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The philosophy of education in Catalonia in the 20th century: dialectics, synthetics and vitalists

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summary

This text is a contribution to the history of philosophy of contemporary education, which presents three major currents in educational philosophy in Catalonia in the 20th century. In the beginning it deals with the line of thinkers represented by Eugeni d'Ors and Octavi Fullat, who understood education as a dialectic between two poles or opposites in constant conflict. Then it will analyze the synthetic view following Jaume Balmes and the constantly modernizing pedagogy from Cardenal Mercier in the Catholic University of Louvain, which was represented in Catalunya by Professor Joan Tusquets. The third case will review the vitalist authors, Joaquim Xirau and Joan Roura-Parella, who understand education as a revitalizing activity. Finally, within the section on the vitalists, we will look at the cybernetic orientation, represented by Professor Alexandre Sanvisens, who interpreted education as an open, dynamic enterprise tending toward optimization. The methodology used has been the hermeneutics of texts through analysis, interpretation and contrast with the philosophical-pedagogical of the aforementioned authors.

key words

Philosophy of education, contemporary pedagogy, history of education, theory of education.

1. Introduction

By philosophy we understand a comprehensive and globalizing knowledge of the educational processes through anthropological, epistemological and axiological conceptions. In uncertain times like the present, we think that it is a good time to look back at the past, which will allow us to have a new understanding of why the present situation is as it is, as it helps orient us for future decisions by drawing inspiration from tradition. In this sense, we would like to present a systematic view of the philosophy of education in Catalonia during the 20th century, and start to draw a map of the main philosophical-pedagogical streams in Catalonia.

In this article we will look at three viewpoints which we have studied through authors we believe to be representatives of these three tendencies: dialectic, synthetic and vitalistic.

2. Dialectics: Heraclitus' shadow

There are two authors who, corresponding to the two halves of the 20th century, can be considered significant references in the dialectic tradition. We refer to Eugeni d'Ors, who led the Noucentisme movement starting in 1906, and Octavio Fullat, Jaume Bofill's disciple, who, starting in the 1960s, showed a clear interest in the philosophy of education. They were not authors to use an *ex nihilo* approach. Behind the two of them one can see and follow the presence of a dialectic grounded in pre-Socratic philosophy, especially Heraclitus, for whom (if we follow fragment B-53) all is struggle, war and confrontation: "War is the father of all, king of all, it makes some gods and others men, some slaves and others free" (Ferrer, 2011, 327)

For Fullat, as we will see, history is a journey and tension in the form of violent episodes between opposites heading toward a kind of eschatology. For his part, Eugeni d'Ors presents education as a confrontation of eons. In his case, between the romantic spirit represented by Rousseau and the desire for neoclassical order which sprung up with the Renaissance – Rabelais is the paradigmatic author – and became more important with the rise of neoclassicism, led by Goethe. In this sense, one must understand d'Ors' great pedagogic project of Noucentisme: the attempt to modernize Catalonia from a classical perspective that seeks order to combat the late XIXth century Modernisme movement, a tendency which consisted of excessive spirit and baroque traditions.

2.1 Eugeni d'Ors: Baroque temptation and dialectic dialogue

In 20th century Europe politics and pedagogy identified themselves with the same goal: the transformation and regeneration of a country – be it Spain, or Catalonia in the case of d'Ors, an intellectual recognized as a key figure in the political-pedagogical project of the Regional League and the director of Public Instruction of the Region. Campalans' essential work, *Politics means Pedagogy* (1933) (*Política vol dir Pedagogia*) is no more than a symptom of the social view of those times: the transformation of individuals was seen as a secondary process, subsidiary to the collective social project, quite different from today's viewpoint. In this situation, for Xenius (a penname for d'Ors used in *Lletres a Tina*), Catalonia can be taken as a protagonist with a trajectory qualitatively different from the rest of the European nations, and should aim toward them, not only in imitation, but to add their Mediterranean idiosyncrasies to the European whole.

Despite its preference for classicism, it is also true that d'Ors' thinking cannot be understood, nor its formation through the years, without the Baroque counterpoint which masks its intellectual production (Suárez, 1988, p. 28). But whatever the existential reasons, the case is that the struggle to distance itself from Baroque culture and thinking acquired the dimension of a category or an eon in the Noucentisme and d'Orsian thinking, and allowed a newly renovated reality counterposed to Classicism. Thus, the ideological combat dragged out by modernity through the first third of the 20th century became an open debate, a kind of dialogue, between the two movements: Classicism and Romanticism.

Viewed properly, Eugeni d'Ors was in favor of a significantly ironic (that is to say, always flexible) dialectic dialogue which tried to overcome the principle of contradiction by harmonizing the opposites, thanks to the principle of participation, by virtue of which each thing participates in the two poles which determine reality. From this perspective, Noucentisme – a 20th century liquidation project – can be understood as an attempt to install a civil and cultural order in tune with the humanistic past and opposing Rousseau's romantic heritage, the enemy to be defeated. Goethe's path showed d'Ors the route for Noucentista Catalonia to follow: the cultural splendor of the small duchy of Weimar. In this sense, the Romantic approaches represent the opposite of the laborious, energetic search, and therefore, of a task well done. Thus there is a definite struggle against one of the principles of Romantic pedagogy: spontaneity. D'Ors (1981, p. 66) couldn't have been clearer in the paragraph we cite as a good indicator of his thinking: "The art of helping to guide students is called Pedagogy. And the danger to Pedagogy is found, as for so many other things, in Romantic ideology. From Rousseau to Spencer, and beyond, this ideology, with its superstition of spontaneity, has imposed on the world of education a repugnance for everything it disdainfully calls "mechanical methods" or "bookish means" or, significantly, "tiring means" of learning. It is said that this pedagogy comes from the Renaissance, but I believe this to be an error. Almost nothing is, in the 20th century, a continuation of the Renaissance. Rousseau began a mental cycle, not different, but contrary to that begun by Rabelais."

With this approach, Eugeni d'Ors wants to impose an education of work and effort, promoting well done work, and thereby eliminating the remaining airs of Romanticism. He was so much in this line, that he demanded the return of the Renaissance as represented by the education proposed by Rabelais in *Gargantua*. "We compare the heroic spirit and learning which explode magnificently in *Gargantua* with the weaknesses of Rousseau's *Emilie*, which has been the source of modern weaknesses: we can clearly see in these a principle of returning to vice-ridden sensuality, the shame of the *Gargantua*'s first teachers and from which his new Renaissance teachers can redeem him" (d'Ors, 1981, p. 66).

In regard to this point Octavi Fullat, in his prologue to a selection of essays by d'Ors, justly titled *The Man Who Works and Plays*, makes the following comment: "Culture, for Xenius, is no more than the domesticating influence that the will exercises on historic forces. *Seny* (sagacity in Catalan), *sagesse* for the French, or living reason offers the formal steps to know, through action, the natural and historic worlds. The man who *works*, following technoscientific laws, and who *plays*, using surplus or useless forces, constitutes the anthropological-pedagogical translation of the epistemological conception of sagacity, a metaphysical conception paired with the ontological metaphysics of Power and Resistance" (d'Ors, 1988, p. xvi). This explains why for Xenius culture is the result of the struggle of power against resistance.

2.2. Octavi Fullat: Education as a dialectic of domestication

In Fullat's thinking we find the traces of pre-Socratic dialectic, especially Heraclitian. In "La Meva Veritat" (My Truth), he manifests, "History, that is everything, can be reduced to *pólemos*, to struggle, and the presence of one is the presence of its opposite" (Fullat 2008, p. 44). But on going deeper into professor Fullat's thinking, it can be seen that he has developed a ternary kind of thought. He also finds three areas in each civilization: cultural, which interprets the world from a view of man as a symbolic animal; technological, which modifies the world from an anthropological perspective that views man as a *faber* (doing) animal; and finally the institutions which constitute the different ways of fitting man in the world from viewing man as a social animal" (Fullat, 1988a, p. 33). "Education could be many things, but inevitably it is one thing; education is the process of transmission of information, of how to think and behave, of attitudes, of how to alter oneself in the face of circumstances, of abilities, of how to compose oneself in a context from a sensory-motor angle" (Fullat, 1987, p.54).

Three clear stages can be seen in his intellectual evolution. Fullat began from a metaphysical conception as a believer, entered gradually into existentialism which set the possibility of transcendence aside. Finally he came to a period of research at the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st, from the perplexity to the flood of post-Modern theories, he himself noted the absence of an Absolute and the irremissible path of relativism (Laudo, 2011, p. 50). Bit by bit the question of God remained circumscribed by a mysterious approach, more along romantic lines. Professor Fullat stopped basing himself in metaphysics and trusted in the odds in favor of God (Pascal), and from there he postulated that all is concentrated in the mystery that can only be grasped by beauty, especially in music and poetry. This does not mean that he renounced the Christian tradition, nor the memory nor the axiology which depends on history; to the contrary, all is due to our cultural tradition which is, as it must be, based on

a triadic articulation coming from the vertices of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, which “form the three *gonon*, angles, of the triangle which engender Western times: the Bible, the Odyssey and the Aeneid; Amen. Amen means “certainly” in Hebrew” (Fullat, 1990, p. 16).

Under the intellectual influence of existentialism (Heidegger, Sartre) and psychoanalysis (Freud), Fullat outlined a phenomenological and existential analysis of education based on a dialectic between violence and eroticism, which preaches the pilgrimage of evil and twilight of good in sight of a pedagogy of the finitude that leads humans to an abyss. From this perspective, education is always moving between Eros and Thanatos, between eroticism and violence, renunciation and aggressiveness. This thesis appears through out his work, although formulated in various ways, but always with the intention of highlighting that the educational act constitutes a dialectical relationship of a military nature: “Education, in the field of facts, is war, the anthropogenesis of force “(Fullat, 1986, p. 58). This dichotomous and polemical view, that conceives the development of the thread of history through wars and tensions and, apart from the pre-Socratic philosophy, drinks from the springs of Hegelian thinking, the dialectic of master and slave, and Freudian psychoanalysis has influenced the professor’s pedagogical thinking. The educational task seems, then, a boxing match: “Teachers must exercise their power, it is their social function. Students oppose discipline, orders: it is their existential destiny. Who will win?” (Fullat, 1986, p. 13). To the extent that this dialectical approach, which considers education as a process of domestication of violence, gives meaning to an anthropology of an existential nature, often anguished and sometimes pessimistic, sees human beings as something wicked and perverse – which is also face to face with the absurd.

While d’Ors’s aspired to the triumph of classicism over modernism, Fullat simply accepts the violence of the power derived from the authority. Life, and of course, education, is a “place of agony, struggle and anguish” (Fullat, 1986, p. 23). Education is nothing but a process of domestication through which the child, evil by nature, will be incorporated into the adult world in a process that moves from the *physis* to culture, an evolution which, following histriadic thinking, will have three stages: “The little animal will become increasingly political; as he moves from one Basic level to the next he will be more corseted by *hermeneutics*, “knowledge”, and by techniques “know and do”. He will enter civilization. Should we applaud, or, quite the opposite, will we cry? “(Fullat and Sarramona, 1982, p. 195).

Be that as it may, for Fullat one cannot educate without keeping in mind the Christian heritage. One thing is to lose faith and quite another to deny the weight and significance of the axiology of western culture based on Christianity. One of his favorite authors, Camus, closes his *L’Etranger*: “So close to death, the mother must feel liberated and disposed to live it all again... And I, too, I was

also ready to relive it all ... with no hope, faced with this starlit night, I opened myself, for the first time, to the tender indifference of the world. Finding it so like me, in fact so fraternal, I felt that I had been happy, and still was.”

Although he continues without any promise of transcendental hope, Octavi Fullat is the protagonist, with the precarious balancing act of a tightrope walker, of existentialism aware of tradition, defending cultural values, challenging barbarism, and at the same time, with an urge to live.

We can link the stream advocating synthesis to the neo-Scholastic tradition which appeared at the end of the 20th century in the Catholic University of Louvain, under Cardinal Désiré Mercier. In this synthetic line, with an unequivocally neo-Scholastic slant, the figure of Jaume Balmes takes on importance and can be considered a precedent with his own criteria. We can also put Bishop Torras i Bages in this stream, disciple of Francesc Xavier Llorens i Barba, who was an enthusiast of the Thomist restoration promoted by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879). We call them synthetic because of their desire to conciliate faith and reason, to harmonize, in accord with the perennial philosophy, the natural and supernatural worlds in a synthesis which tries to overcome the split of modern philosophy between what is and what should be, between intelligence and will and, as well, between the data from scientific experiments and the transcendent dimension. Obviously we can add that this approach coincides with a humanist, spiritualist and personalist conception, rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, and especially in Thomism, which was brought up to date by the neo-Scholastics.

But we must point out professor Joan Tusquets, born in 1901, who at the age of 54 attained the chair of General Pedagogy in the Department of Philosophy and Letters in the University of Barcelona, which had been eliminated in 1939 and restored in 1954 under Education Minister Joaquin Ruiz Martínez. Tusquets stated that there is a direct relation between culture and education and thus established a system of communicating vessels between the two. This approach should not be surprising if we take into account that the European cultural crisis during the time between the wars (1919-1939) generated an unprecedented reaction in pedagogy. Following his culturalist vocation, Tusquets took advantage of the Viennese ethnological school, Catholic inspired, whose founder, Father William Schmidt (1868 – 1954), had appealed for a comparative method of studying religions. Tusquets, however, had received a major influence from his teacher Juan Zaragüeta and his *Fundamental Pedagogy* (1943). He formed a cultural phenomenology orbiting around the principles of nomadic and sedentary pedagogy and was able to build it up in an original way from the anthropological categories and the theory of natural cycles of the Viennese school. From this come the references to nomadic and sedentary pedagogy as two variables which allow one to analyze and understand contemporary pedagogy. The great value of sedentarism is that it treasures and consolidates, while its worst enemy is the

stiffness and mummification. On the other hand, the highest quality of nomadism is that it enriches, and its worst aspect is skepticism. Sedentarism creates convictions and nomadism opens horizons. It is obvious that an excess of nomadism would cause a loss of convictions; an excess of sedentarism, a loss of hope.

In his intent to conciliate the diverse trends in pedagogy, Tusquets took on, in accord with Mercier's passion for seeking unity, an eclectic attitude, in a way that his General Pedagogy should not be "especially rational, experimental, systematic, historically critical nor synthetic, but problematic" (Tusquets, 1972, p. 27). To him, the education of problematics, and the underlying science of problematics, do not form a specific education, as might be the case in professional education, but something more generic, a way of conceiving general education. Tusquets's position is clear and diaphanous: so old and new, the problems are the same as always, just changing in relation to an evermore plural context.

In the end, Tusquets defends a perennial pedagogy which starts from gnoseologic realism and which fits in with the postulates of the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions, so that education is "the radically human activity which helps the educated because, within personal limits and circumstances, a person can live with greater dignity and efficiency" (Tusquets, 1972, p. 18). On the other hand, in combining tradition and novelty, the pedagogy he proposes assumes the progress of modern psycho-pedagogic science.

On this philosophical base Tusquets articulates a basically unitary and traditional pedagogy which adopts plural and modern aspects. We find ourselves faced with a synthesis based on the weight of Aristotelian and Thomist tradition (*Vetera*) with contributions (*Nova*) which respond to signs of the new times. In those times, after World War II, Tusquets aligned himself, far from existentialist positions, with the perennial pedagogy, so that his essentialist education has as a goal to give the educated the habits (forms), intellectual capacity (science) and moral disposition (virtues) which, in any case, would be intensified by existential reality. With this attitude, Tusquets denies positions that reject the human essence, and proposes an eclectic scheme where "existentialism keeps watch to see that essentialism instills authentic habits, not habits founded on alienation and artificiality; essentialism will exhort existentialism to cultivate attitudes which conform to truth, good and beauty" (Tusquets, 1966).

Tusquets takes his place among synthetic pedagogues because his theoretical and epistemological approaches, in pedagogical science, seek a position of equilibrium and conciliation among the various trends and tendencies. Far from dialectic positions, neoclassical and paganizing like d'Ors and especially Fullat's existential and postmodern dialectics, all is explained in Tusquets' philosophy. Every problem has a solution. One only needs to find the particular adaptation to context for a given truth considered a universal truth.

4. Vitalists and cybernetics: from organic unity to optimization

Vitalism can be linked to the principle of functional unity as set out by Professor August Pi i Sunyer in 1919, when he published *La unitat funcional, assaigs de fisiologia interorgànica* (*Functional unity, essays in interorganic physiology*). On the other hand the influence of Ramon Turró, first president of the Catalan Philosophy Society, is also clear in this stream that emphasizes the importance of life. We are not faced with a mechanistic approach, but rather a biological focus on life, whether life is biological or spiritual, takes the lead. The defenders of this option are characterized by giving more importance to the whole than the parts, and defend a global and integral vision which, contrary to the atomized, analytic manner proposed by modern science, constituted a unity, related by a sort of *nexus organicus*, and therefore linked to biology, which connects everything, material and spiritual, because life is a single reality: education is life, with biological and spiritual life forming a whole.

4.1. Joaquim Xirau: full life and loving awareness

As much as Eugenid'Ors was the first to institutionalize and systematize the study of pedagogy in Catalonia, one must wait for Joaquim Xirau for the opening of the Pedagogy Seminary in the University of Barcelona, inaugurated at the end of 1930. Joaquim Xirau proposed a pedagogy of life based on a deep vitalist conviction: life is spirit, and in its turn, spirit is liberty. And so, according to the principles of M.B. Cossio, education implies living, making alive, giving life, spiritualizing, making it possible for the educated to freely live an authentic life through the creating essence of values transmitted through the history of mankind, for we mustn't forget that man is a living culture generator and, as a result, participates in two worlds: biological or material life and axiological or spiritual life.

So it should be no surprise that March 28, 1928, Xirau pronounced the following words at the Ateneu Barcelonès, "So psychology and logic, which study thinking, are simply chapters of biology. Thinking of the truth is simply a way of verifying vital activity... psychology, and through it, all of philosophy, is reduced to physiology" (Xirau, *El sentit de la vida i el problema dels valors*, (The meaning of life and problems of values) O.C. I, 1998, p. 319). Philosophy, as such, is suppressed. Philosophy is psychology is biology, which means physiology. Physiology was converted into the condition that makes philosophy possible, and thereby, pedagogy, beginning with the supposition that educating is to make alive in the biological and, no less, in the spiritual sense.

Xirau's pedagogic vitalism must be set in the field of the axiological world transmitted historically through cultural heritage. So we have no problem noting that Joaquim Xirau also participated in the metaphysics of vital reason, a

spiritualistic philosophy of action, the line defended by Serra Hunter who, in distancing himself from the fallacy of action for action's sake, imposed an ideal realm of values which constitute a transvital regime gravitating over life and imposing atemporal rules on it (Serra Hunter, 1945, p. 131-139). In the end, one must accomplish that the educated, through a pedagogy of loving awareness, achieves a full life. We quote: "True love rejects earthly lust and elevates us, by a gradual ascent, by the progressive, deliberate death of individual desire, to a luminous sphere in which, by renouncing all earthly happiness, we achieve veritable, authentic bliss" (Xirau, *Amor y mundo*, OC I, 1998, p. 138).

4.2 Joan Roura-Parella: Living Education

Roura-Parella, who was born in Tortellà (Girona) in 1897 and died in Middletown (USA) in 1983, is unknown to many philosophers of education because his name was kept in oblivion until the end of Francoism. That was when the heating up of new liberties began a process of historical revision which helped recover memories unjustly silenced by Francoism. After studying teaching in Girona (1913-1917), Roura-Parella continued his studies at the Escuela Superior del Magisterio (Higher Teaching School) (1919-1923) in Madrid, and graduated first in his class (with a major inscience). In 1923 he was posted to the Escola Normal de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria as professor of Pedagogy. He stayed there until 1930, when he went to Germany to study psychology. Thanks to that trip, Roura-Parella passed from concentrating on sciences to humanities without abandoning the former because, according to his viewpoint everything, biological and spiritual, comes in a global unity.

Roura-Parella is found under the influence of the science of spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*), instituted by Dilthey and cultivated by Spranger, without abandoning biological aspects. As a result, thanks to his contact with Spranger, Roura-Parella changed his world view (*Weltanschauung*) from an exclusively naturalist view to a global or unitary one that revolves around a concept of life, a life that is a whole and which must be considered from the perspective of the unity of the biological and the spiritual.

An important aspect of the organic unity of life is based on the fact that man, besides his corporal and biological reality, has a spiritual and axiological dimension. For Roura, nothing in man is completely independent, so that a stratified anthropology is sketched, with Platonic cross-sections, as learned from his German teachers (Hartmann, Nohl). Humans, then, have different levels: physical, organic, psychic and spiritual. However man, in the process of forming himself, is responsible that these levels have a harmonic and balanced structure. When this balance doesn't appear, each person sees reality in a different way, generating different world view. For those who live anchored in lower levels, all

is material, determinism and natural laws, a sort of *analismus* where man is degraded to pure animality or, in the best of cases, to the condition of a simple machine. On the other hand, for those who are called to higher levels, man is reason, will and spirit, until he can impose his laws on his nature. Spiritualizing an individual consists in carrying out the values of his essential core because true life, which does not accept masks, is based on nearing the ideal.

4.3 Alexandre Sanvisens and cybernetic pedagogy

Finally, we must include Professor Alexandre Sanvisens Marfull's (1918-1995) cybernetic thinking in the vitalist line. From his chair of Pedagogy at the University of Barcelona (gained 1970) he articulated a philosophy of education with a systemic and cybernetic touch, which understands education as an open, dynamic process moving toward human and social optimization. Throughout his long academic career Professor Alexandre Sanvisens exercised an untiring intellectual activity starting the distant day in 1942 when he began as an assistant professor of practical ethics at the University of Barcelona, collaborating from the outset with his teacher, Dr Tomàs Carreras i Artau (1879-1954) who worried about the question of doctor-philosopher.

Professor Sanvisens applied his great philosophical intuition to pedagogy in cases: man as a relating animal, the priority of awareness (an aspect inherited from the Catalan philosophical tradition, especially Llorens i Barba) and the cybernetic vision (a dimension acquired from the study of the doctor-philosophers and modern biology, highlighting the importance of the functional unity of living beings compared to their homeostatic equilibrium). On this base he erects a pedagogical structure of awareness and a cybernetic systematization, which points to the importance of the system which, besides working as an auto-regulatory system, is characterized by an optimizing vocation which not only affects individual conduct through a process of self-awareness and self-liberation, but also, thanks to social awareness, also contributes to the improvement of humanity, when considered globally.

Formed in the shelter of the teaching of the brothers Carreras Artau, Professor Sanvisens interested himself in the field of the doctor-philosophers in an approach which tried to bring the Socratic heritage and the Hippocratic tradition in an integral, global vision of man and culture. Here, then, is the motive for which this integral anthropological reality based on the fusion of Hippocratic medicine and Socratic and Aristotelian philosophy, that is to say, the physical and the psychical, offers an unmistakable pedagogic dimension in the sense that the doctor-philosophers want to guide the lives of the people, viewed from the psychosomatic unity, which highlights the importance of the interrelation of brain and mind (Sanvisens, 1993).

Viewing things from the horizon of the doctor-philosopher, education must contemplate both aspects, corporal and psychical, in a focus emphasizing global functioning of a system which always seeks homeostatic equilibrium, because education is a living, open system functioning in a coordinated and integrated manner among the diverse factors which determine it (anthropology, culture, society, communication) and opening it to the optimization of man and society.

In the last case, and in accord with the Catalan philosophical tradition, Professor Sanvisens' pedagogy turns to individual conscience as a regulating mechanism that permits mankind can proceed to its own self-regulation, and consequently, to its improvement and optimization.

5. Closing

We have tried to present a systematic view of, in fact just a part of, the contemporary situation of philosophy of education through some of the 20th century Catalan pedagogues. This interpretation can be completed in the future and, possibly, we can thus build a map of the principal philosophical-pedagogical currents embodied in our pedagogues. In any case, it seems to us that the philosophy of education, sometimes marginalized, others silenced, enjoys a long tradition and acceptable health among us. Far from being moribund, educational philosophy is an field of study with an important tradition. Both in working in pedagogy and in forming educators, to deny it or not keep it in mind is to write in the sand, to sail without a map.

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