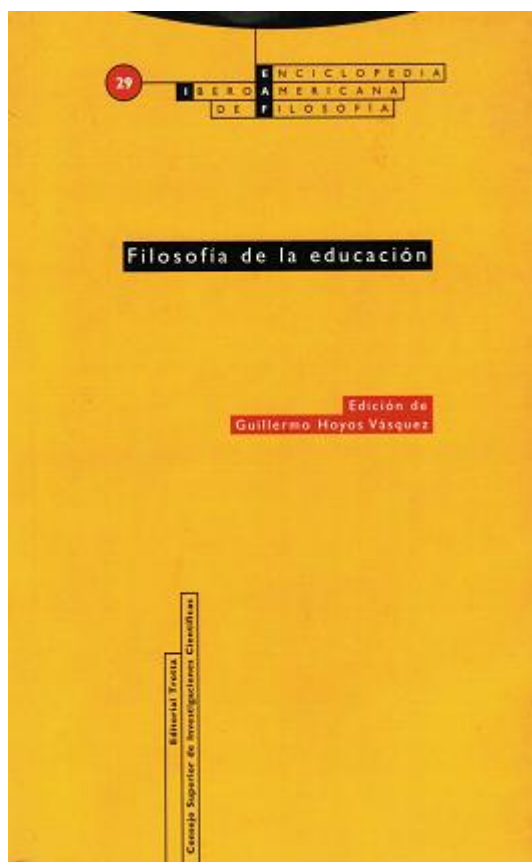


Philosophy of Education *[Filosofía de la Educación]*

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Having four pages at most to comment on a book consisting of fifteen different contributions is quite a challenge. It is even more daunting, I find, when the contributions are all featured in a volume that bears the generic title of “Philosophy of Education”. All this may seem to make it an unlikely candidate for a critical review. But the unlikelihood is in appearance only, given that the book in question forms part (specifically, “part” number 29) of the *Iberian-American Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Moreover, the authors of its chapters and the editor, professor Guillermo Hoyos Vásquez, are all well-known scholars in the area of the philosophy of education being written (and read) in Spanish and Portuguese on both sides of the Atlantic. These two circumstances alone clearly make the book worthy of study, and also make it particularly relevant on this occasion for inclusion in a publication of the characteristics of this monographic issue¹. Its belonging is based on the fact that this volume well serves the purpose of providing a panoramic view of Iberian-American contemporary philosophy of education. In the analysis that follows, I will try to connect the contributions by attending to their subject matter and approach, which in some cases will mean changing the order in which the chapters are originally presented.

1. Education Confronting Postmodernity

Those of us who live through the hot peninsular summers know well what happens to the earth when it goes from dry to arid and finally to parched and cracked. Also known, with the permission of Baumann, is how fluid and liquid the boundaries of our urbanite societies are in the 21st century. As *Joan-Carles Mèlich* highlights, it is a time in which we have accustomed ourselves to calling post-modern, and that “is born the instant a single truth decomposes into hundreds of relative truths that mankind divvies up. Not substance, nor God, nor causality, nor reason, nor subject, nor history” (p. 35). It is a philosophical time in which “there are only *stories, tales, games, interpretations*” (ibid.). The pedagogical consequences of this are, on one hand, that “human beings no longer find rules of learning in a transcendent world”, and on the other, that “all people must endow themselves with a history and invent their own existence” (ibid.). The subject is the protagonist and narrator of a story with an ending and multiple purposes. Neither philosophy nor philosophers can escape that fact. In order to reflect on education in today’s world, Mèlich concludes that a post-modern education requires that teachers and students both be convinced “that there is no single unique language, no privileged language” (p. 51). As he says, “in a world where absolute truths have disappeared, meaning can not be discovered, but rather invented” (p. 53). When the concept of truth enters a process of successive divisions, philosophical reflection seems to grasp onto a degree of material quality of the objects of study. *Fernando Bárcena*’s text proposes thinking about the ambivalence and mistakenness of the body in its dual epistemic and existential mission. The body, in singular, is like the one that “expresses the events of the existence of a subject” (p. 251-252). Keeping this idea in mind in a pedagogical setting does not imply teaching the body in accordance with a set list of ideas, but rather, that “the body itself, in the events that occur to it, will be the one to provide new dimensions for the event of learning” (p. 252). The body is a space where we can give way to the meaning, be it painful-suffering or amorous-erotic, of what is happening to us. It is a passivity that can lead to the silencing of the *logos*, but that accentuates the testimony of the physical world, which does not speak but feels and “distorts our thinking” (p. 253). Recovering the body in singular, as a space for experiential learning, means remembering that we are beings who suffer. This restoration of the body will also remind us of the

¹ For which suggestion I would like to thank professor Gonzalo Jover.

possibility of thinking about it in its erotic dimension, “as an event at the most intense moment of a loving embrace” (p. 270). Living in corporal awareness, as Bárcena proposes, will enrich the biographical-temporal perception of our existence, since the body is not independent of our inner being: we are what we do, with all that we suffer and enjoy. In an exercise that also consists of questioning something we think we already know, *Jorge Larrosa* proposes “darkening what seems clear (...) making the reading matter even more mysterious and therefore more interesting” (p. 278). The chapter fulfils its intended aim: rather than offering answers to the meaning of the reading and plurality of texts, Larrosa launches a series of interlinked questions. *First*, if the reading is singular and the text is plural, does that make the reading experience become subjective and the plurality of the text polysemous? He says, “Is the subjectivity of the text not confused with a sort of weak subjectivism? (...) Does the plurality of the text belong to the text itself? (...) And if it does, is it enough to say that its meaning is always open to interpretation?” (p. 279). *Second*, is learning to speak the same as learning to translate? Translation, its practice and its theory, helps think about reading, its teaching and learning in another way. But *third*, beyond the understanding-translation of the text involved in the act of reading, wouldn't it be possible to think of reading beyond its communicative dimension? Isn't reading itself an experience? And more importantly from an educational point of view, “why do teaching apparatuses prize comprehension, why do psycho-technical and pedagogical texts on reading move exclusively within the framework of comprehension?” (p. 283). If, *fourth*, we state that reading is a translation experience, isn't reading something other than appropriation and dis-appropriation? When faced with a text, the reader appropriates it in his approach to the same extent that the text can make off with the vulnerability of the reader. *Fifth*, how is reading affected by there being myriad languages and the possibility of polyglotism? As well as being “Babel-esque” and plural, educational spaces become singular because of the presence of boys and girls in those spaces. Similarly, then, childhood can be the object of philosophical study. The work by *Diego Antonio Pineda* and *Walter Omar Kohan* makes a general presentation of the possible relationships between philosophy and childhood. The authors rescue from the history of philosophy what Plato, Montaigne and G. Mathews said about childhood. Then, they take us to the American philosopher Lipman's proposal centred on the philosophical education of childhood and that consists of presenting philosophy like a game, with its rules, in which everyone, including children, can play. The trouble with this philosophy for children, as the authors of the chapter point out, is precisely the concept of childhood underlying this entire educational project, as if still “wanting to see the adults of the future in children, who must be modelled after the pretensions of the adults of the present” (p. 311). To finish, they propose new ways of thinking of childhood “as the potential for multiplying possible childhoods and worlds, to open childhood and the world up to experience, evolution, events” (p. 316).

2. Ethical and Moral Dimensions of Education

Another line of work present in this collective piece is the study of education in ethics and morals. *Marco Zingano* gives a historical-philosophical overview of the concept of *paideia* in three classical Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. After a certain time, city-states such as Athens gave up their traditionalist perspective on preparing the new generations, introducing a new attitude “according to which reason (...) is what is divine in us, or is our most divine part, the part that makes us most like the gods” (p. 57). The specific consequences this new attitude brought to moral education of young people

fell into two groups: that “there is no space for a will independent from the acknowledgement of reasons for acting in a direction” (p. 58) and that “if doing something depends crucially on the beliefs that the agent has in relation to his action, then, *prima facie*, the moral training, no matter how complete, does not seem any different by nature from other teachings” (ibid.). The contribution of classical Athenian philosophy to this matter was key, since it uncovered the difference between learning what things are and wanting the best things. For Socrates, moral education was strongly intellectualised; and Plato went on to offer a more complete explanation of the subject’s action by “introducing non-cognitive elements, typically emotional (e.g., wrath, appetite) with a relevant role for the decision that the agent has to take” (p. 63). However, it wasn’t until Aristotle that relevance was given to emotions in the process of discovering what is best and wanting it, since emotions condition “the grasping of moral reasons in the life of men” (p. 73). That is perhaps why the Aristotelian perspective is viewed by many as being more “informative” for the purposes of pedagogic action. Related to moral and ethics education, we find the chapter written by *Fernando Gil Cantero* and *Gonzalo Jover Olmeda*. They propose exploring the “common horizon of humanization” (p. 230) portrayed by the convergence of education and human rights. However, despite the respect generally accorded to human rights, their effective integration nevertheless encounters a certain amount of resistance. The authors point to one of the possible causes as being the re-deployment of “the other languages of education” (p. 236) related with the “post-modern de-pedagogisation” (p. 237) in which, they say, pedagogy gives up any hope of mature knowledge so as to perpetuate itself in seductive adolescence (ibid.). Thus, they advocate that pedagogues should work from “the conviction that not all options are equally valid” (p. 238), trusting that “individuals can share some criteria that structures their common way of life” (ibid.). The educative relevance of an ethics of human rights is based on the pretence of universality with which international declarations on human rights are stated, which “does not refer so much to the values they espouse as to their valuing the human condition in its experience of happiness (p. 243). Close reading of legal texts on human rights, would represent a source of criticism, consciousness-raising and doubt for any educators who are ethically committed to their task. Universities have traditionally been in charge of training the intellectual elite along with noteworthy centres of cultural production and critique. *Susana Villavicencio* presents several philosophies of the university in order to reconsider its purposes and ideals in today’s economic globalisation. She illustrates her analysis starting with the contribution from Jaspers, for whom the mission of the university “is the quest for truth in the community of researchers and disciples” (p. 323). Then, Habermas stated that “we have passed from the enlightened ideal of institutional autonomy and freedom of thought (...) to a weave of different functions in a single institution” (p. 326). But Derrida is the one who Villavicencio considers to be the rescuer of the sense and designs of the university in terms of responsibility. “Consideration of the purposes and responsibilities of the university (...), requires distinguishing what makes the university different” (p. 337). This difference lies in its ability to be different from the other institutions. Defending an active and autonomous stance of the university is key to achieving its own goals.

3. Education and Freedom

Reflecting on moral education requires considering the phenomenon of freedom in mankind. *Newton Aquiles von Zuben* and *Silvio Gallo* propose precisely that. Specifically, studying how freedom is related to “educational processes, according (...) to the political thought of Hannah Arendt and the proposal for a ‘liberating pedagogy’” (p.

179) of the anarchist thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Both perspectives are joined, according to the authors, by the socio-political approach they offer on the practice of freedom. Although Bakunin, Robin and Ferreri Guardia would no doubt disagree with Arendt's position that "draining education of any and all authority was a mistake in that it did nothing to help prepare children for a future life of equality in the political sphere" (p. 201). Still, they would agree on "taking education as preparation for a political life founded on exercising one's freedom" (ibid.). In a quite different direction, *Rodolfo Vázquez* presents a liberal model of education as a facilitator of equal opportunities in the framework of a democratic State. Making a political reading of the theories of Rawls or Dewey, the author defends a mixed model of education, decentralised, democratic and pluralistic. But the title of the chapter ("Liberal and Democratic Education") should not mislead, since that model is founded on a strong state intervention presided by equality and solidarity. He therefore advocates an "egalitarian liberal education" (p. 226) that deploys "all the means for the educand to discover the meaning of his or her social dimension" (ibid.). *Eduardo Mendieta* presents us with the South American tradition in pedagogy where education is understood as the practice of freedom, "as a praxis of liberation for the oppressed, excluded or outcast" (p. 341). The author makes an illustrative review of the intellectuals who promoted this way of understanding education. On Freire, he points out that at his core "we find a human figure as a creature of time" (p. 343), which is "what makes education a determining factor" (ibid.) for mankind. The final ending of the conversation that the two strike up will be awareness-raising: "we take conscious place in a historical and historised world by that very process of deliberated appropriation" (p.346). On Illich, Mendieta cites his de-schooling philosophy, founded on the double accusation that "education is confused with the awarding of diplomas and certificates" (p. 348), and that schooling has become "one of the main vehicles (...) of the modernization of poverty" (ibid.). Enrique Dussel and Juan Luis Segundo are representatives of analectic pedagogy aiming at freeing each and every person "from the inner transcendental, exteriority or metaphysical difference that every human and cultural being possesses" (p. 352). And last, Borda and Bondy, according to Mendieta, represent "the best example of the appropriation of historical materialism from pedagogy" (p. 352). In their studies on the mechanisms of the geopolitics of knowledge, the production of contemporary knowledge not only reflects "passively the effects of colonisation and imperialism, but also participates actively in those processes" (p. 354). The pedagogy of liberation affords a chance to make a conscious critique of those processes and is especially capable of fight against them.

4. Epistemological Reflections about Education

The fourth group of papers is concerned with the epistemological dimension of education. *Alejandro Ramírez Figueroa* looks at the relations between epistemology, science and pedagogy. His main thesis is that "a correspondence can be established between the epistemological approaches and ways of understanding (...) what is teachable in a science; (...) [and] whether or not there is any independence between real science and learned science" (p. 77). The author looks to replace the justificationism in that regard, i.e., that the teaching of a science contributes nothing to science itself, since they are independent levels, and that what can be taught of a science are its formal procedures (contrasting hypotheses). With support from the contributions to the philosophy of science of Kuhn, Feyerabend and Hanson, he strives to show the difficulty of believing that when a science is taught, the science is learned just as it is. Science can indeed be taught, but what we learn are in fact "reconstructions" (p. 96). This chapter is followed by one by

Carlos Eduardo Vasco Uribe, Alberto Martínez Boom and Eloisa Vasco Montoya, whose aim is to “put into play some of the questions concerning epistemological thought on pedagogy and didactics” (p. 100). Their proposal consists of trying to differentiate between the realm of education as a practice situated within the complexity of social contexts, and pedagogy or didactics as epistemological practices of knowledge. This attempt is complicated if not downright impossible, since it is hard to justify saying that “as such and such a social practice, education would not directly be an object of an epistemological reflection, but pedagogy, as with didactics, would in fact be an object of that reflection” (p. 103). This ends by saying that “pedagogy and didactics are closer to teachers, to teacher trainers and to students of education, whereas education itself, as the current slogan goes, ‘is everybody’s business’” (p. 124). This willingness to differentiation that moves them is rather extreme. That is how *Javier Sáenz Obregón* would understand it. He defends pedagogy as a field of knowledge and practice. His proposal focuses on “analysing two historical events in which philosophy was taken as education” (p. 157). He finds the historical background for this way of thinking of philosophy as pedagogy first in the educational practices that accompanied the start-up of schools in the 16th century, when pedagogues took the classical concept of method to move “towards the simplification of the presentation of the teaching materials by establishing more efficient procedures (...) and organising the contents according to its nature” (p. 160). Second, it is found in the works of John Dewey on the relationship between pedagogy and philosophy. Pragmatic positions on knowledge lead to understanding that philosophy is no more and no less than a general theory of education “not only embodied and thus inseparable from formative practices, but a theory whose meaning and worth are played out on their formative action of subjects” (p. 164). Sáenz Obregón considers these antecedents as elements that encourage optimism to improve communication between the camps of theory and practice in education. This is a dialogue “that inevitably requires reconstituting the job of teacher” (p. 173). The relations between knowing, teaching and learning are being widely shaken by the presence of the new information technologies (NIT). Thus, *José Gimeno Sacristán* gives a rich reflection on the relationship between technology and education. He begins with the different ways of understanding technology in the educational setting: as a method, instrumental medium, model of rationality and means of communication. But “what do we understand by education when it comes to posing its relationships with technology?” (p. 139) he later asks. Despite the advantages of more and faster exchanges of information, Gimeno Sacristán fears that “difficulties may arise in generating suitable learning environments” (p. 145). But the most important challenge posed by advances in NIT to education is that it is occurring outside the school: “If adopting and using NIT takes place outside school, it not only means NIT are no longer subject to educational criteria but that the right to education has other settings for being carried out and depends on different agents other than schools, whose control is very difficult” (p. 155).

The miscellaneous nature of the contributions included in this volume creates a certain lack of unity. The itinerary followed throughout this “stroll through different philosophical traditions” announced by the editor in the introduction is not at all clear. This may be something to be expected from being part of an Iberian-American encyclopaedia of philosophy. And yet, reading it offers a plural panorama, rich and extensive in nuances from main lines of work in the philosophy of education written in the Iberian-American linguistic setting. That is more than enough good reason to encourage its being read and studied.