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INTRODUCTION



Kant on Education and evil—Perfecting human beings with an innate propensity to radical evil

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Kant begins his *Lectures on Pedagogy* by stating, '[t]he human being is the only creature that must be educated' (Kant, 2007, 9:441), and he argues that it is through education that we can transform our initial 'animal nature into human nature' (ibid. 2007, 9:441). Kant understands education as involving an ordered process of care, discipline, instruction and formation through enculturating, civilizing and moralizing (Formosa 2011). Further, Kant envisages that we should pursue as a species the 'moral perfection' that is the 'final destiny of the human race' through education (Collins, 1997, 27:470; see Dean, 2014). However, to engage in this pursuit Kant believes that, through education and social change, we have to regulate our 'animal nature' and counter the moral corruption of our species, which he calls the '*radical innate evil* in human nature (not any the less brought upon us by ourselves)' (Kant, 1998, 6:32). If humanity is to pursue its final destiny of moral perfection, then education will need to respond responsibly to the propensity to evil that is deeply rooted in us as finite and imperfect rational beings living in imperfect and at times even in morally corrupted social conditions. In this way, Kant's philosophy of education draws together several strands of his thought, including his discussions of virtue (from his moral philosophy), evil (from his account of religion), and moral progress (from his accounts of teleology, history and political philosophy).

In contemporary contexts, education is often understood as aiming at the pursuit of specifically valued political, economic, social, and cultural ends (Roth, 2011; 2015). But within these discussions, education has largely lost its connection with the pursuit of moral perfection as the core educational aim. Moreover, with the comparative growth of natural science and the withdrawal of religion in the West, the language of evil also largely disappears during the 20th and 21st centuries from both popular discussions of education and the recent academic literature on the philosophy of education. Instead, discussions of education focus on aims, means, motives, conditions, and critiques of various kinds, that is, on the various ways in which human beings are being perfected for certain socially desired ends in specific societies, but they almost never include the notion of evil or moral perfection. But if education is to remain focused on the pursuit of moral perfection or moral improvement, then it also needs to focus on the imperfections that it must respond responsibly to, including the presence of evil both individually and socially. This implies that a discussion of education ought to include, not merely ideas about its final destiny, but also ideas about evil. Furthermore, the continuing absence of discussions of evil in educational philosophy is surprising given the renewed research interest in evil, sparked by the horrors of the Nazi genocide, in recent philosophical and psychological literatures (see Formosa, 2008; Russell, 2014; Staub, 2003; Zimbardo, 2007).

If we want to consider how the philosophy of education might reconnect with the idea of evil and the pursuit of moral perfection, then we believe that looking at Kant's work is an important place to start. However, while there is a large literature concerning Kant's thoughts on

education and moral perfection (see Formosa, 2017; Moran, 2012; Munzel, 1999; 2012; Roth, 2018; Roth, Gustafsson, & Johansson, 2014; Roth & Surprenant, 2011) and many publications concerning his account of evil (see Allison, 2002; Anderson-Gold & Muchnik, 2010; Formosa, 2007; Grenberg, 2005; Loudon, 2011; Michalson, 1990; Papish 2018; Pasternack, 2014; Wood, 1999; 2009), there is comparatively little work that explicitly focuses in detail on the connections between evil, education and moral perfection in Kant's works. This special issue aims to rectify this gap in the literature and help to promote further debate on these important topics.

If humanity is innately evil and education aims (in part) at moral perfection, then the philosophy of education must help to provide a response to Kant's question of how we can 'construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?' (Kant, 1998, 6:100; see Guyer, 2009). The papers in this special issue will seek to answer this question by exploring the various inter-connections between Kant's conceptions of education, moral perfection and evil.

Robert B. Loudon discusses whether human beings can overcome evil in their pursuit of moral perfection. He argues that Kant maintains that evil can be overcome because it is the result of our free choice, but it cannot be eradicated because it is woven into our human nature. Loudon also argues that even though Kant believes that education is central to our attempts to overcome evil, education only plays a supporting role, albeit an important one, in this process. Further, Loudon argues that even though Kant believes that divine grace will eventually make it possible for human beings to be successful in their pursuit of moral perfection, we ought to do all we can through our own efforts to overcome evil and perfect ourselves.

Allen W. Wood argues that Kant's response to his two doctrines—that human beings ought to strive toward moral perfection, and that human beings have an innate propensity to evil—is a creative one, and that responses to evil must be social and not merely individual. Kant also argues, according to Wood, that such a responsible response requires the development of virtue and the regulation of inclinations so that they harmonize with the development of our moral character through education.

Paul Formosa argues that Kant gives two accounts of the way that moral progress can occur, a gradualist and a revolutionary account. This raises the question of how these two accounts of progress fit together. Formosa argues that for Kant gradual progress, in the form of improved mores and practices, must come first and pave the way for a movement toward a revolutionary change in our disposition through which we overcome our radical evil. To achieve this progress, Formosa argues that we need both to consider the various cognitive, volitional, affective and conative components of Kantian virtue, and to recognise the way our propensity to evil manifests itself on individual and social levels.

Jeanine Grenberg emphasises the tension between moral education, which suggests that *someone else* is going to help me become moral, and Kant's focus on autonomy, which suggests that *I* have to make *myself* more moral. To resolve this tension, Grenberg emphasises our individual responsibility while not disregarding the impact of social conditions. She argues that education has to enable us to know ourselves, but we also have to *take* responsibility for doing this, while acknowledging our radical propensity to evil as imperfect rational beings. Moreover, Grenberg argues that Kant advocates a Socratic style of education through which the duty to know oneself can be pursued.

G. Felicitas Munzel also argues that the bulwark against the propensity to evil lies in choosing to cultivate our moral character and that we are enabled to do this through education. Munzel argues that this is a formidable, but not impossible task. It is formidable since the task for education is to cultivate our judgment, virtue, aesthetic sensibility and hence, our moral character, as well as developing the fortitude to live with our propensity to evil. This in turn requires that we use the powers of our mind – *Gemüt* – to subordinate our evil maxims to the moral law through moral education.

Kate A. Moran argues that moral education has to engage with cultivating people's moral character, and that this requires that we engage responsibly with our propensity to radical evil

through an education that helps us to comply with the moral law. She argues that education should help those concerned to combat the vices of jealousy, and ingratitude, through cultivating the duty of love towards others and developing our virtue by being motivated by the moral law, which can be done in part by engaging with casuistical questions.

Klas Roth argues that in our pursuit of our duty to perfect ourselves and promote the happiness of others, we have to struggle against our innate propensity to evil in education and elsewhere. He also argues that education seems to focus on making it possible for those concerned to make themselves efficacious with regard to certain desired ends in society, rather than making it possible for them to perfect themselves morally and help others to do the same. Roth continues by showing that in order for education to render students not merely efficacious, but also autonomous, it has to make students as conscientious as possible with regards to the three grades of evil that Kant discusses.

Pablo Muchnik focuses on the role of *parerga*—the systematic role of the general remarks—in Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and argues that these are essential for making it possible for human beings to confront the limitations of their own reason, and to resist their inclination to submit to dogmatic religious beliefs in education and in society more generally. Muchnik argues that such dogmatism is symptomatic of self-deception, in which we deceive others and ourselves to free ourselves from the stringent demands of morality. He contends that when we do so we wrongly pit dogmatic religion against our duty to perfect ourselves morally.

Our hope is that these papers bring attention to neglected notions in the philosophy of education, namely those of moral perfection and evil. We hope to show that there are good reasons to acknowledge the vulnerabilities and imperfections we as human beings face in the pursuit of perfecting ourselves morally. We believe that by working with our vulnerabilities and imperfections, we can make it possible for us to neither neglect nor burden ourselves with these limitations, but to respond responsibly to them through education and social change.

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