



Reflections On The Philosophy Of Education By The German Philosopher Immanuel Kant

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to highlight the importance of focusing on the fields of education and teaching in Western thought, specifically through the German model represented by the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant worked on this issue from his reformist perspective in Germany during an earlier intellectual setback and had the merit of correcting many educational frameworks within educational institutions. His scientific and intellectual stature at the time had a significant influence on them. His philosophical and objective approach laid the foundations for rigorous intellectual fields and philosophical methodologies, emphasising the necessary discipline that society can derive from them. Through these methodologies, society can aspire to a humane and balanced state, free from cruelty and vice, especially in terms of respecting laws and regulating individual behaviour with religious and ethical obligations. This contributes to the achievement of values and existential goals through which individuals can acquire a new pattern of life, striving for improvement within a human and balanced framework, leading to the manifestation of all good in this world as a whole, in every time and place.

Keywords: Philosophy, education, teaching, duty, ethics.

Introduction:

The field of philosophy of education is considered one of the modern philosophical disciplines, although its cognitive roots can be traced back to ancient times. A study of the history of thought reveals that philosophies by their very nature contain a comprehensive and integrated educational perspective, considering that the authenticity of human beings in their interactions with others of their kind is in fact reflected by the frameworks that govern educational and cultural practices from a purely ethical point of view. This creates a continuous human interaction between the individual and his or her environment in all its diversity, through learning the skills of proper behaviour as an individual within a

conscious community. This in turn allows the individual to feel their essence and existence on the surface of the earth.

So what is the relationship between philosophy and education? And what framework did the German philosopher Immanuel Kant use in his thinking?

1- The relationship between philosophy and education and its importance:

The relationship between man and education is a necessary and recognised reality within human civilisation since ancient times. It is necessary to recognise the importance of this relationship, based on the fact that two important concepts are conceptually and philosophically intertwined. The question remains and the debate continues on the dialectical relationship between man and existence. This forms the cognitive basis of the pedagogical and philosophical problem, which revolves around the central question of how to imagine the relationship between the self and the other within its moral framework, taking into account the possible unforeseen changes and transformations that surround this relationship. These challenges and perspectives shape the normative plan in the lives of individuals and communities.

From this perspective, it can be said that "a person cannot become truly human without education; this is what education creates", as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant stated. Moreover, one cannot fully realise one's humanity without engaging in philosophical reflection. The importance of education is thus inseparable from the importance of philosophy. Education is a field that promotes the moral values advocated by philosophy in the field of human development¹. It serves as a fundamental reference for educational activities at various levels, including thought, behaviour, speech and action. Education is not an exceptional field in its relationship with philosophy, but rather, like other fields of knowledge and sciences, it has been closely related to philosophy since ancient times, when philosophy was described as the mother of all knowledge, encompassing disciplines such as physics, chemistry, medicine, and others, and uniting them into a comprehensive system.

Education is the embodiment of a specific way of thinking, and when it converges with a philosophical approach, it means an intellectual connection, integration and interaction known as "philosophy of education". This field is based on two main areas, philosophy and education, in the light of what has been said.

Philosophy of Education is the field that examines philosophical and social issues from an educational perspective and investigates educational problems through a philosophical and social lens. This means that a philosopher of education must have a clear philosophical and educational orientation and be familiar with the concepts, theories and foundations of other sciences in order to follow their developments and to benefit from

¹- Abdulrahman Badawi, *Philosophy of Education and Religion in Kant*, Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st edition, 1980, p. 47.

them in analysing the educational process and its problems, as well as in constructing fundamental theories in education that guide this process practically and culturally¹.

Therefore, it is necessary for an educational philosopher to have a clear philosophical and educational orientation in order to clarify his educational work with sound philosophical and logical approaches. Discussing these ethical problems in the lives of individuals and communities requires discussing the foundations based on a comprehensive perspective, integrated analysis and specific philosophical planning for each educational process. This is achieved through the role of philosophy of education in attempting to achieve cultural balance in the reality of human life. Philosophy of education helps educators to see their educational work holistically and in relation to other aspects of life and interests, beyond a narrow view of specialisation. This helps to resolve conflicts and clashes in partial perspectives, even within the same field of study².

2- Education in Germany in the 18th century was characterised by:

It faced significant challenges and shortcomings. Teachers were often appointed from among corrupt servants, artisans, disbanded soldiers and unruly pupils, many of whom had questionable ethics and upbringings. Their income from the profession was meagre and their authority weak. Attendance at schools and universities was irregular. The curriculum focused mainly on the teaching of Latin and Greek. School supervisors, as described by Angelhardt, were largely ineffective and neglectful. As a result, students entered university with a very low level of education, leading the universities to complain to the government about this serious deficiency³.

In this context, Immanuel Kant took a firm stand and considered the need to reform education as a means of reforming society, which was struggling in the field of German education. He was highly critical of educational institutions, especially philosophy teachers, who limited their role to teaching students prescribed textbooks without allowing them the freedom to think. However, Kant recognised the need to set certain limits in education.

Kant's position reflected his emphasis on the value of education and its role in shaping individuals and society. He called for reform that would address the shortcomings of teaching methods and encourage critical thinking among students. Kant's philosophy of education aimed to empower individuals to think for themselves and to cultivate their intellectual abilities, rather than simply imparting knowledge through rote learning.

¹- Hans Hentschel, *Philosophy: Its Types and Problems*, translated by Fouad Zakaria, Nahda Misr, Cairo, 1975, pp. 29-30.

²- Nora Bint Saad Al-Qahtani, *Philosophical Foundations and Educational Applications*, Al-Ekkan, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1st edition, 2018, p. 45.

³- See: Abdulrahman Badawi, *Philosophy of Religion and Education in Kant*, Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st edition, 1970, pp. 112-113.

Overall, educational conditions in 18th-century Germany highlighted the need for significant reform, and Kant's critique of the educational system served as a call for change and a reassessment of the role of education in society.

3- Rousseau and his influence on Kant's philosophy of education:

Kant was influenced by some of Rousseau's educational ideas and believed in natural and negative human education as well as moral education, which Rousseau had advocated. Kant also believed that a child's education begins from the earliest moments of their birth. Rousseau wrote books that clearly expressed his views on society, education and nature. While these books do reflect an important aspect of his personality and upbringing, which some see as chaotic and lacking in any system or guidance, what is important to us is the experience that provided a glimpse of hope for change in the philosophy of education in the West in general, and in Kant's philosophy of education in particular. Kant was eager to renew the course of education in his homeland, which was known for its nationalistic tendencies. In his book 'Emile', Rousseau established many principles that became the basis of social education. He argued that a proper education should free individuals from focusing solely on their own interests and should instil in their hearts feelings of compassion and mercy towards others. He also advocated helping and supporting the weak and needy. Many historians regard him as the founder of the social movement in education. The emphasis on industrial work advocated by Pestalozzi, the emphasis on literature advocated by Herbart, the common moral education in our schools, and the call to educate the disabled and handicapped all have their origins in Rousseau's book "Emile"¹.

Through this vision and his understanding of Rousseau's theory of education, Kant was able to draw inspiration for his own philosophy of education. However, Kant approached these ideas with scrutiny, criticism and investigation when he realised that what many saw as mere moodiness and psychological disturbance reflected in Rousseau's words and writings did not represent the totality of his intellectual structure. According to Kant, this moodiness was one of the necessary outlets through which the deep mystery of Rousseau's philosophical personality could be discovered. His social pessimism, full of preconceived judgements, reflected a desire that only Rousseau himself felt strongly - a fierce desire to protect his independence as an individual with his own distinct existence. His social pessimism, full of preconceived judgements, reflected a desire that only Rousseau himself felt strongly - a fierce desire to protect his independence as an individual with his own distinct existence².

4- Immanuel Kant's philosophy of education:

The European Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had a significant impact on changing the concept, goals and orientations of education. Education acquired

¹- Mustafa Amin, History of Education, Arab Press Agency, Publishers, Egypt, 2019, p. 22.

²- Ernst Cassirer, Kant and Rousseau (in Rousseau, Kant Goethe), two essays translated from the German and presented by Jean La Coste. Paris (France), Berlin, 2011, p. 42.

new concepts and aims, which some historians consider to be a comprehensive revolution compared to the prevailing norms of the Middle Ages. In modern philosophy, prominent philosophers played a significant role in changing and shaping intellectual habits, envisioning a different field of practice than Europe had previously known. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is considered one of the most influential philosophers in modern European culture. He is one of the key philosophers who wrote about moral and classical epistemology and is considered one of the major figures of the Enlightenment. His philosophy appeared as a Copernican revolution in the field of knowledge, whether in terms of methodology, conception, content or results, as he defined different functions for reason, including theoretical cognitive functions and practical ethical functions".

In the field of education, Kant believed that the primary aim of education is discipline from an early age. Through discipline, a child learns the rules of behaviour and becomes a moral being who respects duties towards others, without aggression and cruelty. As a result, the individual accepts submission to strict laws around him.

According to Kant, a person does not become a fully formed and comprehensive human being in terms of values and ethics without education, especially if it follows an aesthetic path that encompasses a series of conscious contemplative meanings. Respect, as the basis of the relationship between duty and the framework of truth in human relationships, is at the heart of this approach. Thus, Kant's general idea is based on the practical or ethical aspects, which require an expansion of the scope of human action in its totality. Education, according to Kant, is described as an attempt to correct formative or fundamental behaviour in individuals. In principle, Kant shares with Thomas Hobbes the recognition of man's evil nature or inclination to evil. However, Kant goes beyond Hobbes by also recognising man's natural disposition to goodness. This inclination implies the capacity for autonomous legislation of the moral law and the subsequent commitment to it through free will. Commitment to duty is an internal commitment, and thus it becomes the sphere of action of free will. With such freedom, however, evil can arise and be created by human beings through their free will¹.

Kant recognised the importance of education and its role in the development of European society, seeing education as the art of experience based on human dispositions that begin to develop from a cultured state. In this regard, Kant focuses on the culture that educators and teachers should possess. They have the responsibility of nurturing children and enabling their growth through modern methods that serve them clearly and simply. This depends greatly on the culture and skills of the teacher². This emphasises the importance of the ethical foundations that Kant adopts, placing them at the highest level of human moral elevation, far from the production of myths and social delusions, which according to him are the source of every dark and savage thought.

¹- Immanuel Kant, Religion within the limits of pure reason, p. 45.

²- Falah Abdul Zahra Lazim, Education as an Art of Experience according to Immanuel Kant, Lark Journal of Philosophy, Linguistics and Social Sciences, Volume 1, Issue 44, 2023, Philosophy Research, p. 750.

Kant tried to find educational approaches that would eliminate the ingrained mindset of some pseudo-teachers of his time, especially the erroneous principle of dogmatic indoctrination, especially in the field of philosophy. He argued for a renewed emphasis on contemplative experimentation within the framework of observation and action. According to Kant, ethical or moral philosophy should not be based solely on empirical experience or subjective feeling, as he believed had been influenced by the English philosophers and Rousseau. Instead, it should be based solely on reason, which provides us with a sense of duty as a fundamental pillar in moral matters. Kant identified four factors as the aims of education:

1. **Cultivation:** The effort to prevent bestiality from being a loss to humanity, both individually and socially. Cultivation can only be achieved by restraining savagery, as mentioned above.
2. **Education:** Education encompasses various forms of learning and knowledge acquisition, equipping individuals with skills relevant to their purposes.
3. **Acquisition of Wisdom:** Individuals must also develop wisdom, which enables them to adapt to human society, to be loved and to have influence. This quality is associated with a form of civilisation known as "civil society", and requires behavioural etiquette and a certain degree of discernment.
4. **Moral formation:** It is not enough for a person to be prepared for different ends; he must also acquire the disposition to choose moral ends over others. Moral ends are those which are praised by all and which can be the ends of all at the same time¹.

The most notable feature of Kant's educational philosophy is his inclination towards education and his insistence on the need to develop curricula and plans that enhance the intellectual and physical well-being of the individual without contradicting his aims and purposes. He did not neglect any aspect of education, including physical education, or what is known as physical education in its narrow sense, as well as intellectual and noble education. Kant believed that "the physical culture of the soul differs from moral culture in that the latter is concerned only with freedom, while the former is concerned only with nature". He believed that a person could be highly educated in physical culture and still be morally deficient and evil. He emphasised the distinction between physical culture and practical culture, the former being either legalistic or ethical, the latter not being culture itself but rather the cultivation of good morals².

On this basis, Kant described education as an attempt to correct human behaviour, to prevent any deviation from moral action, with the aim of developing their disposition to the good and spreading it throughout humanity.

According to Kant, this disposition is primarily linked to the exercise of human freedom, which supports the idea of autonomous moral legislation. He believed that "there are

¹- Abdulrahman Badawi, *Philosophy of Education According to Kant*, n.d., pp. 121-122.

²- Same, p. 135.

many seeds in humanity, and it is our duty to develop these natural dispositions in a balanced way, and to develop humanity on the principles of its growth, striving for the individual to fulfil his purpose"¹.

This purpose is an existential goal that Kant made dependent on the laws of reason, which are responsible for achieving enlightenment. Kant defined enlightenment as "man's emergence from the self-inflicted immaturity which is responsible for his inability to use his understanding without the guidance of others. A person is responsible for this state of immaturity when the cause is not a lack of reason, but a lack of determination and courage to use it without guidance from others. Dare to know, be bold to use your own understanding. That is the motto of enlightenment"².

The use of reason requires the exploration of personal human characteristics and their creative development, including behaviours that establish a specific pattern of thinking in a conscious and responsible philosophy of education.

According to Kant, education is fundamentally a human attribute, and human beings must be educated consciously, with trust and care. Kant understood education to include nurturing, nourishing, discipline, and education combined with formation.

Through these three aspects, a complete personality can be formed in individuals, whether they are infants, students or learners. These are the determinants chosen by Kant to form the practical and moral levels of his educational project, which aims to achieve proper education for individuals and communities in every age.

Religious education according to Kant:

The concept of religion in Kant's philosophy is based on the principles of universality and humanity. It is not limited to any particular religion, but Kant subordinated religion to ethics. For him, ethical religion is a religion based on conditional mental preparations. This is because "morality necessarily refers to religion". In this way, ethics expands into a great ethical idea that transcends human beings, and religion serves to know all our duties. According to Kant, these duties are either divine commands or they are based on faith, which makes the essence of any worship of God ethical. Here the question arises: Why does Kant say that our ethical duties are divine commandments? Doesn't this contradict what he repeatedly states in his ethical books, that ethical duties are intrinsically valid and derive from the absolute command of human good will? But Kant answers this objection by saying: "Our duties must be regarded as commands from the Supreme Being, because we cannot hope for the highest good except on the basis of a complete moral will. Therefore, we cannot hope to attain the highest good except in harmony with that will"³.

¹- Immanuel Kant, Three Texts, Reflections on Education, What are the Lights? What is the direction in thinking?, translated by Mahmoud Ben Jamaa, Dar Mohamed Ali for Publishing, Tunis, 1st edition, p. 16.

²- Same, p. 85.

³- Abdulrahman Badawi, Philosophy of Education according to Kant, n.d., pp. 10-11.

Therefore, the depth of judgements and rules that must be perceived and established in the foundations of modern education requires a discernment between good and evil, and this can only be achieved through an ethical religion that refines character traits. This contribution does not impose oppressive subjugation, but derives from the ethical nature of a rational and conscious self, characterised by a compelling and balanced personal conviction between freedom and rigour, duty and achievement. This leads to a functional and forward-looking performance with sound justifications and worthy goals.

From Kant's perspective, ethics is not primarily a doctrine that teaches us how to make ourselves happy, but rather a doctrine that teaches us how to make ourselves deserving of happiness.

When religion is added to ethics, the hope arises in us that we will one day share in happiness to the extent that we have sought it in our past lives. Here the influence of religion on ethics becomes evident after the influence of ethics on religion has been clarified. The hope of achieving happiness only begins with religion. Similarly, the answer to the perennial question of God's purpose in creating the world becomes clear. We cannot say that the answer lies in the happiness of rational beings in this world, but it manifests itself in the concept of the highest good, namely the ethics of these beings. It is this ethics alone that contains a criterion by which we can contemplate the participation of these beings in happiness through the grace of a wise Creator. Therefore, those who have made the purpose of creation the glorification of God have found the most sincere expression, for glorifying God means respecting His commandments and observing the sacred duty imposed on us by His law. When these aesthetic commandments are crowned with the happiness that corresponds to them¹

, the value of ethics and education in humanity is raised to the level of the intuitive principles of the universe, which are supposed to have immutable laws, making good will the only foundation within fixed principles based on generalisation, freedom and finality.

In this respect, Kant takes into account Rousseau's earlier ideas and considers that "religious meanings always presuppose a kind of theology. Can young people who do not know the world and do not know themselves be taught theology? And how can young people who do not know duty be able to understand a direct duty to God? ... (He sees) that if we imagine children who have not witnessed any worship of the Supreme Being and who have never heard the name of God, it would be natural to direct their attention to the aims of humanity and to what is appropriate for them to do in order to achieve these aims. We should train their powers of judgement, teach them the order and regularity in the works of nature, and give them further knowledge of the order of the universe. Finally, we should prepare for them the basis for understanding the concept of God². This will enable children to understand the existence of a law of duty that will protect them from feelings

¹- See: Abdulrahman Badawi, Ethics According to Kant, Press Agency, Kuwait, 1979, p. 154.

²- Abdulrahman Badawi, Philosophy of Religion and Ethics According to Kant, n.d., p. 157.

of illusion, hypocrisy and self-interest, which do not lead to true happiness and cannot fulfil their desired goals.

In summary, Kant suggests that in the education of young people who are not familiar with religion, it is more appropriate to focus on teaching them about the goals of humanity and the principles of nature. By instilling in them a sense of duty and providing them with a solid moral foundation, they can develop an understanding of God and a recognition of the law of duty that leads them to true happiness.

Conclusion:

Kant's philosophy of education adopted a new approach that encompassed the realms of science and knowledge in the context of Germany during his time. This was achieved through the reconciliation and harmonisation between education and individual freedom and autonomy, based on an ethical framework in which individuals can assert the value of reason within the framework of virtue, justice and equality, leading to the establishment of a comprehensive humanistic philosophy. It seems that Kant did not address education as a separate entity from his ethical-critical philosophy, since it cannot in any way surpass the imperatives set out in his moral law, which emphasises the need to treat humanity in oneself and in others as an end in itself, rather than merely a means. This idea is deeply rooted in modern Western thought and has far-reaching implications for contemporary Western philosophy.

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