CHAPTER 2

IN SEARCH OF A CONCEPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

BILDUNG AND THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE

The modern (research) university is closely linked to a model of higher education received from nineteenth century Germany, the Humboldtian model. This model enables us to demarcate universities from other institutions of learning, and also provides a means for regulating and organising our thinking about higher education. Contemporary debates either justify the Humboldtian framework by holding it up as an ideal or criticize the model for its datedness and inability to respond adequately to changing environments.42 In contrast, I want to take a step back and aim at understanding the specific conception of education that emerged in the late eighteenth century. The term Bildung can be taken to encompass this conception and considered as originating a process that culminated in the modern research university in the West. Grasping the concept of Bildung will not only make us appreciate the depth of the debate on education in the West but will also reveal to us the intellectual and cultural roots of the conception of education underlying the university.

The Humboldtian model emerged as a reaction against two dominant traditions of higher learning that existed in the late eighteenth century. One was the medieval university which consisted of four faculties: three higher faculties (theology, law and medicine) meant to train the students as clergy, lawyers and doctors and a lower faculty, (philosophy or artistic faculty) that provided students with a basic knowledge of logic and natural philosophy (the knowledge of nature) before they moved on to the higher faculties. The other was the

42 For contemporary reflections on the Humboldtian university where you can find both views, see Henningsen, Schlæger, and Tenorth (2013) and Maassen and Olsen (2007). Also see Derrida (2002) and the collection of essays in Rand (1992) for a philosophical critique of the model.
Napoleonic tradition of institutions of higher education which were specialist, higher, vocational institutions that had risen in great numbers to meet the demands of industry and bureaucracy. Thus, the “higher” in higher education as embodied in the university, gets its substantive content from defining itself against both the utilitarian ideology embodied by the specialist, technical institutions and the pre-existing, confessional universities tied to the church. The Humboldtian moment instead inaugurated a broader conception of knowledge as necessarily “open” and “unfinished,” of science and scholarship as engaged with “the inexhaustible tasks of ceaseless inquiry.” The universities – Humboldt emphasized - must “treat all knowledge as a not yet wholly solved problem and therefore always remain in research, whereas schools take as their subject only the completed and agreed upon results of knowledge and teach these” (Humboldt [1809]1970, 242-50). The emphasis therefore was not on individual scholars but the individual scholar as part of a larger Wissenschaftensystem, involving a system or unity of disciplines. Every scholar had an obligation to improve upon the disciplines which were self-regulatory and autonomous, yet always incomplete and to be improved upon by future generations. Such a conception of knowledge brought the student and the teacher in higher learning as equal partners engaged in the highest goal of “pursuing truth and knowledge for its own sake.”

Even though the phrase “pursuing knowledge for its own sake” has come under much disrepute today, in the Humboldtian conception, Wissenschaft (Science) was for the sake of Bildung or formation. Wissenschaft and Bildung were mutually constitutive, thereby resulting

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43 In the twelfth and thirteenth century, the European Universities which were centres of scholastic studies largely operated with a theory of knowledge that “all knowledge was a reconquest of that which had been freely available to mankind in the pre-lapsarian state” (Southern 1995, 11). Knowledge was cast in terms of recovery from the past. It is only with the Humboldtian idea that the conception of knowledge as perpetually “open” and “unfinished,” is institutionalized. See Louden (2007) and Nybom (2007, 55–80).

44 As noted earlier, Wissenschaft or Science here is not narrowly equated with natural sciences but was conceived in a much broader sense. Wissenschaft instead referred to any form of disciplined, systematic study of various forms of human knowledge. These included the empirical sciences, the humanities, art, ethics and philosophy (Solomon 2014, 173). I use Science, with a capital to S to refer to Wissenschaft.
in an internal, integrated merger of the pursuit of “objective” scholarship with “subjective” education. It is through the pursuit of Science that the character of the subject of education would be formed.

The model was not just the creation of one individual but a culmination of several lines of prior developments in the intellectual landscape. Humboldt wrote a fragment titled “the theory of Bildung” in 1793 and in 1810, he would make Bildung the pedagogic ideal for the University of Berlin. Kant fleshed out the concept in his famous text “What is Enlightenment,” the romantics stated Bildung to be the highest good and Hegel defined Bildung or the education of consciousness as the central concern of his famous Phenomenology of the Spirit. The process was accompanied by articulations on the nature of the institution that would be the best place to foster Bildung. Kant published The Conflict of Faculties in 1798 and Schiller, Fichte, Schelling and Schleiermacher articulated their thoughts on the idea of the university, its purpose and the nature of academic studies between 1789 and 1804. Despite the internal differences between the various thinkers of the period, all of them shared the aspiration to articulate a common conceptual framework which would provide an anthropological basis for an institution of higher education (N. Rao 2014, 14).

Revisiting the Humboldtian moment is particularly important for us today. While contemporary debates around higher education focus on how to finance education, the kind of returns education must bring in and how to make education socially accessible, the question

45 The five founding documents for a new university include Schelling’s Lectures on the Method of Academic Study (1802[1966]), Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense: With an Appendix Regarding a University Soon to Be Established (1808) [1991], Fichte’s essay on Derivation of a Plan for an Institute of Higher Learning to Be Established in Berlin, Which Stands in Essential Relation to an Academy of Sciences (1808), Henrik Steffans’ series of lectures “On the universities” (1808-09) and Humboldt’s proposal for the university of Berlin On the Spirit and the Organisational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin (1809) [1970]. Humboldt’s recommendations were accepted and he was put in charge of the reform of the entire educational system. However, an enormous amount of intellectual activity preceded the new university which cannot be restricted to just these five documents or just these intellectuals. See Shaffer (1990), Ziolkowski (1990) and Howard (2009) for a useful general account of the period.
of what is the notion of formation implied and the nature of the ethos that holds up the
practice often tends to get elided or is taken as self-evident. Even if we must rethink the
practice of education, we cannot do so in a vacuum but must begin with a reflection on the
categories that we have inherited. Such a task necessitates a revisiting of the moment of
German romanticism and the debate around Bildung. How did the intellectuals of the times
think about education and from where did they draw their resources? What was the specific
conception of education that arose and what was its relation to the larger culture? What
notions of inquiry, formation and knowledge were developed? In order to be able to answer
these questions, we turn to the German Romanticism in the last third of the eighteenth
century when education emerged as the highest good.

This chapter has three aims. It focuses on that moment in European history when a particular
conception of education expressed as Bildung emerges as central in the intellectual landscape
of Europe. Secondly, it examines the depth of the debate in the West by tracing the cultural-
theological roots of Bildung and delineates how the leading intellectuals of the time actively
fleshed out the concept to suit the demands of the time. Thirdly, it attempts to make visible
the “category habit” that underlies this model of thinking about education. Like our everyday
habits, “category habits” too “are not consciously worked-out strategies, and therefore not
necessarily followed consistently throughout one's thinking about some question. Rather,
they are habits of thinking fostered by assumptions that are accepted as trivially or evidently
true, and therefore thought of as not requiring extra scrutiny” (N. Rao 1994, 4). Narahari Rao
points out that the usual metaphor of “excavation” used to refer to the task of scrutinising
intellectual habits can be misleading. Fleshing out the habitual core-assumptions must not be
seen as discovering a framework out there (as the term “excavation” might imply) but as
involving the active task “of constructing a model that can circumscribe a possible mode of
thinking – or in Ryle’s terms, a category underlying a field of discourse” (4-5).
2.1 German Romanticism and the Ideal of Bildung

The Humboldtian ideal of the university emerged in a climate of intellectual ideas that developed between 1760-1830 Prussia. While there are different labels such as Aufklärung, Sturm und Drang, German Romanticism, German idealism and Klassik which are used to understand the various strands of the period, these are latter-day classifications in order to aid understanding of this historical epoch. Irrespective of these divisions, the thinkers of this period shared some concerns and developed certain common lines of thinking in a systematic way. The period and the lines of thinking fostered therein can be designated as “German Romanticism,” using this term more inclusively to encompass German Enlightenment as well (which is often taken to precede Romanticism proper).

One of the scholars who counter-poses German Romanticism to Enlightenment is Isaiah Berlin. Observing that the period between 1760s-1830s transformed the Western culture in profound ways, Berlin notes: “The importance of romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and thought of the Western world. It seems to me to be the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred and all other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century appear to me in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it” (Berlin 1999, 1–2). Dismissing tendencies in scholarship that see Romanticism as a permanent human attitude which can be found in any point in history and in any part of the world, Berlin emphasizes the specificity of the transformation to Europe. It occurred, according to Berlin, mostly in Germany, in the “second third” of late eighteenth century, though we can find these common ways of thinking in English and French Romantics too.46 What is the nature of the transformation that Berlin talks about? He argues that Romanticism brought about a sharp

46 While Berlin emphasizes the revolutionary aspect of German Romanticism in particular, see Abrams (1971; 1953) for common structures of thought and experience that run through the German and English Romantics.
change in outlook amongst European intellectuals, involving an emphasis on the role of
*convictions* to *persons*: in place of contents the stress shifted on to *how* one holds beliefs [the
*belief in belief*],\(^47\) focusing more on the accompanying motives, intentions and sincerity of
feelings rather than on the effects and consequences of beliefs:

The values to which they [Romantics] attached the highest importance were such values as integrity,
sincerity, readiness to sacrifice one’s life to some inner light, dedication to some ideal for which it is
worth suffering all that one is, for which it is worth both living and dying. You would have found they
were not primarily interested in knowledge or in the advance of Science, not interested in political
power, nor interested in happiness, not interested, above all, in adjustment to life, in finding your place
in society, in living at peace with your government, even in loyalty to your king or to your
republic...You would have found that they believed in the necessity of fighting for your beliefs to the
last breath in your body, and you would have found that they believed in the value of martyrdom as
such, no matter what the martyrdom was...The very notion of idealism, not in its philosophical sense
but in the ordinary sense in which we use it, that is to say the state of mind of a man who is prepared to
sacrifice a great deal for principles or for some conviction, who is not prepared to sell out, who is to
prepared to go to the stake for something which he believes because he believes in it – this attitude was
relatively new. What people admired was wholeheartedness, sincerity, purity of soul, the ability and
readiness to dedicate yourself to your ideal, no matter what it was. (Berlin 1999, 8-9)

To bring out the novelty of this emphasis on dedication to belief, Berlin contrasts it with the
sixteenth century Catholic who, in the wake of the great religious war that raged in Europe
during the period, would have simply been puzzled if one said that the Protestants, of course,
believe in falsehood but they believe in it sincerely and are willing to die for it and therefore

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\(^47\) What united the Enlightenment thinkers and the German Romantics despite all differences was the emphasis
on “belief in belief.” While the Enlightenment thinkers’ emphasis on belief was for the sake of certainty, the
German Romantics emphasized sincerity, integrity and living up to one’s belief. Stephen Toulmin traces the
emergence of the extraordinary emphasis on belief or what he calls “belief in belief” to Cartesian rationalism
and argues that the quest for certainty was a reaction to the thirty years religious war in early seventeenth
century which ravaged Europe. The war over doctrines led to an urgent and intense need for deciding which
theological or scientific doctrines were correct: “…the dissatisfaction with skepticism, which led people, in turn,
to an unwillingness to suspend the search for provable doctrines, an active distrust of disbelievers, and finally
to “belief in belief” itself” (Toulmin 1990, 55). He contrasts this new attitude with that of sixteenth century
humanists who were characterized by “an urbane open-mindedness and skeptical tolerance” and whose “ways of
thinking were not subject to the demands of pastoral or ecclesiastical duty” (25).
deserve our appreciation and respect. Such a view would have been unintelligible to them. To give up one’s life for a false belief was indicative of them being dangerous and the more sincerely they believed in it, the more dangerous they were.

One must be wary of construing this focus on how in contrast to what of belief as “anti-rational.” Romantics (in the narrow sense of the term in contrast to my use), recent scholarship has argued, are as much committed to reason as Enlightenment thinkers. They, in fact, even extend it to domains of faith, religion, politics and morality even while emphasizing sensibility, sincerity of feelings and aesthetics in reaction to the rationalism of Enlightenment. Some scholars contend that their attitude is “hyper-rational” rather than “anti-rational” (Beiser 2003). They also share with the thinkers of Enlightenment their commitment to criticism and systematicity. Contemporary scholarship has also revised the earlier opinion that Romanticism is mainly an aesthetic and literary movement by pointing out its commitment to Science (as a means of Bildung), and its subordination of aesthetics to ethical and political ends (Beiser 2003, 1987; Frank 2004; Nassar 2014). For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, we will not emphasize the opposition of Enlightenment to “counter-enlightenment,” using the distinctions only as and when necessary. We will instead consider the last part of eighteenth as well the early 19th century broadly under the rubric of Romanticism.

*Bildung as the Highest Good*

One of the central questions that the debates of the period hinged upon was: what forms the highest good for human beings? Thinkers from early Romantics onwards, Beiser notes, identify Bildung or education as the highest good:

“The highest good, and the source of everything useful,” Friedrich Schlegel wrote in his Ideen, “is Bildung.” In his Blütenstaub Novalis put forward a similar view: “We are on a mission: we have been
called upon for the education (Bildung) of the earth.” Along the same lines, Hölderlin told his brother that the goal most dear to himself was “Bildung, Besserung des Menschengeschlechts.” In their common journal, the Athenäum, the romantics saw one overriding goal behind all their contributions: Bildung. (Beiser 2003, 26)

Bildung was “a mainstay” not merely for the early Romantic writers, but for the whole of German tradition: “it appears in Hamann and Herder;...it is found in Wolff, Mendelssohn, and Baumgarten;...and its champions include Wieland, Schiller, Goethe, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Winckelmann. Though these thinkers gave differing, sometimes even opposing, accounts of this ideal, they all affirmed, in one form or another, an ethics of perfection and self-realization” (28).

The centrality of the concept of Bildung for intellectual history has been emphasized by several other scholars as well. Gadamer, as early as in the 1960s, refers to Bildung as “perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century” and observes that “it is this concept which is the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences of the nineteenth century, even if they are unable to offer any epistemological justification for it” (Gadamer 2004, 8). He notes that Hegel saw that Philosophy and the human sciences (Geistwissenschaften or moral sciences) has “in Bildung, the condition for its existence” (11).

However, it is one thing to note the significance of the concept for late eighteenth century debates on education but quite another to describe the content of the concept precisely.48 Variously translated as self-cultivation, culture, education, self-education, self-formation, self-development, and higher education, it has been recently characterized by John McDowell

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as the “second nature” that education initiates one into.\textsuperscript{49} The concept carries echoes of the Arnoldian sense of culture as ‘cultivation’ that came under criticism in the 1980s for its European bias as well as for its links with the values of the middle-class elite. As against the latter charge, however, Koselleck asserts that it is important to analytically separate the compound concept of Bildungsburgertum which arose only retrospectively in the 1920s, and that there is enough evidence to prove that bearers of Bildung\textsuperscript{50} included the nobility and the non-bourgeois and not merely the bourgeois (burgertum) strata. Our focus, therefore, is not the social niche but the educational ideal. For this the ideal point to start is the neo-humanist educational theory of Humboldt, an early proponent of German liberalism\textsuperscript{51} whose educational proposal was behind the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1810. One of the formative influences on Humboldt’s educational theory was Shaftesbury’s idea of self–formation and “inward form” which was made accessible through the first German translation of the latter’s Characteristics in 1738.\textsuperscript{52} In its turn, Humboldt’s educational philosophy had resonances in England, especially in John Stuart Mill who acknowledges that Humboldt’s conception of self-cultivation or Bildung was one of the primary influences on his conception of the individual while writing his famous work On Liberty (Valls 1999). These cross-

\textsuperscript{49} John McDowell (1998) sees Bildung as a central process through which innate potentialities in human beings are transformed into second nature, into habits of thought and action. It is through this that one acquires conceptual capacities, thereby becoming responsible to “space of reasons.”

\textsuperscript{50} “Free self-formation for all” was the slogan of the times (Koselleck 2002, 181).

\textsuperscript{51} Raymond Geuss points out that Humboldt’s The Limits of State Action as one of the most influential (yet most neglected) texts on the history of liberalism (Geuss 2001, 71). This is despite the fact that there was no liberalism as a political movement and no concept of liberalism when Humboldt wrote his work. However, Geuss points out that this anachronism is useful to capture the early moments of liberalism. Of course, the antecedents of liberal education predate liberalism. Yet the theoretical presupposition that the essence of human nature is freedom enters the idea of liberal education only at this historical point.

\textsuperscript{52} Some of Humboldt’s ideas are pre-figured in Adam Smith whose idea of education as public good does not derive from the argument that education should be for national prosperity, economic self-interest or for increasing economic productivity, as is commonly thought today. He instead makes an argument for why education is the “only effective remedy” for the ills of a modern commercial society and is essential for introducing one to a “variety of situations” and to help hone one’s intellectual activities. It is essential to counter the “mutilation” and “deformation” caused due to uniform, repetitive tasks introduced by industrial revolution through education as self-formation (Rothschild 1998).
references are indicative of a rapid flow of ideas between England and Germany and the centrality of self-formation and “inward form” in the emergent thought of the time.

Derived from its German verb-form, ‘bilden,’ the core of this aesthetic-educational ideal is the notion of sculpting analogous to creating a sculpture from a material at hand. The analogy, however, can only be properly understood if we set it within the context of the conceptual repertoire made available to the Romantics by their antecedent intellectual tradition. Both the question of the highest good and the terms in which it was answered are Aristotelian in origin, but mediated through Christian theology.

Aristotle played an important role in European “medieval” universities and continued to be highly influential in late eighteenth century Germany. In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle (2000) formulates the question of what it is to lead a good life and lays down two conditions for the highest good that one can strive for. The highest good is the one we choose for its own sake and not because it leads to something else. Secondly, it is an ultimate good. All our other actions are subordinate to realizing this good. Thus, we aim at health, wealth and other goods for the sake of this final good. Aristotle designated this highest good as eudaimonia or happiness.

In elucidating eudaimonia and the best ways of attaining it, Aristotle enunciates a concept pair, potentiality and actuality. In finding the best use of something, one has to figure out where the arête or virtue (best translated as excellence) of that thing lies. The virtue of a thing is the purpose for which it exists. The virtue of a good knife, for example, is to cut sharply and well. The virtue of a good horse is to run fast. Similarly, the virtue of man, is in exercising that feature which he alone possesses. These features exist either in a state of disposition, potentia (potentiality), or in a state of active process, actus (activity, fulfilment). A potential by its very presence is both an urge to realise in action and defines the end of that
action – the ‘end’ being used in a double sense, both as ‘purpose’ and ‘denouement’ of that action. That is, the exercise of the distinctive capacity is understood as the actualization of the potential where the form both initiates and represents the end product. Aristotle classifies the soul/psyche into vegetative, sensible and rational (intellect), and identifies the last, i.e. intellect/reason, as the capacity singling out humans from other animals. Hence the life of excellence for man (his arête) is the one led by exercising reason, the capacity to discern and contemplate the order underlying the world.

We find this notion of actualizing the potential of ‘reason’ still resonating in Romantics, but we also find a marked shift: If in Aristotle reason is the capacity to contemplate on the underlying order of nature, for Romantics reason is the ability to set ends and be self-defining. Thus, conceptually freedom supplants Aristotle’s eudaimonia: the end strived for is moral and intellectual autonomy, i.e. imparting purpose to one’s life by following the law one gives oneself and realizing one’s true self.\textsuperscript{53} Secondly, in Aristotle, virtues actualized are ideals immanent in human nature, i.e. they are available as exemplars within the culture made possible by the parameters of nature. In contrast, the ideal for the Romantic Bildung appears to be modelled on God who is perfect and transcends the world. Even when God goes out of the picture, the idea of a normative ideal that goads us from beyond and against nature remains.

This shift, as we shall see, occurs due to a mediation of Aristotle through Christian theology. The Biblical doctrine that man is created in the image of God is interpreted by the medieval Christian philosophers by equating the Aristotelian idea of form or potential specific to man with the Image of God (Imago Dei) supposedly imprinted in him while being created. In this transition, the theological origins of Bildung played a significant role.

\textsuperscript{53} Taylor characterizes this as the feature of what he calls the “modern subject”: “The modern subject is self-defining unlike previously where the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order” (Taylor 1979, 17). Also see Taylor (1989).
Theological Sources of Bildung

Many authors (Koselleck 2002; Gadamer 2004; Dumont 1994) call attention to the theological underpinnings of Bildung. The tracking of the journey of the concept indicates that the word has its origins in fourteenth century medieval mysticism and was conceived primarily in terms of theology where one’s self-perfection was directed towards the image of God:

From Bild, “picture,” and Bilden, “to represent or form,” the idea of form has always been essential to the word. Bildung had meant “form” or “formation” in a religious sense since the mystics of the late Middle Ages. The two moments of this “formation” were the opening to the divine grace, followed by its action on the worshipper, whose one and only model, Vorbild, Jesus Christ. We note that pietism strongly stresses subjectivity, although essentially in order to destroy it (Entselbstung).” (Dumont 1994, 82)

From the Biblical doctrine that man has God’s image imprinted within him, the thirteenth and fourteenth century medieval mysticism derived a command for action: one ought to mould oneself into God’s image or Bild (type) by imitating the divine Urbild (archetype). Human soul reflected the work and will of God. In return, a true Christian would strive to achieve the likeness to God’s image through piety, faith and obedience to God’s laws (Gary 2008). German mystics like Meister Eckhart provide an example: he believed that the Universal Spirit that emerged from the creator and was present in every being became impure through its contact with bodily matter and thus had to be purified before it could merge with the creator. The process itself was described “as an "odyssey," during which an individual must "sculpt away impurities" until the soul becomes a "work of art" or virtuous by attaining self-recognition (gnothi seauton). Referring to this sculpting metaphor, the mystics called such introspection bilden” (Cocalis 1978, 400).
The form of cultivation would involve a set of spiritual practices - meditations, abstinence, renunciations and introspection. These were certain “techniques of the self” that were practiced in medieval monasteries with the aim of purifying and perfecting the soul in order to attain salvation (Asad 1993; Foucault 1999). Foucault identifies two principles as crucial to this spiritual practice: absolute obedience to the master of the monastic community and contemplation of God. Complete obedience to the master meant that the subject could not perform any action without the permission of the master who was considered the representative of Christ. Anything the monk does without the permission of the master is equivalent to stealing and at no point can the monk be autonomous. Through complete obedience, the monk would sacrifice his will. Contemplation on the other hand did not deal with actions as much with thoughts. Unlike in the Greek classical culture where self-examination involved reflection on action, early Christian spiritual practices involved the self-examination of an area anterior to actions, will or even desires. One scrutinized one’s conscience to determine the nature and quality of one’s thoughts. One introspected oneself to discriminate between thoughts which led towards God and those that did not (considered to be implanted by the Satan), involving a confession of various temptations and desires which led one astray. It was through verbalization and confession that one sorted out one’s thought for to bring the “evil thought” out to light was to drive it away (Foucault 1999). The practice thus involved an extraordinary obligation on one’s part to “know who he is, what is happening in him,” by speaking truthfully about it:

54 See Foucault (1999; 2005) for bringing out the difference between the two forms of examination of oneself – the Hellenistic and the early Christian. Foucault points out that in the pagan culture, there is no great emphasis on examining one’s conscience and telling the truth about oneself as it was in Christian spiritual practices. Instead the emphasis is on reflection on action, rules and conduct in order to achieve self-mastery in various situations. Thus, the role of the master is to provide these rules of conduct which will allow one to conduct oneself in all situations without losing a mastery over oneself and without losing tranquility. The verbalization (arming the disciple with various techniques and rules) here was on part of the master and not the disciple (Foucault 1999, 164).
As everybody knows, Christianity is a confession. That means that Christianity belongs to a very special type of religion, the religions which impose on those who practice them obligation of truth. Such obligations in Christianity are numerous; for instance, a Christian has the obligation to hold as true a set of propositions which constitutes a dogma; or, he has the obligation to hold certain books as a permanent source of truth; or, he has the obligation to accept the decisions of certain authorities in matters of truth.

But Christianity requires another form of truth obligation quite different from those I just mentioned. Everyone, every Christian, has the duty to know who he is, what is happening in him. He has to know the faults he may have committed; he has to know the temptations to which he is exposed. And, moreover, everyone in Christianity is obliged to say these things to other people, to tell these things to other people, and hence, to bear witness against himself. (Foucault 1999, 169-70)

By disclosing these impurities to God or the larger monastic community and bearing witness against oneself, one purified one’s soul, a necessary condition for access to truth or God. It was through this verbalization and continuous disclosure of the self, Foucault points out, one moved towards the renunciation of one’s own self. In these practices, the truth about oneself and the sacrifice of oneself were closely related: “We have to sacrifice the self in order to discover the truth about ourself, and we have to discover the truth about oneself in order to sacrifice ourself” (179).

It is Martin Luther who during the period of reformation linked this notion to a larger educational process. Claiming for the individual the liberty to interpret the Bible on one’s own without the mediation of priests, Luther called for the establishment of schools outside the Catholic Church for a form of self-cultivation to enable individuals to realize that liberty (Gary 2008). Thus, the form of self-cultivation with a focus on one’s inner life which was restricted to monastic orders and Christian mystics gets laicized and extends to become obligatory for all individuals. While monastic life itself came to be delegitimized through the Reformation, ascetic norms and its basic structures would expand to include the “priesthood
of all believers” who would now be responsible for their own salvation through their direct, personal relationship to God.\footnote{See Claerhout (2010), particularly Chapter VII “The Protestant Reformers and the Corruption of Religion” for an account of how the structures of conversio or the process of spiritual conversion restricted to monasteries came to include the laity through the Protestant Reformation. Protestant Reformation criticized medieval Christianity and nominal Christians (not “true” Christians) who did not submit their will to the Creator and lead lives of faith. Instead, they were misguided by the priests and their ceremonies. Thus, the criticism of Catholicism expanded the structure of conversio, leading to the monasticisation of everyday life by turning all believers into priests.}{55}

It was through Pietism,\footnote{Pietism, a significant revival movement within German Protestantism was initiated in the late seventeenth century as a purer form of Lutheranism. Every individual could now establish direct personal connection with God by turning inward. It defended the individual, his convictions and freely chosen beliefs and was highly influential in late eighteenth century literary and philosophical movements. Almost all the leading thinkers of the time – Kant, Herder, Hamann, Hegel - were pietists by upbringing and even their secularized thoughts bears its imprint. On this point, see Taylor (1975); Shantz (2013).}{56} a movement within German Protestantism, that Luther continued to exert an extraordinary influence on the literary and philosophical movement at the end of the eighteenth century:

It is impossible not to see a descendant of Luther in the Bildung intellectual. Not necessarily a follower—he may even be an atheist—but a descendant...Actually it is only in Luther that we can understand this dichotomy, which would appear incomprehensible if we looked at it, for example, from a medieval viewpoint...He reintroduced a gap—we might say a chasm—between the Christian's relation to God on the one hand, and to the world of social reality and of relationships between men on the other. Faith, and grace, that is, the relationship with God, are of the essence. Once this relationship is assured, it expresses itself quite naturally though secondarily in the form of love for one's fellows, and gives value to the Christian's works. The subordination of the world and the State to inner life is strongly stressed in Luther, quite explicitly and still more so perhaps implicitly from the fact that he suppressed the extraordinary power of reconciliation of the great mediator between the two, the Church. (Dumont 1994, 45)

Luther had reintroduced the Augustinian doctrine of two kingdoms which became highly influential: the outer world administrable by the State and the world of “inner man” cultivable by the individual on his own. Though man is subject to coercive human laws in the outer temporal world, in the inner spiritual sphere he is free to perfect himself and to realize the
divine in him that was imprinted by God. No human law can interfere in this realm. The idea of the subordination of social life to the inner life of one’s relationship to God is normative, and thereby constitutes an obligation and bindingness to act in a particular way.57

Pietism, with an emphasis on spiritual inner life of the individual, tried to realize the ideals of reformation even more purely. It opposed orthodox Lutheranism’s emphasis on true beliefs and established institutional structures, but at the same time emphasized the ‘techniques of self-disciplining.’ The legacy of Mystics like Meister Eckhart and the monastic practices mentioned earlier, the process of active self-fashioning that the copy is engaged in order to approach the archetype, becomes in the hands of Pietist thinkers of the late eighteenth century like Herder, the “rising up to humanity through culture” (Gadamer 2004, 9). The concept Bildung thus gets divested of its explicit theological content and emerges as a rallying point around which the idea of education and self-formation are now debated.

In this process of secularization of Christianity, we observe a crucial shift. In Christian mysticism, Bildung or ‘formation’ implied complete obedience, a sacrifice of one’s self and the surrender of one’s will to the will of God. However, now it gets understood in reverse: as cultivating the ability for self-determination, for setting one’s own ends to realize one’s unique personality. In short, cultivating one’s own will like that of God’s replaces the idea of surrendering to God’s will. The inner, spiritual world now becomes one where one is free to create oneself, realize one’s will and true personality. Pietists emphasized the sanctity of the unique individual as also the need for education to make that ideal actual. Bildung now

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57 Heidegger holds that the word ‘Bildung’ comes closest to capturing the Greek paideia and elaborates it as a kind of shaping one’s inner life “guided by a paradigm”: “Bildung ("formation") means two things. On the one hand formation means forming people in the sense of impressing on them a character that unfolds. But at the same time this "forming" of people "forms" (or impresses a character on) people by antecedently taking measure in terms of some paradigmatic image, which for that reason is called the proto-type [Vor-bild]. Thus at one and the same time "formation" means impressing a character on people and guiding people by a paradigm.” The contrary of formation is lack of formation, “where no fundamental bearing is awakened and unfolded, and where no normative proto-type is put forth” (Heidegger 1998, 166-67).
becomes an ideal of self-cultivation through the study of works transmitted from the past. Some of the religious associations of ‘cultivation’ did continue, in fact even proved decisive in the manner of reception and use in fostering the culture of the “inward man,” fuelling the idea of scholarship as forming the moral man:

If Herder, someone who helped the humanistic concept of Bildung achieve its breakthrough in its historico-philosophical and cosmological dimension, could still write, “Every man has an image (ein Bild) of himself, of what he shall be and become; as long as he is not yet that, in his bones he is still unsatisfied,” then the religious definition of religion clearly and audibly rings through. Even in the young Humboldt, who resolutely liberated himself from every foreign, authoritarian definition of religion in order to advocate spiritual and moral determination, did not escape a Christian-Neoplatonic stereotype: “For all Bildung has its origins in the interior of the soul alone, and can be induced by outer events, never produced.” The moral man forms himself (bildet sich) “in the image (im Bilde) of divinity through the intuition of the highest idealistic perfection.” (Koselleck 2002, 177)

The secularization of the concept of Bildung by the 18th century thinkers now seems merely the further “rationalization” of the theological concept they inherited. Secularization does not involve a hostile break from Christian ideals as is assumed but is a reformulation of religious ideals such that they could be realized in this world. The concept which earlier had its meaning within a framework of salvation is divested of its overt theological content, but retains its formal structure. From a notion of sculpting oneself in a God-given circumstance, it gets linked to the notion of bringing out the dormant human potential. This with a twist, of course: that dormant potential to be brought to light is the autonomous will. The technique of disclosure which was earlier related to the renunciation of the self now gets linked to the constitution of a new, expressive self. The shift is best captured by Foucault:

Throughout Christianity there is a correlation between disclosure of the self, dramatic or verbalized, and the renunciation of self. My hypothesis, from looking at these two techniques, is that it is the second one, verbalization, that becomes the more important. From the eighteenth century to the
present, the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break. (Foucault 2000a, 249)

How is the concept used as a device\(^5\) to express the intellectual and pedagogic articulations of self-formation in the late eighteenth century? Understanding this process will tell us why the modern research university as an institution was thought about in a particular light in this period and took the shape it did. In the next section, I explore the relation between Bildung and the idea of self-formation that was developed by focussing on the thinkers of the period – Kant, Humboldt and Hegel among others – who actively fleshed out a distinct concept of education as part of the process of secularization.

### 2.2 The Theory of Self-formation underlying Bildung

Far from being in conflict, the study of biblical revelations (natural theology) and the pursuit of scientific knowledge of nature (natural philosophy) were seen in medieval Europe as united efforts to seek God’s ways (E. Grant 2001; Ferngren 2002; Harrison 1990). Studying the Book of God (the Bible) and the Book of Nature (nature being conceived in analogy to a text) were two ways to know God’s truth. In this conception, doing natural philosophy is an attempt to decipher the plan of the Supreme Architect. The view of inquiry entailed by this is summed up by Isaiah Berlin in three propositions: all real questions can be answered and if they cannot be answered, then they are no questions at all. The answers are knowable and teachable. And lastly, none of the answers would be incompatible: if we state all the answers in the form of propositions, then no proposition would contradict any other (Berlin 1999, 27).

\(^5\) I take this from Quentin Skinner (1978) who points out that seeing concepts as device enables us to ask what people at a particular historical juncture are doing when they use a concept rather than see it as merely referring to a particular thing passively.
With the advent of Reformation and the subsequent religious wars, interpretation of biblical revelations became a highly fraught domain. Reason came to be relied upon more than the Revelation as a way to determine which of the doctrines were true. This was compounded further by the achievements of Newton which showed the way to certainty to be deductive and inductive reasoning. The search in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was to extend such methods to the domain of politics, morals and aesthetics as well. Though the assumption of a perfect God bringing about the world remained, He came to be increasingly cast in the role of a Supreme Designer of a functioning mechanism analogous to that in mechanical clocks. Thus in viewing nature ‘meaning’ gets displaced by ‘mechanisms’ and investigation becomes a task of discerning mechanisms in place of interpreting texts (Taylor 1975). This “moment” has been described as “disenchantment” caused by the exile of God, the source of value, leaving “the world configured in one’s conception as merely brute, subject to nothing but causal laws, bereft of value, reducing value to either utility or to subjective psychological disposition” (Bilgrami 2009).

The emergence of the universe as a separate domain, intelligible in itself where occurrences could be explained causally, leads to a conceptual separation of the object-in-itself (the thing-in-itself or the true nature of the object as it really is) from the object-for-consciousness (the object as it appears to us given our categorial determinations). Consequently, the purpose of studying nature becomes the extraneous material utility it may provide rather than the intrinsic value of deciphering the ways of God it embodies. Thus we find the French Enlightenment extolling the use of science for social and material advancement through

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59 Israel notes that till about 1650, Western civilization was united by common faith and most disputes about God and the world revolved around which confessional bloc possessed truth and therefore the God-given authority till philosophical reason and scientific revolution challenged it all. See Israel (2001) for an account of the radical enlightenment. The high enlightenment after 1750, according to Israel, is merely a consolidation of this earlier phase. Other scholars note that Israel’s emphasis on the theological uproar caused by the radical enlightenment disguises the religious indebtedness of many of the Enlightenment thinkers and that the phase was only a continuation of the rational Reformation. See, for instance, Bunge (2012), Louden (2007). Also see Shapin (1996) for the roots of the “scientific revolution.” He shows that science was envisaged as the true handmaiden of religion and the two were not seen to be opposed to each other.
social action. This outlook went under the name of Enlightenment Philanthropism and underlay Napoleonic reforms in education (Collins and Taylor 2006).

As against this, Pietism does retain an important element of the legacy from the medieval university which focussed on studying the “Book of Nature” to know God, but now with a conceptual renewal: In place of scholarship as ‘seeking knowledge of God’ there appears the notion of it as striving towards perfection, towards the unfurling of the potential dormant in the very nature of a human being. Thus arises the notion of engaging in Science for the sake of formation or as Science as an end in itself. This was further strengthened by the biological conception of man as a species-being who perfects himself towards a final species end, thereby realizing one’s essence. Man then developed both as a species and an individual. The development of one’s capacities to emerge as autonomous and the unfolding of it was a process which took place in history.

However, this perfection could not be realized in one’s lifetime. One developed one’s capacities as a species being within one’s historical circumstances and perfected oneself to the extent possible, with every generation passing on its learning to the next. While different thinkers provided different emphasis on what were the capacities or potentialities to be developed, the idea of history as the unfolding of human essence remained central to the idea of Bildung. Bildung became the development of already given capacities to be realized in history, with the theory of education firmly placed within the philosophy of history.

German Romanticism and the debate on Bildung then is a solution to the problem of alienation between man and nature, the gulf between the subject and object. Bildung or education is envisaged as an attempt to restore the unity of the (Western) man with the world. It is a solution to the problem in which the subject finds itself standing against an objectified world; to see, as Taylor puts it, “objectivity as an expression of subjectivity or in interchange
with it” (1975, 29). Taylor, extending Berlin, captures this as expressivism, a theory of the self which has remained one of the most influential ideas ever since. It remains our implicit anthropology of what it means to be human: To be human then is to express our subjectivity and actualize inner freedom through our actions.

Within this debate on self-formation, we can distinguish three different strands: The one represented by Immanuel Kant emphasized the cognitive process and envisaged the end of Bildung to be the emergence of the autonomous moral man who rationally wills the moral law in order to guide his actions. The second, represented by J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder, Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt, viewed man more explicitly as an expressive being who must be seen as a harmonious unity like a work of art. They stressed the role of faith, language, art, traditions and sensibility in the process of Bildung. The third, represented by G. W. F. Hegel, conceives education of humanity as a process of evolution from natural consciousness of everyday dealings with nature to a form of consciousness involving a conceptual understanding of the object. Hegel characterises this transition from looking at nature for its utility to knowledge of nature for its own sake as a transition from apprehending the immediacy of nature in everyday dealings to an attitude of distance and detachment towards nature, resulting in a conceptual understanding. Let us examine these strands more closely in order to see how formation is thought about in each of these strands.

**Kant: Moral Autonomy as the Final End of Human Species**

Kant was among the first to develop a notion of subjectivity in sharp opposition to nature by making claims of man’s autonomy. The emergence of nature as mechanistic had meant that human beings themselves too, as part of nature, would be subject to its causal laws. This

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60 Before Kant, Descartes had established the subject as the founder of practices of knowledge. While Descartes cuts off the ethical moorings of the subject who is constituted through practices, Kant reintroduces the ethical subject in the form of the idea of constituting oneself as a universal subject who wills and conforms to universal laws (See Foucault 2000b, 279–80).
would mean that man is determined by factors outside himself left with no power to choose the right and wrong action and was hence unfree. Kant challenged this view by placing an enormous importance on free-will. Man, Kant observed in his famous *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, constantly chooses between actions which flow from his desires, inclinations on the one hand and actions which result from his notion of morality and duty on the other. This presupposes the fact that man can choose and that he possesses free will.\(^1\)

This distinguished man from the rest in nature, whether animal, plant or inanimate thing. Kant thus proposes a “two standpoints view” of man:

... in respect to mere perception and receptivity to sensations he must count himself as belonging to the world of sense; but in respect to that which may be pure activity in himself...he must reckon himself as belonging to the intellectual world...On account of this, a rational being has to regard itself as an intelligence (thus not from the side of its lower powers), as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding; hence it has two standpoints, from which it can consider itself and cognize the laws for the use of its powers, consequently all its actions: first, insofar as it belongs to the world of sense, under natural laws (heteronomy), and second, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which are independent of nature, not empirical, but rather grounded merely in reason. (Kant [1785] 2002, 68-69)

The “two standpoints” view makes it possible to grasp man both as a part of nature and as free from subjection to the laws of nature. From the theoretical standpoint of the observer or a scientist, man is determined: he belongs to the world of appearances or *phenomenon*, the *sensible world*, where he is subject to causal laws like all other things of nature. But from a

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\(^1\) Kant would say that “we cannot prove this freedom as something actual, not even in ourselves, nor in human nature; we saw only that we have to presuppose it if we would think of a being as rational and as endowed with consciousness of its causality in regard to actions, i.e., with a will; thus we find that from precisely the same ground we have to attribute to every being endowed with reason and will this quality, to determine itself to action under the idea of its freedom” (Kant 2002, 65). Freedom in short must be presupposed as the quality of the will of all rational beings. The relation between divine will and human will has a long history in the West and was central to the theological disputes during reformation. Thus, when Kant presupposes free-will, he is drawing from preceding disputes but collapses it with the “natural” property of man. See Gillespie (2008), Pink (2004), Schrift (2005) for the free-will debate. For an interesting account of how we do not find the concept of free-will in Aristotle, see Frede (2011).
practical standpoint of a deliberator or as a moral agent, he belongs to the intelligible world (the world of ideas or noumenon). Here, he is free to act and has to choose in terms of regulative ideas. Thus our freedom lies in being able to commit ourselves to values and ends (laws) whose sources are internal and set by ourselves. Only then are our actions our own. Of course, we can act ‘autonomously’ (auto – self, nomos – laws) where the sources of laws regulating our conduct are given by ourselves, or, ‘heteronomously,’ continuing to subject ourselves to forces outside us, whether of natural impulses, the laws of autocratic rulers or the rules of inherited traditions and customs.

Such a view also entails a radical re-conception of man’s relation to nature. If till Kant nature was thought of as something that is a source of healing and harmony (Berlin 1999), now nature gets associated with all that results in heteronomy, i.e. slavery to one’s emotions and senses, to instincts, to one’s body, to one’s customs and traditions. It is by transcending the limits set by nature, by committing ourselves to values/ends that we set ourselves by choice that we become really human. Only then have we freed ourselves from a state of nature to culture. Thus, we see that with Kant, freedom is in the commitment to value set by oneself.

Kant does not view this latter mode of life as subjective but as a movement towards objectivity. How do we make sense of this specific notion of moral objectivity? We have seen

62 In one of his early essays, Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective ([1784]2006), Kant puts forward the idea of species-end and the march of universal history as one towards morality. Kant distinguishes the use of reason which he sees as leading to morality from reason involved in the cultivation of arts and science on the one hand and from the everyday reasoning constitutive of social life on the other. While cultivation of civilizational refinements can proceed with an incipient morality, what constitutes a fully cultured life is the one which involves willing the moral law: “We are cultivated to a great extent by the arts and the sciences. And we are civilized to a troublesome degree in all forms of social courteousness and decency. But to consider ourselves to be already fully moralized is quite premature. For the idea of morality is part of culture” (Kant 2006, 12). Reason therefore for Kant is a capacity not identifiable with the reasonableness of individual human beings. Reason is rather the ability to rise above natural instincts, such as interests and desires. In other words, while we largely use our skills and knowledge to manipulate the material world in order to satisfy human needs and desires, one does not emerge as a moral agent till one goes beyond the desire to realize the rules of reasons itself. Thus, autonomy is moral self-legislation which enables individuals to go beyond their immediate, egotistical interests for purposes of an ordered life. The just state, by creating stability through coercive mechanisms and its legal sanctions, would ensure that each person can pursue his interests and desires without harming the others. The creation of the just state itself is part of the larger movement towards morality.
that for Kant, an action is moral only when he chooses to act on the basis of Duty rather than on desires and instinct. In this reason’s role was supreme. Through principled reasoning, we would determine the categorical imperative, the supreme principle of morality: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Kant 2002, 37). It is reason that would give us the universal law such that we will the law which every other rational person would, if placed in a similar situation. Conscience would impose an element of “ought to” or a certain “normativity.” One would experience a bindingness and unconditional moral obligation to act in obedience to the law. As the inner court of the categorical imperative (the law), conscience would evaluate whether one has acted in accordance with law or in violation of it, thereby praising or punishing one.

Thus, in his “What is Enlightenment” (Kant [1784]1996a) Kant would associate maturity with our capacity to self-determine through reason and emerge as autonomous. A Pietist by upbringing, Kant is Lutheran in spirit – every individual must think for oneself. Defining Enlightenment as “Mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity,” Kant describes immaturity as “an inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of

63 For instance, one ought to tell the truth at all times because it is the right thing to do. For Kant, if we tell the truth so that we can profit from the credibility we will build, that is still acting not according to Duty but for instrumental reasons. The obligation to tell the truth is an imperative that must have the force of a command at all times: “Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to be valid morally, i.e., as the ground of an obligation, has to carry absolute necessity with it; that the command ‘You ought not to lie’ is valid not merely for human beings, as though other rational beings did not have to heed it; and likewise all the other genuinely moral laws” (Kant 2002, 5).

64 The specific question occasioning this essay was raised in 1783 in passing in a footnote in the journal Berlinische Monatsschrift by a theologian and educational reformer Johann Friedrich Zollner, in his response to a proposal by Johann Erich Biester, one of the editors of the journal. Biester had proposed that the clergy should not be brought for executing marriages because it gave the public a false impression that the marriage contract was more sacred to God than other kinds of contracts. Removing the clergy would make the public enlightened by driving home the point that all contracts were equally sacred to God. Against this, Zollner maintained that marriage was indeed a more sacred contract than others and removing the clergy would only result in disorientation and confusion in the minds of the public. Observing that often “under the name of enlightenment the heart and minds of men are bewildered,” Zollner remarked in a footnote: “What is enlightenment? This question...should indeed be answered before one begins enlightening” (Schmidt 1996, 2). He was implying that those who were proposing measures for enlightening the citizenry, including proposing measures such as removing the presence of clergy during wedding ceremonies, would be better advised to first answer the question of what Enlightenment was. This remark triggered many responses and among them are the two famous answers to Zollner’s question, one by Kant and another by Moses Mendelssohn. Enlightenment then, is an extension of reformation, continuing the tension between what people live by and the certainty of scientific truth, of individual autonomy defined against the hold of the clergy on everyday life.
the other,” especially in matters of conscience. If one depends on a book for understanding, or on a priest to act as one’s conscience, or on a doctor to decide one’s diet, then we are in a state of immaturity. The immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not “in the lack of understanding, but in the lack of resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another” (58). Tutelage is not presented as a cognitive deficiency but as “a sort of deficit in the relationship of autonomy to oneself” (Foucault 2010, 33), where “cowardice”, “laziness” and “fear” keep us in that condition of tutelage and at the same time prevent us from coming out of it. In short, it is a certain state of our will, which makes us accept others as authority in areas where we need to use our reason.

How does one exit this condition into that of autonomy? In elaborating an answer, Kant distinguishes between public and private uses of reason. By ‘public use’ Kant means the use of reason one makes in one’s capacity as a universal subject without consideration for particular interests arising from one’s individual situation. Ideally a scholar’s use of reason before his audience and the reading public should provide an example, since for a scholar, knowledge is primary, and in favour of it he is supposed to transcend all his particular, personal interests; he addresses others as rational beings, in their capacity as members of humanity or as citizens of the world. In contrast, the private use of reason is the one which is made while striving to secure particular interests whether it is of an individual, a member of a family or a particular group, a member of a specific profession, or a citizen of a particular State. All these have specific aims that are of no concern to other families, professions or States. Thus, as a clergyman, one is obliged to deliver the sermons as part of a particular church he serves, in keeping with the doctrine that the church upholds. The same person in

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65 In another essay, What is Orientation in Thinking ([1786]1991), Kant suggests that “to think for oneself means to look within oneself (i.e. in one’s own reason) for the supreme touchstone of truth and the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is Enlightenment” (249, footnote; italics in the original).
his capacity as a scholar, however, is free and has an obligation to look critically at those doctrines and institutions.

For Kant the regulative final end of Bildung is radical autonomy. It requires one to cultivate the faculty of reason as a duty to oneself, involving a movement from “passivity” to a morally cultivated spontaneity. In this scheme, rational beings are those who ought to have reasons for their actions and will the right action. One cannot act in the “dark of reason.”

Such a moral action is conceptually tied to the notion of ‘self-mastery’ which would presuppose a divided self where the higher, reflective (noumenal) self masters the lower, empirical (phenomenal) self and shaping the will is to bring these two parts into a particular relationship.

Obviously, the development of such a moral subject is made possible only through the process of education. For, as Kant says in his treatise On Education ([1803]2003), “Animals are by their instincts all that they can be ever be; some other reason has provided everything for them at the outset. But man needs reason of his own. Having no instinct he has to work out a plan of conduct for himself. Since, however, he is not able to do it all at once, but comes into the world underdeveloped, others have to do it for him” (11).

These ‘others’ are institutions meant for education (in the sense of liberal education or Bildung). What should such institutions look like? Obviously their main mandate is to educate the citizenry in the public use of reason mentioned earlier. Institutionally, therefore, those disciplines receive priority that are meant to serve not the particular or sectional

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66 Hence, Robert Pippin, in his inaugural lecture on “Aims of Education” to the incoming class of 2000 at the University of Chicago, remarks that if one does not have reason for one’s action, one’s actions are not one’s own: “Unless you have some idea of why it is better for you to be here [at the university of Chicago] rather than anywhere else or at any other university or whatever, then you did not come here freely. There is an element of alienation or strangeness to you in your presence here. Some crucial part of your life, while it was in fact produced by you, does not truly reflect the “you” that you understand yourself to be and identify with, and so this decision cannot in the deepest sense be yours” (2000; italics in the original).
interests, but rather those whose pursuit is truth itself. In *The Conflict of Faculties* ([1798]1992), Kant therefore argues that the faculty of philosophy (*embodiment a theoretical orientation* comprising the faculties that would today fall under the rubric of the sciences, both natural and human) would be the one to enjoy this privilege of unrestricted use of public reason. The conflict that Kant refers to is one between philosophy\(^67\) (the lower faculty) and faculties of law, medicine and theology (the “higher” ones). While the “higher” faculties promise *utility* by training public servants (lawyers, doctors and priests respectively), and therefore are subject to the command and control of personnel entrusted with these services, philosophy, “which has public presentation of truth as its function,” (55) has to and can remain independent of the social control. According to Kant, philosophy in the sense of theoretical disciplines, by its very distance from State power would possess a higher degree of freedom. Regulated by reason alone, philosophy is concerned with truth which is the result of reason’s free judgement, (involving, says Kant, no imperative “believe!” but only a free “I believe,”) (92). Thus, in an institutional form, the faculty of philosophy, embodying the self-legislating exercise of reason in the service of *Wissenschaft*, is given primacy. Philosophy may not be able to command the other ‘higher’ faculties; nevertheless, it can control them by evaluating and validating their output, thereby helping them to perfect themselves. In today’s terminology, the higher faculties are ‘applied disciplines,’ and in them the tendency to seek short cuts to achieve particular interests is likely to be there always. Therefore, it is inevitable that there would be conflict between the applied disciplines and judgements of theoretically oriented disciplines. Such conflicts, in Kant’s opinion, should not be settled amicably, i.e. by compromise; they call for a *verdict* rather than *settlement*. The conflicts do not cease thereby.

In fact, Kant says, that it is the task of philosophy and the university structure that gives

\(^67\) Philosophy is further divided into *historical sciences*, comprising history, geography, linguistics, and humanities as well as *pure rational sciences* comprising pure mathematics, pure philosophy and metaphysics of nature and morals. Currently we could take philosophy to mean human and natural sciences, all of which are under philosophy at the time Kant is writing. The separation of natural sciences from philosophy happens later. It is clear that Kant actually reverses the relation between higher and lower faculty. See Kant (1992).
primacy to philosophy, to keep them going. If such a role of philosophy is not accepted by the administration entrusted with different disciplines or by the State, then it amounts condemning the very soul or essence of the university to death.

For Kant, faculties administering the applied disciplines are obliged to follow the logic of private reason where one obeys the ends set by others. The university in a real sense needs to be constituted by faculties entrusted with seeking truth rather than training for professions. Accordingly, Bildung is not acquired by training oneself to advance some utility or the other, but rather through cultivating reason capable of, and engaging in, a search for truth. Kant propounds an influential distinction between training and theoretical education (the latter being the main vehicle for Bildung), and the corresponding institutional division between those meant to train for practical professions and those meant for liberal education. He also brings into existence the influential argument demanding that the practical or applied disciplines be founded on theoretical disciplines.

As must be evident by now, Kant does not view his conception as one particular way among others of relating to the domain of practices and actions. Nor for him is it a culturally specific way of ‘enculturing’ “subjects,” where education and learning necessarily take place outside the logic of practices that otherwise one may inhabit. Rather, it is the inevitable way ensuing from the true grasp of human nature: the entire human race has to take this path he has explicated (Biesta 2007, 28). In this conception to make man free is the essential aspect of education. However, ‘freedom’ is not understood here in terms of freedom from earthly existence, or freedom from specific determinations like one’s oppressive status in society but specifically in terms of the exercise of faculty of reason through which we will universal laws and base our actions on them. The emphasis is on independence from tradition and other forms of authority to emerge as moral agents.
2.3 The Expressivists: Moral and Aesthetic Unity as Species End

Kant’s conclusion that Reason is the highest faculty and therefore Bildung or education should consist in the development of this specific human potential met with several objections. In fact, many of the intellectual currents in contemporary scholarship against Enlightenment have their origin not in the twentieth century but in the late eighteenth century debates. The “expressivists” or romantics proper (as they are referred to in scholarship) – Herder, Goethe, Schiller and others – agreed with the Enlightenment thinkers that Bildung or education of humanity was the highest goal. However, they objected to both the Enlightenment’s understanding of reason and the singling out of reason as the only potential worth cultivating. One must however be cautious about construing this criticism as “irrational” or “anti-rational.”

As early as 1784, Hamann, a Lutheran (regarded as the father of Sturm und Drang, an intellectual movement of the 1770s which focussed on sensibility in opposition to the Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason, and subsequently led to the Romantic Movement), had challenged the Kantian presentation of Reason. Hamann did not make an argument against reason,68 instead he challenged Kant’s presentation of it as an autonomous, a-historical faculty that operated in the noumenal, intelligible sphere. The greatest fallacy of Kant, he argued, was the “purification” of reason in order to make it independent of the three elements essential to it - tradition and customs, experience and most importantly, language.69 Reason, Hamann instead asserted, was to be found only in the particular activities of a people, in their traditions and ways of going about the world. Hamann realigns the link between reason and tradition. They were not opposites as Kant had made them out to be; reason instead was

68 I use Reason and reason to differentiate that which Hamann upholds and that which he criticizes. When reason is abstracted as an ahistorical faculty, as it is for Kant, I use Reason.
69 We see that the “linguistic turn” of the last few decades is prefigured in the late eighteenth century itself.
embedded in the traditions of a people. Since language was expressive of ways of seeing and experiencing the world and there was no thought apart from language, it is in language that we must look for the genesis of reason. Therefore, reason exists only in language, he declared, “the only, first, and last organon and criterion of reason, with no credentials but tradition and usage” (Hamann [1784]1996, 155).

If one of Hamann’s objections was against Kant’s presentation of reason as ahistorical, the other was with regards to the limits of reason: What is this faculty we call Reason and within what bounds must it operate? If everything in this universe must subject itself to the criticism of Reason, then should not Reason criticize itself? Hamann’s objection was to Enlightenment’s demand that we subject all our beliefs to scrutiny. Instead, Hamann distinguished between those beliefs for which other beliefs can be cited as evidence and beliefs such as tanginess of the orange for which we cannot cite other beliefs as evidence but necessarily have to turn to experience (Beiser 1987, 28). Faith, which was belief in the existence of God and his plan, for Hamann, was an immediate experience like the tanginess of an orange. Reason, in the way Kant used it, had no jurisdiction over faith because faith was immediate experience, similar to the experience of tasting and sensing. Hamann’s contention is not that faith is contrary to reason and yet we have to hold on to it. His claim is that faith is neither rational nor irrational because reason cannot prove or disprove it. When reason takes upon itself the task of criticizing all beliefs, it crosses its limits and becomes unreason. However, as Beiser insightfully notes, a religious experience is not like the experience of finding the smoothness of silk or tanginess of orange through experience, for a religious belief does not merely describe an action, sensation or experience but already involves explanation or interpretation for one’s experience within God’s plan (29). Thus, Hamann claimed for faith and tradition (which involves belief or inner conviction in God and his plan but which cannot be subject to scrutiny as true or false) the status of another form of
knowledge which was non-discursive and closer to immediate experience. This led him to put forward the theory about the metaphysical significance of art. Art, according to Hamann, was the highest form of knowledge since it could give us knowledge of faith, which Reason could not.

Hamann thus emphasized the importance of art and the creative vision of the artist in providing an insight into nature, faith and God’s workings. The artist, through the non-discursive medium of art captured nature through images which were rich in all its diversity and concreteness. Unlike reason which grasped the world through abstract concepts, our senses and feelings captured all particularity. The artist’s personal feelings and passion, an expression of the hidden true self, was at the same time a revelation of the creative powers of nature, an original insight into the nature of God’s workings. In this way, Beiser notes, Hamann fused an extreme subjectivism with objectivism.

The idea was later developed by the Sturm und Drang and the Romantic Movement, both of which emphasized the centrality of art to Bildung. It would enable Herder, Schiller and others to address the Cartesian separation of nature and man augmented by Kant. They radically reconceptualised nature as a living organism with various forms of life including human being as different degrees of organizations of the same force. It is the same underlying set of forces that runs through nature that reveals itself in the personal vision of the artist. Art (the term often used was Poesie, an aesthetic ideal that would include all forms of artistic activity, shaping all the arts and sciences as well as life itself according to the demands of art) emerges as the highest form of knowledge for the Romantics. Therefore they argued that it is cultivating our senses we must accord priority to.

Charles Taylor, we noted earlier, uses the term “expressivism” to refer to this alternative anthropology put forward by Herder and the Romantic generation. Undergirding the notion of
life as an expression was a view of life as the realization of a purpose or an idea. The idea of self-realization would not just be the fulfilment of a pre-given form or “essence,” but also involve realizing the unique form that each one of us is called to realize.

To talk about the realization of a self here is to say that the adequate human life would not just be a fulfilment of an idea or a plan which is fixed independently of the subject who realizes it, as is the Aristotelian form of a man. Rather this life must have the added dimension that the subject can recognize it as his own, as having unfolded from within him. This self-related dimension is entirely missing from the Aristotelian tradition. In this tradition a proper human life is 'my own' only in the sense that I am a man, and this is thus the life fit for me. It was Herder and the expressivist anthropology developed from him which added the epoch-making demand that my realization of the human essence be my own, and hence launched the idea that each individual (and in Herder's application, each people) has its own way of being human, which it cannot exchange with that of any other except at the cost of distortion and self-mutilation. (Taylor 1975, 15)

As pointed out earlier, in the Aristotelian form of man, the form or the ideal is available within the existing order, through exemplars. There is no one's own “inner form” to realize. However, with the Romantics the “human form” involves an inner force within oneself struggling against an external world to reveal the unique form of life one is called to realize. That this takes on a moral significance is now familiar, with individuals and forms of life being called upon to realize their authenticity, the realization of the form unique to the individual or a set of people by finding one’s true self in the process clarifying who they are. The Kantian pattern of formation, however, is to be found even in these writers. The march towards universal history, like in Kant, followed the movement away from natural, instinctive actions into acts of freedom, morality and autonomy where one chooses between alternatives presented by the moral law. The intervention of a specific form of reflection and choice between man’s instinct and action such that rational action according to moral law itself became as spontaneous as man’s action in the original and undivided condition, is the goal of
education. Art would help acquire this spontaneity, by educating the emotions and senses of man by bringing them in harmony with reason. Thus, in his *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* ([1794]2005), Schiller would envisage the educational journey of the human race through which every individual must also pass before coming into maturity as consisting of three stages – natural, aesthetic and moral. This would be envisaged as a movement from innocent self-unity into disunity only in order to move forward to a higher unity, providing a new wholeness to the character, a pattern we would see in British Romantics as well.

As is obvious by now, the Romantics did not disagree with the species-end as defined by Kant. They were in agreement that species-end was moral autonomy; however they differed on Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason alone as the human potential to be cultivated. Sensibility or the senses, which included desires, perceptions, emotions and feelings, had to be cultivated too and in this, the Romantics continued the tradition of *Sturm und Drang*. It is by educating the senses that one would be prepared for the world of ideas and reason. Enlightenment had dissected man and distorted his human nature: It had separated man from nature, the soul from body, reason from feeling, thought from senses and mind from matter thereby distorting the true nature of man. Instead man had to be seen as a continuous, single stream of life, more like a work of art. Thus, they fused moral autonomy with an aesthetic ideal. *Bildung* or education had to be conceptualized as bringing about unity by addressing the formation of the “whole man” into an integrated and harmonious whole, where feelings

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70 In his landmark study, *Natural Supernaturalism*, Abrams shows how this pattern is present in almost all the Romantic writers. German thinkers, Abrams meticulously shows, were steeped in Biblical literature and their central ideas as well as forms of thinking were secularized versions of traditional theological concepts, ideas and imagery. Through textual analysis of the various Romantic thinkers of the eighteenth century, both British and German, he delineates out how the Biblical model of human history – of man’s fall from a happy unity into increasing division and fragmentation (representing the formation of self-consciousness) as a necessary and indispensable stage back to unity but on a higher plane (of Paradise Lost and Regained) - was adopted by almost all the thinkers of the eighteenth century into various genres including their speculative theories of development of human race and in their theories of the role of art (Abrams 1971).
and sensibility would spontaneously be in accord with reason. The “whole man” would embody an integral unity by fashioning himself like a work of art.

In Kant, Bildung is still defined in terms of cultivating a capacity that inheres in all of us which is to be developed at the species level. Kant identifies this capacity as reason (as a guide to the will) and provides us with the broad contours of this process of self-formation resulting in self-determination. The Romantics argue that not just reason but our sensibilities too should be cultivated such that our life itself is like a work of art. They inaugurate autonomy at two levels – at the species level and at the level of the individual which involves realizing one’s “true” self. These strands come together in Humboldt:

...but when in our language we say Bildung, we mean something both higher and more inward, namely the disposition of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavor, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character. (Gadamer 2004, 9-10)

Declaring that “all moral growth and culture spring slowly and immediately from the inner life of the soul, and can only be induced in human nature, and never be produced by mere external and artificial contrivances” (Humboldt 1854, 85), thereby distinguishing Bildung from any other model of formation which were for external reasons, Humboldt did more to canonize and institutionalize the concept of Bildung than anybody else. During the decades between 1790 and 1810, Humboldt sought to lay the conditions under which Bildung could flourish, unhindered by any external interference even if self-formation could only take place in a dynamic relation to the “external” world of action. How does Humboldt elaborate on Bildung, such that now it can now create an institutional space for itself, becoming the driving force of pedagogy and defining the purpose of the university?

In his essay The Spheres and Duties of Government ([1791-92]1854) which greatly influenced John Stuart Mill, Humboldt works out how to define the limits of State such that
the Bildung of the person could take place without any obstacles. In fleshing out the ideal of Bildung, he brings together several antecedent intellectual lines of thinking which run deep for an institutional vision.

Stating that “the true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole,” (11) Humboldt argues that in order to make possible for different faculties to develop in “spontaneous cooperation,” the pre-condition is freedom and diversity of situations. How does one achieve this without any hindrance and interference from various institutional bodies? In order to ensure the first condition of freedom necessary for individual formation, Humboldt proposes the curtailment of state power to the barest minimum possible, restricting it to providing internal and external security. The state must be relegated to a purely minimal entity because by interfering too much and by attending to the well-being of its citizens, it suppresses the energies of its people and restricts one’s personal growth in favour of generating productive and obedient citizens. It is not surprising that Humboldt has a strong criticism of the very idea of National Education:

…National education – or that which is organized and imposed by the State is at least in many respects very questionable. The grand leading principle, towards which every argument hitherto unfolded in these pages directly converges, is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity... Now all systems of National education, in as much as they afford room for the manifestation of a government spirit, tend to impose a definite form of civic development, and therefore to repress the vital energies of a nation. (Humboldt 1854, 65–67)

Humboldt’s primary concern here, as Sorkin (1983) points out, is to ensure that the inward development of man, the development of the capabilities of the person, his self-education, is

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71 Here, Humboldt borrows from Kant who delineates the role of state such that it maintains peace and provides security in order to enable the Bildung of man. See Sorkin (1983) for a useful analysis of Humboldt on Bildung.
given priority over man as *citizen*. The person, Humboldt argues, is always more than a citizen, thereby firmly placing education in the *spiritual realm*. Such a person whose capacities have been allowed to develop to the fullest, and who is capable of self-expression and self-determination would be more than a mere subject of the State, even while being most useful to the state when required. Education, or *Wissenschaft*, would improve the moral fibre of the people who would also eventually be good citizens.

By reducing the State’s power, Humboldt delineates a programme that will help meet the first condition for self-formation – the freedom of the individual to exercise one’s reason. The second condition requires the presence of a diversity of situations and social bonds. It is in fulfilling the second condition that Humboldt recognizes the importance of intermediate institutions which stand between the State and citizens. It is in institutional settings such as the university that the true exchange and development of individuals would take place, without interference from the State, leading to his vision for the University of Berlin in 1810.

Humboldt not only lays out the conditions for *Bildung*, but in a fragment titled “Theory of *Bildung*,” (Humboldt [1793-94]2000), he also sketchily works out how formation takes place. Central to the process of self-formation is the linking of the self to the world and engagement with the *world as object*. Emphasizing the relation between the “external” and “internal,” Humboldt notes that man is “naturally” driven to move beyond himself to external objects and that “it is crucial that he should not lose himself in this alienation but rather reflect back into his inner being the clarifying light and comforting warmth of everything he undertakes outside himself” (59). He must, thus, bring objects/matter closer to himself and impress his mind on them, bringing the two into close resemblance.

The impetus to link the self to the world and the constant reworking of the relationship between the internal and external, with movement directed outwards towards the world only
to be directed back to oneself such that one’s own powers are honed, runs throughout the fragment.\footnote{The genre of Bildungsroman, the novel of formation which captured the organic development of the central character through encountering various situations in the world, developed around this time. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}, written in 1795, was the paradigmatic example of this form.} Pointing out that within man there are several faculties to represent the same object – “as a “concept of reason,” “as an image of imagination” and “as an intuition of the senses”- Humboldt argues that these are different tools to grasp nature, but the purpose is not to be acquainted with nature from all sides but \textit{to hone one’s own “innate powers”} of which these diverse views are “differently shaped effects” brought into unity in the concept of the world: “It is precisely this unity that determines the concept of the world, a concept that encompasses both the diversity of ways in which the external objects touch our senses and the independent existence through which these objects influence our feelings.” (59)

Humboldt therefore concludes that for self-formation to occur, what man needs most is “simply an object that makes possible the interplay between his receptivity and his self-activity.” However, if this object is to occupy his full being, the ultimate object must be nothing less than the world itself:

But if this object is to suffice to occupy his whole being in its full strength and unity, it must be the ultimate object, the world, or at least (for only this is in fact correct) be regarded as such. Man seeks unity only to escape from dissipating and confusing diversity. In order not to become lost in infinity, empty and unfruitful, he creates a single circle, visible at a glance from any point. In order to attach the image of the ultimate goal to every step forward he takes, he seeks to transform scattered knowledge and action into a closed system, mere scholarship into scholarly \textit{Bildung}, merely restless endeavour into judicious activity. (60)

The entire variegated world of human actions now comes to be seen as circumscribed as a closed system. It is through such craving for unity that can impose order from a single point that self-formation would take place.
Stressing on the similarity in the balance present in the beauty of a work of art which also characterizes the moral man with the ideal formation of the self, Humboldt, like Goethe and others asserted the importance of studying the texts of ancient Greek culture and classics as well as of other ancient cultures as a means to further the process of self-formation. The educated man would craft himself through developing an interest, appreciation and understanding of different fields – language, art, aesthetics, music, architecture, literature and theatre which went hand-in-hand with an interest in the history of these forms - of not just his own but of cultures very different from his own. Understanding ancient cultures was a means of knowing their own selves and their past. In this way, one would develop and perfect one’s individuality.

Kant lays out the contours of the self-formation and its end. The Romantics transform the notion of self-formation to include realizing one’s true self, making individuality an essential part of autonomy. Humboldt sketches a rudimentary theory of Bildung, emphasizing the importance of the objectual world in self-formation and draws the limits of the state by laying down the external constraints such that Bildung of the individual could take place unhindered. He ultimately institutionalizes the concept by putting it on a pedagogic track by founding an institutional link between Wissenschaft and Bildung. However, it is Hegel who works out what Bildung or education is in terms of the experience of the individual consciousness. If, as Gadamer says, “what constitutes the essence of Bildung is not alienation as such but a return to oneself – which presupposes alienation to be sure,” (Gadamer 2004, 13) then it is in Hegel

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73 Years later, Antonio Gramsci, in opposition to capitalism and the burgeoning vocational schools, would echo this Humboldtian sentiment by making a case for traditional schools which focussed on formation: “Pupils did not learn Latin and Greek in order to speak them, to become waiters, interpreters or commercial letter writers. They learnt them in order to know at first hand the civilization of Greece and of Rome – a civilization that was a precondition of our modern civilization: in other words, they learnt them in order to be themselves and know themselves consciously.” They studied them, Gramsci reflected, for the discipline of work, for ends that were disinterested and mainly for the interior development of personality. Gramsci argued that the vocational schools which were advanced as being democratic were injurious to personality development and perpetuated social difference (Gramsci 1996, 37-40).
that this is most explicitly brought to surface, though the theme runs through in Kant, Humboldt and other German Romantics too.

2.4 Hegel: The Long Road to Science

Hegel describes *Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807]1998; hereafter *Phenomenology*)\(^{74}\) “as the detailed history of the education of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (50).

Education is education of the natural consciousness, standing for our everyday dealings with nature where we attend to the world as its inhabitants. Thus, *Phenomenology* begins as a reflection on the nature of everyday knowledge and perception (or our “naive” form of knowledge, “sense certainty”). Human cognition is seen as the unfolding of three moments - consciousness, self-consciousness and reason, with the “arrival” of reason marking a significant moment in our process of cognition. In this process, our natural, first-person dealings with nature is replaced by another mode of engagement with nature which begins by focusing on our consciousness of the world and *modes of understanding*. This necessarily requires the cultivation of a distance and a detached attitude towards object, only to return to it with a conceptual grasp. *Phenomenology* therefore links formation to the development of conceptual thought.

It must be remembered that one of the central problems to which Hegel, like all the thinkers we have discussed so far, was responding to is to the perceived problem of alienation – the alienation of man (subject) from nature/world (object). In the way Hegel and the other idealists of the time express it, for consciousness, its object (world) is other than itself. This

\(^{74}\) Foucault identifies *Phenomenology* as one of the central works of the Western tradition that attempts to link the activity of knowing to the requirements of spirituality. Seeing the attempts of nineteenth century philosophy as trying to pose the ancient question of the care of self without saying it, as a response to the Cartesian frame which tries to erase these structures, Foucault says: “In all these philosophies, a certain structure of spirituality tries to link knowledge, activity of knowing, and the conditions and the effect of this activity, to a transformation in the subject’s being. The Phenomenology of Mind, after all has no other meaning” (Foucault 2005, 28). More recently, John McDowell (1996) has emphasized the importance of Hegel’s work in understanding the idea of education as second nature and sees his own work as a prolegomena to Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. 
gulf between the subject and object is a precondition of the possibility of theoretical knowledge. The very possibility of consciousness presupposes that a subject can distinguish itself from something, while at the same time relating to it. The possibility of knowledge presupposes this duality and the “arrival” of knowledge is equated with the erasure of this gulf.

*Bildung* or education is not only important but fundamental to *Phenomenology*. For Hegel, the term refers to the development of spirit (or “the collective mind”) and is a social as well as a historical process. The development of the subject is both a model for the historical development of philosophy (conceptual thought) as well as a model for the self-directed activity undertaken by individual consciousness to arrive at a better understanding towards one’s own experience.

In his preface, Hegel points out that what is merely familiar is not cognitively known or understood. Thus, “Subject and object, God, Nature, Understanding, sensibility and so on, are uncritically taken for granted as familiar, established as valid and made into fixed points for starting and stopping,” leaving our activity of knowing rather superficial. Instead, for the purposes of rational cognition, it is essential that we first make strange the object (or an idea) by removing or “ridding it of the form in which it had become familiar” (18) and by breaking it up into its original elements, such that we see them as possessions of the thinking self. This process of defamiliarization or estrangement, where the thinking self destroys the immediate, existent unity, through the process of analytical understanding, however, is only one dimension of *Bildung*. The other significant and crucial aspect to *Bildung* is when the thinking mind re-unites with the object, which is now rationally cognized in a new form in the form of the Notion. Thus, in genuine cognition, the gulf between subject and object, produced by the first stage of analytical understanding, is overcome through a struggle with it. The
object no longer presents itself in all its immediateness but is grasped with greater comprehension by the means of a universal concept. Education, thus according to Hegel, is the “laborious emergence from the immediacy of substantial life” and “must always begin by getting acquainted with general principles and points of view, so as to first work up to a general conception of the real issue, as well as learning to support and refute the general conception with reasons…”(3).

Hegel captures this process of education of natural consciousness as an initiation into a form of education where “one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of thinking in terms of the Notion” (35). Hegel describes the shape of consciousness as comprising two fundamental “moments” (A. W. Wood 1998) – a) the being of something for consciousness that Hegel characterizes as “knowing” (subjective) b) the being-in-itself which Hegel characterizes as “truth” (objective):

Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something and at the same times relates to it. This something exists for consciousness and the aspect of this relating or the being of something for a consciousness, is knowing. But we distinguish this being-for-another from being-in itself. Whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this being-in-itself is truth. (Hegel 1998, 52-53)

Hegel here is drawing from the Kantian problem of “Is objective knowledge possible?” but departing from the Kantian solution. Kant had accentuated the gulf between the subject and object in his attempt to bridge it. He had argued that we can never know the object-in-itself (noumenon) apart from the categorial determinations that both make experience possible and render it intelligible, rendering only the appearances or object-for-consciousness knowable. Hegel rejects this Kantian scepticism which makes objective knowledge of the object-in-

75 While the ancient skeptics had denied our ability to know about the nature of things or possess knowledge about the world, they had maintained that we had enough relevant grasp of on immediate situations that enabled us to go about our lives. However, the scepticism of modern tradition that followed from Descartes denied the
itself impossible. Instead, he argues that this distinction between the object-in-itself (truth) and object-for-consciousness (knowledge) is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all and it is consciousness that posits the thing-in-itself. Thus, the construction of the object is part of a particular mode of engagement. As Hegel puts it: “For consciousness is on the one hand, consciousness of the object, on the other hand consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the true, and consciousness of its (own) knowledge of that truth….Something is for it the thing itself; and knowledge, or the being of the object for consciousness is, for it another moment” (54). In short, the distinction of being-in-itself and being-for-consciousness happens within consciousness itself.

Since, both are for the same consciousness, consciousness is itself their comparison. It is for this same consciousness to know if the knowledge of the object (which ‘I’ grasped as the Notion) corresponds to the object or not. The thing-in-itself or essence serves as the standard or the underlying criterion with which the thing examined is seen to correspond or not. In other words, what is recognized as its essence would not so much be its truth but just our knowledge of it. In this way, consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself such that the entire investigation is a comparison of consciousness with itself, thereby making it both what is measured and the standard of that measure.

If the comparison shows that the two moments do not match, then consciousness would have to alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But in the process of alteration of knowledge, the object itself alters for it because the knowledge that is present is the knowledge of this object. This is how consciousness comes to realize that the in-itself is not an in-itself but was an in-itself for consciousness. This means consciousness already has some conception of what is true (being-in-self or essence) or some conception of what it is to

existence of the world if we did not have knowledge about the world. The only way to relate to the world is to have knowledge about the world. On this point, see Taylor (1975, 7). I use “scepticism” with a ‘c’ to refer to the scepticism of the Cartesian tradition and with a ‘k’ to refer to ancient skepticism.
know reality. This provides us with an idea of truth where truth is not “a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made,” (22) without an effort on our parts but constituted through a process of internal struggle, labour and cognition where “The True is actual only as system (14) and “true thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labour of the Notion” (43).

This dialectical movement of consciousness detailed above that consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is what Hegel calls **experience**: “The moment of transition from the first object and the knowledge of it, to the other object, which experience is said to be about” (55). Our knowledge of the first object or the being for consciousness of the first in-itself, itself becomes the second object. This new object, Hegel emphasizes, comes about through the workings of the consciousness itself. Thus, a new pattern of consciousness emerges for which the essence is different from what it was at the preceding stages.

Hegel’s claim is that in the journey of consciousness, the two moments necessarily fail to agree leading to a series of failures, with consciousness tracing "a path of doubt, or more precisely, a path of despair" (49). Consciousness, however, propelled by its own instability presses forward to arrive at a point where object and notion correspond, “a point where appearance becomes identical with essence” (Hegel 1998, 57), where “subjective knowledge” and “objective truth” become one, which is absolute knowing itself. Thus, Hegel also calls **Phenomenology** as the Science of the **experience of consciousness**, where consciousness finally reaches a stage where knowing does not contradict itself. This stage is reached through the dissolution of internal contradiction which takes the form of ‘negative determination’ and is resolved at a higher level of comprehension, resulting in a new shape
which appears one step closer to the truth. Dualities are erased but not by going back into some innocent unity of subject and object but through the negative dialectics between consciousness and self-consciousness which unites the oppositions at a higher level of comprehension. This process of Bildung, or negative dialectic, thus requires a particular form of reflexivity comprising the movement of the mind which for Hegel, leads to genuine Science.

Hegel would place the development of conceptual thought itself as part of the unfolding of history, with different forms of knowledge – empirical sciences, art, religion, philosophy - emerging at different points in the movement towards universal history and different cultures as part of the stages of the unfolding Spirit reaching the pinnacle of development in Europe.

Conclusion

When scholars say liberal education has not taken root in our context, despite the presence of universities and colleges for a couple of centuries now, they appear to be referring to a thick notion of education that they find absent in our context. What is this thick conception of education that is found to be absent? Thus, I turned to the Humboldtian moment and the debate around Bildung in order to obtain a better grasp of the generative moment which also sets the limits on what is generated. The moment provides us with one dominant model of thinking about education and university learning. My attempt was to historically reconstruct this model of education that emerged in the late eighteenth century that continues to influence our debates even today in direct and indirect ways.

We saw that the idea of the modern university emerged out of the intellectual and cultural matrix of Bildung. When Bildung erupts into the intellectual landscape and is fleshed out to

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76 For, Hegel the world is rational. It moves towards a purpose and is intelligible to us. Thus any unintelligibility or tension is not part of the world but is generated by our conceptual lenses.
articulate a separate domain of education, it is the result of many centuries of ways of being and thinking which has organized the Western society. It is, in other words, an accentuation of dispositions already present in the culture. The picture of man which emerges in Europe in late eighteenth century Europe is enabled and sustained by social-institutional arrangements such as religion, the church, the monastic order and its spiritual practices, the idea of omnipotent, omniscient, perfect God as a law-giver, theological disputes regarding the relation between God, man and creation, the centrality of obedience to God’s moral law in people’s lives and the emergence of the universe as a separate, intelligible domain in itself. These social-institutional arrangements and ideas were the necessary background for the notion of formation as the actualization of the will implied by debates on Bildung to emerge. Humboldt responds to the demand of the times by picking up the various antecedent strands within the culture that run deep in order to put forward his proposal for the University of Berlin.

One of the tasks I have attempted here is to capture the debates internal to the tradition of Bildung - how was education problematized, why was the institution of the university thought about in a particular light and what were the different ways in which formation was thought about. The entire discussion around education as Bildung assumes two necessary nodal points: a prior distinction between subject (with intentions, desires, will and interests) and the object (the world which either resists or is an object of study). The labour of thinking is directed at overcoming this alienation between subject and object, the self/mind and the world. However, this discourse on education as overcoming the alienation between subject and object is internal to the Western tradition and emerges in the West only at a particular point in history. In response to the emergence of nature/universe as a separate domain where all occurrences are “caused,” Kant posits “free-will” as essential to the very definition of the
moral man. Free-will then is a pre-theoretical supposition to save man from being determined by causal forces, thereby rendering the modern man as a “subject” with a “free-will.”

However, far from saving man from causal forces, the “causes” now get pushed interior to man where actions are a result of ends/values one commits oneself to. As a result, what emerges is a view of the individual (as “subject”) defined in abstraction from any order or matrix of practices. If actions earlier derived their meaning from the tradition of activity within which they are performed, now they acquire their meaning from the ‘interiority’ of the person. Or to put it another way, there is a deeper, prior, anterior realm to action which explains an action in terms of the subject’s beliefs, intentions and desires. Actions here are subject-expressive.

The other task I have attempted is to ask a question external to the tradition. What is Bildung a response to? Bildung is constitutive of the moment of secularization. Secularization, as we saw in this chapter, is not divesting the world of religious beliefs or even an indifference to it but an attempt to realize religious ideals in this world. In the notion of education that emerges with the Humboldtian idea, the assumption that human beings have a pre-given form or a purpose which they are called upon to realize is a pre-theoretical supposition, thereby providing a normative dimension to the notion of education. However, we also witness a shift in the way formation is now conceptualized. If earlier, the idea of formation involved sacrifice of self or one’s will to the will of God, now with the removal of God from the picture, a positive conception of self (involving the actualizing of one’s will to emerge as self-determining in freedom) which would help realize God’s plan, replaces the earlier idea. The attributes of a divine will are transferred to human beings.

What happens here is a genealogical shift in the very conception of education. Before this historical point, “education” or formation involves the sacrifice of the self. In the debates on
*Bildung* in the late eighteenth century, education is the actualization of the self and the realization of one’s unique individuality. Freedom as self-determination (not proved but assumed) emerges here as the species essence. Even feminist and Marxist critiques of liberal education can be seen as drawing sustenance from *Bildung* where the idea of a self-unfolding subject (realizing the capacity for self-determination) and expressive unity continue to be an ideal to be realized.

*Bildung* is often seen as a theory of formation. However, I have tried to relocate it back to its context and see it more as a cultural phenomenon specific to Europe which then gets universalized as a theory. The thrust is on the activity of understanding, the internal division of consciousness and the conceptual movement that *Bildung* necessarily involves through which formation occurs. It appears that *Bildung*, which is squarely placed in the “realm of spirit” as opposed to the “realm of works,” is a concept around which the Western tradition organizes its reflection on knowledge, subject and truth.