

Liberating Education: What From, What For?

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Title	Liberating Education: What From, What For?
Editors	Igor Cvejić, Predrag Krstić, Nataša Lacković, Olga Nikolić
Publisher	Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade
Reviewers	Ana Dimiškovska, Aleksandar Dobrijević, Zoe Hurley
Design and Layout	Tijana Milojević
Proofreading	Olga Nikolić
Print	Sajnos d.o.o. Novi Sad
Place and year	Belgrade, 2021
Number of copies	150
ISBN	978-86-80484-79-2

This volume was realised with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, according to the Agreement on the realisation and financing of scientific research.

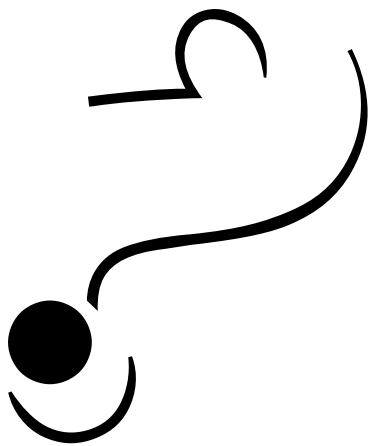


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EMANCIPATION FOR AND FROM THE SOCIETY

Milica Smajević Roljić¹

An Interpretation of the Educational Process from the Perspective of Kant's Philosophy of History and Legal-Political Theory

Introduction: Kant as an Educator and Philosopher in the Eighteenth Century

"The final destiny of the human race is moral perfection. . . . How, then, are we to seek this perfection, and from where is it to be hoped for? From nowhere else but education" (CL, AA 27: 470-471)

Kant was one of the few philosophers who wrote about education and also had a diverse teaching experience. In his long and rich teaching career, we can distinguish three major periods. First, during the 1750s, he worked as a home teacher in two families near Königsberg (Beck 1978:188). Although we do not have much knowledge

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about this period, based on the fact that Kant maintained close social relations with these families long after he stopped teaching their children, we conclude that they were satisfied with his educational skills.

Second, in 1776, Kant became one of the greatest supporters of Basedow's experimental school in Dessau, the Philanthropin (Louden 2016: 393). Being deeply influenced by Rousseau, Basedow wanted to incorporate his ideas into the curriculum of the new school he founded. Some of the main goals of the school were to practice critical thinking and learn foreign languages through conversation and play, to separate moral education from religion, and to develop mechanical skills (Beck 1978: 189). In 1776, Basedow published an account of his school, which was designed for parents who planned to enrol their children in the Philanthropin.

Kant wrote a review of Basedow's account and openly showed enthusiasm for this new educational system. In *Essays Regarding the Philanthropinum*, Kant wrote:

To each commonwealth, to each single citizen, it is infinitely important to get to know an institute in which an entirely new order of human affairs commences, and which, if it is spread quickly, must bring about such a great and such a far-sighted reform in private life as well as in civil affairs, as one by a casual glance could not easily imagine. (EP, AA 2: 448)

Although Kant argued that a radical reform of the existing education system was necessary and raised money for the work of Basedow's school, it turned out that his efforts were largely in vain. After several attempts to maintain the school, it was finally closed in 1794, and Kant pointed out that people are wrong when they think that experiments and innovations in education are unnecessary; their greatest significance is reflected in the fact that the results of experiments are often different than expected (Päd, AA 09:451).

Third, Kant worked as a university professor for forty-three years and gave lectures in various fields such as metaphysics, natural theology, logic, ethics, and anthropology. His lectures were very popular and well attended, and even students from other countries used to come to listen to them. It is well known that Kant did not take a leave of absence from work, nor did he travel or leave his country. His commitment to his university career and students was complete.

It should be recalled that Kant was born at a time when the pursuit of educational reform was already present, not only in philosophy but also in other disciplines. Locke's book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Rousseau's *Emile* and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* represent some of the most important attempts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to rethink both education and its role in society. It was considered that one of the main goals of education should be "the production of a moral and civic-minded citizenry" (Munzel 1999: 248), and many of Kant's claims about education confirm that he shared this vision with his predecessors and contemporaries.

Based on all the above, it could be expected that Kant left behind extensive writings dedicated to the topic of education, but that is unfortunately not the case. Although he considered education to be "the greatest and most difficult problem that can be given to the human being" (Päd, AA 09: 446), Kant left behind relatively little written testimony on the subject, which is why his works on education (*Lectures on Pedagogy*, *Essays Regarding the Philanthropinum* and the "Doctrine of the Methods of Ethics" in his *Metaphysics of Morals*) are best interpreted if placed in the broader context of his philosophy. Even in the secondary literature, Kant's understanding of education is given far less space and attention than other aspects of his philosophy.

Kant's understanding of education is most often interpreted from the perspective of his ethics, where the importance of the moral development and cultivation of each individual is particularly emphasized

(Roth and Surprenant 2012: ix). The topic of this article, however, will be somewhat different. Instead of the usual analysis of one's duties to oneself and emphasizing the importance of developing one's own talents for the purpose of personal growth and education, attention will be paid to examining the phenomenon of education from the perspective of Kant's philosophy of history and legal-political theory. We will see that this perspective is very important, because it shows us that the goals of education coincide to a large extent with the goals of the historical-political process. Therefore, the first chapter of this paper will be dedicated to Kant's understanding of the philosophy of history and its relation to the theory of education. We will see that the historical and educational process takes place simultaneously and that they strive for the same goal – the establishment of a cosmopolitan community of moral and educated citizens. The second chapter will provide a brief analysis of Kant's legal-political theory, and then point out its connection with historical and educational processes. We will show that the development in the sphere of education of individuals can never be complete if, at the same time, we do not work on the development of the social system in which individuals live. In the third chapter, attention will be paid to the relationship between the Enlightenment and education. The eighteenth century was the age of Enlightenment ideas, and education was certainly one of the main ideals to be pursued.

Kant's Philosophy of History as a Basis for Understanding His Philosophy of Education

In the eighteenth century, it was considered that there was a close connection between the philosophy of education and the philosophy of history (Beck 1978: 191). This can be noticed in both Rousseau's and Kant's works. As we read Kant, we realize that his philosophy of history is a more important starting point for understanding his theory of education than, for example, his anthropology or epistemology. In his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant asks: "Should we in the education of the individual imitate the course followed by the education of the human

race through its successive generations?” (Päd, AA 09: 459). Although Kant did not offer an explicit answer to this question, it is clear that the historical process is the key to understanding his theory of education. If we take even a brief look at Kant’s writings on the philosophy of history and compare them with Kant’s texts on education, we immediately realize that the interpretation of his theory of education cannot be complete without taking into account the historical perspective.

In his famous article “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim”, Kant reveals to us that, in his opinion, the main goal of the historical process is the establishment of a cosmopolitan community of all people that would allow free expression of freedom of every individual, together with the freedom of all other individuals, and all in accordance with the general law (IaG, AA 08: 23). Kant makes a very similar statement when he talks about his understanding of education in the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, where he points out that “children should be educated not only with regard to the present but rather for a better condition of the human species that might be possible in the future” (Päd, AA 09: 447). The idea of a better future in which people would live in a free cosmopolitan community was omnipresent in Kant’s works.

Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” consists of nine propositions, and we will quote and briefly analyse only the first three because they are directly related to Kant’s theory of education.

When he claims in the first proposition that “*all natural predispositions of a creature are determined sometime to develop themselves completely and purposively*” (IaG, AA 08: 18), Kant unequivocally incorporates the teleological principle into his view of the philosophy of history. He adds that an arrangement that would not progress towards the realization of its purpose would be contrary to the natural principle of purposefulness. This would imply that complete lawlessness and desolate chance reign in nature.

In the second proposition, Kant says that “*in the human being, those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual*” (IaG, AA 08: 19). With this statement, he emphasizes that man is fallible being who should live for many centuries in order to achieve its purpose. Since nature has determined that human life span lasts much shorter, only a few decades, it is necessary for a large number of generations to pass on their knowledge to each other, in order to achieve the natural purpose of the human species. Kant believed that an individual could make progress only as a member of the human race, through numerous trials and errors, which are inherent in man as a sensible being.

The teleological principle and the idea of the possibility of the full development of human abilities only in species are explicitly present in Kant’s *Lectures on Pedagogy*. Kant points out that education “will get better and better and each generation will move one step closer to the perfection of humanity; for behind education lies the great secret of the perfection of human nature” (Päd, AA 09: 444). He argues that progress in education and the development of man’s natural disposition can only be achieved through a number of generations that educate one another. We can never say that one individual has succeeded in achieving the ideal of education, because only the human race as a whole can strive to accomplish this task. Each generation should use the knowledge of their ancestors and move on to new achievements and knowledge.

Although man as an individual cannot fully develop independently, but only within the human species, Kant in the third proposition claims that:

[...] nature has willed that the human being should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of himself, and participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct through his own reason. (IaG, AA 08: 20)

Each individual possesses reason and free will, which makes them capable of working on their own improvement and development of talents. Although previous generations need to pass on their knowledge to young people, when it comes to the development of reason, every human being must work independently to fulfil this task. Kant presents the same idea in his *Lectures on Pedagogy* where he claims that although a young man needs an educator to guide him, he primarily needs reason in order to develop his abilities and learn to act morally. Therefore, while educators can teach any mentally healthy person to read, write, and think critically, success in moral education depends on the individuals themselves, not on the efforts of their tutors. Education, then, can be both physical and moral, and “the idea of education which develops all the human being’s natural predispositions is indeed truthful” (Päd, AA 09: 445).

A brief analysis and comparison of the first three propositions of “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” with parts from the *Lectures on Pedagogy* showed us that the goals of the historical process largely coincide with the goals of education. However, it is interesting and useful for our current purpose to notice another important thing. Namely, Kant divided the history of the world into phases that largely coincide with the phases of an individual’s education. The earliest phase of the historical process is the so-called natural state, which characterizes life in accordance with instincts and the absence of established laws, rights, and freedoms of individuals.² In order to achieve their goals, people do not use reason, but physical strength, force, and instincts. This phase of the history of the human race corresponds to the earliest phase of a child’s education, which Kant calls nurture, and which refers primarily to feed-

2 It is important to understand that for Kant, the natural state is a hypothetical idea that helps us see the importance of the existence of basic human rights, but also the social institutions that protect them. By describing the natural state, Kant does not offer us an empirical account of the life of our ancestors in society before the creation of the state and institutionalized rights, but tries to emphasize that some values and some rights are universal and independent of the social systems we live in. However, in order to protect and ensure these rights, it is necessary to form a civil society.

ing and nurturing a child. At this stage, the child is a human being who belongs completely to nature and relies only on its instincts. When it is hungry or sleepy, it cries, and when it is happy, it laughs.

In the second phase of the history of mankind, people have left the raw natural state, but they live in societies that have not yet reached their highest potential. Although there are established laws, as well as the rights and duties of all citizens, these regulations are not always respected because the human race has not yet reached the level of morality. This period in the history of the human race corresponds to the period of children's education which Kant calls discipline, and which refers to the school years. At this stage, the child is no longer guided only by instincts, but also by its educator or professor at school. The child learns how to read, write, be obedient, do homework and organize its time. Although the schoolboy has not yet reached complete independence, he is no longer at the stage when he is guided only by nature. His mind and body are in the phase of discipline. At this stage, however, an important problem arises.

One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom. For constraint is necessary. How do I cultivate freedom under constraint? I shall accustom my pupil to tolerate a constraint of his freedom, and I shall at the same time lead him to make good use of his freedom. Without this everything is a mere mechanism, and the pupil who is released from education does not know how to use his freedom. (Päd, AA 09: 453)

In other words, the following question arises: How to unite obedience to the imposed restrictions with the child's ability to use its freedom? Kant offers two answers to this question. First, he argues that "from earliest childhood the child must be allowed to be free in all matters (except in those where it might injure himself, as, for example, when it grabs an open knife), although not in such a manner that it is in the way of other's freedom" (Päd, AA 09: 454). Second, "one must

prove to it that restraint is put on it in order that it be led to the use of its own freedom, that it is cultivated so that it may one day be free, that is, so that it need not depend on the care of others” (Päd, AA 09: 454).

Hence, in the second phase, both the child and the human race left behind a natural state, but they have not yet reached the level of morality.

The third stage of the history of the human race is the stage of genuine morality. This phase is the most difficult to explain because no experience or history can help us in accomplishing that task. A cosmopolitan society, a federation of states, perpetual peace and freedom of each individual should be realized in the future, and then the human race will achieve genuine morality. This is the final goal of the historical process. This stage in the history of mankind corresponds to the stage of children’s education which Kant calls cultivation. Unlike Rousseau, Kant believes that man is not moral by nature (Anth, AA 07: 324) and “morality is not one of the natural dispositions of the child that can be brought to actualization by training” (Beck 1978: 200). Therefore, an educator cannot make a child moral; he can only teach it discipline and basic skills. Every man has the task of developing their morality by following the principles of their reason. Neither the progress of the human race nor the development of morality in the individual can be fully explained, because both humanity and the individual will realize their full potential only in the future.

For Kant, the history of mankind has an evolutionary course. It is a history of the slow but inevitable development of human rationality (Vuković 2016: 154). Kant’s view of the historical process can also be defined as progress from nature to culture. Kant confirms this when he says in his article “On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but it is of No Use in Practice” that the “human race is constantly advancing with respect to culture (and its natural end)” (TP, AA 08: 309). The goal of the historical process is the supremacy of morality over nature and the formation of a cosmopolitan community of all the

people of our planet. Similarly, the goal of education is the supremacy of morality, rationality, and rational principles over blind instincts and passions. Education is a means by which individuals, and then entire societies, can be enlightened and emancipated from their own intellectual immaturity. The relationship between education and the Enlightenment will be the topic of the last chapter of this article. However, before we turn to this topic, in the next section we will focus on Kant's legal-political theory and its relationship with the theory of education.

Kant's Legal-Political Theory - The Ideal of Education Cannot Be Achieved in a Lawless State

The examination conducted in the previous chapter shows us that the ultimate goal of Kant's philosophy of history largely coincides with the goal of his theory of education. The chapter before us will show that Kant set the same goal before his legal-political philosophy, especially emphasizing the importance of establishing a republican system in the state, the only one that can lead to the establishment of a federation of states, and then to a cosmopolitan community made up of all the inhabitants of our planet. Although he admits that the assumption of the inevitable progress of mankind may resemble a story from a novel (MAM, AA 08: 109), Kant believes that it is supported by the past experience of the human race and helps us to establish certain regularities in the confused sequence of historical events.

Kant divided public right into state, international and cosmopolitan right, and he paid the most attention to the former. He believed that the republican system, which is based on the principles of freedom, equality, and dependence of all citizens on the same set of laws (ZeF, AA 08: 350), is the most suitable of all systems, because it can establish institutions that would protect the rights of all individuals. Every republican state contains:

[...] three *authorities* within it, that is, the general united will consists of three persons (*trias politica*): the *sovereign authority* (sovereignty)

in the person of the legislator; the *executive authority* in the person of the ruler (in conformity to law); and the *juridical authority* (to award to each what is his in accordance with the law) in the person of the judge (*potestas legislatival, rectoria et iudicialia*). (MS, AA 06: 313)

Legislative power rests on the people and their united will and derives its legitimacy from the fact that laws apply only to individuals who have chosen them of their own free will. If a few people are allowed to prescribe laws in the state, it is always possible that injustice will be done, because that group of individuals will want a more favourable position for themselves, as is the case in the natural state. If the holders of legislative power are all citizens of the state, through their united will, then there is no fear that the laws will be unfair because no one does injustice when deciding on themselves.

These three types of authorities must be strictly separated from each other and one of them must not be allowed to interfere in or influence the affairs of the other. The legislator in the state cannot be at the same time the one to whom the executive power belongs, nor the one who judges in court disputes, because, in that case, due to conflict of interests, no form of government could perform its function impartially and under prescribed laws. Through these three types of authorities, the state achieves its autonomy. It becomes an independent and autonomous political entity, whose citizens obey only those laws that they have prescribed for themselves by the united will of all. The goal of such a constituted state is to eliminate the possibility of doing injustice and to enable the expression of freedom guaranteed by law.

Although he pays far more attention to state right than to international and cosmopolitan right, Kant points out that there is an interdependence between these three types of public right and that all three are necessary to ensure freedom, equality, peace, and a cosmopolitan community. None of the goals set before public right can be achieved until the state, as an individual, forms an alliance with other states and reaches an agreement with them on peace and mutual non-aggression.

However, if a republican system based on the principles of freedom and equality is to be achieved, Kant believes that this is possible only through a long historical process. We cannot expect that the full development of society will be achieved in one generation. Humans are rational individuals, and the development of their reason takes place gradually through the historical process of progress. With this line of argumentation, Kant makes a close connection between his legal-political philosophy and his philosophy of history. As we read Kant, it is difficult not to notice that most of his texts dealing with the philosophy of history, simultaneously deal with his legal-political theory.³ The basic postulates of state, international and cosmopolitan right are placed at the core of Kant's philosophy of history. Standing on legal-political ground allows us to decipher the direction of history, which, in Kant's opinion, is defined by the same principles that determine the formation of the republican system, and then the federation of states.

Why was this brief account of Kant's legal-political theory relevant to us in the context of examining his theory of education? Why did we draw a parallel between the philosophy of history and legal-political philosophy? The answer to both questions lies in the fact that, in Kant's view, the historical, political, and educational processes take place simultaneously. The development of human skills, the process of education, the formation of the republican system in society, the transition from the natural state to the social state, the pursuit of cosmopolitan community of all people – all these processes take place in parallel and affect each other. Although it is impossible to determine which of these processes precedes one another, it is clear that they all last for centuries and that many generations pass on their knowledge and skills to each other. We cannot expect to have educated and moral individuals in a society in which the established laws and rights of all citizens are not respected. This leads us to

3 This refers to: "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim", "Conjectural Beginning of Human History", "On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but it is of No Use in Practice", "The Conflict of the Faculties".

the conclusion that work on the education of future generations includes work on the development of the entire socio-political system.

Age of Enlightenment - Education as a Process of Emancipation from One's Own Immaturity

Although Kant lived in eighteenth-century Europe, which was the centre of the republican and revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment, it is important to point out that Prussia, the country in which he spent his entire life, was an absolutist monarchy. Despite the fact that Kant did not live in a state where the proclamation of new slogans and attitudes was common, he openly advocated the ideals of the Enlightenment and believed that these were at the same time in the main interest of mankind (Smajević 2020: 212). The freedom of the individual, the recognition of the rights and dignity of every human being, the necessity of freedom for personal progress through education, the formation of a strong state that allows intellectual freedom to its citizens, international cooperation, and peace – all these are the goals of the Enlightenment to which Kant himself aspired (Beck 1969:437). The goal of the Enlightenment was to create educated and moral people who use their own reason. As Loudon (Robert Loudon) and many others have noted, “the Age of Enlightenment was also an age of pedagogy; indeed, the very term ‘Enlightenment’ implies a process of education” (Louden 2016: 394).

At the beginning of his short article “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” Kant says that one of the main culprits for the absence of enlightenment is man himself, who, as a physically mature being, is responsible for his own passivity, disinterest, and inertia (BdF, AA 08:35). Although each individual possesses reason and the ability to use it for the purpose of their own education and progress, Kant points out that most people, due to laziness, rely exclusively on the opinions and attitudes of social authorities and do not think for themselves. Kant asks all adult human beings to renounce

the passive-observational role and, using their own reason, to form their own personal attitudes. The process of advancing towards enlightenment depends primarily on the individual who is responsible for working on their own growth, education, and emancipation.

A potential ambiguity arises here: namely, it may seem that the claim that every human being should work on their own emancipation and should renounce authority is not in line with the view that we need teachers, educators, and new experimental schools. Kant advocated this second view when he supported Basedow's school and the necessity of educational reform. However, we can solve this potential problem if we remind ourselves that Kant claimed that a person needs educators in order to master skills such as reading, writing, discipline, critical thinking, and foreign languages. Kant, of course, also wrote about practical or moral education and defined it as "education by which the human being is to be formed so that he can live as a freely acting being" (Päd, AA 09: 455). However, Kant claimed that "human being is by nature not a moral being at all; he only becomes one when his reason raises itself to the concepts of duty and of law" (Päd, AA 09: 492). Morality is not a natural disposition and therefore educators cannot make a child moral through teaching, exercise, and training. They can give the child examples of morally virtuous and morally bad actions and ask it how it would act in a certain given situation. They can present options to it and make it think about what is morally right to do. Some children will know which behaviour is right and will act accordingly; some others will also know what is right but will not act accordingly, while others will think that it is better to act according to prudence than according to morality. This shows us that true morality does not depend on the educator's efforts, but on the extent to which the individual follows the principles of their reason. Since humans are not perfect and sinless beings, we cannot expect them to always act in accordance with moral principles. What we can expect and what we can hope for is that each individual tries to understand rational principles and to apply them more often when acting. Therefore, we can

conclude that every society needs educators who will pass on the skills and knowledge they have acquired to future generations, and that after acquiring basic skills, each individual is responsible for working on their own emancipation and moral progress. There is no contradiction between the need for educators and the use of one's own reason for the purpose of enlightenment and further moral education.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude that all responsibility for emancipation from the state of immaturity is placed on man as an individual who should aspire to be independent and autonomous. In the continuation of his short article, Kant emphasizes the importance of the social context, which has a unique role in the aspiration of the individual towards progress and the state of Enlightenment. If a state system does not respect the human right to freedom and equality with other citizens, then such a society does not allow an individual to work on their development and education.

Kant condemns the revolution as a potential solution to this problem and believes that it is not a legitimate means to achieve Enlightenment, because rebellion can lead to a change of government, but not to a radical change in the way of thinking in society. This second goal can be achieved only through a gradual reform of society which, in order to be justified, should be initiated and implemented by none other than the legislator himself. The sovereign must be instructed in the existing social problems, because only in that way can the constitution be improved in accordance with the ideal of the law" (Smajević 2020: 206).

Therefore, the Enlightenment aspiration for each individual to use their own reason in making decisions and to work on personal growth, emancipation and education is inseparable from the aspiration for the social system as a whole to be just and cosmopolitan. The work of enlightening individuals must at the same time be the work of enlightening the whole society.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have tried to emphasize the teleological dimension of Kant's theory of education and its great significance. "The human species has a *Bestimmung* (translated variously as 'destiny', 'vocation' and 'determination'), and education is a necessary means towards the achievement of this fundamental goal" (Louden 2016: 405). In order to achieve proper development of all fundamental human capacities, it is necessary for a person to be in a constant process of education and to develop their predispositions and talents. Humans require education in order to effectively exercise their freedom and autonomy. Expressed in Kant's words: "the human being can only become human through education" (Päd, AA 09: 443).

The aim of this article was to show that a correct and comprehensive understanding of Kant's conception of education requires a historical and political perspective that emphasizes the fact that human progress and development in all fields is always a long, multi-generational process. The education of the human race takes place in parallel with the progress of the human race on the historical and political level, and thus the process of education is inextricably linked to the socio-political development. The course of the historical-political movement, which at the same time represents the course of education of the human species, can be roughly defined as the progression from nature to culture. While the natural state is imbued with lawlessness and wild freedom, civic order is a huge step towards culture, education, legalized freedom, and the creation of a cosmopolitan community.

At the very end of this paper, we must not forget to ask one important question: Can Kant's understanding of education be useful to us today and how? We believe that the answer to this question is positive and that we can draw several important lessons from Kant's theory of education. First, we must understand that education is not an isolated phenomenon. If we want to work on the development of education today, in the 21st century, it is necessary to take into account

the broader picture of the society in which we live. If, for example, laws within the state system are often violated, then in parallel with the work on education, an effort must be made to improve the implementation of legal regulations in society. Progress in the field of education cannot be achieved separately from the progress of other domains of society. Second, educators can educate the individual only to a certain extent. They can teach them the basic skills necessary for a functional life, they can show them numerous examples of moral conduct, but true moral agency depends on the individuals themselves and the extent to which they follow the principles of their reason. Therefore, the full potential of education can only be realized by investing efforts to improve the social system in which we live and by working on personal progress and emancipation.

Although there is a lot of public talk about education, peace and freedom of expression, the efforts made to achieve these goals seem insufficient or perhaps even wrong. While there are a few countries that are very close to realizing these ideals, such as Norway and Denmark, most other countries in the world, especially non-European ones, face a number of problems and challenges. Extreme poverty, inaccessibility of primary education, cruel treatment of members of some social groups - all these are indicators that even in the twenty-first century, the basic needs and rights of all people on the planet have not been met (Smajević 2020: 213). Each individual should work on their own education and talent development. However, it should be emphasized that a person who struggles every day to achieve basic needs such as drinking water, food, a roof over his head and primary education, cannot be blamed for general ignorance. The biggest task is set before free and educated individuals who should make efforts to change social systems and point out the importance of education. Therefore, the main advice of this paper is that each individual should work on their own education and on improving the system in which they live, while the greatest responsibility lies with people who have already reached a certain level of education and who should be the initiators of positive changes in the future.

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