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## **Education, History, and Human Nature**

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There is an obviously correct and trivial answer to the main question of this conference: the new generation should of course conform to the old generation if the old are right, just as they should of course oppose the old generation if the old are wrong. This answer need not disappoint a contextualist such as Frieda Heyting, because it raises a whole array of important questions concerning major epistemological and normative themes, such as how we can decide whether the old are right or wrong without buying into a generational bias. In this paper I shall not defend the trivial answer nor pursue the route it opens up. Instead, what I intend to do in this paper is to try to understand the question. Why would we have an interest in asking, and in answering, this question? And I shall argue that we have to make sense of the relation between education and history if we want to understand the question that is the central theme of this conference.

My focus shall be broad, and general, and very abstract. I shall discuss 'education' and 'history' as modes of being human, as symbolic forms, to use a phrase from Ernst Cassirer (1923-29, 1944), or as forms of life, as Wittgenstein puts it (1953). My interest is not in education as a specific social institution, nor in history as a specific academic subject, or as mankind's process through time. I shall rather use the terms 'education' and 'history' to denote 'anthropological constants', a term that I shall use to refer to defining features of being human. There are three different kinds of relations between education and history of

which I shall discuss those two that are least familiar in educational departments. The relation that is familiar is the one in which education is thought of as a product of history, and thus as having a history of itself that is the topic of historians of education. The other two relations that I shall explore are:

education as a response to history

education as producing history

My claim shall be that once we understand these two kinds of relations between education and history, we shall be able to understand why we (early 21<sup>st</sup> century philosophers of education) should like to know whether the young should conform to or oppose the old, but also why the question is ill-conceived. I shall first, however, set the stage for this argument.

### **History as an anthropological constant**

A deep distinction between nature and history runs through modern culture (Margolis 1993). The assumption is that things either have a nature or a history, that the properties of a thing are either determined by the thing's nature or its history, and that understanding the thing's behaviour is either a matter of grasping its nature or its history. The distinction runs through the sciences as well, unsurprisingly, dividing the academy into the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, leaving the social and behavioural sciences behind with a very uncomfortable embarrassment, due to the fact that it is our human nature to have a history, to say it paradoxically.

This idea of history as an anthropological constant, a defining feature of what makes us human, can be understood as an ontological, epistemological or psychological claim. The idea could be that it really is the case, ontologically speaking, that human beings have a history rather than a nature, as might be inferred from Sartre's famous claim that our existence precedes our essence (Sartre, 1946). But the idea could also be taken in a less demanding way, implying merely that it is epistemologically more reliable, or perhaps even

merely that it is psychologically more economical, to think of human behaviour as determined by the individual's history rather than the species' nature. I intend to remain silent in this paper on how to interpret the idea of history as an anthropological constant. That is, I shall assume the relevance of a striking contrast between exemplars of *homo sapiens* and exemplars of another nature. I shall assume the contrast to imply a difference between how best to make sense of similarities and differences in the inner and outer make-up of exemplars of either kind, a difference related to the claim that all creatures except humans are best conceived of as having a nature in virtue of which each exemplar of a kind runs through cycles of existence that have a determinate, stable, invariant structure, such that each new exemplar displays a strikingly similar inner and outer make-up. In contrast, exemplars of human nature are best conceived of as running through history, in virtue of which each new exemplar displays an inner and outer make-up that is determined by the specific trajectory of this individual human being through its environment over time.

This is the rough idea which stands in need of considerable refinement that I shall merely indicate now, and shall come back to later in this paper. A first issue that needs a more precise discussion is the issue of time scales. That is, we might need a different time scale in the case of human nature to discover its determinate, stable and invariant structure. Determinacy, stability and invariance are, after all, temporal properties. They always presuppose a temporal index, and therefore the invariance of the nature of any creature, say that of butterflies, is an invariance merely within a certain time-scale. This might be understood to mean that the distinction between things with a nature and things with a history is a mere gradual distinction. That is, on a larger time-scale, say a couple of billion years, creatures with a nature, such as butterflies, will have a history. And, the other way around, perhaps human beings will merely have a nature if we take the time scale to be a couple of days.

A second issue that needs more discussion is complexity. It might be that the variation in inner and outer make-up is not so much a matter of a human being's history as well as a matter of the complexity of human nature. We can imagine that due to sheer complexity it would be better to investigate human

nature on a sub-personal level, cutting down each exemplar of human nature in large numbers of parts - organisms, perhaps, or even smaller. To get the idea: think of how difficult (even absurd) it would be to investigate the entire continent of Africa as if it were one exemplar of a particular nature, displaying an inner and outer make-up that we would assume to be the result of a determinate, stable and invariant structure. In such a case it would of course make epistemological sense to break Africa up into millions of independent parts, each of which might be an exemplar of a particular nature. One might think that this would entail an important loss of insight into the nature of Africa as a whole, but thinking of this insight as intelligible at all might be a mere chimera. And the same might hold for human nature: too complex to make sense of at the personal level, without this having much to do with human historicity.

A third issue that would need more discussion is externalism (Wilson, 2004), both diachronic and synchronic. It might be that the variation in inner and outer make-up of human beings is not so much a matter of their history (simply understood), or their nature, but primarily a matter of how the individual is related to its current environment as well as to its past and future. The idea is here that there might be intrinsically relational properties (such as being a Dutch philosopher, a medieval monk, a guitarist, a black person, a woman, or a child) that cannot be reduced to well-determined individual properties, as a consequence of which we cannot determine the inner and outer make-up of any single exemplar of human nature if we fail to take into account a wealth of information about this individual's environment, past and future.

Including an individual's past and future, i.e. including diachronic externalism, is of course a way to include human nature's historicity. But in mentioning the three issues that require more attention to understand more fully what it means to say that history is an anthropological constant, I do not wish to deny nor assert that historicity is an essential feature of, and only of, *human* nature. I simply wish to outline the issues that will be involved in any attempt at understanding the meaning of the claim that human nature has a history. And I have an interest in this claim merely because on this occasion I want to

understand why an interest in education raises the question whether the younger generation should conform to or oppose the older generation.

### **Education as an anthropological constant**

To complete the stagesetting, let me also say a bit about education as an anthropological constant. The idea embraces a couple of related features: (1) that human beings live their lives in situations involving more than one generation; (2) that power, authority and expertise is unevenly distributed among these different generations; (3) that human beings have rational capacities that allow them not merely to respond appropriately to environmental requirements, but also allow them to care for the appropriateness of their own responses (Pettit, 1993); and (4) that as a consequence the relations between the generations display a lot of “downstream epistemic and moral engineering”. Downstream epistemic and moral engineering is basically what teaching is. It is what makes education differ from merely a learning environment. It consists in the construction and restructuring of environments by the adult generation such that the younger generation can acquire and develop relevant epistemic and moral capacities with more speed and success.

Downstream epistemic and moral engineering makes sense precisely because human beings have rational potential. This is not the place to substantially discuss this feature of human nature. Just a word will have to do. The assumption here is two-fold (Pettit, 1993). Firstly, human beings are intentional agents that can act on their desires and beliefs. They can represent their environment internally (which is what their beliefs do), and thereby find more appropriate means to reach their goals (assumed to be present in their desires). On top of this intentionality, which human beings probably share with some of the higher animals, comes a reflexive level, that I have called man’s educatability (Bransen, 2003). It consists in a concern for the (truth-tracking) quality of one’s beliefs and the (good-tracking) quality of one’s desires, in virtue of which human beings can revise their own beliefs and desires so as to improve their own attunement to their environment.

These are sophisticated capacities that require a lot of time to develop, which explains why there is a salient uneven distribution of these capacities (and relatedly an uneven distribution of power and authority) among the different generations. This asymmetry gives the older generation the lead to support the young in developing capacities that are crucial to their living a successful human life.

Downstream epistemic and moral engineering need not be explicitly intentional. A lot of research has shown, for instance, that the way adults speak to babies, and almost can't help speaking to babies, involves a lot of completely unconscious engineering that allows babies to pick up the language much more easily (Gopnik et al., 1999, p 128-132). But besides these varieties of what we may call natural nurturing there is of course a lot of downstream epistemic and moral engineering that is intentional, and that is the topic of, and often also the result of, all the evidence-based intervention research that goes on in our contemporary departments of education. When I speak of education as an anthropological constant, I do not intend to restrict what I shall say to *intentional* downstream epistemic and moral engineering, but I shall be speaking of asymmetrical educational arrangements involving more than one generation. And it is the necessary presence of these different generations in education that raises the need to introduce a discussion of history.

### **Education as a response to history**

Suppose it is true that to understand a human being's behaviour we should be acquainted with the individual's history, rather than with the individual's nature. Suppose, that is, that the appropriate time-scale for human behaviour, the complexity of human nature and the diachronic and synchronic externalism of human life is such that one can only make sense of the inner and outer make-up of an individual in terms of the individual's trajectory through its environment over time. What would that mean for each of us in our daily encounters with other people? Of course, we are acquainted with the history, or at least with long stretches of it, of quite a number of people we meet regularly.

Collaborating with these acquaintances would be possible, and probably not much of a problem. But what about the strangers we meet too, day after day? If the assumption carries substantial weight, the implication should be that we wouldn't have the faintest idea about what to expect and how to respond to such a stranger's behaviour. Running into an unfamiliar animal or a strange artefact need not be much of a problem to us, given that we can derive all kinds of predictions from assumptions about these things' natures. But if we cannot rely on such assumptions about the stranger's nature, because he doesn't have a nature but only has a history we fail to know, running into a stranger could be extremely disturbing.

This conclusion is of course based on the assumption that each individual's history differs substantially from those of other people. This seems to be a justified assumption as long as we entertain the thought that there is an important difference between things with a nature and things with a history. After all, if individual histories don't make much of a difference to the individual's inner and outer make-up, the distinction between things with a nature and things with a history would be much of a distinction without a difference. But the assumption introduces an interesting option too: would it be possible for human beings to have a very similar history? This allows for some rather speculative observations. Perhaps, indeed, most of the exemplars of human nature that have lived their lives on earth so far did go through considerably similar trajectories, due to very stable and invariant material and cultural environments. Perhaps it is only in modern times, with all its emphasis on individuality and globalization, that people start to have significantly different individual histories, as a consequence of which it is for the first time in mankind's history that the fact that we have a history rather than a nature makes a difference to our prospects for living a successful life among strangers.

Two further options seem available along this rather speculative line of reasoning. The first option is to link up with developmental psychology, and to explore ways to rethink individual human histories in terms of fixed developmental pathways determined by human nature. If developmental psychology could come up with a comprehensive theory of how specific

developmental trajectories belong intrinsically to the way human nature manifests itself in each new exemplar, we would not need to be upset by modern culture's support for individuality, globalisation and historicity. We could be happy to let a thousand flowers bloom, and still be confident that we would be able to get along with strangers whose histories are unknown to us. A first encounter should suffice to give us a reliable indication of the stranger's developmental stage and our knowledge of developmental psychology could do the rest to guarantee successful cooperation. Of course, this is nothing but an extremely overoptimistic dream, that is definitely not part and parcel of developmental psychology's explicit self-image, but it seems to me an important though largely implicit regulative ideal of developmental psychology as a real and promising natural science.

The second option is to trust in what we might think of as a typical modern counterpart of human historicity: education. The speculative suggestion here is that the discovery of our historicity should have alarmed enlightened, socially committed intellectuals to set up education as a most appropriate response. Such a response is based on the acknowledgment that newborn exemplars of human nature are the most disturbing as well as the most vulnerable strangers, and both at once because of their lack of history. Because they don't have a history, the behaviour of babies is unintelligible, both unpredictable and confused. And, because they don't have a history, they need to cope with life's surprises without the support of their own rational capabilities. The contrast between newborn human beings without an individual history and those of the older generation should have created in the older generation an awareness of their specific educational responsibility, and of the feasible gains for mankind as a whole of an educational programme that would support the younger generation to acquire a history that would facilitate their well-being and well-functioning.

Thinking of education as a proper response to man's historicity is a well-known theme of the Enlightenment. In elaborating further on this theme I would like to discuss two issues. The first is the intentional, as well as rational, character of



downward epistemic and moral engineering, in virtue of which we can think of environments, and of the individual trajectories through these environments, as accessible for design. The idea here is that recognizing that human beings have a history rather than a nature entails a dramatic emancipatory momentum, because if we all have a history, rather than a nature, our inner and outer make-up is not simply fixed and given, but is the result of a process that is in principle accessible to the manipulating efforts of intentional engineering. Whereas we might have lived our lives in pre-modern times in stable and invariant environments, without any awareness of our capacity for rational control (in “self-incurred immaturity” as Kant (1784) maintained), the discovery of history is not merely the opening up of diversity, confusion and unpredictability, but does rather allow for the recreation, through rational control, of new, stable, designed, educational environments. Education allows us to receive our historicity as exceptionally good news, because it entails the promise of us all intentionally having the same history, a history that will be for the better, that will support each newborn human being to develop the capacities needed to live a good human life.

Connected to this is a second theme that is, apparently, crucial to education as a response to history - at least in its enlightened conception - but that also, or so I shall argue, fails to appreciate the depth of human historicity. The theme is maturation, entailed in the idea that education is a process executed by the older generation and experienced by the younger one; a process that can and will be completed once the newborn child becomes mature, i.e. once the younger generation becomes the older one. One can interpret the idea as if educators accept that human beings, at least the younger ones, have a history rather than a nature, but that there is also a post-historical phase in each human life, the phase of adulthood. The idea then becomes that it is only during childhood that man’s history is critical in determining his inner and outer make-up. That is, the idea seems to be that adults have a history, in the sense of a past, that can be known as an acquired, *second* nature (to use a phrase made popular by McDowell, 1994), stored and available in his attitudinal and behavioural habits, virtues and principles of rationality.

Thinking of childhood as an educational process that terminates in the second nature of adults is a very powerful way of incorporating the elusive plasticity of man's historicity in an optimistic conception of human history as progress. But it is a conception that presupposes controversial assumptions about the relevant time-scale, the prospects of complexity reduction, and of meeting externalist demands. Let me explain.

(1) To think of adult human beings as having a second nature is to think of their inner and outer make-up as the result of a determinate, stable and invariant structure albeit an acquired one. But as I observed in section 1 determinacy, stability and invariance are temporal properties. If adults are to have a determinate, stable and invariant second nature this implies that changes in this structure do not appear over time during adulthood. This might be plausible - the idea being that the changes that occur in a human being's internal structure during childhood are frequent whereas they are infrequent, or even absent, during adulthood. As a consequence we might think of a child as having a determinate, stable and invariant structure only if we restrict the child's being an object of thought to its existence during one single day (or a week, perhaps). In contrast, however, the assumption allows us to think of an adult as having such a determinate, stable and invariant structure even if we extend the time-scale and think of the adult's being an object of thought for its entire life. Stated as radically as this, the assumption seems rather controversial. Recent research on attitudinal and behavioural changes over the life-span, does indeed support the idea that changes in inner and outer make-up become much more infrequent during adulthood, but they are never absent. Obviously Adults have a history too.

(2) Complexity is the second issue in an attempt to think of variation in inner and outer make-up as determined by a being's nature rather than its history. If it makes sense to think of childhood's history as terminating in adulthood's second nature, it should be possible to summarize the totality of history's determining effects in the characteristics of the resulting second nature. The implications of this claim are as follows. On the one hand it should be assumed that during childhood the individual's history, rather than its complex

nature, provides epistemologically better (or perhaps merely psychologically more economical) resources for understanding, predicting and anticipating the individual's behaviour. And on the other hand it should be assumed that during adulthood the individual's second nature, rather than its history, provides these more favourable resources. This seems plausible only if an adult's second nature is less complex than its history, that is, if this second nature can be reduced to a limited number of habits, virtues and/or principles of rationality. I doubt that this can be done, particularly in contrast to the related assumption that this cannot be done in the case of a child's nature.

(3) The third issue is externalism, in both its diachronic and synchronic form. If the child's trajectory through its environment over time plays a crucial role in the determination of the child's behaviour and also in the formation of the adult's second nature, this seems to provide a role to play for both synchronic and diachronic externalism with respect to the child's behaviour but merely for diachronic externalism with respect to the adult's second nature. That is, the determinants of the child's behaviour can be relational properties of the child, properties that depend for their individuation, and thereby for their determining efficacy, on features of the child's present, past and future environment. Think of simple examples: the child's attempt to grasp a certain object requires her to keep her fingers and thumb at a certain distance from one another and also requires her to use an appropriate amount of strength. Which distance and how much strength is determined by the actual object (an apple, say, or an egg, or a cuddly toy) she tries to grasp (synchronic externalism), or alternatively by past or anticipated future experiences of grasping the object (diachronic externalism).

The adult's assumed second nature is an acquired nature, the result of education. Its determinants will, therefore, be relational properties of a diachronic kind. That is, the adult's second nature will have properties that depend for their individuation (and therefore for their determining efficacy with respect to the adult's behaviour) on features of the child's past developmental trajectory. These properties would not be properties of the adult's second nature if the child s/he was before would not have gone through a certain trajectory.

These properties would not even be the properties they are if the trajectory had not been the trajectory it is. It is unclear and controversial as to what this externalism exactly amounts to. Does it suffice for a specific property of an adult's second nature (say its mode of attachment) that it bears a merely *causal* relation to the relevant features of the developmental trajectory that terminated in the adult being, say, avoidantly attached? Or is it required for the property to be the property it is (say a fear for spiders) that it bears some kind of intentional (interpretive or meaningful) relation to the relevant features of the developmental trajectory that terminated in the adult having arachnophobia?

This is a hotly debated question in the philosophy of mind (Burge, 1986; Hurley, 1998; Wilson, 2004) that I shall have to by-pass here. For now it suffices to observe that the line of reasoning in which education is related to maturity as its completion, gives a very different role to play to diachronic as opposed to synchronic externalism. The observation is rather paradoxical. The idea seems to be that to understand an adult's second nature (in terms of which we are supposed to understand the adult's behaviour) we need not investigate synchronic relationships between the adult and its present environment, but merely diachronic relationships between the adult and its past environment. But if this is to be plausible, we should be able to explain why synchronic externalism is an issue in childhood (it has to be in order for a history to be build up), but would stop being an issue in adulthood. I don't see how this could be done. Why would external influences fade out in reaching maturity? Possible answers might refer to popular but also controversial ideas about critical developmental periods. Referring to such ideas, however, is in the present context seriously problematical, due to the necessity to accept, and to continue to accept, the relevance of diachronic externalism. The adult's second nature, after all, is to be understood as the result of a specific past trajectory. That is, external influences are not simply absent during adulthood; they remain crucial in that some of the second nature's properties depend for their individuation (and thus for their determining efficacy) on the past environment of the adult in question. Only the synchronic externalism fades out.

I suspect that the very idea of a second nature as indeed a nature (a

determinate stable and invariant structure) produced in history by education and completed in maturity is incoherent. I shall not elaborate on this here, but merely note that I think the idea is basically a blurred mixture of two lines of reasoning that might both be coherent. We have seen these lines earlier in this section. One line of reasoning is to side with a thoroughly naturalistic developmental psychology, according to which second nature does not differ intrinsically from human nature simpliciter, but is merely a specific instance of one of the many (but not infinite) variations nature allows human beings to flesh out. On this line of reasoning nothing much hinges on the use of the adjective 'second', nor is there a deep distinction between things with a history and things with a nature. Things with a history are on this account simply things with a nature, although this nature is more complex and allows for a more or less great array of variations due to developments over time in various environments.

The other line of reasoning accepts a stronger notion of history as an anthropological constant by denying a view of education as a process that can be terminated in maturity. According to this line of reasoning the idea that education is an appropriate response to history is incomplete and needs to be supplemented by a view of education as itself a historical process, i.e. as itself producing history. In the next section I shall discuss this line of reasoning.

### **Education as producing history**

Two features of education as an anthropological constant should be highlighted to understand the claim that education produces history. These are the role of design, or, better, of engineering and the role of rationality. Let me say just a bit more about each in turn, revisiting themes from Frieda Heyting's insightful paper on pedagogical intentions and pedagogical efficacy (Heyting, 1992).

Engineering is to be associated with intentionality and functionality. If the older generation engages in downstream epistemic and moral engineering they take efforts to reach an aim, an aim that cannot be thought of as intelligibly related to these efforts unless there is a functional assumption, i.e. unless there is some idea of the educational setting as a system that can be described in terms

of the causal roles for the whole of the possible (psychological and social) states of its parts. Heyting expresses this as follows:

“...in pädagogischen Intentionen wird Wünschenswertes in bezug auf die miteinander verbundenen psychischen und sozialen Systeme vorausgesetzt und jeweils verknüpft mit der Überzeugung, darauf ausgerichtetes Handeln sei sinnvoll und möglich” (1992, p. 139).

If education means for the older generation that they partake in downstream epistemic and moral engineering, this means that they should try to aid the young to acquire and develop relevant epistemic and moral capacities with more speed and success. Just as Heyting emphasizes, this requires not merely a functional setting and an intentional attitude on the part of the older generation. Education is not merely engineering, but it is a specific type of engineering, one that necessarily takes recourse to the normative structure of rational interaction. That is, education is normatively oriented. Education is directed at improving the quality of the younger generation’s attunement to their environment. In Heyting’s words, who takes into account that attunement between the young and their environment is not merely a matter of assimilation but should allow for emancipatory participation:

I maintain that educational discourses fulfil a specific *reflexive* function in society, pertaining specifically to whichever kind of ‘better’ participation from new generations we strive for in the specific kind of ‘better’ future society that appears desirable to us. (Heyting, 2001, referring to Heyting, 1992)

In my terminology this means that in education the older generation aims to support the younger generation’s efforts to respond appropriately to environmental requirements, and also to support the younger generation’s efforts to care for the appropriateness of their own responses. As I have argued elsewhere (Bransen, 2006), a specific class of self-regarding reasons should be understood as belonging to the class of environmental requirements. This should suffice to take into account Heyting’s sympathetic and plausible observation that the young should not only assimilate to their environment as a given, but should be encouraged to participate in its determination (cf. Heyting, 1997).

There is independent support for this in the very idea of the normative structure of rational interaction, support that is crucial to understanding how education produces history. Here is the idea. Rational interaction, i.e. the giving of and asking for reasons, presupposes at least two interlocutors, each of which should be considered by all of them as in principle co-authoritative about and co-responsible for the import of the rules that regulate their attunement to one another and their environment. In terms of an example, if I give my son a reason why he should obey me, and if I want him to obey me *for this reason*, I accept - precisely in virtue of my attempt to *rationally* interact with my son - that my son has a say in determining the import of this reason. Of course, his authoritativeness in this matter is not just a question of his whim, but is itself a consequence of his attempt, if there is such on his behalf, to *rationally* interact with me. Much follows from this, among others the idea that education produces history. Here is why. In education the older generation tries to improve the younger generation's capacity to attune to their environment. This is the capacity to interact rationally, where this should be understood in a very broad sense that allows for instance for emotions, among many other things, to be reasons, and that accepts that there may be many and enduring impediments to the explication of the reasons we feel to have. So this is not a plea for an over-rationalistic conception of educational arrangements. The only crucial feature of the picture is that the attunement between human beings and their environment is a normative issue, and that human beings are therefore right in having an interest in getting the import of the relevant norms right.

But getting the import of the relevant norms right is a *historical* process. It takes time, filled with interactions between particular human beings. Norms are not simply given features of a natural environment. They require justified expectations, and these require, for their existence to be possible at all, social beings with intentional and authoritative states of mind. Norms are, therefore, a prime example of things with a history, things with properties that are determined by a specific trajectory through time, a trajectory that necessarily involves a process of interacting human beings that invest their expectations, their sensibilities, expertise, authority and power to determine the import of all

the relevant norms that will regulate their attunement to one another and to their environment.

Now we can see what it means that education produces history. Downstream epistemic and moral engineering takes place on billions of occasions among billions of people, and if getting the import of the relevant norms right constitutes a substantial portion of the interactions between the young and the old, on each occasion, it is completely inconceivable how this could fail to be an intrinsically historical process from which emerges a great variety of different norms. On a global scale downstream epistemic and moral engineering produces a multitude of norms, each determined by its history, rather than its nature, i.e. each determined by a particular series of interactions between a limited number of people from different generations. It is these norms that are historical, produced over time by education, and it is these norms that we need to understand human behaviour.

These norms don't make up an adult's second nature. As years go by human beings may develop a more insightful, more reliable, and psychologically speaking also more rigid grasp of the import of the norms that regulate their attunement to their environment. But the resulting stability is not a matter of overcoming history, of reaching a state of maturity conceived of as the achievement of the end of education, a state of nature, *second* nature. There is no end to education, and thus, no end to history.

### **Education without maturity**

I should like to conclude by returning to the main question of this conference, and to use the results of the preceding discussion to explain why we could have an interest in answering this question but also to provide some support for my claim that the question is ill-conceived.

I began this paper by providing an obviously correct and trivial answer to the central question of this conference: the new should conform to the old when they are right, and should oppose them when they are wrong. A striking feature of this answer is that it completely ignores the key terms of the question.



Whether or not the young should conform to or oppose the old has, according to this answer, nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that the young are young and the old old. The correct and trivial answer emphasises that the discriminating factor between conformity and opposition is rightness, not generation. But if that's the correct answer, why should we have posed the question as if it had something to do with generation? Why should we have expected there to be a general answer concerning the appropriate attitude of the younger to the older generation? Why should we have expected it to be the case that the asymmetrical distribution of power, authority, and expertise among the different generations should lead to an asymmetry in the direction of rational interaction?

I'm inclined to think there is an underlying, implicit assumption at work here, not a pragmatic presupposition with a foundational function, but an ill-conceived assumption that power, authority and expertise on the one hand, or unbiased, original sensibility on the other hand, are somehow analytically related to epistemic and moral rationality. That is, if power, authority and expertise were analytically related to rationality, it would make sense to think that the older generation will as a matter of course be right about the rules that regulate human beings' attunement to their environment. Their rightness will provide support for the claim that the young should, normally speaking, conform to the old. But if on the other hand unbiased, original sensibility were somehow analytically related to rationality, it would make sense to think that the younger generation will as a matter of course be right about the rules that regulate human being's attunement to their environment. On this line of thought the young should, normally speaking, oppose the old.

On the basis of the argument developed in the previous two sections, it might seem plausible to maintain that the underlying assumption discussed here is related to the idea of education as terminated in maturity. That is, the assumption might seem to be related to a very serious and substantial distinction within mankind between the generations. According to this distinction, children have a history rather than a nature, but adults have overcome history in virtue of their second nature. As a consequence, there should be a general answer to

how these distinct kinds of human beings should attune themselves to one another. And then it depends on whether one thinks of history as primarily an emancipatory power of mankind, or rather as primarily a source of unintelligibility, unpredictability and confusion, whether one is inclined to side with the young and preach opposition or side with the old and preach conformity.

It will be rather obvious now that my argument in the previous section provides most support for a rejection of the underlying implicit assumption. There are no two kinds of human beings, historical ones that are young, and sensible, but unpredictable and confused as well, and post-historical ones that are mature, and experienced, and in possession of a second nature. There are just educatable persons. They differ of course hugely, depending on whether they are old and experienced or young and exploring. But they don't differ in their historicity. They are all exemplars of *homo sapiens*, exemplars of human nature, best conceived of as running through history, in virtue of which each new exemplar displays an inner and outer make-up that is determined by the specific trajectory of this individual human being through its environment over time *during its entire life-span*.

It is our concern for the import of history on our lives in conjunction with a mistaken conception of education as terminating in maturity, that explains our interest in the central question of this conference. Without this mistaken conception of education our concern for the import of history on our lives will not weaken. But we will be able to understand this concern better - as a concern for human life as an experiment we should like to endorse without being entitled to claim that we know how it will succeed.

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