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Education and the Subject of Reason: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Women in All of formal education rests on the plinth of reason, and yet the nature of reason itself is rarely discussed by educators who take its self-presence for granted. However, even a cursory look through the history of reason reveals the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and striking differences between different conceptions of reason as well as the thinness of its self-knowledge. In an effort to bring reason under scrutiny in the context of education this paper engages with five major viewpoints on reason, namely those of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Husserl, and Freud. The analysis is aimed at trying to find clues as to the behavior of reason using shifting perspectives and deriving there from a complex understanding of rationality that goes beyond the naïve positivistic outlook that forms the background of education in general.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a mystery that undergirds much of human understanding, and although it has received plenty of intellectual attention, it is a mystery that no theory has ever been able to solve till date. At best, the finest minds have managed to nibble at the edges of this profound riddle that especially affects the domain of what we call learning and therefore of education in general. The name of this mystery is reason, something that Husserl had called the “enigma of enigmas.” At base, ‘how is cognition even possible’ was the question. And although it has remained an ‘impossible question’, this paper claims that it is important to return to this fundamental problem again and again in a bid to pit different understandings alongside one another, and against one another, thereby to gain not some final understanding, but a fresh angle towards praxis. We can function without a theory of reason just as we can function without a theory of life. Nevertheless, since there are infinite prejudices, obscurities, and sediments of convention that masquerade consciously and unconsciously as justified propositions, educationists especially need to arrive at a certain self-consciousness of reason. And since we employ many other modes of reasoning than the formal, it is not sufficient simply to know about the formal aspects of rationality. It is therefore that this paper desires to engage with the phenomenology or lived aspect of rationality, for the foundations of learning ultimately rest on the geo-ontology of reason, and the latter in turn must engage itself in critical self-evaluation if it is to be true to itself and the macrocosm. When we think of reason what comes immediately to mind are its formal aspects such as deductive reason, inductive reason, propositional logic and so on. Or we think of reason in terms of being ‘reasonable’ in social and individual life, meaning to be judicious or responding

accurately to facts etc. In other words, we take reason for granted and debate about its attributes. Rarely do we think about the stuff of reason itself. Within the debate, what is mostly evident is an externalist perspective of reason in terms of what reason achieves or fails to achieve, its operational characteristics etc., and not the phenomenological or lived nature of reason. The argument made here is that apart from discussing the formal characteristics of rationality, it is important, especially from the point of view of education, to inquire into the character of ‘living reason,’ that is, rationality as it insinuates itself in the lives of the individual and collective life and the relations between them. The present paper will advance the thesis that reason is not simply a method, a structure, or an approach to making sense of object relations that has grown mature with time, nor is it something readily available to the human being, notwithstanding the accumulated products of technical reason or the techno-scientific state of a society. Rather, reason is a certain potential that has to be actualized or realized again and again in order for us to become fully human.

In other words, contrary to the Hegelian view of the abstract progress of universal reason, and of the Western Enlightenment view in general, it is contended here that whether it be the time of Moses or Russell, the Buddha or Einstein, humans are always in the same relation to reason: the necessity to attain to it every time individually and collectively. This is a singular departure from the modernist understanding of the accumulated pool of reason that can be taken for granted and that is “available” to everyone. The following paragraphs will go into the genealogy of modernist reason to try and throw light on some of the major approaches to the process and character of rationality as it has been regarded since the Enlightenment.

The Reason of Modernity

One of the key figures of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, made reason the central point of his inquiry into moral and practical philosophy. He attempted to clear the ground and establish clearly what reason could and could not legitimately accomplish. For example, Kant insists that reason is the “arbiter of truth” in all judgments, but it is incapable of intuiting any transcendental or supra-sensible truths, thereby putting to rest many of the claims made by several philosophers before him. It is worth noting that in spite of writing volumes on reason, Kant rarely speaks directly of the nature of reason as such but mostly in terms of its roles and functions. In other words, we do not get to know what reason is, but rather, its operational modes and capacities. According to Kant reason has two major roles, namely, the regulatory and the constitutive. “In its regulative use, reason guides our work in striving for knowledge, helping us to correct errors and arrive at more comprehensive insights. By contrast, the “constitutive” use of our faculties actually helps to constitute the objects of knowledge, by providing their form as objects of possible experience. Constitutive principles thereby have a strong objective standing, whereas regulative principles govern our theoretical activities.”¹ Reason as the arbiter of truth according to Kant has the task of constantly assessing the validity or otherwise of our experiences. For example when we see lightening of the sky we assume that it must be close to dawn, or when we hear the noise of an engine we surmise that there must be a vehicle close by, or when we do not receive an expected response from someone we sense something amiss, and so on. These judgments help us regulate and make sense of incoming impressions of the world, or correct possible errors of judgment.

The constitutive principles on the other hand help to constitute the objects of knowledge, by providing *a priori* unity of structure against which we can experience things. In order to experience a tree we need to preserve cognitive continuity of sense impressions without which we can only experience a random sequence without coherence or meaning. This cognitive continuity is afforded by structures built into reason to which, according to Kant, reason itself has no access. The task of reason is to seek unity of experience since without that there would be no “coherence,” and without coherence it would be difficult or even impossible to arrive at “empirical truth.” Coherence here means agreement between various knowledge claims. For example, let us consider a hypothesis ‘A’. The truth of this judgment must be consistent with judgments about other related phenomena in order to arrive at true knowledge. It cannot stand on its own apart from or in conflict with other known behaviour of related phenomena. Darwin’s hypothesis of natural selection was found to be in agreement with the interpretations of various fossil findings as well as explanations of bird species found in different islands and so on. On the other hand, the 19th century hypothesis of “ether” as universal medium of propagation of electromagnetic waves was not coherent with other findings and hence could not stand its ground. Thus when the explanatory apparatuses of related phenomena converge and affirm one another we can claim to have used reason adequately to arrive

at true knowledge.² Therefore, in Kantian thought, the unity of reason is to be sought after as a major principle. Importantly, in attempting to establish a truly secure ground for reason’s knowledge, Kant establishes the limits or boundaries of reason. Supra-sensible claims to knowledge cannot be justified rationally since different groups have conflicting versions of such notions leading to endless strife and controversy. Ideas of soul, God etc. are beyond the realm of reason and any claims about these are futile since there is no common world of experience with regard to such ideas. Thus there are according to Kant, three transcendental ideas about which reason can have nothing to say. These are the thinking subject (individual), the world-as-a-whole (totality), and the Being of beings (God). But accurate knowledge is not the only goal of reason; it also guides our conduct within the world. This is the practical aspect of reason. Kant claims to have discovered the highest principle of practical reason, which he calls the Categorical Imperative. The Categorical Imperative is an obligation to act in such a manner that it conforms to a general principle. In Kant’s words, the Categorical Imperative demands that we “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”³ This implies that we are obliged to act in a manner that would qualify as acceptable under all conditions. In other words, our action in this world cannot be whimsical; it should conform to standards that would be deemed reasonable by all. For example, if I behave in a manner that is prejudicial to the interests of another, such action cannot be deemed to be reasonable under the Categorical Imperative since it cannot be elevated to a maxim. For, if each one behaves in a manner prejudicial to the interests of another, there would be disorder and chaos. Similarly, my attempt to secure a position through unfair means cannot have the quality of a universal principle since if each one uses unfair means, ultimately all basis of social transactions would collapse.

Nevertheless there is an awkward moment in Kant’s claims about the “Categorical Imperative.” In the Gospel of Mathew, we have the famed words of the Christ from the Sermon on the Mount: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”⁴ This maxim, found in different forms throughout world religions, is central to Christian thought. Put negatively, it means that our actions towards others should not be different from how we would want others to act towards us. All action must be in concordance with this universal principle of reciprocity and mutuality. This is the teaching and fulfilment of the Prophets. It is obvious to any fair minded person that the central deontological idea in this principle and Kant’s claim in the Imperative are identical. Therefore it is not clear how Kant can claim this timeless principle to be his discovery. What makes it even more ironical is Kant’s rejection of religion (conscience) as a basis for morality and his attempt to create a moral basis of action from within reason alone. But his main formulation turns out to be nothing more than a, perhaps unconscious, rewording of a religious formulation, in particular, from the Judeo-Christian tradition. A second moment of ambiguity occurs in Kant’s account of reason when he talks about a “common principle.” Kant posits

¹ Garrath Williams, "Kant's Account of Reason", In The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/kant-reason/>>.

²One of the reasons why Kant objects to intuitive or mystical truths as reasonable is that there are little cognitive correlates or agreements between hypotheses in this domain.

³Ibid.

⁴Mathew 7:12, *The Bible*, King James Version.

the necessity of “reason’s common principle” meaning that one must be able to come up with the unity of practical reason with theoretical reason, “since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason.”⁵ Kant writes that it must be possible to derive everything from one principle: “the undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions.”⁶ However, Kant fails to arrive at this unity of cognitions between theoretical and practical reason. The reason for that is not far to seek. In this case the seeker is not different from what is sought: the thinking that brings Kant to this point is obviously not distinct from what he is reflecting on. In other words, we are talking about the self-knowledge of reason. When reason demands from itself the basis of its own unity we are faced with a peculiar conundrum.⁷ This conundrum is not solvable within reason itself. That no system can possibly give a full account of itself from within itself seems to have escaped Kant, and in the process, he ends up unconsciously positing himself as the transcendental thinker within reason, the very thing he had rejected earlier. Nevertheless both these “failures” have great significance for education as we shall see later.

In the Western Enlightenment tradition Hegel’s influence and importance equals that of Kant. On the question of reason, Hegel’s starting point, however, is very different than that of Kant. Contrary to the Kantian view, Hegel begins with a supra-sensible view of reason in *Logic*, his famous oeuvre. Hegel postulates that the true being is reason, manifest in nature and come to realization in man. The realization takes place in history, and since reason realized in history is mind, Hegel’s thesis implies that the actual subject or driving force of history is mind or consciousness. While Hegel acknowledges the role of humans in history, the true subject of history is the universal, not the human being; the true content is the realization of the self-consciousness of freedom, not the interests, and actions of individuals: “The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom,” Hegel writes, and yet at first glance, “history convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action – the efficient agents in this scene of activity.”⁸ In other words, the progress of reason is abstract principle even though it appears as if humans are the driving force of it. How does Hegel resolve the paradox? Hegel has a heroic view of history. Historical reason acts through historical personae in whose aims and actions lies the traces of the universal principle, and who become the destiny of their nations or peoples. Such individuals become the unwitting tool in the hands of historical reason or Mind. And who are these supermen? According to Hegel, there are some individuals who rise above the level of being mere historical subjects and “their actions do not repeat old patterns but create new forms of life. Such men are men of history like Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon. Their acts, too, spring from personal

interests, but in their case these become identical with the universal interest and the latter far transcends the interest of any particular group: they forge and administer the progress of history. Their interest must necessarily clash with the historical interest of the prevailing system of life. Historical individuals are men of a time when ‘momentous collisions’ arise ‘between existing, acknowledged duties, laws, and rights, and those potentialities which are adverse to this fixed system; which assail and even destroy its foundations and existence. These potentialities appear to the historical individual as choices for his specific power, but they involve a ‘universal principle’ in so far as they are the choice of a higher form of life that has ripened within the existing system. Historical individuals thus anticipated ‘the necessary subsequent step in progress which their world was to take.’ What they desired and struggled for was ‘the very truth for their age, for their world.’ Conscious of ‘the requirements of the time’ and of ‘what was ripe for development,’ they acted.”⁹ The idea is that the universal principle acts through historical personae to steer the world toward the next stage of development. Reason is thus intimately related to social evolution.

In other words, even historical individuals are not the true movers of historical reason; at best they are the instruments of a larger purpose. The real mover of history instead is the Idea or the World Mind. “The final subject of history Hegel calls the world mind (*Weltgeist*). Its reality lies in those actions, tendencies, efforts, and institutions that embody the interest of freedom and reason. It does not exist separate from these realities, and acts through these agents and agencies. The law of history, which the world mind represents, thus operates behind the backs and over the heads of individuals, in the form of an irresistible anonymous power. The transition from Oriental culture to that of the Greek world, the rise of feudalism, the establishment of bourgeois society – all these changes were not man’s free work, but the necessary results of objective historical forces. Hegel’s conception of the world mind emphasizes that in these previous periods of recorded history man was not the self-conscious master of his existence. The divine power of the world mind appeared then an objective force that rules over the actions of men. The sovereignty of the world mind, as Hegel portrays it, exhibits the dark traits of a world that is controlled by the forces of history instead of controlling them. While these forces are as yet unknown in their true essence, they bring misery and destruction in their wake. History then appears as ‘the, slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized.’ Hegel at the same time extols the sacrifice of individual and general happiness that results. He calls it ‘the *cunning of reason*.’ Individuals lead unhappy lives, they toil and perish, but though they actually never win their goal, their distress and defeat are the very means by which truth and freedom proceed. A man never reaps the fruits of his labor; they always fall to future generations. His passions and interests, however, do not succumb; they are the devices that keep him working in the service of a superior power and a superior interest. ‘This may be called the *cunning of reason* – that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss.’ Individuals fail and pass away; the

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Transl. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Today we know that no such account is possible. Godel’s Incompleteness theorem has shown that all closed systems suffer from incompleteness meaning that certain self-referential propositions can neither be proved nor disproved within that system.

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p.19.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).

idea triumphs and is eternal.”¹⁰The mechanism of this triumphal advance is called the dialectic. A situation reaches its fullness and eventually runs into contradiction (cannot cope with new developments), this leads to a higher stage of development, and so on endlessly. Formally, thesis is followed by anti-thesis (contradiction), finally absorbed in a synthesis. This dialectical process repeats itself indefinitely. Thus, in the idealist conception, the present is always a sacrifice to the future, to an endless coming-to-be, to a posited hypothetical actualization that never comes to pass. Seen in this manner the present does not have to be accountable to itself; its suffering can be written off as an investment for some ideal future. The danger in such thinking obviously is that every atrocity and unspeakable horror, apart from other things, can be justified as part of some historical necessity in an unseen account book kept by an ideal force. Apart from the mystification, an ostensive impersonal force of history working itself out through human agents may have a certain appeal as an explanatory mechanism for the precarious state of the world, but it certainly is no guide to reasonable action itself.

Marx, for example, criticizes the idealist view and says that they do not know “*real, sensuous activity as such*,” and it is this activity, which for Marx is the cradle of Reason. Reason is the objectively necessary content of our practical activity which we have internalized in a mental, subjective form. In a famous letter to Arnold Ruge written in 1843, Marx writes:

Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form. Hence the critic can take his cue from every existing form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from this ideal and final goal implicit in the *actual* forms of existing reality he can deduce a true reality. Now as far as real life is concerned, it is precisely the *political* state which contains the postulates of reason in all its modern forms, even where it has not been the conscious repository of socialist requirements. But it does not stop there. It consistently assumed that reason has been realized and just as consistently it becomes embroiled at every point in a conflict between its ideal vocation and its actually existing premises. This internecine conflict within the political state enables us to infer the social truth. Just as religion is the table of contents of the theoretical struggles of mankind, so the *political state* enumerates its practical struggles. Thus the particular form and nature of the political state contains all social struggles, needs and truths within itself. It is therefore anything but beneath its dignity to make even the most specialized political problem – such as the distinction between the representative system and the estates system – into an object of its criticism. For this problem only expresses at the *political* level the distinction between the rule of man and the rule of private property. Hence the critic not only can but must concern himself with these political questions (which the crude socialists find entirely beneath their dignity)...Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e., from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them...The reform of consciousness consists entirely in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in explaining its own actions to it. Like Feuerbach's critique of religion, our whole aim can only be to translate religious and political problems into their self-

conscious human form. Our programme must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas but by analyzing mystical consciousness obscure to itself, whether it appear in religious or political form. It will then become plain that the world has long since dreamed of something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality.¹¹

First, as distinct from the Kantian effort towards abstract formalization of reason, Marx seems to suggest that reason has always existed in heterogeneous conducts in different forms of human activity and “practical consciousness” but not necessarily in its current form. Using reasoning deduced from the existing forms, our task is to fashion out of all these a “true reality.” But the postulates of living reason are contained in the existing political state of a society, which is the raw material. Further, the hypostasis of a particular political state assumes that “reason has been realized.” This assumption, a patently false one, leads to endless strife and contradiction. Politics pretends to subscribe to the ideal, however, the real premises acting within actual situations are very different. This perpetual conflict between the real and the ideal comes to be the condition of society. At the same time, this “internecine conflict” reveals to us (to reason) the true nature of society. Just as religion is the catalogue of abstract struggles of human beings, the political state is the index of practical struggles of a society. Hence, the major task of reason is to critically examine the fundamental premises of a society, such as, for example, the system of private property. The fundamental (and mostly unexamined) premises of a society manifest themselves at the political level, and from there we can draw the distinction between the real rule of reason and the rule of an unexamined premise masquerading as reason. And this understanding is meaningfully accomplished not in an abstract theoretical manner but by being engaged in actual struggles. The self-knowledge of reason lies in relentless criticality; the “reform of consciousness” which had imagined that it had attained reason, has to occur by waking itself up to its own actual state. The real work of reason therefore must be to render religious and political problems into their lived human forms.

Let us consider, for example, the question of freedom. In its abstract political form it becomes a convenient sacred symbol or transcendental signified to which reality may be sacrificed. Instead, reason must translate freedom into daily activity and everyday relations, thus bringing freedom intimately into our lived lives. Reason must unmask hypocrisy. Again take the question of justice. Political reason pays endless tribute to justice and makes it its ostensive social goal. However, at the same time, within the structure of private property and winner-take-all character of modern societies, justice as lived experience turns out to be something very different. The task of reason is to discover and throw light on the basic contradictions that exist between overt political objectives and underlying social practices, and at the same time make it possible to visualize how to attain to self-conscious action that is stripped of duplicity. Mystified consciousness, or consciousness not aware of its own deceit and perfidy, must be exposed to itself through daily action and lived relationships, and not through political or religious dogma. Then and only then can human beings come into possession of a collective

¹⁰ Marcuse, op. cit.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Marx Engels Collected Works Vol. 1* Transl. Clemens Dutt (London: International Publishers, 1975), p. 397.

and social life that reason has often imagined but never come into possession. It is therefore only through sensuous activity that we overcome the idealist formulations of reason the goals of which remain as unachieved principles. At this juncture it would be extremely beneficial to take up the great phenomenologist Edmund Husserl for consideration for whom the “riddle of reason” was a central part of his life-long investigations into cognitive consciousness. Husserl wrote about the necessity to investigate the phenomenology of reason. This is why phenomenology, according to Ernst Wolfgang Orth, is simply “another name for the problem of reason—for human rationality itself.”¹² Having come thus far into our inquiry into reason we get some valuable insights from Husserl’s inquiries. To begin with, and rather appropriately, we encounter the notion of “horizon”:

According to Husserl, human cognition is accompanied by an “empty horizon” which co-determines the activity of reason. At this point, the phenomenological concept of horizon reaches the correlation between reason and unreason. Each thing known in a rational way necessarily presupposes an unknown horizon. The latter is equal to unreason. Husserl concluded: “Thus *the structure of the known and the unknown is a fundamental structure of world-consciousness.*” In a text written in December 1935, Husserl articulated these ideas with the use of two Greek words: “pevra” and “apeiron.” He succinctly explained the terms in the following way: “on the one hand, things in a proper sense, each thoroughly seen, possible to grasp, in a thorough shape and the universe of thorough things as the first notion of the world. In the opposite that which is shapeless: the Earth as the ground which in principle is not able to be experienced as a ‘thing’.” Therefore, the concept of horizon expresses the correlation between the determinable and thus reasonable element of one’s cognition, and the undeterminable element which seems to exceed the power of reason. However, one can expand the realm of reason (not ever in its entirety, of course), to the unbounded range of unreason. This is possible because the world remains the “undeterminable possibility of determination.”¹³

The positivity of perception occurs against a background of indeterminate emptiness that accompanies it. Unreflecting thought experiences a succession of cognitive moments as an unbroken chain. However, this is merely an illusion. Each cognitive moment is surrounded by a corona of non-cognition whose exact nature cannot be determined within reason. Husserl calls this zone an “empty horizon.” It stands to reason that the positivity of thought-reason must have to be complemented by its dual opposite, an uninhabited precinct, and that each arising of cognition would simultaneously require a spacing which is free of other cognitive fragments. But, this is entirely alien to the attitude of modernity which believes in unbroken positivity. The cognitive and agentic continuity of the individual is taken for granted. Therefore the talk of “unreason” ontologically accompanying reason is something not often countenanced in modernist thought, probably also because it introduces un know ability and uncertainty both of which are anathema to modernity.

¹² Witold Plotka, “The Riddle of Reason: In Search of Husserl’s Concept of Rationality” In *Bulletin d’Analyse Phenomenologique*, Vol 5, No.2, 2009. URL: <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/1782-2041/index.php?id=303>.

¹³ Ibid.

Nevertheless, the self-knowledge of reason reveals that thought moments are not continuous but discrete, surrounded by an indistinctness that may be given different names. Thus Husserl affirms that the “fundamental structure of world-consciousness” lies in a dialectical relation between reason and unreason, or between cognition and horizon. “Therefore, in this context, the correlation between reason and unreason indicates that reason as a whole is a never ending process in which we constitute reason in light of the necessary presence of unreason.” While it is possible to extend the bounds of reason indefinitely, it will always be accompanied by the horizon of an amorphous unreason that cannot be brought within the bounds of experience. “The description of the doxa will always be incomplete due to the concept of horizon,” consequently, there is always an excess that escapes cognition and we cannot arrive at complete knowledge of anything.¹⁴ The second important observation Husserl makes with regard to reason concerns the representational character of the human mind. Each mental act or state is about something other than itself, a representation of something else. In other words, mental states are mostly directed toward some object which may or may not have an extra-mental existence. In other words, intentionality may have an object, but the content of intentionality is essentially independent of the ontology or existential truth of objects. In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl talks of the property of intentionality as central to the problem of consciousness.

The concept of horizon is structurally connected with the notion of intentionality which is one of the most widely discussed concepts in the study of Husserl’s phenomenology... [T]he concept of intentionality expresses the ability of consciousness to be directed towards *something*. Husserl’s notion of reason seems to be defined by intentionality. If one is directed towards something due to reason, this something is always surrounded by other things, and each proposition about something implies many other prejudices. Hence, in phenomenology, “... no single, isolated cognition could have the character of absolute justification.” Human cognition is continuously surrounded by its horizons. Because of this, any particular intention points to other intentions, and so on. On the other hand, “... horizons are not open possibilities [which] could be fulfilled by fantasy, but horizons are forms for apodictic determination. Husserl strictly emphasized that horizons as possibilities cannot be fulfilled by fantasy. Hence, the concept of horizon leads to the formulation of the thesis that not every intention can refer to any other. Only due to such a determination the world is not perceived as chaos. At the same time, the concept of horizon indicates that each intention presupposes another, known or unknown, intention.¹⁵ The point is that isolated cognition is not meaningful or justifiable. An act of reason directed toward something, or a mental proposition about some object or event is always surrounded by other objects and propositions. Moreover, since every intentional (cognitive) act is surrounded by a horizon, objects gain specificity in consciousness and do not become a confused muddle. Three things emerge from the foregoing discussion. First, the representational character of reason is necessarily embedded in a network of propositions and are not lonely or sequestered acts. Second, acts of reason may or may not have an actual

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid.

(real) object as their focus. And third, intentionality indicates a causal chain of succession, with each intentional act triggering the next, and so on. It is this endless succession of intentionality that gives the impression of a stable reality. A third point relates to the question of a specific form of rationality, namely, scientific rationality. Husserl detected what he called a crisis in the existing scientific manner of thinking and proceeded to give a critical account of it. In doing so, he did not deny the “success” of the sciences, but notably wrote of the possibility of crisis accompanying success. We come upon an important insight: success does not preclude crisis.

In the *Crisis*, Husserl stressed the unquestionable status of scientific success. As he famously stated, “... knowledge is power.” Husserl attributed the power of sciences to their grounding in method, which allowed to reduce the scientist’s workload. Nevertheless, Husserl spoke of the scientist’s reliance on method as a double edged sword. The method, of course, “...is progress, but it is a danger as well: it saves the scientist much intellectual effort, but due to the mechanisation of method, many branches of knowledge become incomprehensible; outer rationality, which is understood as justification based on changing conclusions, does not correspond to inner rationality, to the understanding of inner senses and aims of thoughts and to basic elements of method.” This indicates that the critique of the mechanization of method is closely linked to the critique of reason in phenomenology. Husserl spoke of an “inner” and “outer” rationality. While “inner” rationality seems to be equivalent to the essence of reason and thinking, forming its aim and meaning, “outer” rationality of method reduces reason to its own ideal constructs of justification and the “outer” mechanisms of practice. Therefore, the rationality of mechanized method transforms reason into a mechanism that belongs to a dogmatic or at least a technical science. According to Husserl, the rationality of positive sciences as shaped by the mechanization of method contains in itself a fundamental contradiction. More precisely, positive sciences claim that “[s]cience should make us independent ... in all our practice and aspirations. However, as science is subordinated to the mechanisation of method, it does not make us free even theoretically.” In other words, positive sciences enslave human rationality. This contradiction accompanies all attempts at the mechanization of method....Husserl enquires what the implications of adopting a certain view of the world are, and he asks how the premise of rationality is translated outside the scientist’s life. He concludes: “I do not know anyone who can answer such uneasy questions.” Therefore, as a practitioner, the scientist does not question the foundations of his practice. He just knows what he can do, and this is the reason why he does not care about the premise of rationality. He focuses on his actions or actual operations, and he does not address the theme of reason in his investigations. In this sense, Husserl suggested that we [simply] assume that certain activities are rational. Hence, when we want to describe the concept of scientific rationality, we should examine how it is practiced, rather than investigating scientific theories themselves. At the very beginning of the 1922-1923 *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lecture series, Husserl emphasized that such an investigation would allow us to formulate a theory of rationality which is immanent to theories constructed by

scientists.¹⁶ Organized science relies heavily on method. In fact, the very success of modern science owes itself to what is often called the scientific method. It reduces the burden of doing science and arriving at commonly held justifications. However, Husserl says that this very expediency leads to several problems. First, due to the “mechanization of method” science becomes fragmented into areas of highly specialized activity. The scientist who has mastered a method of gene splicing may know next to nothing, say, about a closely related area, and vice-versa. Why is this a problem? When branches of science become overly specialized aided by esoteric method they become incomprehensible to one another. Growing within the logic of their own super-specialized areas they do not communicate with each other resulting in a loss of any comprehensible aim of doing science. It is even possible to say that the overt logic of doing science may lose coherence with comprehensive societal goals. Here Husserl makes a distinction between “inner” and “outer” rationality. Inner rationality does not mean an inward or private rationality of the individual. It indicates the essence of rationality that forms its “aim and meaning.” Whereas “outer” rationality refers to the outward mechanisms of practice. The outer rationality of technicism has turned out to be so powerful and “dogmatic” that today the mechanized and routinized methods have begun to dominate and shape the positive sciences. It is the tail that wags the dog, as the saying goes. There is an implicit claim in the scientific endeavour that it progressively brings autonomy to the human being. But when that very science is subordinated to mechanized method, it cannot bring the promised freedom. Rather, it ends up enslaving human rationality since it is unconscious and uncritical of its own conduct.

Raising a closely related and equally important issue Husserl questions the conduct of the scientist. The scientist, he says, practices scientific rationality in his professional life, but it is not clear how that rationality extends itself beyond that point. Besides, the scientist rarely questions the premises of the science s/he does implicitly assuming that it is a rational act. The practitioner of science is trained to focus on the actions or operations and not on the rationality or otherwise of what they are doing. That is why an inquiry into the basic assumptions of science escapes them in an unscientific manner. In trying to understand scientific rationality, we should instead focus on how science is actually practiced rather than inquiring into scientific theories. Only such an investigation would throw light on the actual rationality implicit in the doing of science. Next, let us turn to a different and key 20th century perspective on the function of reason—the psychoanalytic. To the largely unitarian view of reason we have encountered so far, the work of Sigmund Freud offers a significant counterpoint. Although Freud is a very important intellectual figure of modernity, his counterpoint and insights, largely from his inquiries into the psycho-sexual development of the human being, have been largely ignored in educational discourse except at the fringes. Education has preferred to move with the positivistic assumptions about reason, morality and human thought. In a trenchant critique of these assumptions, Freud was to write: “That the upbringing of young people at the present day conceals from them the part sexuality will play in their lives is not the only reproach we are obliged to bring against [culture].

¹⁶ Ibid.

It offends too in not preparing them for the aggressions of which they are destined to become the objects. Sending the young out into life with such a false psychological orientation is as if one were to equip people going on a Polar expedition with summer clothing and maps of the Italian lakes. One can clearly see that ethical standards are being misused in a way. The strictness of these standards would not do much harm if education were to say: This is how men ought to be in order to be happy and make others happy, but you have to reckon with their not being so. Instead of this the young are made to believe that everyone else conforms to the standard of ethics, i.e., that everyone else is good. And then on this is based the demand that the young shall be so too.¹⁷ Freud accuses culture and the educational establishment of hypocrisy, and concealing from the young the real basis of their experiences and instead sending them on a 'leather hunt.'

In Freudian theory of the psyche, reason is divided into two parts, the Conscious and the Unconscious, each following its own language and logic of operations.¹⁸ This division plays a critically crucial role in the make-up of the human and what we take to be everyday consciousness. For Freud, humans exist as a composite of a natural, biological matrix (termed unconsciousness) and another part, the conscious ego. (The biological formulation is discussed below.) Schematically in the last formulation, the rational ego (with its own laws, logic and language) and the a-rational id function with differing causalities through their respective operations and goals. As the id strives for its own aggrandizement, the ego, with its countervailing rationality, attempts to restrict it. Psychoanalysis would empower this rational faculty by penetrating the unconscious to discern its functions through rational inquiry. Simplistically, this schema structures Freud's notion of psycho-dynamics, and, while no neat partition exists in Freud's mature presentation, where the ego is divided between conscious and unconscious components, for this discussion, suffice it to leave rationality (for better and for worse) insulated within the conscious faculty of the ego. Indeed, this repository is the crucial arena in which psychoanalysis ultimately achieves its own goals: reason 'understands' and then putatively better restrains the unconscious drives that inhibit or prevent goals and behaviors established by the rational faculty.¹⁹ In developing an understanding of psychopathology or mental illness, Freud had an insight into consciousness that indicated that beneath the so-called conscious mind, in which we are able to direct, control, and evaluate our thoughts and actions, there is a subterranean vault where all of our memories and past experiences reside. These are memories of experiences that have been repressed on account of associated psychological stress, feelings of guilt, and shame etc., as well as those that have simply been consciously forgotten and no longer important to us. It's from these memories and experiences that our background beliefs, habits, and behaviors are formed of

which we are not conscious. Besides, this background consciousness or subterranean repository is also the root of what Freud called our "drives" or primitive orientation of desires and passions including aggression. The unconscious contains all sorts of significant and disturbing material which we edit out of conscious awareness because they are too disturbing to acknowledge fully. For example, sexual attraction towards one's parents fills us with confusion and guilt; similarly, feelings of great violence towards one's sibling may result in psychic disruption. Therefore, people develop a range of mechanisms called "repression" in psychoanalytic theory in order to put out of sight their unconscious motives and feelings. An important point to be made here is that "the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time," that is to say, there is "no recognition of the passage of time," in the Unconscious, and events "are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred."²⁰ The conscious mind, on the other hand, forgets very quickly.²¹ Freud emphasized the importance of the unconscious mind, and a primary assumption of Freudian theory is that the unconscious mind directs behavior to a greater degree than society imagines. This is very dissimilar to the positivist assumptions about rationality which asserts that consciousness is self-present, that is, fully present to itself, and the content of our conscious thoughts and memories are all there is. This now appears as a rather simplistic and naïve model of the human mind.

But we have to find out next about Freud's characterization of the conscious mind in order to be able to grasp the nature of reason within this dialectic. As regards a characterization of the ego, in so far as it is to be distinguished from the id, we shall get on better if we turn our attention to the relation between it and the most superficial portion of the mental apparatus; which we call the Pcpt-cs (perceptual-conscious) system. This system is directed on to the external world, it mediates perceptions of it, and in it is generated, while it is functioning, the phenomenon of consciousness. It is the sense-organ of the whole apparatus, receptive, moreover, not only of excitations from without but also of such as proceed from the interior of the mind. One can hardly go wrong in regarding the ego as that part of the id which has been modified by its proximity to the external world and the influence that the latter has had on it, and which serves the purpose of receiving stimuli and protecting the organism from them, like the cortical layer with which a particle of living substance surrounds itself. This relation to the external world is decisive for the ego. The ego has taken over the task of representing the external world for the id, and so of saving it; for the id, blindly striving to gratify its instincts in complete disregard of the superior strength of outside forces, could not otherwise escape annihilation. In the fulfilment of this function, the ego has to observe the external world and preserve a true picture of it in the memory traces left by its perceptions, and, by means of the reality-test, it has to eliminate any element in this picture of the external world which is a contribution from internal sources of excitation.²²

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* Transl. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

¹⁸ The idea of the conscious versus the unconscious did not originate with Freud. Dynamic psychotherapy and ideas of a fluid subterranean constitutive of the human make-up were around for at least a century preceding Freud. But the latter was singularly responsible for bringing this credibly before the public and in making the idea popular.

¹⁹ Alfred I. Tauber, "Freud's Dreams of Reason" In *History of the Human Sciences*, <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals> 22:4; 1-29; DOI: 10.1177/0952695109340492 <http://hhs.sagepub.com>.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, "The Structure of the Unconscious" In *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Transl. W. J. H. Sprott (New York: Norton, 1933).

²¹ This fact is very important for psychoanalysis, and opens the way to eliminate pathology by the route of making repressed memories conscious.

²² Sigmund Freud, "The Structure of the Unconscious."

As a general principle the birth of the “ego” or the conscious mind is generated by the proximity and interactions with the external world. But it is also receptive of the excitations from within (i.e. the “id” or the Unconscious). In fact, one can safely say that the ego or the conscious mind is a splinter of the primordial consciousness itself as modified by the influences of the surrounding world. It has the task of reflecting a reasonable representation of the world and saving the organism from coming in conflict with external forces. Thus the “Reality-principle” which is identified with the ego overcomes the Pleasure-principle of the Id by paying a certain price, which is repression. In Freud’s mature writings, the ego became a complex composite of conscious and unconscious domains, with the latter in dynamic intercourse with the id and super-ego. Indeed, the ego as part of the mental triad increasingly attracted his attention as he pondered the mystery of a rational faculty surveying and judging other domains of the mind. He explained this ability in almost an off-hand gesture in his 1933 lecture, ‘The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’: We wish to make the ego the matter of our enquiry, our very own ego. But is that possible? After all, the ego is in its very essence a subject; how can it be made into an object? Well, there is no doubt that it can be. The ego can take itself as an object, can treat itself like other objects, can observe itself, criticize itself, and do Heaven knows what with itself. Freud might have then further developed this Kantian construction, but he did not, and instead he observes how consciousness becomes self-consciousness: In this, one part of the ego is splitting itself over against the rest. So the ego can be split; it splits itself during a number of its functions-temporarily at least. Its parts can come together again afterwards. That is not exactly a novelty, though it may be putting an unusual emphasis on what is generally known.²³

This brings us to the key question of how the rational faculty represented by the ego is able to survey and judge itself: What is the nature of its self-consciousness or reflexivity? For without the self-reflective element we cannot talk about reason in an objective manner (when we talk about reason, it is essentially reason reflecting on itself). But how can the subjective ego become its own object, become self-critical? In other words, *how does consciousness become self-consciousness?* The answer to this key conundrum is that the ego splits itself over as the observer on one part and the observed as the other part, a division is produced between ‘thinker’ and ‘thought’, so that one part is able to survey the other, make judgments about the other, control and modify the other, and so on. This schism can occur in a number of ways producing different kinds of splits in consciousness, but the observer/observed duality remains the central fact of human consciousness.²⁴This is at the same time both a banal and an extraordinary finding, and for the present inquiry into reason it is a most rewarding one.

Reason and the Imperatives of Education

From the foregoing exploration into some of the most systematic and intense inquiries into reason, we have been able to gather some insights. Let us organize those findings and look into what each of them might hold for education

²³ Ibid.

²⁴This is not to be confused with the pathological condition called “split personality” etc.

individually and collectively. There is no suggestion here of any coherence between these viewpoints, and there isn’t any, nevertheless the collage emerging out of this exercise turns out to be very stimulating for questions relating tone of the foundational assumptions of education, which is the existence of reason. We become aware of the acute significance of our mental productions and learn to see them from different standpoints leading not to a synthesis but to the potentiality of the unthought. Society, tradition, and culture often teach us what to think, but rarely do they teach us *how* to think. A self-consciousness of reason is therefore essential.

The first of our investigations led us to Kant, the great figure of the European Enlightenment. Failure often teaches us more than success. From Kant’s inability to draw out a purely rational basis for morals we learn a most important lesson: the necessity to comprehend the boundaries and limits of rational thought.²⁵ If the ultimate value of practical philosophy is to find an unwavering ground for moral action then reason alone, understood as empirical consciousness along with logical propositions derived there from, are not sufficient. Similarly, despite his stupendous efforts, Kant’s inability (or anyone else’s for that matter) to give a single rational account of reason that reconciles practical reason with theoretical reason might indicate that there is no such single principle from which all of it can be derived. Educationally, an adequate response to this analysis demands a sea-change in our understanding of how to go about organizing learning. Neither theoretical reason nor practical reason by themselves are sufficient to produce a reasonable human being. The “mind” in which knowledge-reason resides is incomplete by itself; in other words, there is an intrinsic incompleteness with regard to reason’s self-knowledge. Mere knowledge of physics, biology, economics or genetic engineering is insufficient to produce the moral or reasonable human being. There is a somatic as well as an intuitional consciousness deliberately ignored in modernity that possibly needs to be taken into account in order to come up with a deeper insight into liberation curriculum and emancipatory pedagogy. The somatic is prior to mental categories which is why I invoke it as a way to go beyond Kant’s account of reason. There is no room here to go deeper into the topic, but a coherent reason can only be found in a unified psycho-somatic investigation. In other words, it is an ontological and not just an epistemological effort.

Next, from Hegel, we get the dialectical form of reason. Stripped of the mystification of unsubstantiated propositions such as “World-Spirit” etc., what the unsentimental picture reveals is that of an empirical consciousness in endless search for security glorified as the action of transcendental reason.²⁶This is a reading of Hegel against Hegel. The neurotic search for security actually creates more and more insecurity in the world. The dialectic pushes us inexorably not toward a more reasonable world but a world breaking into confusion, something confirmed by experience. Hegel’s attempt to merge identity (thesis) and non-identity (anti-thesis) into a higher

²⁵ The Categorical Imperative, as we have seen cannot truly and fairly be considered as a secular proposition.

²⁶ Here, a parallel can be drawn to Kafka’s famous literary work *Der Bau* or *The Burrow*. The narrative concerns an animal’s attempt to set up an absolutely secure burrow for itself. The animal feels hunted and burrows ever deeper in response. It is really an allusion to human efforts to construct a rational world of their own making against the outside world dominated by irrational and unpredictable forces.

identity (synthesis) and claim that as progress turns out to be a typical 19th century self-deception.²⁷ To take an unsentimental view, what these means for education is that we self-consciously throw away the glorified view of reason and learn to be sceptical of the search for security in more and more technology and higher and higher objectification of the world, the twin symbols of progress. This also means that we make sure that alongside teaching science we do not teach scientism or an uncritical view of science. Freed of the apotheosis of scientific reason (not of science), a reformed consciousness must of necessity seek a new orientation with the macrocosm. Here, Marx's idea of sensuous and practical activity being the true source of objective reason is useful.²⁸ Out of somatic activity we derive insights into the relations that surround us. Consciousness need not precede us, instead history or human activity generates consciousness. This brings upon the educational situation a different responsibility: we are no longer merely directing the flow of knowledge within a pre-existing background consciousness. Rather, this new understanding makes consciousness and its reform the primary educational focus, requiring that we "translate religious and political problems into their self-conscious human form." In other words, the task of reason and that of education is now concomitant, and it is to make the abstract conditions surrounding us intelligible. Reform of societal relations cannot occur without reformulation of the idea of reasons itself and this in turn is dependent upon the transparency of reason in education. Going deeper into the phenomenology of reason we find Husserl's statement that the fundamental structure of world-consciousness lies in a dialectical relation between reason and unreason, or between cognition and horizon. Therefore, in this context, "the correlation between reason and unreason indicates that reason as a whole is a never ending process in which we constitute reason in light of the necessary presence of unreason." This has profound significance for the way in which we consider education.

The unobservant mind experiences consciousness as a uniform and continuous flow, and reason as an unambiguous source of judgment. Husserl's analysis shows neither to be the case. Reason is interspersed by unreason (i.e., outside of reason), and consciousness arises against an empty horizon. The neat educational idea that we can gain secular or objective knowledge without ambiguity founders here. Consequently, education must inquire into "unreason" even as it looks into reason, and must worry about the horizon no longer taking consciousness for granted. Both require heightened self-awareness, an area not given any attention by conventional education. Finally, we have the Freudian insights into consciousness. At least two things are of import here as far as education is concerned. First, education hardly ever speaks of the unconscious, instead training all its energies on the conscious mind. Although the idea of the unconscious has been around for a long time now and is widely accepted, educational discourse has preferred to remain silent about it pretending what happens in the conscious mind is all there is. We know that the unconscious cannot be "educated," nevertheless, a serious acknowledgment of its existence and relevance ought to be part of the self-knowledge of the subject. Second, on the question of how consciousness becomes self-consciousness, the rational ego splits to produce the observer and the observed. This is of profound significance. What education has so far taken to be a unified rational subject turns out to be a phantasm. How education should respond to this realization will have to be, perhaps, the subject of another paper. Suffice it to say here that from this point on, both the educator and the educated, the teacher and the taught, have to regard each other differently. The ability to regard heretofore known things differently is the beginning of true reform in reason. And in order to bring about positive change in education, we need first to bring about a new self-consciousness in reason.

²⁷ None of the available livability indexes show well-being increasing over time. Technology has not improved the human condition, it has only made it more complex.

²⁸ We have to acknowledge that Marx too made the error of putting science outside history, but we will side-step that issue in favour of a rich insight useful from the perspective of education.