As is usual in the German language, the concept of Bildung (shaping or education in the broadest sense) is used by Hegel in a variety of different ways and applied equally to the study of nature, society and culture with their different developments and forms. It accordingly extends from the organic natural drive (nisus formativus, inward form) to the processes by which ethical and mental maturity is acquired and on to the highest spiritual manifestations of religion, art and science in which the mind of an individual, a people or the whole of mankind may be represented. The specific pedagogical or educational significance of the German word plays only a subordinate role.

In this article, the pedagogical content of Hegel’s work will be approached primarily from the theoretical perspective of education in its broadest sense. This is not an arbitrary decision that might be prejudicial to the existing body of texts and to their objectively correct interpretation. On the contrary, this viewpoint is the only way of arriving at a correct assessment of the possible significance of typically Hegelian reflection on what is commonly referred to today as ‘educational action’, with a view to applying those ideas in a derived form under the present circumstances. In contrast, for example, with Kant, Hegel himself assigned a particularly high importance to this broad concept of education as a source of proof in his ‘Phenomenology of the Mind’ and in his lectures on ‘The Philosophy of Justice’. He did so for historical reasons and also for reasons pertaining to developmental logic. These are the two areas in which it is possible to perceive most clearly how Hegel interpreted the ‘educational question’ and what he saw as its limits and problems.

However, in order to acquire a comprehensive picture of the different aspects from which the phenomenon of education is viewed in its natural and mental, as also in its ethical and cultural, aspects, we must move beyond these sources and turn our attention to texts on aesthetics, the philosophy of religion and even on logic, which repeatedly provide sometimes surprising insights into the Greek paideia, and also into the characteristic educational principles of modern times. At all events, that has always been the approach of leading Hegelians to the area of pedagogics. The same attitude is encountered when Willy Moog, for example, goes so far as to put the question as to whether the more extensive principle of Bildung, which was systematically developed by Hegel, did not at the very least relativize the task of education as such or even render it superfluous.

However, the concept of education in its narrower sense was not alien to Hegel. It was after all one of the guiding themes of his age, even if its relative value in the interplay of schooling, training and teaching was not uncontroversial, after the frontiers of all education committed to the principle of practical reason had become indeterminate. Hegel also associated certain more clearly defined concepts with the word education. However, he never developed them in a broader context so that any exegesis must draw together the threads of the many—occasionally whimsical—statements dispersed throughout his work and try to establish a mosaic pattern before drawing conclusions from them. With that end in view, we shall concern ourselves primarily with the ‘Nuremburg texts’ and with the
passages from the ‘Encyclopedia’ which are a source of information on natural, mental and ethical
development. Here, we shall also find statements on the need for, and limits of, educational measures,
and on the function of general, specialized and philosophical teaching.

But even in these publications which deal in various contexts with pedagogical issues, many a
false hope will be disappointed because Hegel’s interest in what is commonly termed ‘shaping of the
will’ or character formation was not particularly high. He was quite rightly concerned that educational
eendeavours of this kind might imperceptibly turn into doctrinal teaching or mere mental dressage in
which reason, understood as personal insight, reflection and intelligence, would fall by the wayside.
However, in the narrower area of intentional endeavours and teaching measures, it is possible to
discern in Hegel’s work the fundamentals of an educational theory whose principal purpose is to
overcome self-willed action and self-seeking interests in the theoretical and practical spheres alike, and
so move on ultimately to that common purpose of knowledge and volition which is essential to permit
ethical action and culture.

Significantly, Hegel believes that pedagogics must serve to ‘shape the subjective mind’\(^4\) and,
referring to the teaching situation, recalls ‘the extent to which Christ had in mind the shaping and
perfection of the individual through his teachings’.\(^5\) In both cases the task must be to ‘impart a sense of
ethics to man’. Logically, therefore, pedagogics takes a ‘natural’ view of man and points the way to
‘his rebirth, to the transformation of his first nature into a second, spiritual nature so that spirituality
becomes a habit for him’.\(^6\) This is the only route by which man can take possession of his true, spiritual
nature.\(^7\) However, this is only possible if the ‘individual will’ is relegated to the background; man must
be made aware of the ‘futility of self-seeking’, whereas the ‘habit of obedience’ must be instilled in
him.\(^8\) Man must therefore learn, in the interests of his own broader education, to abandon his purely
subjective ideas and to be receptive to the thoughts of others,\(^9\) in so far as they are superior to his own.

It is therefore unacceptable for man to ‘indulge in his own caprices’; that would simply throw
the door wide open to arbitrary action. This self-will, which bears within it the germ of ‘evil’, may even
have to be broken by ‘discipline’.\(^10\) The transition from natural love in the parental home to the strict
objectivity of a school must be seen in this light; here the child ‘will not only be loved, but also
criticized and guided according to general principles’.\(^11\) Consequently, the school must reflect a
common will and the teaching must be focussed solely on the material which is to be presented and
understood.

That being so, the task of all education would not simply be to take suitable action to ensure
that natural and mental developmental processes take place with the fewest possible inhibitions, but
also to see to it that individual and social life are conducted in a spirit of reflective speech, generous
thought and reasoned action to their highest possible level of perfection. Hegel was convinced that this,
in turn, would only be possible if, in both practical and productive terms, the distinction between will
and reason made by the old school of psychology of character attributes could be overcome and with it
the disjunction between ethical and dianetic virtues. These two contrasts both tend to destroy the unity
of action and, in the final analysis, mean that the individual ceases to be recognizable in his own actions
and works.

This alienation had, of course, already led in philosophy to an ethic of external success and, at
the other end of the scale, to an ethic of sentiment. Hegel believed that both these approaches bore
within them the risk of ethical and moral isolation. His judgement of ‘romantic irony’ and of its
consequences for philosophical ethics was correspondingly harsh. Torn between the longed-for
‘beyond’ and the disillusion of the ‘here and now’, recent moral philosophy had increasingly been
characterized by a divided and split consciousness whose certainties and truths bore within them its
own contradiction, accompanied by the hope of emerging from this desperate situation with outside
help. Hegel’s analysis of education must be understood in terms of its deep roots in this horizon of questions that point far beyond strictly educational interests. His analysis sought to reduce a historical and systematic problem to a common denominator, taking in all forms of consciousness as they were understood in his day and suggesting a pressing need for their interpretation.

With reference to the classical, medieval and modern understanding of education whose possibilities and limits Hegel thought through in a manner which, in all likelihood, nobody before or after him equalled, he distinguishes various sides, levels and forms in the process of ethical and mental education, and in its different stages and manifestations. He was always aware of the risk of ‘excessive’ or ‘distorted’ education, and he also cited the reasons for which the enlightened ‘viewpoint of education’ must, despite its recognized absolute significance, be refuted. In this sense, Hegel was certainly the greatest educational theorist of the age of German idealism; he was also the sharpest critic of the modern principle of education which ran the risk of degenerating into ‘mere egoism’ or into a pure instrument of ‘arbitrary action and domination’. As to the indispensable ‘acquisition’ of formative knowledge, which enriches the cognitive and active subject in equal measure and transforms and liberates him, Hegel warned that the subjective-formal aspect of the ‘appropriation’ and ‘use’ of acquired knowledge must not be made the sole centre of attention in this process; account must also be taken of their objective side by which knowledge itself is brought to life and reshaped in the spirit of the age. It is true that each individual must first pass through ‘the formative stages of the general mind’ in the learning process, but the thinking contemplation of nature and a reasoned shaping of history will bring about a substantive change. In that twofold sense, the formative process must not be seen simply as a quiet and continuous progression. On the contrary, education has an earlier material content and object which it reprocesses, changes and reformulates independently. That in turn is only possible if the mind has escaped from the ‘immediacy of substantial life’, acquired a ‘knowledge of general principles and viewpoints’ and attained the stage of ‘objective thought’, which will in future enable it to think and act in a reasoning manner. The subjective side of the formative process by means of which the human condition is placed on a ‘free mental foundation’ is therefore described as follows: ‘This individuality assumes its own essence and that is the only way in which it can have a true existence; its reality and force are equivalent to its degree of education.’

These different standpoints and levels of modern educational thinking also include the fundamental difference between theoretical and practical education, which can be compared with the difference between contemplative and active reason. This brings into play a second form of knowledge which is essentially different in terms not only of its object and genesis but also of its justification. However, both forms share the ability to abandon the ‘individual particularity’ of knowledge and volition in order to impress upon both the ‘stamp of generality’. Seen in that light, education always takes the ‘form of thought’ according to which ‘man is able to know himself and act not simply according to his inclinations and desires, but to pull himself together’. Thus he sets the object free and is accustomed to ‘act theoretically’. This ‘emphasis on the generality of thought’ and this achievement of a reasoned abstraction constitute the absolute value of education which is not attained automatically. Referring to both theoretical and practical knowledge, Hegel speaks of the need for ‘hard work to eliminate the mere subjectivity’ of feelings and behaviour, of opinions and volition in so far as they follow mere ‘caprice’. Theoretical education includes, above all, the acquisition of varied and proven knowledge and ‘the generality of points of view’ from which things can be judged, in other words a ‘feeling for objects which are free and independent and not overlaid with subjectivity’. On the other hand, practical education imparts the ability for man to adopt a reflective and moderate attitude to the satisfaction of his natural needs. That, in turn, is only possible if he liberates himself from blind nature, devotes himself to his profession and does not merely remain
confined to the necessary ‘satisfaction of natural needs’ but is also capable of ‘sacrificing himself to higher duties.’

**Modern theoretical and practical education**

Hegel appreciated, and at the same time criticized, the modern form of theoretical and practical education for its strictly formal and unilaterally subjective character. The theoretical plane involved first and foremost the standpoint of modern reflective philosophy founded on the theory of cognition which, hand in hand with the viewpoint of the psychology of character attributes, distorted understanding of the independent nature and inner purpose of the ‘thing itself’. At the practical level, he went on to criticize the lack of understanding of the forces of the objective mind which were made clear in their independence and freedom in the institutions of society and culture expressed through ethics and language. He set great store by the ‘unique attitude of Greek education as spirituality which has its own individual character’, but warned at the same time, taking the example of the sophists, against an education which was merely subjective or strategic without any deeper system of reference. He believed that this had many points in common with ‘modern evil’. This ‘position of subjectivity’ could only ‘arise in an age of high education in which serious faith has perished and mere vanity prevails’. But this same position is exposed to the criticism of creating room for arbitrary and random action in the theoretical and practical spheres alike.

Hegel was thus conscious of the origin of, and need for, the concept of education, but its intermediate position in the case of the sophists, who had shaped the nature of philosophy, already called attention to a dilemma which persisted in modern education. Referring to Socrates, Hegel maintained that the mind must have attained ‘a given level’ of ‘subjective and objective mental development’ before the emergence of philosophy; he therefore attributes an ‘infinite value’ to education. On the other hand, he speaks of an ‘absolute point of transition’ to call attention to the limits of an education which adheres to a fixed standpoint instead of moving on to ‘understanding thinking’. That risk already lay in store for the sophists. However, it did not develop fully until the days of late-scholastic philosophy and the modern enlightenment. Viewed from this angle, the feature shared by both forms of enlightenment was that their content consisted solely of the ‘development of formal understanding, but not of reason’.

With reference to the typical, modern principle of education, Hegel concedes that education has been decisively important in all ages but believes that it ‘acquired a unique significance’ in the days of the Reformation. This ‘education in reflection’ created, in respect of both volition and judgement, a need to ‘adhere firmly to general viewpoints and apply them to the particular so that general forms, laws, duties, rights and maxims are determining factors and reign supreme’. But this form of education could only lead to ‘free judgement’ and not to conceptual thinking. It therefore remained strictly formal with a one-sided attachment to the subjectivity of knowledge and volition. This was made apparent by an analysis of the bourgeois conscience and by an assessment of the French Revolution, both of which proved capable of liberating the subject absolutely but were at the same time unable to give a positive meaning, i.e. a firm content and an objectively convincing shape, to freedom. Education under these conditions thus became a ‘source of disintegration’ whose effects were bound to be felt very soon in the theoretical and practical spheres, although to differing degrees.

By directing his criticism at the ambiguity of all modern education, Hegel raised problems which have continued to overshadow us until today. The ambiguity of ‘renunciation’ and ‘alienation’ which are necessary attributes of all education, has left an inevitable mark on the history of the moral sciences and gained a permanent place in our thinking, speech and action. In this sense, Hegel of course
saw the general task of his ‘Phenomenology of the Mind’ as that of ‘leading the individual away from his uneducated standpoint and on to the acquisition of knowledge’, which could only be achieved by ‘shedding his immediate self’. In this context, Hegel was also prone to speak of ‘alienation’ which, in effect, occurs whenever the mind has lost its faith in an immediate ethic and sees itself as a moral subject. In this confused state, ‘perfect education’ is placed in ‘deadly jeopardy’ - a situation which led on to the phenomenon of ‘romantic irony’ in the history of philosophy and became the preserve of ‘bourgeois society’ with all its consequences.

The true contradiction, however, facing modern education, which it was unable to understand or surpass, led the moral world view on which it was based astray into a state of unjustified self-certainty and endless criticism of everything which already exists. Hegel described this dubious certainty of all ‘moral education’ in the following words: ‘This negative aspect is itself a characteristic of education; it is in the nature of a feeling of profound revolt against everything which exists today, which is alien to self-awareness and wishes to exist without it, in which it finds no trace of itself; a certainty of the truth of reason which it assumes with the distance between intellectuality and the world and is certain of its own destruction.’

Significantly, he goes on to mention the other side of the moral viewpoint: ‘The positive phenomenon includes so-called immediately understandable truths of sound human reason which contains nothing other than this truth and the need to find itself and remains blocked at the level of that need.’ Against this ironic suspension of all that exists, which allows nothing real to escape its own judgement and declares itself to be the sole yardstick of goodness and justice, he objects elsewhere: ‘Incipient education always begins with criticism, but complete education sees the positive side in all things.’

The modern notion of reason

An even more fundamental reproach is leveled against typical modern education when it is accused of being in a state of inner torment which is manifested in its own language. This criticism culminates in the following observation: ‘Mental education, the modern notion of reason, brings out this conflict in man which makes him an amphibious being trying to live in two mutually contradictory worlds so that the conscience is set adrift in this contradiction and blown hither and thither, unable to find satisfaction anywhere.’ But if education resides in this very contradiction which it is unable to overcome through reason, it will remain at the level of reason-based judgements which distinguish between being and appearance or being and volition as direct contrasts, just as they distinguish between the prosaic here and now and the ideal hereafter, or the incomparably divine and the pathetically human.

But for Hegel this was only half the truth of this conscious form of an eminently ironic or even despairing faith, since these very conflicts bore within them the hope of ‘intercession’ or ‘reconciliation’. He therefore goes on to write in the work cited above: ‘This duality of life and conscience brings with it a need for modern education, governed by reason, to put an end to this very contradiction. However, if understanding cannot break out from the vice-like grip of these contrasts, the solution for the conscience will remain purely hypothetical [...]’

When the ‘standpoint of education’ is viewed in this manner with Hegel in both philosophical/historical and systematic perspectives, it is seen to be a necessary stage in the general and individual process of acquisition of maturity by the mind which, torn by inner conflicts, has not yet come into its own and now looks forward to its future fulfilment. In Hegel’s scheme of things, this conscience is consequently not only split, but also feels an urgent need to settle those very conflicts which it has itself brought forth, although it can never do so. In the long run, it is impossible to live in
this dual world; and so education looks, in the last resort, to philosophy for an answer to those questions which it had itself raised but was unable to answer within the confines of its own horizon:

The question then arises as to whether this universal conflict which is unable to move beyond the stage of mere theory and postulated solutions, is truth itself and the highest ultimate purpose. If general education has lapsed into the same contradiction, the task of philosophy will be to resolve the conflicts, i.e. to show that neither the one in its abstraction nor the other in its same biased position hold the truth, but are on the contrary self-destructive; truth lies in the reconciliation of the two and in intercession between them, and this intercession is no mere abstract demand but something which has already been brought to completion and must always be so completed hereafter.

The fracture between two worlds which is deeply felt by education and the ‘need for a philosophy’ which is supposed to resolve this contradiction without simply negating it in the name of a direct or absolute knowledge, affects practical knowledge in particular because the growing alienation between ethics and morality, which was to gather pace in the modern world, led to a lack of direction in speech and action in which education played a determining role. The criticism already made by Hegel of the educational system of the sophists, which owed much to the philosophy of Plato or Socrates, was strengthened in the longing for a pure morality which could forget reality and the present in its radical criticism of existing circumstances in the name of the absolute.

The truth of this education which either degenerated into irreconcilable contradictions or awaited its redemption from outside in a spirit of longing despondency, was either a ‘feeling of deepest revolt’ or the inability to act in relation to a world which did not bend itself to its own ideal standards and justifiably made its own demands of a morality which had become alien to it. In this way, modern education suspended the link between practice and reason, so opening the door to ideologies which were to become dangerous to human action in many respects. Pedagogics were also exposed to this risk and their plea for ‘development of the personality’ may under certain circumstances seem just as dubious as the tendency to subscribe to an educational theory which has long ago lost all certainty of its foundation in reason and increasingly seeks its salvation in the irrational; but this may well deprive it of any firm basis in comparison with the Hegelian position.

Notes
1. Jürgen-Eckardt Pleines (Germany). Professor in the Education and Philosophy Departments of Karlsruhe University. He has written many publications on reason, aesthetics and ethics, particularly Hegel’s Theorie der Bildung (1983-86); Begreifendes Denken: Vier Studien zu Hegel (1990).
4. Quotations from Hegel are taken from the Theorie-Werksgabe, Frankfurt/Main, 1971 (see References I below, hereafter WW), or exceptionally from the edition published by Meiner-Verlag, Leipzig in 1928 and Hamburg in 1962 (hereafter Ph.B). In this instance: WW, 6.374.
6. WW, 7.302.
7. WW, 18.543.
8. WW, 10.225.
9. WW, 18.228.
10. WW, 10.82.
11. loc. cit.
13. WW, 7.345; cf. WW 12.89.
14. WW, 7.344.
15. WW, 7.345.
16. WW, 7.464.
17. WW, 7.327: ‘Man is not by instinct that which he must become; he must acquire his own characteristics. That is the foundation of the right of the child to be brought up.’
18. Ph.B., 165, p. 311; cf. WW, 7.344: ‘In its absolute determination, education is therefore liberation and the task of a higher liberation [...]’
19. WW, 3.19; cf. WW, 7.345: ‘That which appears as education in relation to the individual is the essential moment of the substance itself, namely the direct transition from its conceptual generality to reality, or the simple soul of that reality, through which that which is perceived and existence itself have their being.’
20. Ph.B., 165, p. 311
21. WW, 3.14; cf. WW, 18.231: ‘True education does not consist in guiding attention towards oneself and concentrating on oneself as an individual - mere vanity, but rather in forgetting the self by a deep penetration of objective generality - forgetting the self.’
22. WW, 10.52.
23. WW, 3.364.
24. WW. Cf. the view that the distinction between thought and volition is simply the contrast between theoretical and practical behaviour. In that case, volition is ‘a special manner of thinking: thought being translated into existence, as a drive to acquire existence.’ WW, 7.46; cf. WW, 10.240-46.
26. WW, 7.71; cf. 7.343-45.
27. WW, 7.344; cf. ff. and Ph.B., 165, p. 184 ff.
32. Hegel, Fragmente, in Hegel-Studien, Bd. 1, p. 18.
33. WW, 7.283 (summary).
34. WW, 7.286.
35. WW, 18.409; cf. ff.
37. WW, 7.345.
38. Cf. WW, 3.56 ff.
42. WW, 13.25; cf. 80 ff.
43. Ph.B., 171a, p. 65.
44. WW, 3.31; cf. ff.
45. Ph.B.
47. Cf. WW, 3.327-494.
49. Cf. WW, 18.460; WW, 7.277-86 (after Solger).
50. WW, 7.339-45.
51. WW, 20.291.
52. WW, 7.414 (summary).
54. WW, 13.80.
55. WW, 16.56.
56. WW, 13.81 ff.
Hegel’s principle works on education
(‘Erziehung’ and ‘Bildung’)

Hegel, G.W.F. Werke in zwanzig Bänden (Theorie Werkausgabe). Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971. (Cited as WW.) In particular:

2. Nürnberger Schriften (1808-1817), WW, 4.305-76.

Summaries of the complete texts and remarks on education
(Erziehung, Bildung, Unterricht)

Thaulow, G. Hegels Ansichten über Erziehung und Unterricht. 4 Bde. Glashütten, 1974. (Kiel, 1853.)

Further reading

To obtain a more general view of current Hegelian studies, the reader is referred to the Hegel-Studien which are published annually, together with their appendices (Bonn, 1961-); particular mention should be made here of the report by Albert Reble on published literature (Hegel-Studien, Bd. 3, Bonn, 1965, p. 320 ff) because he provides a great deal of information which remains valid today on the present state of Hegel research on pedagogics. Also the Hegel-Jahrbücher published on behalf of the Hegel-Gesellschaft eV by Wilhelm Raimund Beyer, the year 1972 being particularly relevant for our purposes here (p. 280-324). Among the many collections which have appeared, the following four publications contain valuable information on present interests and the present state of knowledge:


A convenient and accessible introduction to the study of Hegel will be found in the collection edited by Otto Pöggeler (Hegel: Einführung in seine Philosophie, Freiburg; München, 1977) which includes an extensive bibliography; also the equally accessible monographs by Franz Wiedmann (Hegel. Reinbek, 1965) and Christoph Helferich (G.W.Fr. Hegel. Stuttgart, 1979) with comparable appendices and the extensive study of Hegel by Charles Taylor (Cambridge, 1975, German translation: Hegel. Frankfurt, 1978) which contains much relevant information. Finally, reference might also be made to the extensive collection of titles published by Kurt Steinhauser (Hegel: eine Internationale Bibliographie. München, 1980) which is detailed enough to provide references on specialized research topics. For further comments on the phenomenology and philosophy of justice and on specific chapters, we recommend the following publications by Friedrich Fulda, Dieter Henrich and Manfred Riedel: Materialien zu Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’. Frankfurt, 1973; and Materialien zu Hegels Rechtsphilosophie. 2 Bde. Frankfurt, 1975. The principal German and international interpretations of Hegel’s theory of education are mentioned by the author in his introduction to the first volume of the collection Hegels Theorie der Bildung (see above, 1983, p. vii-xxxvi), some being the subject of indirect discussion.