

Grounding Education Philosophically: An Essay on Behalf of Human Happiness

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Abstract The authors envisage finding a philosophical base for grounding education's endeavour. Methodologically they rely on an argumentative exploration that essays a genealogy of the philosophical attitude as the core of "Paideia", in order to unveil the philosophical fabric that sets, simultaneously, the rooting of the philosophical and the educational efforts. They start by considering the mythical figure of Eros as the paradigm of the philosopher, which is taken as a reference to show how the philosopher launches himself in search of wisdom, delivering existence to the care of the soul, while addressed to attaining ontological harmony. Such striving is presented as implying an act of conversion that bounds existence to a radicalization of the gaze capable of opening the way of conceptual creation, understood as the core task of philosophy's quest. A parallel is so established between philosophy and education, as corresponding to a correlative process. Such elaboration allows them to draw some main conclusions. Not only philosophy appears as the basis of education and formation, far beyond the contemporary "utilitarian reason" drift, which is restricting education to its "performativistic" functionalization; as formation, relating to professional qualification, and education, involving socialization and subjectification, will never make sense one without the other, which let the authors infer that although not being admissible to neglect formation, it seems reasonable to admit a primacy of education over formation. Thus, it is claimed that education and formation are both summoned, teleologically, by philosophy, as if it provided their ground and horizon.

Keywords Education, Philosophy, Personhood

1. Introduction

The questioning about the role of philosophy in

education and formation can be disarming if we end up finding that the answer was already given as we proceed with our inquiry. In the dialogue entitled *Lysis*[1], Socrates poses a problematic that is resumed in the *Sophist*[2] and in the *Symposium*[3], given its crucial importance to express his personal posture:

"We may say that those who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they be gods or men; nor again can be lovers of wisdom those who are in such ignorance as to be bad: for we know that a bad and stupid man is no lover of wisdom. And now there remain those who, while possessing this bad thing, ignorance, are not yet made ignorant or stupid, but are still aware of not knowing the things they do not know. It follows, then, that those who are as yet neither good nor bad are lovers of wisdom".[4]

The issue—here in sight and yet hidden—, is recapitulated in the *Symposium*, when Socrates, considering the object of erotic desire as what we do not possess, hears Diotima, the wise priestess of Mantinea, resorts to a myth that explains the progeny of Eros: his mother would have been Penia—Poverty— and the father Poros—Resource. The first means that from his intrinsic initial state Eros is not to be rich, that is, he does not possess the object of his desire; the second tells us that, since resource is an integral part of his nature, he will always find a way to reach its object, or at least he will ideally dispose himself to seek it by all means and with great passion. Or would he not be Eros! In conclusion, Eros being neither wealthy nor devoid of ingenuity lays between wisdom and ignorance, thus symbolizing the paradigm of the philosopher.

"Who then, Diotima? I asked, 'are the followers of wisdom if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?'

"Why a child could tell by this time,' she answered, 'that they are the intermediate sort, and amongst these also is Love. For wisdom has to do with the fairest things, and Love is a love directed to what is fair; so that Love must need be a friend of wisdom, and, as such, must be

between wise and ignorant.”[5]

Love, as Diotima characterized it, is a shortage, intensely felt, forever persevering in its deed of unfolding its artfulness to reach its object. But how can then philosophy be the basis of education and formation? We are inclined to say that philosophy is at the very heart of education because there is no education without the yearning for what it promises. Philosophy teaches us and puts us in its tracks. Philosophy is intrinsically educational, awakens everyone to education and its value, it germinates the motivation that opens up to the disposition and to the effort implied within education and within self-education. If Eros is the son of Penia and Poros, the Paideia is the daughter of Eros and Kinitro (the Motivation). For its part, the Paideia represents nothing more than the paths of philosophy, a commitment, close to the herculean works of Prospátheia (Effort).

2. Genealogy of the Philosophical Attitude as the Core of Paideia

2.1. On the Erotic Genesis to Entering the Symbolic Garden

There is no contradiction in understanding the origin of philosophy by conjugating need and ingenuity while seeing it, at the same time, as the product of astonishment as Plato suggested [6] or of admiration and perplexity, as Aristotle[7] then proposed. In both cases, we only discover the sense of lack or poverty (Penia) that philosophy is born of, as well as of the ingenious saga (Poros) in which it involved itself, so indicating to us – right away– its creative nature.

We now see, with clarity, why Socrates –humbly shutting it out– became a philosopher when he said, “I only know that I know nothing.”¹ In this sentence are condensed the lack and the will to know, something that his life testified through an indefatigable search for what could be wisdom, debating with his fellows’ citizens. Indeed, in his “dialogues” –immortalized by Plato[9]– he used to launch a challenge: “Are you then willing to look for what it may be...” [a certain subject to be clarified]?. What followed was, at the same time, philosophy and education.

But what about the case of a child? Regarding the communication process that sustains education, one must look for its genealogy in a dramatic evidence, the fact that “the child does not know that he ignores, that is, does not feel the lack of knowledge that can not have”[10]. And “it is the teacher, the one who already knows, who firmly believes that what he teaches deserves the effort it takes to

be learned”[11]. It is not even right to demand from the child the eagerness for the knowledge that the subject can not even foresee. Therefore, as aporetically as it may sound, it is not possible to educate without contradicting the learner, so being we must first form the subject’s will “and this always hurts a lot”[12]. Curious irony, this one, which shows that the decisive human difference is based on knowing how to locate ignorance among humans. And wasn’t this, precisely, the endeavour of Socrates?

In human society, it is up to the social group to remedy the amnesic ignorance of the neophyte. “Being human consists in the vocation to share with everyone what we already know, teaching newcomers how much they should know to become socially valid”[13]. Nevertheless, as necessary as it may be to locate the specific educational point of ignorance, of much more relevance it will be to simply raise the awareness of those who must learn about their condition. Thus, in such a case, the most useful deed will be to use irony in order to incite the wills and, above all, to avoid stifling the capabilities. Savater [14] tells us that the most proper of man is to learn from others, insofar as they establish an intersubjective linkage, so that more than assimilating concrete knowledge, it is important to provide access to meanings. Now, it is from our fellow humans that we must obtain “the key to enter the symbolic garden of meanings”[15]. Education distinguishes from simple information, precisely, because it implies entering and dwelling with a symbolic universe, which requires the ability to translate intelligences among themselves. “First of all, education is the revelation of others, of the human condition, as a compromise of irremediable complicities” [16].

What we have above discussed can not be taken as a negligible subject, that may be addressed by instruction or professionalization, although they are both important and in no way incompatible with the educational purposes mainly provided by the Humanities. In any case, we will only be able to obtain an education that provides access to the full possession of the human condition if, for the present time, we promote an educational “reparadigmatization”, in which at least the role of the so-called “hard sciences” is balanced with the “soft sciences” or “humanities”[17]. Which means acknowledging the role that Humanities, in general, and philosophy, in particular, can undertake, like Socrates in the Apology so poignantly makes us aware of: “For know that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god. For I go about doing nothing else than urging you, young and old, not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much”[18]. Aimed at making out of education the care for one’s soul, Socrates proposes as an educational commitment to rescue it from all the illusions of this world: fame or fortune. To him we thus owe, from onwards, the push towards a relentless discover of the

1 “Whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either”[8].

immeasurable value of the continuous improvement of the soul. Focusing on such endeavour the Paideia, relating to an open and utopian horizon, is launched after a complete education, as the asymptotic yearned quiescence of philosophy, i.e., wisdom.

As Amilburu[19] notes, education has always to refer to an image of what the human being may be, including a certain ideal of its perfection, which constitutes a necessarily complex and controversial referent capable of agglutinating, rather than separating the eventual implied different dimensions, since each one of them only makes sense when referring to their integrative totality. It is, in fact, such totality that endows to humans their specific dignity: humans are destined to be persons, which since Kant[20] means to be ends in themselves. Now, from what we have seen, also for Socrates, education should point to a Telos that is still fundamental today, and perhaps will always be, “education must be understood as an integral formation of the person and not only as a preparation restricted by labour urgencies”[21]. Hence, as Ordine[22] invokes, only

“By curbing the utilitarian and entrepreneurial drift, we will help our students to better understand that knowledge should not be embraced for the sake of money, but above all to help us become free women and men capable of rebelling against the selfishness of the present so to try to make humanity more human.”

2.2. Igniting the Remarkable Gaze

By its Greek birth, philosophy appears to us driven by astonishment, awe, admiration and perplexity, which reveals in its emergence a double meaning: one, apparently, negative and other, supposedly, positive. Astonishment (*thaumazein*) refers more to the result of a scare, which establishes synonymy with shock, commotion, fear, dread, panic, horror, trembling and terror. This basis seems to be more indicative of a consequent attitude of retraction than of exploration. According to Paula[23] – following Kierkegaard’s “Fear and Trembling”, “the trembling actually occurs in the face of what exceeds our will and our knowledge, as everything seems permeated by the idea of enigma, and the mystery of what can not be understood”. On the other hand, awe or admiration seems to relate more to the dazzlement, prone to inflate the hearts with enthusiasm. However, in both cases –in the one where the contemplation of the world inspires us all what the terms referred suggest, including fear and even terror, as well as with the other sense that refers to the filling of our breasts with an enchanting hankering–, something is required. In the first case, courage is demanded, in the second case power of will is needed. In any case, however, these are not the most usual reactions from common mortals, who live accommodated to see the sun apparently moving every day through space, without causing them any

astonishment or fear, but rather inspiring a certain sense of security and comfort. In both situations, the philosophical leap only occurs if there is “a gaze that sees and remarks” [24] so that the strongest feelings burst. And it is precisely such gaze that philosophy endows education, as it is from it that springs the courage and enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Not that it could not be ignited, spontaneously, by the encouragement from any kind of conversation, or even within one’s own private reflection. Anyhow it is philosophy that cultivates it more strongly, that best works to infuse it in one’s soul, rooting it in an availability always lurking, simultaneously defensive and offensive. Whoever tastes of such bread will not look for another, and will never be entangled by the drowsiness of indifference; for the neophyte, everything looks anew and unsuspected, everything will appear in a light that blinks a claim.

3. Philosophy as the Basis of Education

3.1. A quest of the Soul

Since its seminal burst in ancient Greece, philosophy has been essentially a matter of embarking on a certain way of life, i.e., a question of living an examined life[25]² or, as Foucault [27] has elucidated, a matter of taking care of oneself (“*epimeleia heautou*”), developing the accordance between the saying and the being. Such desideratum requires the aforementioned art of looking at things as if it was for the first time and creatively inserting new meanings into life, (re)signifying the world. Hence, “friendship for wisdom” should really entail the “murder of the sage”, while being the one who claims to possess it [28]. And that is why that, since its burst and until the end of the thirteenth century, philosophy was not an erudite practice of producing treatises, but rather an existential option of persevering in the love for wisdom, in order to strive to live up to it [29].

The accordance between being and saying, expressed in a way of life, was the path of Socrates, who would have reached the status of “*mousikos aner*” [30], that is, the condition of an excellent ontological harmony [31], well demonstrated in a passage in which it is stated that “he has tuned himself with the fairest harmony, not that of a lyre or other entertaining instrument, but has made a true concord of his own life between his words and his deeds” [32]. From such example and others, his contemporaries sprung a prolific and heterogeneous diaspora of philosophers. For them, what ignited their hearts with the craving for knowledge was their own being, ergo they

² “And if again I say that to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is the greatest good to man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you will believe me still less.”[26]

were willing to an endless dedication to learning. Consequently, philosophy became then aligned with the *Paideia*. The way it was taught could not be separated from its experimentation; to such an extent that it could not be reconciled with the attitudes, we see today among those who are obsessed with a kind of Instrumental Reason, which nefarious hegemony Max Horkheimer[33] has long ago traced. Indeed those embroiled in the technique of “how-to” educate, are barely inclined to ask about the “what for” of education. That is why nowadays some teachers understand themselves as “information technicians of the dissemination business” and others as “the bearers of a heritage” [34], but both as nothing more than banking education technologists[35].

Kant's famous admonition about leading students to learn about renowned authors and doctrines that could not correspond to philosophizing, but to a mere historical knowledge of philosophy, expresses well the recovery of the antiquity tradition, very congruent with the principle of “daring to think for oneself”, which he would later put as the leitmotiv of Enlightenment[36]. For Kant[37] “it is not thoughts but thinking which the understanding ought to learn. The understanding ought to be led, if you wish, but not carried, so that in the future it will be capable of walking on its own, and doing so without stumbling.” Otherwise, we have only a process of reviewing solutions that smothers within an unawareness of the problems that originated them[38]. “If it is not allowed a personal elaboration of one’s own questions, with elements coming from everywhere, from anywhere, but rather they are extrinsically stated, one will not have much to say”[39]. At best, we can learn the thought, but not knowing why it was thought, which advises caution over the concepts that were not created by oneself – a principle valid for both philosophy and education.

3.3. Repetition and Difference

We have come to the point where it is clear that the selection of some authors and doctrines followed by a presentation of their ideas, although proficient, could never guarantee that the addressees will ever learn and much less come to philosophize. Moreover, as Boyum[40] well explained, philosophical education can never consist of anything merely cognitive or intellectual, guaranteed by a simple transmission conducive to the increase of knowledge, although such result can be expected to happen as well. In fact, a philosophical education implies a transformation, an attitude and a character shifting –the already mentioned metamorphosis or conversion–, albeit different people can reach different destinies, through diverse experiences and achieving heterogeneous outcomes. Philosophy can not be taught, because it is never really finished; it can only be learned by personal experience: “a philosophical education cannot be defined as a straightforward increase in some well-known entity

called ‘knowledge’, but is cast as a journey of the soul”[41].

Such an attempt does not imply giving the students some problems that are already adjusted to being discussed but instead involves the rooting of the problems in the soil from which the dynamics that sustain them emerge, requiring a personal elaboration. In their substance, philosophical texts can be the basis for an interpretative process only if one takes into account the difference between “a philosophical reading and a historical reading of such texts”[42]. And the initial problem can not contain a propositional posture presenting its own solution; instead, its meanings must be found in the intensity of the problem that requires an interpretation, or several, which ought to promote the process of philosophizing. Philosophical texts are therefore but pretexts, not to discover hidden truths, but perhaps to correspond to the interests that could inspire philosophizing. Not just an abstract rational approach to reality, which lack the pain, the desire, the anxiety, the terror, the awe it may produce in our awaken souls. An abstract rational approach, on the other hand, will be nothing more than a parched procedure that produces a desert.³ And this is the case for saying that “the truths of philosophy are lacking in necessity and the mark of necessity. As a matter of fact, the truth is not revealed, it is betrayed; it is not communicated, it is interpreted; it is not willed, it is involuntary”[43].

If teaching philosophy can only be an incentive to philosophize, this is because it must navigate through the original practice that the philosophers themselves experience. However, no one produces anything out of the void, so the philosophical text can always be found as a means of providing the encounters on which philosophical production depends; “Encounters are robberies and robberies are always creative; to steal a concept is to produce a new concept”[44]. Philosophy consists in taking back what has already been thought, while introducing a deviation, in articulating a multiplicity of concepts to intuit new concepts.

Although philosophy may imply reflection, it is not simple reflection, nor simple communication, because it entails an intervention that creates a world and not only aims at consensus, it may also aim at dissent. As an art of creating concepts, philosophy is an adventure, because “we can define the concept as an adventure of thought that establishes an event or several events, providing a point of view about the world, about the lived”[45], leading to a (re)signification of what otherwise would be an unutterable Chaos. In their complementarity, art, science and philosophy are the three movements that face Chaos, reacting to the mere opinion that promises (the inconceivable possibility) of overcoming it, of definitively taming it, providing us with accommodative and escapist

3 Where, as we will see forward, the Nietzschean sage despairs.

answers within the scope of the same[46], which could be consumerism or any ready-made comfort that soothes our minds and drowns our hearts.

For a long time, our tradition has produced plenty of reasons to philosophize, yet it seems to have failed to identify what really is fundamental for philosophy: “the plane of immanence that it must trace, the philosophical characters it needs to invent, and the concepts that must be created. These are the three constituent verbs of the philosophical act, and not to contemplate, to reflect and to communicate”[47]. Not that the latter does not matter, but because they are not exclusive and central to philosophy, The importance of philosophical concepts relies on their authenticity, importance, and interest, that is, they should speak about lived experiences, light the mark of need, interest, and desire as living essays to fill the Chaos with meanings.

3.3. How the Questioning Belongs to the Child

There is yet another strife concerning the dynamics of philosophy which we consider essential. Philosophy as a special task of creating concepts can not be made by reference to positions of simple opinionated approaches, meaning, the common “Doxa” that Plato[48] deplored by its propensity to embrace the established and the obvious. Thereupon the creation of philosophical concepts should require something more that refers to “astonishment”, which is not a neutral translation option, in fact, “the ordinary polysemy of the Greek verb ‘thaumazein’ does not dissolve with its philosophical appropriation, it lets survive a semantic oscillation that goes from complete and disturbing disorientation to the supreme and pleasurable marvelling” [49]. Such understanding opens two approaches that place the process on a higher plane. The first refers to the last metamorphosis of the spirit according to Nietzsche [50], represented by the Child or “spirit of beginning”, not anymore blindly stuck to the accepted tradition or the simple destructive “saying no” to it, but rather concerning a new look and the willingness to create anew:

Three metamorphoses of the spirit do I name to you: how the spirit becomes a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion, at last, a child.

Many heavy things are there for the spirit, the strong weight-bearing spirit in which reverence dwells: for the heavy and the heaviest are what its strength longs for.

What is heavy? so asks the weight-bearing spirit; then it kneels own like the camel, and wants to be well loaded.

[...]

All these heaviest things the weight-bearing spirit takes upon itself: and like the camel, which, when burdened, speeds into the wilderness, so the spirit speeds into its wilderness.

But in the loneliest wilderness the second metamorphosis happens: here the spirit becomes a lion;

it will seize freedom, and become master in its own wilderness.

Here it seeks its last master: it will fight him, and its last God; for victory it will struggle with the great dragon. [51]

The Camel's effort to understand the “whole universe” is the one arising from the initial impetus resulting from wonder as it faces the colossal amount of knowledge to overcome. So it could be understood more as a later case of some kind of “disturbing disorientation” followed by an enthusiastic search for knowledge, corresponding to the admiration of beholding a “supreme and pleasurable spectacle”. In any case, as important as the first movement can be considered, it can not produce the radical questioning that the “Child” invoked by Nietzsche represents. It is still necessary to go through the nihilistic attitude, a task of destruction that can open a desert, a nothingness where the real question, of the virgin gaze, can finally be born through asking:

What is the great dragon which the spirit is no longer inclined to call Lord and God? "You shall," is what the great dragon is called. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will."

[...]

All values have already been created, and all created values - do I represent. Truly, there shall be no 'I will' any more. Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there need of the lion in the spirit? Why is it not enough the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent?

To create new values - that, even the lion cannot yet accomplish: but to create itself freedom for new creating - that can the might of the lion do.

To create itself freedom, and give a holy No even to duty: for that, my brothers, there is need of the lion. [52]

In order to “create freedom for himself”, it was needed the Lion’s destructive attitude, the Spirit of Nihilism that brings forth the “nothing”, the ground from which a “new creation” is now possible. Such a figure has surpassed tradition, but a different character is now necessary when it comes to the opacity of nothing and to dare a creative beginning: the child.

But tell me, my brothers, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why must the predatory lion still become a child?

Innocence is the child, and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes.

For the game of creating, my brothers, a sacred "yes" to life is needed: the spirit now wills its own will; the one who had lost the world now attains its own world. [53]

Since all the figures represent phases and metamorphoses of the spirit, it can be said that they also represent a kind of birth or rebirth of higher orders. Of all, the latter corresponds to the deeper “admiration”, the basis

of the original creation: to think anew. An achievement that we can also grant to the ancient Greeks, namely Sappho and his art of drawing attention "to see as if it was for the first time" [54].

3.4. At Nothing's Glade

Our second reference goes to Heidegger's lecture entitled "What is Metaphysics" [55], where we can find the unfolding of the process through which the obscure manifestation of Nothing is fissured. In this essay, we see how a kind of anxiety, originally undetermined, reveals itself only after the consideration of all beings. For Heidegger, this process is a prerogative of existence (Dasein), which should not be confused with being in the world, but considered as a way of being sensitive to the question of Being. Here too, existence has to endure a phase of destruction, namely reaching through the anxiety a glimpse of the Nothingness, the possible background of the beings, as a whole that decrees –through its experiencing– a true "nihilation".

Existence is now open to the meanings of Being, just as before it was blind to its possibilities, in spite of all its knowledge about this and that. A new awakening happened through the process of "nihilation" that made possible the opening to beings as such:

"Only because nothingness becomes manifest on the basis of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings astonish us. Only when the strangeness of beings overwhelms us, admiration is awakened and evoked. Only on the ground of admiration -the revelation of nothingness- the 'why?' may appear before us. Just because the 'why' is possible, as such, we can, in a definite way, investigate the motives and ground them." [56]

Now we can experience a new way of wondering, not just the strangeness about this and that, but the transcendent strangeness glimpsed when it hangs from the nothingness that opens the wonder about Being. Hence a new terrain to understand the philosophical attitude is also presented:

"Philosophy is only initiated by a peculiar insertion of our own existence into the fundamental possibilities of Dasein as a whole. For this insertion it is of decisive importance, first, that we allow space for beings as a whole; secondly, that we throw ourselves into nothingness, that is, that we free ourselves from these idols that everyone has [...]; and, finally, let our suspense take its full course, so that it returns to the fundamental question of metaphysics which nothing himself demands: 'Why, after all, are there beings, and not nothing at all?'"[57]

As we understand it, such a radical questioning - only accessible after awe, admiration and play have been activated - asks for, as conditional requirements, the

critical thinking dynamics and the creation of concepts that properly philosophical questions elicit. It should be remembered, however, that in its own intensity philosophy once again shows itself as a pure source from which springs the "curiositas" of which education feeds.

4. Philosophy and Critical Thinking

4.1. Philosophy, Creation, Parrhesia and Criticism

Perspectivating philosophy as a concept-making activity does not distance it from the tradition of telling the truth to oneself and to others. A practice that has raised its understanding as a way of life, that is, it does not exclude itself from its parrhesiastic function and, as such, alone could it be taken as an eminently critical act. In fact, so eminently critical as creative, and this as much as it is inescapable to be always in the taking of personal experiences.

As Foucault[58] has shown, in his Lectures at the Collège de France, that Socrates introduced into philosophy an unprecedented inflexion in considering it a way of life, mediated, pedagogically, between oneself or with an interlocutor, that could still take the sense of a process to approach the "Polis" as a whole. Which in any case constituted an exercise of "parrhesia", that is, of telling the truth, requiring courage always in the face of an assumed risk.⁴ In the courage to speak the truth, we see the Lion and the Child of Nietzsche [59] as well as the authenticity of the existential opening referred by Heidegger[60].

In all its forms, the Socratic "parrhesia" is always a matter of repudiating flattery, which is considered to be the most harmful attitude we can give ourselves, either about ourselves or about the others. Concerning this, the Epicurean and Stoic schools tended to work within a close community of initiates (pilgrims of truth) or, if we will, the aesthetes of life. The cynics, on their part, turned to the outside driving corrosively against the city, which was well needed of such attitude. This completed the circle of the Socratic parrhesia that combined the self and the other, considered as a fellow citizen, thus implying the city and the common good as an inseparable life dimension. While, nevertheless, it should be taken as a challenge regarding a "life that deserves to be lived." So it becomes evident how everything is rooted in the maxim "Know thyself", which Plato frequently takes Socrates to utter, in order to motivate his Dialogues, notably in the Charmides [61], Protagoras [62], Phaedrus [63], Philebus [64], Laws [65] and in the First Alcibiades [66].

Philosophy, therefore, entails a dynamic which, as we

4 Whether it is the personal undressing that reveals weakness in our gaze or in the gaze of another; it also could represent the immense risk of telling the crowd "The King parades naked".

have already said, is inseparably creative and critical. Critical thinking refers to two concepts. “Criticism” or “the art of judging”, and “criterion”, from where we derive the ability to judge according to criteria. The Socratic maxims are perfectly conjugated within this realm because if the sense of philosophy is “to live an examined life” in order to take charge one’s own life it follows that one must also take charge of one’s own mind. We have to take care of how it works, how we can monitor it, fine-tune it, and improve its functioning. One must get into the practice of developing the habit of reflectively examining our impulsive ways of thinking and acting in all dimensions of our life.

And we have many reasons to acknowledge the need for critical thinking, given the human atavism to tend, when left to itself, to unquestioned gregarious beliefs, prejudices, precipitous generalizations, common fallacies, and self-deceptions, whether through “rationalization” or by “wishful thinking”, as well as through some rigidity and narrowness of approach. Our propensity is, consequently, to produce errors, to yield to misunderstandings and to project distortions, so that by nature it is perfectly very common to live an unexamined life; to live uncritically more or less subdued by automatism. Commonly we live without really taking care of the people we are becoming, hence neglecting to develop or act on the competencies within our reach. In doing so we do damage to ourselves and others and we miss many opportunities to make our lives and those of others fuller, happier and more productive. In addition, we must take into account that if an unexamined life is subject to enormous risks, errors and injustices, a conjugation of unexamined lives will tend a fortiori to produce a very dangerous and unjust world; a world where it will be more difficult to fulfil ourselves individually and collectively.

As the Critical Thinking Community[67] points out, critical thinking requires an intellectually disciplined process of competently designing, analyzing, applying, and evaluating any kind of information, communication, belief or conviction generated in a variety of ways, such as imitation, observation or non-judgmental thinking. This means that it is up to us to take control of the inherent structures of our thought as well as self-imposition intellectual standards capable of improving our reasoning capacity, and thus promoting our own autonomy of thought. When developed critically, thinking becomes self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitoring and self-correcting.

Critical thinking includes a complex combination of competencies that we deduce by comparing the proposals of Kurland[68], Olin[69] and Elder and Elder[70], namely: rationality; self-knowledge; honesty and integrity; open-mindedness; discipline; and reflexivity. According to Elder and Elder[71], critical thinking must be applied sensitively to the elements of thought, i.e., considerations,

interpretations and inferences of information, concepts, assumptions, implications and consequences, points of view, or purposes, all this by following some standards: logicalness; clarity; accuracy; precision; relevance; amplitude; depth; significance; and analytical equity. As we see it, critical thinking corresponds well to the sense of the Socratic maieutic articulated with Nietzsche’s Lion and Child, when conjugated and active within ourselves.

4.2. Of Skill and Wit

Kant said that skill serves prudence, but over both, it is the moral formation, the last and most important of all, that consummates the human destiny of a rational and free being[72]. Nevertheless, such a goal does not mean any devaluation of training in education. If training forms the professional, education forms the person, although both concur for the same purpose. In order to grasp such understanding, it is necessary to recognize that humans can only fulfil themselves through work –which gives them the measure of their strengths, capacities and self-esteem–, although not necessarily assuring a sufficient condenser of their existential sense. As Aristotle[73] explained, “All art and all inquiry, and just as all action and all choice seem to tend toward some good; therefore it is rightly said that good is that to which all things tend”. In relation to the present case, we understand that, despite differently underpinned, we have to recognize that formation and education have to go side by side. While training contributes to a professional achievement that promotes the person, education, which inevitably must take place in formation, also promotes the same person, albeit in a specific way once it targets a higher focal point. Indeed, Aristotle said, “If there is really an end for the acts we want for themselves, while the other ends we want them for their sake, and we choose nothing for no other reason –so we would proceed to infinity in such a way that the desire would be futile and empty– it is evident though that such end must be the good and the supreme good”[74]. Where, then, ought education to focus its gaze but on the supreme good? And in the human case what the supreme good achievable by education shall be? Let us remember here that Rousseau expected from his Emilio, already a little man, that all the rustic works should be familiar to him, and that he should be aware of the craft he had chosen, although he would never stay a simple craftsman apprentice, otherwise he would never undertake the effort to be an apprentice of being a man. That is why, education should be this almost impossible art of knowing how to follow the course of nature and educating the human to himself, to his human condition, in which “to live becomes the sole craft”[75] to be learned.

In the context of our “structural finiteness”[76], the “supreme good” that can be translated as happiness can only correspond to an “ideal of the imagination”[77],

something that one never ceases to seek above all else, something that, although utopian, can only be timely, temporary and limited. Hence, in its possible expression, it can only be oriented towards the perfectibility of the person, for whose realization education yields as its primordial “telos”[78,79]. Nonetheless, we are compelled to combine perfection with happiness, or we may risk sliding into the deplorable case of those who have become masters at the cost of their happiness, like those persons who achieved piano-playing virtuosity under the force of fingers beatings.

5. Conclusions

Teleologically, education is thus ordered in a triple way to a paradoxical end which Kant[80] was well aware of: “One of the greatest problems of education is to conciliate, under legitimate coercion, submission with the faculty of using one’s will. Because coercion is necessary. But how to cultivate freedom through coercion?”. Hence, considering human dignity, education should aim to lead humans to their limited condition of freedom, taking out their humanity from themselves, that is, promoting the realization of all their possibilities, which means to refer to perfectibility, whose materialization only makes sense if it coincides with the possible (!) happiness allowed by human condition.

In the antinomian game of the educational process [81,82], formation and education will never make sense one without the other –rather they are both ordered to achieve the teleological trilogy–, which let us infer that it is not possible to neglect formation, although it seems reasonable to admit a primacy of education over formation. Moreover, in current times, we ought to take care of not to succumb to a reversal of such a relationship. The deviation of subservience to “Instrumental Reason”, i.e., to the utilitarian reason that would bring forth the risk of forgetting the respect for the person and human dignity, asides annihilating the possibility of acquiring the “critical knowledge” that allows us to always want to be better and increasingly free[83].

In a more encompassing way, we can take an important advantage of referring here that in education not only the question of purpose is essential, as it must be faced in its multidimensionality while entailing a functioning in at least three areas, namely, qualification, socialization and subjectivation[84]. In a broad way, we can say that qualification refers to the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions. To a large extent, this function is geared towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities related to “knowing how to do” something, i.e., to qualify for a professional field, preparing for life in our complex modern societies. As important as such an endeavour may be it should not be

taken as a hegemonic plan, diverting from facing that education should also correspond to an indispensable initiation into ways of being and doing related to the insertion in cultural, professional, political and cultural traditions. This function may, however, slip into the reproduction of existing social inequalities. Therefore, one must not forget the importance of the subjectivating function of education, which, in addition to qualification and socialization, aims, at best, to promote the fulfilment of the person of the learners, that is, the way in which they come into existence as subjects, i.e., authors of initiative and responsibility, and not as mere objects of the actions of others. Meaning, functionalized to a labour market or a mode of social organization.

Any harmful consequences resulting from the disequilibrium or disregard of any of the functions or domains of educational purpose are readily apparent here. This would be the case with the contemporary insistence on qualifying achievement that –overestimating the know-how and its most substantive disciplines, such as science, technology and mathematics– tends to belittle subjectivation and, as Nuccio Ordine has shown [85], the intrinsic value to the humanities. The same could be said of today’s striking imbalance of wanting to reductively focus education in learning, according to an ideology of “learnification”, as Biesta has poignantly explained [86].

Professional formation and the education that forms the person are summoned, teleologically, by philosophy – which is addressed to them as if it were their ground and horizon– in order to uncover and debate their ends, to pounder their processes and to analyze their results. If there is an opportunity for philosophy and education to fulfil their missions, we can still be free and, as Plato[87] predicted, we could still “fare well.”

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