (*beseelte Gesellschaft*): a society that collectively and thus always publicly searches for orientation to order men's collective life in light of the idea of human dignity.¹⁰

"The great work of education, to make the sense of right active early in youth, would proceed of itself without difficulty, if combined with good discipline and government; the moral perceptions which belong thereto would be the first and most natural among them all, if children were allowed to accommodate themselves to and associate with each other in their own way, and could be judiciously left to themselves. For where human beings, big or little, rub against each other, the relationships with which those moral perceptions are connected develop abundantly and spontaneously. Each one soon has something individual which the others acknowledge; the children associate with each other and exchange things and services at prices more or less fixed. The interference of adults, and the anticipation of this possible interference alone, make justice among children uncertain, and deprives it of their respect; well-meaning government has this effect in common with every other which is despotic. It is obviously impossible to rule children like citizens; but we may lay it down as a principle, never to disturb what exists among children without good reasons, nor change their intercourse into forced politeness. When disputes arise, we must first ascertain what has been settled and agreed upon amongst the children themselves, and must take the part of the one who in any sort of way has been deprived of his own. Then we must try to help each one to what he deserves, so far as this is possible without violent injury to justice. And finally we must point beyond all this to what is best for the common good, as that to which it is right that both property and merit shall be spontaneously sacrificed, and which will be for all the chief measure for future agreements." (261)



Herbart, Johann Friedrich. 1806/1908. The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aim. In: Johann Friedrich Herbart. The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aim, and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World. Translated from the German with a biographical introduction by Henry M. and Emmie Felkin and a preface by O. Browning. Boston, 78-268.

5.6 “Moral Strength of Character”

Political *Bildung* by means of moral guidance presupposes political *Bildung* in the context of instruction. The task of moral guidance is to support active learners in developing “moral strength of character” in the world of politics. “Character is the continuously defined way of how man relates to the world” (Herbart 1919, 524). For Herbart, a *moral* character manifests itself in “man looking out on the world with free eyes and doing not what the others are doing, but what is good and necessary and may be all the more necessary because the others are not doing it” (ibid., 505). Political education thus not only has to help the learner develop the ability to independently define political rules of orientation and evaluate them in light of the difference between good and bad. Education also has to help people act on the rules they have deemed to be good. According to Herbart, “character” is defined by the fact that it is “formed solely through acting of one’s own volition” (Herbart 1806/1964, 19).

Herbart assumes that all human beings, as a result of their socialization, already have “very marked features of character” (Herbart 1806/1908, 201). On the one hand, these features of character determine men’s action; on the other hand, they can also be disrupted in the interplay between concentration and reflection. This interplay is capable of “robbing a man of his unity with himself, and setting him at discord with himself,” namely, when experiences are “sowing dissension between the subjective and the objective” (ibid., 214). This is the case when active learners find that their rules of political orientation can no longer be deemed essential for their relationship to self and the world, and it therefore becomes necessary to develop, and act on, new rules. For Herbart, this inevitably leads to a “conflict” (ibid., 245). When this happens, newly developed rules clash with the already given features of character.

For Herbart, it is the task of moral guidance to help individuals successfully deal with this conflict and develop new features of character. The measures of moral guidance are therefore not aimed at teaching individuals to adopt an affirmative attitude to a certain world view. Instead, its methodological key question is: “How ought egoistic action to be *limited* and *encouraged*?” (ibid., 239)¹¹ It is a question that continues to play an important role in the theory and practice of citizenship education both at the national and international level.¹²

“I am, however, convinced that the proper hardening principle for man, who is not merely corporeal, will not be found until we learn how to arrange a mode of life for the young, whereby they can pursue, according to their own and indeed, their right mind, what in their own eyes is a serious activity. A certain publicity of life would contribute in no small degree to this. But the public activities customary up till now will not bear criticism; for in most cases they lack the first requisite of an activity which forms character. They do not proceed from the youth's own mind; they are not the acts through which the inward desire determines itself as will. Consider our examinations through all school classes, from the lowest up to the disputations for the doctor's degree. Add, if you like, the speeches and the theatrical exercises by which young people are sometimes made forward and smart. The art of appearance may gain by all this; but the future man, whom you guided through such exercises, will perhaps one day search in himself painfully, as vainly, for that power of self-manifestation and self-control on which character is based.” (219)

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Endnotes

* I am grateful to Elmar Anhalt for his critical reading of the manuscript and for helpful information on Herbart's reception. I would also like to thank Manuela Thurner for her professional translation.

¹ All emphases in quotations are in the original. I will mainly refer to Herbart's German writings, but will quote from the existing English translations where available. This applies to the following works: *The Aesthetic Revelation of the World* (1804/1908), *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aim* (1806/1908), and *Outlines of Educational Doctrine* (1841/1913). Quoting from these works is not without its problems, however, and I would like to briefly point out three translation problems. First, the standard translation translates the term *Zucht* as "discipline." As Andrea English has pointed out, this translation does not do justice to the meaning of the original term. According to Herbart, *Zucht* derives from the German word *ziehen*, i.e. "to draw" or "to pull" (see Herbart 1806/1908, 227). For Herbart, *Zucht* thus means that a teacher encourages a learner to develop a moral character. In English's opinion, "discipline" would rather be a more appropriate translation for *Regierung*, which, in the English translation, has been given as "government" (see English 2013, 17). I agree with English and will follow her suggestion to translate *Zucht* as "moral guidance" and to use the word "discipline" as a translation for the term *Regierung*. Second, in this article, the term *politische Bildung* is translated neither as "political education" nor as "citizenship education." For Herbart, *Bildung* means the process of man's active engagement with the world; *Erziehung* (education) is the means by which we influence this process. The term "culture," however, which has been used for *Bildung* in the standard English translation, is highly problematic (Herbart 1806/1908, 229), as it fails to distinguish, or mark the commonalities and differences, between *Bildung* and *Kultur*. I have therefore chosen to keep the German word *Bildung* and to use the phrase "political *Bildung*." Third, the word *Bildsamkeit*, which Herbart introduced into the language of education, also has no adequate equivalent in English, where it has been translated as "plasticity" and "educability" (Herbart 1841/1913, 1). Here, too, I will not follow the standard English translation, but will be using the German term *Bildsamkeit*.

² <http://www.herbart-gesellschaft.de/>

³ The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) describes "*perspectivism*" as "the fundamental condition of all life" (Nietzsche 1886/2002, 4). "The world," writes Nietzsche, "does not exist as a world 'in-itself'; it is essentially a world of relationships: under certain conditions it has a *differing aspect* from every point" (Nietzsche 1901/1968, 306). According to Nietzsche, this is not without consequences: "There are many kinds of eyes (...) and consequently there are many kinds of 'truths,' and consequently there is no truth" (ibid., 291). Even though it is impossible to find the only "right" rules of orientation in a situation of perspectivity, Nietzsche holds out the possibility of viewing things from different perspectives and of trying for orientation in the interplay



of perspectives. “The *more* eyes, various eyes, we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’” (Nietzsche 1887/2007, 87).

⁴ Based on the differentiation of worlds of orientation typical of modern societies, the educationist Dietrich Benner (*1941) has formulated the “principle of the non-hierarchical order of all human practice” (Benner 2012, 115ff.). According to this principle, no world of orientation can or may claim primacy over another; since every world of orientation operates by its own rules, it is no longer convincing to give a certain world – and its internal logic – priority over all others.

⁵ Herbart here seems to have anticipated what prompted the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) to develop his “philosophy of symbolic forms.” As Cassirer points out, when we refer to an issue, we are always involved in sets of rules that structure the context in which individuals grasp an issue. Or to put it more succinctly: “The world for us takes the shape given to it by the mind.” (Cassirer 1922/1956, 60) The mind, however, contains “a concrete multitude of different directions,” as a result of which “one’s being and its classes, connections, and differences appear to be different when looked at through different intellectual media” (ibid.).

⁶ Herbart’s understanding of politics turns out to be highly contemporary, if one compares it with current definitions of politics. The constitutional theorist Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde (*1930) defines politics on the basis of the following characteristics: 1. Form of relationship to self and the world: “Politics is (...) a form of thinking and acting” (Böckenförde 1995, 3). 2. Governance or regulation of people’s collective life: “Politics (...) deals with (...) issues that affect the governing of people’s collective life” (ibid., 2). 3. Public sphere: “Politics and political behavior belong to the public sphere, not the private sphere. They deal with issues of regulating and governing people’s collective life, which are always public issues” (ibid.). 4. Conflict: “A debate on an issue or a matter to be solved becomes political to the extent that people form groupings around different opinions and objectives, that commonalities or differences are accentuated and thus determine action and interaction” (ibid., 4). 5. Universality: “Every issue has the potential (...) to become the subject of efforts and struggles about the right order of people’s collective life and thus a subject of politics: religious issues as well as issues of clothing (swimwear fashion, Islamic headscarves), security issues as well as issues of public speech, child education as well as birth control and sexual practices. The question, too, to what extent people’s collective life can be authoritatively governed at all and what constitutes an individual’s autonomous sphere of privacy is often, and can always become, a

subject of politics and thus is itself a political issue” (ibid., 3).

⁷ Herbart uses *Bildsamkeit* to denote what Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) calls *perfectibilité*, i.e. man’s ability to learn as well as the indeterminacy of human nature that comes with this ability to learn.

⁸ Immanuel Kant has formulated this principle in the second formulation of his Categorical Imperative, generally referred to as the formula of the end in itself: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means” (Kant 1785/1993, 30). In Germany, the principle of respect for human dignity has found expression in Article 1 Section 1 of the German Basic Law, which reads: “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.” As Benner makes clear, Herbart’s political ideas can be read as an attempt to formulate “elementary ideas of a political judgement of social conditions,” which “flesh out Kant’s categorical imperative for social subsystems and, by doing so, (...) develop principles of a good social order which recognizes the mutual recognition of individuals as an end in itself (...) as a task of public and political practice” (Benner²1993, 167).

⁹ Along similar lines, the political scientist Ernst Fraenkel (1898-1975) has contrasted a common good *a priori* to a common good *a posteriori*. According to Fraenkel, what we call common good cannot be determined *a priori* in modern democratic societies. Rather, the common good first has to be defined in a public dialogue of different positions (see Fraenkel 1964, 199ff.).

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas defines the “public sphere (...) as a network for the communication of information and points of view” (Habermas 1996, 360). As far as I know, Herbart’s political ideas have not yet been analyzed in light of the definition of the public sphere developed by Habermas, most notably in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (see Habermas 1989). It would, I think, be a very rewarding undertaking.

¹¹ In *The Science of Education*, the translators Henry M. and Emmie Felkin themselves point out that the translation “egoistic” for *nach eigenem Sinn* is misleading and comment in a footnote: “Self action, not selfish action is here meant” (Herbart 1806/1908, 239).

¹² For example, consider issues such as civil courage or dealing with plurality and heterogeneity.

