The current theories of recognition, and particularly Axel Honneth’s, invoke, among other historical references, a thesis of Fichte’s that states that ‘summons’ and ‘impetus’ are provided by one rational being to another rational being as a condition for the self-position, i.e. for self-determination, and for self-consciousness, of a finite rational being. According to Honneth, “It seems beyond any doubt that Fichte’s assumption of a ‘summons’ (Aufforderung) really refers to a communicative act that one cannot consider as the product of subjective elements of constitution (of the subject)” (Honneth 2001, 76). While Fichte’s theory is of increasing interest for the theorists who focus on the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, Kant remains for such theorists as Honneth the defender of a monologist theory. In the realm of education as well—both of children as and of humankind—Fichte and Kant clearly diverge. The fact that the ‘summons’ (Aufforderung) plays a major role in Fichte’s conception might lead one to see a similarity between Fichte’s conception of education and Honneth’s politics of recognition conceived of as social integration. However, Honneth’s politics of recognition combines, rather, a Fichtean element with a Kantian one, in an original, but, in my view, highly problematic way.

In Kant’s practical philosophy, recognition does not play any transcendental role in the constitution of either the subject or self-consciousness, and there is no such thing as the Fichtean ‘summons.’ Yet, recognition, from a teleological perspective, is a key function for recognition in a meaning, which is both traditional and closer to Honneth than the Fichtean meaning. In the fourth proposition of the *Idea of a Universal History*, Kant writes: “Man has an inclination to live in society, since he feels in this state more like a man, that is, he feels able to develop his natural capacities. But he also has a great tendency to live as an individual, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance all
around, just as he knows of himself that he is in turn inclined to offer resistance to others. It is this very resistance which awakens all man’s powers and induce him to overcome his tendency to laziness. Through the desire for honor (*Ehre*) (*Ehrsucht*), power (*Macht*) (*Herrsucht*) or property (*Reichtum*) (*Habsucht*), it drives him to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot bear yet cannot bear to leave.” (*Idea for a Universal History* Ak VIII:21, Nisbet 44; see also *Pädagogik* IX:492 about *Ehrsucht*, *Herrschsucht* and *Habsucht*). It is not cupidity, but instead, ambition, lust for power, i.e. stringing for a high rank in society or for social recognition that are quoted by Kant in the first place. Unlike cupidity, which is impossible to satisfy for all people because of the scarcity of goods, ambition and lust of power are impossible to satisfy for all by their very nature, even in a land of milk and honey. Indeed, these things are all relational goods. One cannot fulfill all these conflicting ambitions, lusts of power and this cupidity, precisely because they are conflicting and asocial tendencies.

Ambition as a motivation to individual efforts does not contribute only to the increase of the total amount of goods produced. The key function of ambition is rather to develop human talents in their diversity. Indeed, Kant characterizes reason in the finite human being as “knowing no limits to its projects. It has a non instinctive causality, and it rather needs attempts, exercises and learning [Versuche, Übung und Unterricht], in order to gradually progress from one stage of understanding to the next one.” (Second Proposition.) The purpose of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), of which the equivalent in the domain of education is ‘discipline’ exercised by the parents, is not only to determine and to enforce the limit of the freedom of each citizen, in order it not to infringe the freedom of others, but also to enhance the diversity of projects and attempts proceeded by human beings. Kant offers a famous metaphor: “But once enclosed within a precinct like that of civil union, the same inclinations have the most beneficial effect. In the same way, trees in a forest, by seeking to deprive each other of air and sunlight, compel each other to find these by upward growth, so that they grow beautiful and straight […].” (*Idea for a Universal History*, Fifth proposition, Ak VIII:22, Nisbet 46) The growth of the tree above itself represents a non–zero-sum-game, because it results in a development into a space that was not previously occupied by other trees, so that the total space occupied by the trees expands. In his course on pedagogy, Kant conceives of the education of children like he does of the education of the entire humankind. He advises