



The Sisyphean Destiny of Philosophy (of Education)

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Abstract

Authors begin by a synthetic historical review of the emergence of the philosophy of education up to the present day. It follows a presentation of the results of recent meta-analyses on the topics, problems, guidelines and relevance given to the philosophy of education (PE). For this purpose, several paths were chosen: one, more empirical, focused on the works developed within the field; the other, more foundational, sought a disciplinary sense within the field's tradition and the current challenges that are being raised. Authors then outline some of the paths that can be opened up for the philosophy of education, understood as a critical and creative quest. Namely, they try to show how it may be understood as a creation of concepts, in a stance to rip Chaos, by introducing an innovative intensity, which can correspond to the creation of meaning that opens and articulates a possible world (of meaning). Complementary to this, PE could take charge of the analysis of educational discourses, the suggestion of a general direction for the educational process, the elucidation of the human's educating structure, the explanation of the different pedagogies through the unveiling of their underlying teleology, the recollection of interesting philosophical questions for educators, or a metaphysical analysis of related issues, as well as an analytic approach, aimed at clarifying concepts, or a radical approach, by reflecting upon the deep assumptions of education, and even a deductive approach derived from the great philosophical matrices. Philosophy of education remains, nowadays, a field of hermeneutic openness that should assume the stance of resistance to any attempts to stifle or silence the axiological dimension, and very particularly, PE could be developed as a way of probing the concrete educational practice activity, by engaging in discussions, in order to make suggestions about "what was valuable in the past" and "what is worthwhile in the present". Today, perhaps more than ever, PE requires the critical work and commitment that philosophy always had the virtue of incisively developing, particularly when it comes to the field of education that is proven to be a multi-layered arena of conflicting crossovers.

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1. A historical review on philosophy of education

To guide ourselves in structuring philosophy of education (PE), as, among other possibilities, a training course for teachers, we must ask what this discipline may consist of, what rationale could support it and what kind of purposes it could have. Many people have posed these questions and the answers given have ended up producing a broad spectrum of ideas. If this demonstrates the creativity of this field of knowledge, it also produces a sense of vertigo when faced with the wide dispersion of perspectives and the ingrained inconclusiveness that has set in, characteristics that are not negative “per se”.

Attempting to construct a fair overarching definition, Noddings (2012, xiii) tells us that “philosophy of education is the study of education and its problems, [...] by applying the methods of philosophy.” As clear as this definition may be, it becomes no more than indicative. Relying on what is generally assumed about philosophy, we could say that it points to critical analysis on the deep assumptions of a specific understanding about education, requiring both a sound historical information, namely about the educational conceptions produced and their anthropo-philosophical bases, while not, necessarily, sticking to the onto-metaphysical stances that might be entailed (Ibañez-Martin, 1984). Howsoever, PE must indeed be defined in relation to the immanence of current challenges that are inherently constituted by a past that somehow grounded them in a set of problematic contexts, as well as by a future from which all actual potentialities unfold. In no case can we conceive of PE outside the contexts in which it arose, came to take certain stances and was successively redefined, meaning that we have to refer such an endeavour to its own history if we want to at least make some sense out of its current conjuncture.

Following the recent analysis of Chambliss (2009), the origins of PE in continental Europe can be traced back to the work of Kant and Hegel. The first American book entitled *Philosophy of Education* was published in 1904 by Herman Horne (Chambliss, 2009, 245), for whom philosophy was a kind of science about science, while PE would constitute the unifying element of the science, the practice and the history of education.²

The third phase of PE’s development derived from John Dewey, who is named by Amilburu and Gutiérrez (2012) as “the first philosopher of education,” because he sought to show how philosophy is engaged with educational problems. According to Dewey, scientific discoveries would not be sufficient to establish the aims and methods of education. Hence, without discarding scientific possible contributions, it would be up to philosophy to put forward the questioning and criticism that could test ideas about the purposes and methods of education. In such a framework, PE is not to be the result of an

² In Horne’s opinion, by studying scientific disciplines separately, one could meet the development process of the human mind, in whose participation the individuals would find their identity and develop their competencies.

application of some preconceived ideas to a system of practices, the former having an origin and a purpose extraneous to the latter, rather answers to the problems must be found within the realm of educational activities. In this respect, one can advocate that the means and the ends are, in the context of practical things, mutually constitutive elements of the dialectical process that produces practical rationality, and so being the interdependence between action and ideas should be acknowledged. Theory must be tested, and it is dependent on practice as the practice is on the theory which makes it possible.

When we refer to the academic context, it seems that PE emerged in university departments as a sub-discipline of philosophy around the middle of the nineteenth century. Under the Anglo-Saxon influence, analytic philosophy became the dominant trend during the first phase of the twentieth century and pursued a purpose that was primarily one of epistemological foundation. Later on, such a trend was eventually criticized for its inability to truly meet educational problems, and for its strong hostility towards ethical issues (Chambliss, 2009).

According to Amilburu and Gutierrez (2012), PE has, in fact, a relatively short academic history, and still lacks recognition from some disciplinary areas or, at least, from a somehow positivistic reading. However, it can be said that it presents nowadays a vibrant field of strong vitality, if one counts the number of meetings and publications, even if its impact on educational policies seems to be scarce and devaluated and thus rendered ineffective (Hayden, 2012). The cited authors state that, at the present time, we can identify the following dominant streams: analytic philosophy, critical philosophy, deconstructionism, phenomenology, neo-Marxism, existentialism, personalism, the hermeneutic approach and neo-Aristotelianism.

In a book delineating the critical historiography of the educational sciences, Adalberto Dias de Carvalho (1988) characterized, as follows, the range of attitudes assumed for PE:

1. The practice of extracting a given framework of metaphysical conceptions of the learner, education and its purposes, that are then applied normatively to the educational field – thus attributing to PE the simple task of conceptual transposition;
2. The refusal to assign to philosophy any legitimacy for stating value judgments, based on the assumption that they lack verifiability, and thus limiting its work to the criticism and clarification of the language used within the education field - in which case, PE would consist of a mere analytic process;
3. The uncritical transference of philosophical ideas, theoretical and practical fundamental principles, as well as the supposedly absolute ends bequeathed by great pedagogues – which means retaining PE as a mere work of application;
4. The scientistic refusal of any philosophical intervention due to its assumed uselessness, in which case PE is taken as a simple speculative exercise lacking proper demonstration.

Now, it must be a striking evidence that all and each one of these attitudes deny to PE any creative ability: “the first one (metaphysical) limits itself to

extraction, the second (philosophical-analytical) limits itself to cleaning, the third (historical-philosophical) limits itself to pouncing and the fourth (scientistic), like the Narcissus myth, does not assume any limitation at all” (Fadigas, 2003, 71). In fact, the later “scientistic” trend, which evacuates PE from the educational field, is far from being outdated. We could say it fits with an actual pervasive dynamic that is globally delivering the humanities to contempt, as Nuccio Ordine (2017) has so eloquently verberated. Such is, in fact, the current implication of instrumental rationality generalization, from which accrues the triumph of the anti-utopian flowers of utility and efficiency, within which scope, as was very pertinently noted by Standish (2003), it has become uncontroversial – even for the European Commission (1995)– to assume that the purpose of education is simply to serve the economy.

2. The tasks of philosophy of education from the meta-analysis of recent publications

In the last decade, even under the harassment humanities³ suffered, several attempts have been carried out in order to understand the specificity and relevance of PE in the context of its emergence. To serve such a purpose, multiple paths were chosen: a more empirical line of work focused on the product developed within the disciplinary field; and a more foundational one, that sought for the discipline’s purpose within its heritage and in the current challenges it faces.

Among the meta-analyses on PE’s current activity, it stands out the one carried out by Hayden (2012). The author begins by recognizing the present strong anxiety about the relevance of PE’s work and identifies a set of issues, specifically: the tendency of some to emphasize philosophical work and to separate it from education, leaving this last field malnourished; the reliance on classical philosophical sources, despising theorists and philosophers of education, risking a recurrent slip into “reinventing the wheel”; a certain lack of interest among the philosophical community in focusing on educational themes and, vice versa, an aloof disinterest from the educational community regarding philosophy, which leaves philosophers in a kind of monologue with themselves. There is, also, the understanding that PE lacks a clear methodology as well as a circumscribed object necessary to be considered a kind of discipline. These problems add up to the questioning of the PE’s values and its potential to actually have an influence on education. Such a scenario seems to suggest that we should stimulate the debate about education among philosophers, and between them and the educational community by

³ It is certainly due to some reason that books entitled “An engineer with a humanistic's soul: Humanistic issues of technological world” (Sośnicka, 2019), showing concern with the the cleavage between techno-science and the humanities.

focusing their work on specific educational problems, i.e., an orientation that does not conceive philosophy as something definitely separated from education practices.

In the aforementioned study, the author also seeks an answer to the question of “what philosophy of education is about”, by analysing the field’s recent outputs.⁴ The author applied a content analysis which returned the 10 most prevalent themes, grouping together the 143 most frequently occurring concepts.⁵ According to this analysis of publications in the field of PE we can conclude that the authors are interested in theoretical explorations related to education, teaching, learning, pedagogy and practice; they refer to thinkers taken as classical (Plato, Dewey and Freire), as well as to others, to a lesser extent, who are seen as current references for the specific field (Foucault, Derrida, stand out). There is no significant variation regarding the covered topics, which is indicative of the central concern with theory, foundations of education, teaching and learning, and thus suggesting that the field is still dispersed by a wide variety of subjects. However, a significant narrowing of the concepts under research is now clear.

Questions of “What philosophy of education is?” and “What is the current state of the field?” were also raised by Chambliss (2009), who states the need for a review on the history of PE so that we can grasp the nature of the discipline. To this such purpose, the author follows, in a sense, the “factualist” approach, by performing an analysis of four renowned publications in the area: *A Companion to Philosophy of Education*, edited by R. Curren in 2003; the *Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education*, published in 2003 by N. Blake, P. Smeyers, R. Smith and P. Standish; the *RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Philosophy of Education*, edited by W. Carr in 2005; and the *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology*,

⁴ Namely the titles, abstracts and keywords from 1572 papers, published between January 2000 and December 2010, in four renowned Anglophone journals: *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Educational Theory*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education and Studies in Philosophy and Education*. In this respect, Amilburu & Gutiérrez (2012) identify as leading PE’s specialized research journals the following: *Educational Theory* (founded by John Dewey); *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (official publication of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australia); *The Journal of Philosophy of Education* (official journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain); the *British Journal of Education Studies*; the *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*; *Prospero*; *Interchange*, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*; the *Journal of Moral Education*; and *Studies in Philosophy and Education*.

⁵ Among the concepts, “theory” stood out with 338 (21.5 %) references, followed by the concept of “education”, with 333 references (21.2 %), “learning” with 287 (18.3 %) references, “school” with 280 (17.8 %) references and “practice” with 272 (17.3 %) references. The first three concepts (“theory”, “teaching” and “learning”) appeared as the five most frequently selected among the four studied publications, and therefore they could be considered the three most important lines of research in the field.

With regard to the “themes”, the analysis yielded “research” (1039: 66.1 %), within which “theory” (338: 21.5 %), “teaching” (333: 21.2 %) and “education” (280: 17.8 %) were highlighted. For the theme of “philosophical fields” (424: 27 %), “ethics” (160: 10.2 %), “moral” (156: 9.9 %) and “epistemology” (77: 4.9 %) stood out. The theme of “great thinkers”, with 422 references (26.8 %), highlighted the names of Dewey (92: 5.9 %), Foucault (67: 4.3 %) and Derrida (38: 2.4%). Surprisingly, a low representation of Rousseau (12: 0.8 %) was also found. As to the “isms” theme (407: 25.9 %) - the quoted theoretical lines - the study brought forward “liberalism” (119: 7.6 %), “postmodernism” (78: 5 %) and “pragmatism” (67: 4.3 %). “Liberalism” is by far the most referenced concept, whereas, unexpectedly (or perhaps not), “multiculturalism” appears to be a very residual topic.

edited by R. Curren in 2007. According to the reviewer's impression, PE is a lively and burgeoning academic topic, as well as one of the main philosophical themes selected by editors.⁶ In short, the last 50 years are striking with regard to the interest devoted to PE. All editors seek to find an answer to the question of "What is PE?", and some also enquire about its object and purpose.

In his *Anthology*, Randall Curren states that PE has been a sort of application of philosophical beliefs to the field of education. The book is divided into five core educational issues: educational purposes; authority; responsibilities involved; processes; and educational contents. In the *Companion*, from the same editor, PE's configuration is described by considering certain philosophical problems and some problems of education, thus outlining the emergent transdisciplinary character of the theory of education, which indicates single disciplines' inability to address the specific issues involved. The book covers the themes tackled by the movements unfolding within the educational field, teaching and learning issues, educational policy and ethics, as well as higher education problematics. The author believes that PE is better equipped than any other discipline to carry out the synthesizing conceptual work required to develop a transdisciplinary theory of practice, and mentions in both publications PE's critical role.

For its part, the *Guide* – by N. Blake, P. Smeyers, R. Smith and P. Standish – identifies the current opening of PE into a broad spectrum of ideas and practices. The book is divided into five parts: cultural and social theories; policies and PE; teaching and curriculum; and ethics and teaching. The editors define PE as an important creative work, considering the Anglophone heritage and the continental one, alongside the constraints and possibilities of the discipline. After the initial domination by analytic philosophy, the authors recognize a growing interest in issues such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity, as well as the acknowledgement of a contemporary challenge to philosophy's foundational approach and a renewed interest in the work of continental philosophers, such as in works of critical theory, deconstructionism and phenomenology. The *Guide* also considers the relationship between PE, teacher training and educational research, suggesting a return to psychological, sociological and historical studies as sources for educational theory, which could enable PE to persist in its quest for an educational "ought to be", drawing from the insights of the great philosophers.

On the other hand, the *Reader*, edited by W. Carr, points out, as seems to be most noticeable in contemporary PE, the broad and diverse understanding of what the discipline should be, as is quite notorious the lack of consensus between the incompatible large number of perspectives associated with different philosophical traditions. A situation that does not allow for the identification of a neutral, independent and, so to speak, superior viewpoint that could be taken as a standard. The developments of the

⁶ To the later are attributed 27 anthologies, 27 "Companions", 19 "Guides" and 10 "Readers".

discipline seem to be dependent on the developments of philosophy itself, but the editor chooses to organize PE's issues around the following themes: PE; the purposes of education; politics and education; and moral education. According to the editor, PE does not appear to be particularly relevant to education, which seems to disparage the discipline. This situation may result from the prevalence of analytic philosophy, thus suggesting the need for some revision in this regard. According to Carr, education professionals should develop their own "phronesis" by questioning their own practices, i.e., by reflecting on their own practices' historical dynamics and by rethinking received practices in light of the challenges to be tackled.

The answers pointed out by the editors of the quoted works, analysed by Chambliss (2009), lead us to the recognition of the wide range of issues addressed that return a multifaceted understanding of the discipline itself. Certain issues are "timeless", while others only emerged from the sociocultural transformations of recent decades. Among the topics covered, we found the following to be most prevalent: the nature and purposes of education; ethics and politics of education; moral education; feminism; analytical philosophy; practical wisdom; multiculturalism; commercialization of education; special needs; major figures in philosophy taken as references for the educational field; and the historical trends in education. When the authors seek to clarify what grants PE its philosophical character, it seems that they are satisfied with the relevance of the disciplinary outputs achieved so far. If it is true that for the four considered books, the major input comes from philosophy departments, we also receive contributions from other very varied sources, a phenomenon that proves the current interest in the discipline, which is confirmed by the largen count of publications on the field.

In Chambliss's (2009) opinion, it seems evident that a certain tradition of PE has consisted of applying a set of beliefs derived from a certain philosophical trend to educational practices; that is, followed by a settling of certain basic philosophical positions that have implications for the theory and practice of education. This is an approach that, in our view, cannot be totally discarded. However, it seems easy to verify that two philosophers may have a common philosophical position and disagree about the educational practices, and vice versa: some may agree on certain practices and differ about the philosophical scope. The task of PE seems to be less to derive suggestions for practice from a belief system, especially when it is assumed in a totalitarian viewpoint, and more to produce insights about the emerging practical problems, as well as, eventually, to criticize mainstreaming assumptions, or to clarify educational purposes and evaluate pedagogical methods. This would correspond to understanding PE less as an application of a certain philosophy to practice, and more to assuming that philosophy should emerge from practice and return to it. It would, therefore, be more a creative process of conceptual production that, without totally discarding the use of certain philosophical approaches, could be capable of producing the necessary complexities and clarifications of educational problems.

Following the analytic branch focused on PE production, Wortham (2011) examined two reference works: the Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education, published in 2009 by Harvey Siegel, and the Yearbook in two volumes of the National Society for the Study of Education (Why We Educate - Renewing the Conversation, vol. I, and Why We Educate - Voices from the Conversation, vol. II), edited in 2008 by G. D. Fenstermacher. The first work is addressed more to philosophers and philosophers of education who would be interested in serious philosophical work. It proposes to relocate the discipline and presents sections on ends, rationalities, ethics, knowledge and education policy. The second work, meanwhile, is aimed more generally at researchers from the field of education, professionals, educational policymakers and the general public. The chapters introduce a series of questions relating to the purposes of education that relate to educational policies and practices. The first volume is more academic and the second consists of about a hundred short texts from non-academic and very heterogeneous sources, constituting a diverse reflection on the purposes of education.

For Siegel (cf. Wortham, 2011), the editor of the Handbook, PE is a branch of philosophy that addresses philosophical questions concerning the nature, purposes and problems of education, looking into the discipline of philosophy as well as outwards, focusing on educational practice. This is an idea that can encompass both publications: the Handbook would look into the discipline and the Yearbook would look out, meaning that the works are complementary.

The editor of the Handbook realizes that the great philosophers, from Plato to the present day, have produced important reflections on education in their works; however, it seems that in recent decades, the field of education has somehow been abandoned by philosophers, a fact that not only deprives educational philosophy of their talents but also affects the status of the discipline. Hence the need for a restoration of PE so that the problems of education can be addressed seriously. In this case, it is recognized that philosophers are holders of a specific competence which can be productively applied to phenomena and educational topics, including providing insights and arguments that can be used by researchers, practitioners, policymakers and the general public.

The editor of the Yearbook understands that many public discussions appear dominated by a small group of ideas, and it seems necessary for the public to learn to shape proposals more philosophically, particularly regarding the purposes of education. So being, it is claimed that philosophers of education should use their knowledge in order to engage researchers, practitioners and policymakers, as well as the general public, in more substantial discussions about educational teleology.

The Handbook assumes that the exploration of philosophical questions concerning education is partly dependent on the investigations carried out in the core areas of philosophy. Hence, the investigations carried out in PE are dependent on the uptake of concepts, arguments and insights developed in general philosophy, while the opposite is

not possible. This means that we have a dynamic that stems from the work in philosophy to illuminate issues from the realm of education; issues raised by researchers and professionals or by those responsible for educational policies. Philosophy would develop perspectives that would apply to educational topics. This is one aspect that cannot be entirely ruled out, although we can take the opposite approach, as some do, preferring to develop arguments on topics of educational philosophy without presupposing the contributions of general philosophy. In this case, we should carefully examine the different positions, diligently assess their unspoken assumptions and systematically check if they find credible reasons, without an obligatory withdrawal of support for the work of general philosophy. It may even happen that certain issues from PE come to acquire a crucial role in the field of general philosophy, which is a reason to reject any relationship of subordination of the former to the latter. In certain cases, it is possible to enjoy a strong entanglement between the two, because the depth of the responses to the particular educational issues is necessary to respond to issues of general philosophy. In this case, we would come to admit an essential and intrinsic connection between general philosophy and PE. Thus, it seems to be conceivable that certain key problems of general philosophy depend on the work of educational philosophy. For instance, one could question “How to design an equitable society without delineating an educational project that could lead to it?” or “How to characterize human freedom without exploring modes of education for authenticity?”

All this leads us to consider, following Wortham (2011), that a conflict between different positions may not really exist, once it is given that some philosophers adopt more than one position. Philosophers of education and researchers in the field can benefit from ideas and approaches developed within general philosophy, but it may also be the case that philosophers of subfields, exploring educational issues, raise philosophical questions, or that any question of general philosophy comes to imply a foray into an educational topic. On the other hand, the fundamental demand in the areas of general philosophy can lead to educational issues that would be enhanced by the attention one may give to them. Educational issues seem to be, in fact and in reason, intertwined with philosophical questions. Philosophy can hardly answer central questions about knowledge, ethics, sociability, etc., without addressing how humans act and must develop cognitively, ethically and socially, once these are understood to refer to developmental processes that cannot be elucidated without examining what education is and should be. So, rather than a hierarchical relationship between general philosophy and PE, in which knowledge would be produced in the first and then decanted for application within the second, we arrive at a complex mutual dependence that enriches both. This is a stance that would entail a conversation with other audiences: professionals, policymakers and the general public, along with a more sensitive and committed philosophical reflection on practical problems of education, as well as the emergence of professionals more sensitive and philosophically able to formulate their questions and proposals. This would be a

great achievement for a field that, on too many occasions, slides into low-quality discussions among actors using narrow approaches.

In times of unprecedented challenges, serious dissatisfaction with education, and the devaluation of the humanities in favour of dominant instrumental rationality, it seems we must take the latter as the best topic to promote a broader and deeper discussion about the purposes of education, in order to uncover philosophically well-informed perspectives about concrete educational policies. Such a task would only be possible if the ears of philosophers were more open to the proposals of the “common people”. Academics undoubtedly have competencies and insights that can renew and enrich the conversation and catalyse it to the depth that is required, thus feeding philosophically well-informed requirements indispensable to managers and professionals. But that will only happen if they are aware of what all parties involved have to say. An endeavour that would correspond to –and this turns out to be Wortham’s (2011) proposal– a heterodox open conversation. Something that seems to require a debate of the attempted proposals submitted in genuine humility, which retains a sense of what unites and differentiates us humanely, exploring the tensions and elaborations that can articulate the proposals through sufficiently powerful intuitions. Hence, the job of unveiling the underlying assumptions of the stances under discussion appears to be, still and always, an essential one, if we are to open paths for exploring the most productive alternatives. If philosophers should help the orientation of open debates about alternative approaches on key educational issues –philosophically well-formulated ones– it is necessary that the other stakeholders are called to commit themselves in these debates, but without trying to limit them to the role of simple receivers of prescriptions as to what they should believe.

Philosophy of education can, therefore, perform two complementary movements. It can turn inward and seek the arguments for general philosophy’s applications to education, benefiting from philosophers’ need to address certain educational issues. But it can also turn outward, pledging itself to public discussions, which in some cases already include provocative ideas and interesting arguments about the purposes of education.

We thus arrive at a hybrid position that can serve as the basis for a wide perspective for PE:

“On such a view, knowledge does not simply flow downstream from academic experts to educational publics, because even general philosophers can learn new things about their core interests from engaging with educational processes and educational practices. Philosophers do have some superior knowledge and skills that could improve public theories and practices. Publics also have the right and some relevant knowledge to participate in conversations about educational means and ends, but they could use expert help sometimes. These would seem to position philosophy of education as a broker, contributing to disciplinary knowledge but also facilitating engagement between disciplinary ideas and relevant publics” (Wortham, 2011, 739).

By embracing heterogeneity, PE could develop such a task in at least seven ways: producing didactic approaches to philosophical issues relevant to education; exposing certain ideals' underlying assumptions about education; encouraging ideological polyphony without producing locks or closing positions, deliberately defying conventions and dodging enclosure, given the intrinsic inconclusiveness of the complex and essentially contestable issues that traverse education; creating Habermasian spaces of ideal communicative contexts in order to find consensus, where one can provide the involved public with the use of various tools for philosophical examination and consideration of alternatives; promoting exchanges between philosophical discourses and empirical researches in order to gain mutual enrichment; working together with professionals in addressing concrete educational problems and choosing the most promising options; and communicating philosophy through alternative means such as blogs, films and music, among others. We have no reason to choose the single best route, since all the options referred to can be useful and their complementarity can better serve the mediating role of PE that –despite being a borderline, marginal and sometimes marginalized discipline– may well find, through such an approach, a relevant and recognized role within education.

3. Assignments for Philosophy of Education

We should now consider that, in its dynamics, philosophy has always appeared as a creative process of ideas and concepts, which means that PE cannot fail to be precisely this kind of activity.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1994) sought to show, philosophy cannot be simple reflection because this is not unique to its dynamic. So being, a reference to strict reflection denounces the poverty of philosophy and not its richness. Besides, nor can it also be reduced to contemplation, because contemplation is not creative in itself; and neither can it consist of mere communication, since communication is aimed at consensus and philosophy is often –when not always, when it wants to be authentic philosophy, in its more significant acts– dissent, which means, precisely, creation. Philosophy, in its most genuine and unique endeavours, is creation of concepts. Concepts that –pronounced by a unique character⁷, embodying the novelty of a new insight designed and referring to a pre-philosophical underground wish to rip Chaos– introduce an innovative real-intensity, a plan of meaning that opens and articulates a possible world (of meaning). This does not signify that philosophy does not involve reflection, contemplation and communication, but such activities are not the ones specific of its core identity. In this regard, Fadigas

⁷ Plato immortalized his Socrates, St. Augustine his Homo Viator (then retrieved by others), Descartes launched his Cogito, Kant raised his Sovereign and Critical Reason, Hegel assigned a main role to the Spirit, Nietzsche, more prolific, has put in scene Dionysus, Zarathustra and the Antichrist ...

(2003, 79), after rejecting those cloistering drifts PE went through, offers the following approach: “Philosophy of education is the creation of concepts that relate directly or indirectly to education”. However, in our view, the challenge is to know what it means and whether it will be incompatible with other tasks assigned to PE, in particular the discussion of the purposes of education and the analysis of discourses arising from the educational field. Does the fact that dated and metaphysically feudalized stances have uncritically devoted themselves to the settling of uncritical educational purposes mean these cease to be an educational desideratum? Will it be the case that, because analytical philosophy's program of analyzing discourses and concepts has, in a way, aborted, such a task is no longer meaningful? The pressing contemporary need for a reconstruction of “Pedagogical Reason” (González, 2010) tells us that, on the contrary, more than ever, these themes are relevant and critical.

The critique of metaphysics, sovereign reason and metanarratives tended to obliterate the whole purpose of any kind of reasoning and normativity, especially when presented as prescriptive. Meanwhile, the compelling nature of certain areas has put us in need of confronting the wilderness produced by the first phase of postmodernity as well as calling us to dare to go beyond that very postmodernity, towards an eventual meta-modernity (Herrerías, 2009a, 2009b). In our view, our times claim not so much the collapse of all reasons and normativity, but rather a problematic reasoning and a debated normativity, because we cannot sustain ourselves without them. In the specific field of education, what is being said, as much as the questions of what is and what education should be, also call for critical intervention. Thus, we can perhaps better see why the Sisyphean nature of certain educational issues can indeed resurface, which means that while they may not be definitively surmountable, neither is it desirable that we forget them.

With an opening account on the status of PE at the beginning of the new millennium having been given, Randall Curren (2003) pointed out the complex nature of the discussions that claimed a commitment to various tasks, regarding which philosophy is shown to be exceptionally equipped. The author begins by highlighting the interpellation arising from the intense public debates involving practical matters, in the Kantian sense of the term, indicating the contribution of different philosophical sub-disciplines to the vital foundations of education, and remembering the important stimulus that the historical recovery of certain ways of thinking about education brought to this field. In his view, even if scientific research relativized the conceptions of human nature and of mind produced by the philosophical tradition, thus dictating a decline of philosophy's intervention in the field of learning theory, it is nonetheless evident that some philosophical tasks remain warrantable. In particular, the author highlights at least three forms of intervention in the field of PE: 1. a critical work of conceptualization and inter and transdisciplinary synthesis that triggers the construction of a systematic body of principles, generated, tested and justified by practical success and research within various disciplines; 2. the assumption of rigorous research focused on the normative level

that could serve for the guidance of educational practice, in particular by clarifying what are the purposes and constraints of education – according to the quoted author, philosophy is specially equipped to address the normative components of educational theory and it is crucial that it really does so; 3. finally, it is of great importance a description of the vocation of philosophy to produce a critical scrutiny of the philosophical content inherent to instruction and learning theories. Curren concludes by stating that the theory of education is no more empirical than normative, no longer a more scientific than philosophical field, which means that a well-trained philosopher is as well-tuned to the architecture and adequacy of theories of practical guidance as a scientist may be.

However interesting the above discussion may sound, one can say that such an analysis of PE's contemporary situation does not take us very far from the program proposed by Octavi Fullat about three decades ago. After having been one of the most active protagonists of PE's development process, in 1978 Fullat came to point out four tasks: the analysis of educational discourses; the suggestion of a general direction for the educational process; the elucidation of human's educating structure; and the explanation of the different pedagogies through the unveiling of their underlying teleology. More recently, Amilburu and Gutiérrez (2012) identified the following six major ways to develop PE: a descriptive one, focusing on what happens; an anthological, which collects interesting philosophical questions for educators; a metaphysical analysis of related issues; an analytic approach, aimed at clarifying concepts; a radical approach, reflecting on the deep assumptions of education; and a deductive approach derived from the great philosophical matrices.

The abovementioned approach is more summative than critical but has the virtue of recalling tasks that should perhaps not be forgotten. One cannot help but notice how the cited tasks are interconnected, referring to each other and making claims about each other for a work that, today as yesterday, is still required anew from PE. Assuming the essentially contestable nature of education's concept(s), then and now, we can only ask ourselves critically about the meaning of the discourses on education, which implies discussing the general sense that indicates the educational process in relation to a given teleology – more or less implicitly – while assessing the sufficiency of the educand's structure to which they refer. Moreover, assuming the antinomial nature of education, which Cabanas (1988) stated magisterially, we cannot, indeed, neglect to seek an approach that values the complexity, dynamics and tensions that span the educational field, while trying to avoid any form of reductionism that may arise from the proposals on the nature and meaning of education. This is the case, as Standish (2003) and Smeyers (2010) noticed, for the moment we are experiencing, when the utilitarian climate feudalizes the meaning of education to the “performative” logic, assuming, as if it were obvious, that the only admissible purpose is the one that strictly prepares the educands for the labour market in the current economic environment. Hence, if we want to face the dominant technicist ideology, we must continue to examine the teleology, the meaning

and educating structure underlying the proposals in the field. The discussion about purposes is neither finished nor outdated. Today as yesterday, we need to seek its clarification, avoiding, however, the dangers to which such a task has exposed us. One danger, in particular, is that form of predicating education on a metaphysical standpoint, which made education a hostage of the essentialist fallacy, and which not only did not discuss, but indeed dogmatized in its grandiloquence, ends and means, diverting attention from the complexity and diversity constitutive of the educational dynamic in play. “In sum, the implications are not that the question of aims should be avoided but that it should be broached with greater reservations and sensitivity to this diversity” (Standish 2003, 223). If we do not undertake such work within the field of education, we would be blind to, or would blind ourselves to, the narrowing process currently underway that finds no value in any of the supposedly “useless sublime” fields of study, that Adam Smith spoke about, and which concern everything that opens humans beyond the useful competencies to assume their tasks under the realm of the division of labour.

Now, as duly noted by the author in the quoted work, even engineering involves, beyond the technical mastery required, a broad ethical sense of its purpose and effect, let alone an aesthetic and an ecological sense of concern (Sośnicka, 2019). What should one then say when education is concerned with the human that requires a commitment to values such as freedom and emancipation? In one activity that inherently entails a process of liberation of the subject, of giving to him or her the ability to exercise an always limited freedom, and to make him or her free from the eventual internal and external constraints⁸, we cannot admit the subordinate allocation of general purposes, nor cloister human perfectibility in a demarcated plan of achievable goals. “[T]eleological thinking becomes grotesque where it conceives of human beings and their politics as perfectible – in terms of ends that are in principle realizable” (Standish 2003, 227).

This implies refocusing the question of purpose towards a related human aspiration to be more and better, to enter and deepen one’s own understanding, “to be oneself”, the “ensimesmar-se”, as Fullat (1988) likes to say, through which the individual potentials of development are confirmed and expanded. This requires the symbolic mediation whose introduction only education provides (Savater, 1997). It is through education, debate and culture, by entering the symbolic mediation, that the educand can find their own voice. This is an endless task because neither is the voice ever definitively established, nor identity finished, nor perfection attained, nor educational ends completely achieved. We are an essential incompleteness in endless construction. Moreover, the purposes and values that we require are also a continuing (re)construction, challenging us to identify them, to discuss and explore them, because values are inexhaustible in number, as are the meanings that we can assign to them (Cabanas, 1998).

⁸ One should consider here the sense that Kant (2003) attributed to education: to pull out the person from the animal in order to address her/him to the destined end that he or she is in themselves.

Philosophy of education remains, in our day, a field of hermeneutic openness that should assume, according to Smeyers (2010), the response of resistance to any attempts to stifle or silence the axiological dimension, and which, very particularly, should be developed as a way of probing the concrete educational practice activity, being able to engage in discussions, to make suggestions and, while going beyond positivism and nihilism, determine the proper receptivity to both “what was valuable in the past” and “what is worthwhile in the present” (Smeyers, 2010, 113). Such work is even more significant when it comes to thinking about education in the context of our currently cynical and sceptical society. That is a society which, according to Satterthwaite (2011), lost the sense of trust in people, in institutions, in public life, in truth as a possibility, in knowledge, in philosophical systems and, inevitably, in education itself. Today, perhaps more than ever, PE requires the critical work and commitment that philosophy always had the virtue of incisively developing, particularly when it comes to the field of education that is proven to be a multi-layered arena of conflicting crossovers.

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