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"Bilding macht frei!" Humanistische en realistische vorming van Duitsland 1600-1860

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“BILDUNG MACHT FREI!”

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SUMMARY

“Bildung macht frei!”

Humanistic and realistic education in Germany 1600–1860

Since Western culture came into being, one has been concerned with the issue of what should be learnt at school. This thesis, “*Bildung macht frei!*” *Humanistic and realistic education in Germany 1600–1860*, describes 1) how humanistic and realistic education in Germany have been put forward in the course of modern times as different answers to the question of what should be learnt, and 2) how a conflict developed between the two, in which 3) humanistic education triumphed. Humanistic education realized the humanity that is potentially present in every individual – or in plain words – developed humans as humans. Realistic education, the down to earth counterpart, was education that was concerned with the practical preparation for a profession and citizenship for people. Gradually certain types of educational contents became interwoven with one of the two kinds of education, and so two different educational domains originated. One was concerned with higher affairs, namely language, art and culture, especially that of classical antiquity; the other was concerned with practical efficient issues that were, however, considered to be of less esteem, like natural science, technology, geography, politics and economics.

In this form, humanistic education is a typical invention of the German classical period. Late 18th-, early 19th-century stars in the area of literature and philosophy appeared at the firmament, like Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Kant, Fichte and Humboldt. These thinkers gave *Bildung* a unique, elevated meaning; *Bildung* became equal to self-perfection and all-sided development. Every individual had the duty to make a piece of art out of himself and to realize true humanity in his person. The only way to realize this was through immersion in the true high culture. Those who wanted to educate themselves devoted themselves to poetry and art, history and literature. Greek antiquity, the model of perfect humanity, was the ideal *Bildungswelt* (educational world). In the classical period the humanistic educational domain became an intrinsic element of education itself: true *Bildung* became equal to *humanistic Bildung*.

This process resulted from the socio-political situation in Germany. The emancipation of the German bourgeoisie developed less smoothly than elsewhere. Where the French bourgeoisie had gained its position through the Revolution and the English through colonization and trade, the German bourgeoisie did not manage to disarm the *ancien régime* with a political approach. Thereupon the German bourgeoisie seized a different weapon: the culture. They left political authority to the king and nobility and seized power themselves in the realm of the mind. The classical philosophy of *Bildung* concerned the aesthetic of the mind, but had originated from political protest and had a critical undertone.

This emancipation-strategy took place at the expense of realistic education. For the classical thinkers practical preparation for a profession was inferior to true *Bildung* of the mind. In contrast to the superpowers France and England – where natural science prospered and technical academies flourished – practical efficient education in Germany had a difficult time. There was, however, no gap between humanistic and realistic education during the classical period. Generally, every education of the mind attributed to the realization of humanity. Besides literature and poetry, Goethe also wrote important essays on mineralogy and color-theory for a good reason, and Wilhelm von Humboldt's brother, Alexander, was the most prominent German natural scientist of his time. A real gap between humanistic and realistic education did not originate until after the classical period.

In the course of the 19th century, the idolization of true *Bildung* resulted in the emerging of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (bourgeoisie by virtue of *Bildung*). This class of educated people, who often held high official positions and owed their social status to the fact that they had enjoyed higher education, increasingly started using the possession of *Bildung* in order to strengthen their own position. Education was no longer a means of achieving emancipation, but became an instrument for perpetuating the existing social structures. The *Besitzbürgertum* (bourgeoisie by virtue of *Besitz*; *Besitz* = possession) – the class of merchants, bankers and manufacturers – was excluded. The gymnasium (a school type that is similar to the British grammar school) played a crucial role in this. As only the *gymnasium* made admittance to university possible, and a completed academic study was necessary in order to be admitted to the *Bildungsbürgertum*, only those who had enjoyed this classical schooling could consider themselves part of this class. From then on, the dispute concentrated on the school types: the *Bildungsbürgertum* associated itself with the prestigious *gymnasium*, the *Besitzbürgertum* had to make do with the *Realschule* (the school type for realistic education) that was considered to be of a lower esteem.

Only to the end of the 19th century, in the German Empire of Bismarck's *Realpolitik* (realistic policy), did realistic education and the *Realschule* become

respectable matters again. Natural science. Neo-humanistic education has influenced Germany for a long time.

Chapter 1 illustrates the title – different pedagogical approaches to the dry-as-dust education of the time. Teaching in the tradition of the enlightenment thinkers and the various different reasons – for a better connection to the world. In the enormous growth of the 18th century, a conflict arose between the

At the end of the 18th century, the appearance of this conflict. Useful, realistic education. There was also continuity in the pedagogical views of the enlightenment.

Chapter 2 introduces the ideas that have shaped the typical German. Herder, the Storm and Stress, and the *Klassik* are reviewed. Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas and ideals like individuality, creativity, beauty and social justice. Classical thinkers Greece and Rome in her ideal form. At the end of the 18th century, Humboldt, who incorporated the classical period into one philosophy. The ideas a movement came to be known as the heart of non-violence. It had a large influence on the Prussian state. Out by the Prussian state. An era of humanistic education. Dreamt of freedom and democracy. Neo-humanistic education.

Chapter 3 describes the opposition to each other in the philosophy of *Bildung* of neo-humanistic ideas of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

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respectable matters again. Around 1900 Germany was even the leading country in natural science. Nevertheless, the 19th-century predilection for humanistic education has influenced the ideas on education and the practice of teaching in Germany for a long time – up until this day.

Chapter 1 illustrates that since 1600 – which is why this year is stated in the title – different pedagogical movements originated out of dissatisfaction with the dry-as-dust education at Latin schools. Here students received humanistic teaching in the tradition of the *septem artes liberales* that mainly focussed on teaching Latin grammar. Comenius, pietism, pedagogical realism, the Enlightenment thinkers and the philanthropists all pleaded – although for various different reasons – for more realistic education. Education should have a better connection to the altering post-medieval society and should account for the enormous growth of scientific knowledge. Therefore, in the early modern period, a conflict arose between humanistic and realistic education.

At the end of the 18th century a new kind of humanism arose which changed the appearance of this conflict: the thinkers of the classical period condemned useful, realistic education and propagated true education of the mind. Still there was also continuity: the classical period elaborated further on the pedagogical views of the early modern period and continued the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Chapter 2 introduces the thinkers and movements of the classical period that have shaped the typical German, humanistic philosophy of *Bildung*. Successively Herder, the Storm and Stress, philosophical idealism and the *Weimarer Klassik* are reviewed. With these thinkers, *Bildung* obtained a unique meaning. Ideas and ideals like individualism, personal autonomy, natural development, creativity, beauty and social freedom colored the philosophy of *Bildung*. For the classical thinkers Greece was the unspoilt paradise where *Bildung* was displayed in her ideal form. At the end of the chapter the life and work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who incorporated and bundled the different movements of the classical period into one philosophy of *Bildung*, is discussed. Following on from his ideas a movement came into being that considered the study of classical antiquity as the heart of non-vocational education: neo-humanism. This movement had a large influence on the extensive educational reforms that had been carried out by the Prussian state after the defeat to Napoleon. The classical period was an era of humanistic education, but also the time in which the bourgeoisie dreamt of freedom and democracy. The classical philosophy of *Bildung* and the neo-humanistic educational reforms were meant to shape this dream.

Chapter 3 describes how humanistic and realistic education became more opposed to each other in the course of the 19th century. The progressive philosophy of *Bildung* of neo-humanism gradually made way for the politics of interests of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. In the 19th century this class of educated people

entered into an alliance with the throne, nobility and church, who wanted to restrain progressive political forces as much as possible. Humanistic *Bildung* and the school type that embodied this education, the *gymnasium*, became socially defensive strongholds. The *Besitzbürgertum*, which was predominantly liberally orientated, started to associate itself more and more with realistic education and the *Realschule*. In this political sphere of influence humanistic and realistic education became radically opposed to each other. This was certainly not a fair match, since the political forces behind humanistic education were much stronger and realistic education never managed to gain any momentum. In this unfair match, the ideas of the despairing advocates of realistic education gradually came to converge with those of their opponents. The *Realschule* would not offer practical efficient education, but like the *gymnasium*, true *Bildung* of the mind; and just like the teachers at the *gymnasium*, the teachers at the *Realschule* started to distance themselves from the common people. In this way, realistic education also lost its progressive, democratic zest of the classical period in the course of the 19th century.

The epilogue describes how the hegemony of humanistic education crumbled from the 60's of the 19th century onward – which is why this decade is mentioned in the title. In the German Empire realism held the winning cards and the *Realschule* eventually obtained the same rights as the *gymnasium*, and so the school-political competition between humanistic and realistic education had subsided. But the two different school types both continued to exist, which is why the heat of the combat between the two cultures, one classical-humanistic, the other modern-realistic, could be felt for a long time afterwards.

The conclusion rounds off by first discussing the importance of the study at hand for the contemporary German discussion about the value of the classical philosophy of *Bildung*, and by secondly relating the study at hand to the history of humanistic and realistic education in The Netherlands. When the Dutch law on secondary education was passed in 1863, The Netherlands adopted the most important feature of the German educational system: the dichotomy between the *gymnasium* and the *hogere burgerschool* (higher school for the bourgeoisie), which was the Dutch equivalent to the German *Realschule*. By doing so, it took over the peculiarities of German history of education, where the contact with the philosophy of *Bildung* of the classical period had been lost for a long time already. Therefore, the progressive and democratic zest of the classical period of *Bildung* remained concealed for the Dutch educational history.