



Moral asepsis in education

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to question the alleged dissociation between ethics and morals and its consequences for the education, from a hermeneutic perspective. Starting from the hypothesis that theorizations and educational and pedagogical ramifications have been disregarding the discussions on morals and their normative, prescriptive and even pragmatic demands, for the adoption of a posture of permanent suspension, relativization and criticism, at theoretical and practical levels. Such a perspective, in educational contexts, would lead to the abandonment and refusal of reasonable and minimally stable values, which are essential to the justification of the very reason for educating. Consequently, these writings have three key purposes: to understand the causes of the controversial, although necessary, dissociation between ethics and morals; to question the relationship between human becoming, its educational capacity and the moral subject; and to demonstrate the correspondence between ethics, morals and education.

Keywords: Ethics; Moral; Education; Human Condition.

De la asepsia moral en la educación

Resumen: El presente artículo problematiza, a la luz de una perspectiva hermenéutica, el supuesto de la disociabilidad entre la ética y la moral y sus consecuencias para la educación. Parte de la hipótesis que las teorizaciones y desdoblamientos educativos y pedagógicos han pasado a través de los debates sobre la moral y sus demandas normativas, prescriptivas y hasta pragmáticas, en el nombre de la adopción, tanto a nivel teórico como práctico, una postura de

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permanente suspensión, relativización y crítica. En contextos educativos, tal perspectiva conduciría al abandono y rechazo de valores razonables y mínimamente estables, indispensables para la justificación de la propia razón para educar. Ante esto, estos escritos se orientan según tres propósitos fundamentales: comprender las causas de la controvertida, aunque necesaria, disociación entre ética y moral; problematizar la relación entre el devenir humano, su educabilidad y la cuestión moral; y demostrar la copertenencia entre ética, moral y educación.

Palabras clave: Ética; Moral; Educación; Condición humana.

Da asepsia moral na educação

Resumo: O presente artigo problematiza, à luz de uma perspectiva hermenêutica, o suposto da dissociabilidade entre ética e moral e suas consequências para a educação. Parte da hipótese de que as teorizações e os desdobramentos educacionais e pedagógicos têm preterido as discussões sobre a moral e as suas demandas normativas, prescritivas e até pragmáticas, em nome da adoção, tanto em nível teórico quanto prático, de uma postura de permanente suspensão, relativização e crítica. Em contextos educativos, tal perspectiva estaria conduzindo ao abandono e à recusa de valores razoáveis e minimamente estáveis, indispensáveis à justificação da própria razão de educar. Diante disso, estes escritos orientam-se segundo três propósitos fundamentais: compreender as causas da controversa, apesar de necessária, dissociação entre ética e moral; problematizar a relação entre o devir humano, a sua educabilidade e a questão moral; e demonstrar a co-pertença entre ética, moral e educação.

Palavras-chave: Ética; Moral; Educação; Condição Humana.

Introduction: dealing with the problem

In the most different areas of contemporary society, the debates on ethics have grown to the point of becoming a phenomenon. In Lipovetsky's words, a kind of "whooping cough that invaded our time" (2005, p. 224). Observing carefully, we will see, unfortunately, that they are perhaps even greater in the business universe than in institutionalized formative spaces such as schools and universities. In any case, regardless of the context, it is easily perceived that the theme of morality and the whole set of expressions

associated with it such as duty, norms, principles, rules, prescriptions, regulations, have been avoided. On the theoretical-philosophical level of these discussions, we seem to have forgotten that ethics has precisely the moral for its object and, on the theoretical-educational level, which is under the aegis of the containment of instinctivity and under the primacy of the norm that humans are introduced into culture and can live together. In a philosophical-anthropological regression, it seems that we also forgot that no educational intervention is justified without the supposed precariousness of our innate condition and that, therefore, to a greater or lesser extent, our humanity is always ideally anticipated "[...] according to a previous model, no matter how open, tentative, capable of innovating about what is received" (SAVATER, 2012, p. 91). In theory, initially, we humans, are just a project planned and engendered by others.

In fact, it would not be a problem if humans were determined at birth and if his end would be in a single and precise direction. Nor would it be a problem if each educator would not have to answer for those, he/she educates. Since this is not the case, both the ideal anticipation of the human being is inevitable, and it is also desirable that this educational ideal does not remain at the mercy of the will of the so-called educators, be they parents or teachers. Which means that if we consider the republican and democratic principles that still guide us,¹ a public component is required there, including from the privacy of the family. Furthermore, what is done with a child in our country, whether or not it is protected from vicissitudes, whether or not it is taken to school, whether or not it is vaccinated, is a matter of interest to everyone, including the State. From this we can infer that every project about the humans is - despite the controversies - minimally aligned with the project and the values of the society in which it is registered. In the words

¹ It concerns the way our country, with its democratic and republican tradition, conceives the role of the State and of each of its citizens in the education of the young, who, especially under Brazil's Statute of Child and Adolescent (ECA), are committed to the responsibility of all: "Family, community, society in general and public power have the duty to ensure, with absolute priority, the enforcement of rights related to life, health, food, education, sports, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community life" (ECA, 1990, Art 4).

of Adela Cortina (2009) "[...] structurally speaking, there is no person who lies above good and evil" (p. 74). To employ a frequently used metaphor, it means that all of us are guided by notions that function as compasses. Not exactly pointing spontaneous and indistinctly to the north, but compasses showing us our moral sensibilities, our understandings, perceptions and sensations related to the conformity or nonconformity of our own and others' behavior according to certain notions we have regarding good, bad, justice and injustice.

School education plays a very important role in it. Being integrated into society, it is populated by individuals whose compasses may or may not point in the same direction. Equating this diversity of values - students and teachers - in the light of some equally valuating perspective, is the great challenge of the school in the field of ethics. Without this, it cannot judge those values, nor can it coordinate actions aimed at their assimilation or, if necessary, their rejection (especially in cases of violence). Since, of course, we understand the school has some legitimacy for this, since its reason for being and remaining in society as a whole is not evident. Beyond educating, it also needs to continually develop its rationale and legitimation in order to protect itself somewhere in the society.

Here, we return to the essentials. Every "[...] action intended to transform the human being into what it should be [...]" (HERMANN, 2001, p. 21) must be justified based on some foundation, in other words, in meanings. This is what we can name, generically, ethics of education. When a public institution undertakes this task, as in the case of public school, this place is protected by law. In theory, it would suffice, but its legitimacy is only achieved by the acknowledgement of the whole society, even if it is not entirely clear, what the purpose of school is. On a moral level, this legitimacy would enable schools to do precisely what was conceived as the goal of education by the Greeks and also by the modern man. And according to Nadja Hermann: to transform the human being into what it should be. What, let's face it, is no small thing.

Whenever we decide to educate someone, we start from the supposition that this student, if possible, must overcome his or her current

being. He or she needs to become something else in relation to what he or she currently is. This is true not only for the first educational act which, in Freudian language, converts “flesh” into language, but also for what continues to be undertaken by family and school education and is motivated by the belief in the ability that everyone who is part of the educational process has to go a little further. What we usually denominate transcendence, in other words, a dimension and condition that is different from the animal being found in immanence, completely absorbed by nature and instinctively determined.

It is the idea of a *must be* that is implied there and that forces us to admit the assumption of a *telos*. Despite the historical stigma of the expression, I risk using it due to the inexistence of a corresponding expression which no longer causes the same discomfort. It is simply said about the ideal anticipation of an objective, an answer to the fundamental ethical question concerning education: *why and for what purpose one educates?* This question should always be repeated and the answer must always be given, never without admitting its bias and provisional nature, but, I insist, it must always be given. On one hand, so that our understanding about the human being is not reduced to a point where we believe we can fit all human subjects into a single definition, constraining the multiple forms of their becoming. On the other hand, so that we do not forget that the human being lacks contours and determinations in order to become something more than a generic and relative attribute.² Thus, the search would be for the recognition of a set of predicates that seem reasonable to us and, why not, indispensable to the constitution of the human being^[56] and that would need to be justified before other possibilities of its fulfillment, including not investing in one's education, if that is the case.

² As an example, may we recall some typical expressions of Kantian ethics, which predicate the way of being human, such as: autonomy, freedom, emancipation, responsibility, conscience. Recurring to Kant, here, is obviously illustrative, but it also aims to recognize our debt to his thought. In part, or in the whole, I suspect that there is no Pedagogical Political School Project in our country that does not contain in its writing some of these expressions, if not all.

In the general and contingent flow of the intergenerational schooling dynamic, this *telos* is rarely outlined. It operates in the immanence of traditions and, to a good extent, it is drawn up in response to circumstances, so that the answer to the question *why and for what purpose one educates?* is not given. The question is not even asked. The question is not even asked. Consequently, there is no immediate moral response, empirically divided into actions which, for being moral, are always educational. This is not to say reflection before action is impossible, but the urgent need for action and its unavoidable moral commitment tends to affect the minimum temporal displacement required by reflective precedence. This obviously only makes sense if we aim at an ethical action (*práxis*), which demands, in addition to some distancing from the empirical plan, a high degree of autonomy of the acting-being, as he does not always see himself in the company of someone who can envisage his positions or advise him on the imminent need to act.

When referring to school education more than ever, the aforementioned question needs to be asked and supposedly answered, in good measure, the distancing provoked by ethical reflection is considered both necessary and desirable. This is where the problem begins to emerge. The division established by every question would not continuously inhibit the action as if, when educating, the action was no longer - despite the redundancy – being performed; nor could it envision undermining educational practices, leading to their defencelessness. But this is exactly what seems to be happening.

Under the historical influence of some philosophical perspectives, the impression created is that education is symptomatically responding to the old and insoluble controversy over the distinction and relationship between morality and ethics. Nevertheless, countless factors have contributed to the maintenance and intensification of the controversy, one in particular is worth mentioning: the incomprehension that as indispensable as considering every moral suspicion is also to understand that it presents itself as an indelible imprint of every human act, consequently of every educational act. In summary: the one who educates is unable to remain exclusively in ethical indecisiveness. Therefore, the hypothesis supported

here is that the continuation of this floating posture, animated by certain relativistic philosophical conceptions, remarkably reluctant to any norms, would have submitted education to a kind of moral purification, leading to direct or indirect consequences such as the evident misguidance of the exercise of adult authority by educators and parents, and a school that is no longer confident of its *raison d'être*.

Before exploring the theme, however, it is necessary to clarify some important points concerning methodological aspects and theoretical orientation that support these writings. Although no theoretical matrix is considered to be exclusive, since the focus is laid on the theme itself rather than the interpretation of this or that author, the arguments are outlined amidst modern principles, thereby demonstrating the belief in human educability and in the commitment of those who educate to do so based on the supposed supreme value of the human person and the preservation of the world as a common world. Furthermore, adopting a critical-hermeneutic approach is what raises the issue, which requires an interrogative approach to the object and the acknowledgment that its truth is always partially presented, due to the linguistic and interpretative nature of our access to it.

In a nutshell, these writings are divided into four parts. The first presents what I refer to as “mapping a crisis” by observing the way in which this crisis ended up having an impact on education. The second part raises the question of the relationship and semantic-conceptual distinction between ethics and morals, and how this context of discussion came to influence educational conceptions. The third part argues in favor of the fact that it is due to the precariousness of the human condition and the unavoidable demand for its educability that morality emerges into the educational game. The fourth, and last part, advocates the idea that, given its radical nature, education can only be conceived belonging together with ethics and morals.

1. Mapping a crisis: from the Greek *paideia* to “ethics without morality”

The Greek willingness for education was based both on the belief that pedagogical intervention could produce some result in human behavior and on the conviction that the aspirations to be achieved should be aligned

with the cosmological ideals of society and humanity that guided the Greek culture as a whole. This intuition and effort were called *Paideia* by the Greeks: the man conceived based on his potential for educability, inseparable from the ideal of polis and harmony with the cosmos (JAEGER, 2013). A certain way of thinking and acting according to reason, which aimed to preserve the integrity of Greek culture by balancing the individual with the collective, the part with the whole.

Such an idealistic and projective conception of education found a unique resonance in Christian thought, with Christ's figure representing the model of human perfection to be persistently sought by every believer. Regarding pedagogical work, the metaphysical element, here, became more prominent, as the formative process was being developed under a transcendent model and with unquestionable authority, that for being always presupposed, foregoes foundation (TUGENDHAT, 2012, p. 23). The guiding model was too great to be achieved, the objective almost impossible to be defined, so great was the distance between what the subject was and what he could or should become. Hermann (2001) states that this conception had no causal relationship between ideas and reality, between the goal and the subject's inner life (p. 33), which did not hamper the search for predictable results through the application of methods considered as adequate.

Traces of such theological morality, according to which only a single path was possible, for a long time was the foundation of pedagogical actions, but it was put in question by modernity, especially when reviewing the Christian idea of the godly ordered cosmos and of human nature revealed and designated by God. The beginning of this process of secularization led modern men to ancient times, particularly to the Greek *paideia*. Updated by the German expression *Bildung*, before established in the polis, that sense of formation came to focus as much on the subject as on culture and society, as an attempt to find a universal principle based on a sense of "good" to be recognized by all (TUGENDHAT, 2012, p. 80). Motivated by this search, the modern men believed in the universal application of norms and the abandoned religious foundation for the sake of reason as a way to constitute

an ethical community. And analogous to the possibility of mastering nature, consequently of a more radical and bolder intervention in it (LIMA VAZ, 2012, p. 269), they also believed in the moral improvement of the individuals. Specially intending to lead them to emancipation and enlightenment, the former calling to the transcendent was abandoned in the name of the moral person as their own legislator.³ A resulting problem had to be addressed: if everyone can legislate on their own behalf, how can we find a universal principle capable of reconciling these multiple moralities? Moreover, considering the historical and cultural conditioning and, after Freud, the assumption of a dimension of the human psyche which is inaccessible to consciousness and the indelible imprint of affections and passions, how can we still sustain the idea of an unconditioned, unselfish and free reason?

The promises of the Enlightenment of autonomy, emancipation, freedom, as well as equality and justice were not enough to answer these questions, and thus led the ethics of duty (like the Kantian model) to disrepute. In the sphere of philosophy, Nietzsche is one of the great figures in this scenario. His philosophy directed a radical criticism not only over the metaphysical tradition and all its presuppositions, but also over the whole set of values nurtured on by the western world. In his book *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1987), he criticized morality for having submitted to the impulsive nature of reason and for being derived from a will to power. The criticism over the abuse of moral improvement - which, for him, only leads to undervaluation of life - and that everything is nothing but human creation and interpretation, produced a deep shock in the field of ethics and moral values, to the point of leading to nihilism: the loss of the value of supreme values once supported by Christianity, by metaphysics and by morality (NIETZSCHE, 2008, p. 29).

³ Habermas identifies a post-metaphysical epoch, characterized by the end of the great philosophical systems and of transcendental thought by the development of historical consciousness and the emergence of finiteness, by the appearance of the philosophy of language in opposition to the philosophy of consciousness and the scientific objectivation of thought (1990, p. 43).

Henceforth, the impacts on education could not be less, especially since most pedagogical theories - albeit with reservations - are dependent on modern Kantian-inspired ethics. And after Nietzsche's "hammering"⁴, it became meaningless to idealize a subject to be educated in this paradigm, because such telos, if they were not based on a metaphysical, safe and unquestionable model, were at best only a human fictional projection, which is why they could be perfectly abandoned. Highlighting the interpretative, provisional, fleeting and relative aspect of the values and truth derived from tradition, the dismantling begins, one by one, of the supposedly safe foundations which until then justified the education. Values and ideals that guided the programs and pedagogical actions of the past began to be replaced by uncertainty, not however, as a way of avoiding possible authoritarian decisions, but as an uninterrupted state of suspicion, therefore, of stopping the action. Defending any value that reminded us of any modern ideal was immediately repudiated, which is why the rhetoric played an important role in the critical review of the standardizing and excluding trend that the modern world has also produced has turned out to be as dogmatic as the perspectives that have been criticized.

The foundation of education became doubt from a standpoint of philosophical disturbance. The subjects of formation, disorientated when faced with judging and acting, were incredulous about the possibilities, the purposes and the limits of pedagogical interventions. Notions such as emancipation, autonomy, responsibility, freedom, which for a long time have punctuated the elaboration of educational meanings, are disregarded without having been replaced by others. At most, expressions that say little or nothing about education such as relativism and spontaneity have become their insignia. The question *why and for what purpose one educates?*, when answered, began to be expressed based on subjective convictions of each educator. Alternatively, it has been defined circumstantially from local contexts, in an increasingly expressive highlighting of particularities, of experiential and communitarian contingencies, emphasizing the aesthetic,

⁴ Alluding to the work *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*.

the emotional, the sensitive, which, despite their indisputable relevance, do not allow themselves to be universalized. Flexibility, relativism, subjectivism, multiculturalism, contextualism, fragmentation have become the mark of the contemporary. On the other hand, expressions such as norms, guidelines, interventions, limits, authority, started to be revoked.

Therefore, especially after Nietzsche's criticism, the problem of how education can be thought of, amidst the abandonment of modern pretensions to human emancipation, perfectibility and moral formation, persists. The insurgency of countless forms of rationality has led us to abandon our own reflection on the possibility of defining some shared sense of good or fair, or even of separating good from evil, good from bad, just from unjust, beautiful from ugly. The idea of truth and equality, of a common world to be desired and built, and of reasonable criteria for judging in the name of some values to be elaborated and sustained, all in order not to be accused of being conservative, became suspicious in the face of plurality and relativism. As Hegel, we would say that we fell into the trap of inverted worlds (1996, §157-158): we left one absolute to enter another.

It is no coincidence that now, without an ultimate foundation, the previously unchallenged link between ethics and education is compromised, especially from the standpoint of the Greek *paideia* and the modern concept of a universal and emancipatory education. The desired and justifiable openness to human becoming, revealed in multiple ways of being, has increased the difficulties of establishing bonds based on a morality of universal pretensions, especially because particularities and individualism have found a breeding ground for radicalization. Lipovetsky (2005) diagnosed this epoch - our epoch - naming it *post-moralist*, Adela Cortina (2010) described it as an *ethics without morals* and Luc Ferry interpreted it as a *moral of the second humanism or secular spirituality* (2012). Despite some differences between these authors, all three point to the insurgency of an ethics challenging to redefine instincts and emotions facing the demands of duty and to consider an individual with enormous difficulties to recognize his dependence or need for something that is beyond himself, in other words, the other or the collective.

In this context, the cultural aspect⁵ gains exponential and deeply contradictory perspectives: sometimes by obliterating the expansion of this individualism, due to the "weight of the community" (FERRY, 2012, p 89), the tyrannical submission of a group (ARENDT, 2014, p. 230) or even due to the unconscious character and, therefore, supposedly unavoidable of this moral authority; sometimes by placing itself at its base, legitimizing human behaviors freely exercised, indifferent to each other and irresponsible from the community's perspective. In other words, if on the one hand we cannot get rid of culture, because it influences our thinking and acting, therefore, morality itself; on the other hand, it does not determine morality tragically, nor makes it a fatality immune to criticism, precisely because it is a human construct.

Based on this argument, we are prompted to recognize the vulnerability of its values and, at the same time, the implications arising from it in the educational sphere, where we hope that the discussions transcend the scandalization - which eventually reveals the extent to which we are hostages of our own values -, the comfort of omission and the mere diagnosis of specialists. Without qualified studies and dialogues, we will have difficulties in solving such problems, especially when they come from intercultural coexistence. We will not be able, for example, to answer the question of how to enable the coexistence of different cultures and ways of life without some having to be constrained at the expense of others; or if we can and how we can justify coercive actions without relying on a predicate of universal "good"; or if we could do so without establishing minimal moral parameters and without what we understand as "good" or "evil" finding its limit only in the group where it was agreed in the first place.

These and other issues derive from the supposed and already mentioned "ethical crisis", mainly as one side of the "education crisis". Once assumed as a *crisis*, we immediately find ourselves facing the challenge of

⁵ The word *culture* here means, as Adela Cortina says, "[...] the set of models of thought and behavior that direct and organize the activities and material and mental productions of a people, in their attempt to adapt the environment in which they live to their needs, and that can distinguish them from any other." (2005, p. 148).

having to deal with a scenario of division, or breakup. That is why we have to map and understand its conditions and contradictions, identify its ramifications in education and seek, within our limits, a way to address the issue that allows us to confront the subject of morals without much "guilt". A possible beginning is precisely by facing the historical debate about the distinction and the relationship between ethics and morals.

2. The distinction and relationship between ethics and morals

In general, every debate about ethics and morals demands certain clarifications about its semantic aspects. They are essential for the discussions developed here, because, as we shall see, as important as recognizing its conceptual distinction is not to make it absolute. I propose, instead, to a large extent, to minimize it.

Etymologically the terms ethical (from Greek, *ethos*) and moral (from Latin, *moralis*) have the same origin, "[...] both fundamentally designating the same *object*, namely, either the socially considered *custom*, or the habit of the individual to act according to the custom established and legitimized by society" (LIMA VAZ, 2012, p. 14). Such definition is derived from the subtle, but no less important, peculiarity of the meanings that guide both concepts. Meanings that translate, considering a long tradition, its semantic heritage and that have rightly put in question its primary synonymy. The need for distinction between ethics and morals arises from the complexity of modern societies, in which an individual emerges mainly guided by his personal interests, seeing himself in a kind of estrangement when confronted with the demand for ordering in favor of the maintenance of the social whole. This conflicting scenario did not exist in the original context of ethics among the Greeks.⁶

⁶ The Greeks did not conceive any distinction between individual values and collective or social values, so that the principles that guided the behavior of each individual were coincident with the principles that governed the entire community. But that is not all, this relationship between individual and society was grounded in a cosmological approach, in which good and evil were

A new chapter in the treatment of ethical status is therefore involved, especially from the point of view of modernity, because of its differentiation with morals. Distinguished by a deep transformation in anthropological conceptions, since Plato and Aristotle,⁷ when the fact of human existence, of learning and awareness of virtues of the rational and political nature of man became suspicious⁸, were insufficient to ensure a life in accordance with ethical principles. Another important fact that emerges from this distinction between the moral and the ethical from the point of view of modernity focuses on human freedom⁹. Given the mistrust that the habits and principles bequeathed by tradition no longer ensured happiness or a fairer society, consequently more ethical, the individual began to emancipate himself from the normativity instituted by communitarian ties, including often, authoritarian reproducers of violent cultural practices.

related to cosmic harmony (cf. JAEGER, W. *Paideia*, 2013). Therefore, the metaphorical linguistic meaning of *ethos* (abode, lair, animal shelter) is, according to Lima Vaz, very meaningful: it expresses a deep intuition of the Greeks about the nature and conditions of human action, in the sense that once the abode of *ethos* is destroyed, all the meaning for human life is also compromised (2012, p. 13). *Ethos* expresses the human version of *physis*, the principle that qualifies habits and virtues according to their rational nature. "The existence of *ethos* is primitive and cannot be demonstrated, and thus becomes the first principle of demonstration in the sphere of human action [...]". This proposition translates the normative and prescriptive nature of the *ethos* that both regulates and orders the *goodness* of acting from the point of view of its required insertion into a historical-social context" (LIMA VAZ, 2012, p. 13).

⁷ Socrates conceived *psyché* as an ethical interiority of the individual in search of *areté*. This emerges in an exemplary way according to Plato and Aristotle, while demanding an anthropological conception that justifies the original characteristics of ethical action, considering the totality of the being-agent in its structural dimensions - somatic, psychic and spiritual - and in its relations with the world, the community and the transcendence. This allowed the necessary link between Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics to be established, so that the definition of human realization can only be given from an ethical perspective (LIMA VAZ, 2012, p. 26).

⁸ Check out the dialogues *Menon* and *Protagoras* by Plato.

⁹ With a reservation to the philosophy of Kant, because the ideal of Kantian morals is to realize itself ethically, that is, through the objective use of freedom, the end of all humanity. It is what he calls *practical reason*: the theoretical use of reason aimed at achieving the ends of humanity (KANT, 2003).

Both are guided by a certain ideal of good, humanity and justice. Morals, however, refer to contextual experiences, engendered within the communities or groups in which it is cultivated (whether through religious, political or ideological discourse) and where human actions aim, at first, only at conformity with established rules and norms. Ethics, on the other hand, demands precisely the removal of contexts of origin in order to identify and question the values that operate tacitly in the organization and regulation of the behavior of human groups, seeking to find principles pointing to some universality. And it can only do so because it is not limited to a certain definition of human and humanity, precisely what, in general, distinguishes it from community morals.

In this sense, morals become associated with the expression of a subjective attitude towards the set of rules, norms, prescriptions, which guide human action, inherited by culture and preserved by the customs of a community. Whereas ethics adopts, in the words of Tugendhat “[...] the philosophical reflection on ‘morals’” (2012, p. 39), taking it as its object. And “as a philosophical reflection”, explains Adela Cortina (2009), “[...] is compelled to explain theoretically why there is and must be morals, or to confess that there is no reason for them to exist”, and then says: “The ethical task consists, as I see it, *in accepting the moral world in its special nature and in giving it a reflective reason*, so that men may grow in their awareness about themselves and, consequently, in freedom” (CORTINA, 2009, p. 40).¹⁰

Cortina warns us of points that deserve our attention. First of all, alongside Tugendhat, she takes on the theoretical and reflective character of

¹⁰ Cortina says that ethics would have three fundamental tasks: the first one, is to clarify what morals consist of (a matter of clarification); the second one, is to provide reasons for being moral (a matter of foundation); and the third one, is to try to apply the result obtained to guide the action in the different areas of social life (a matter of applied ethics) (2003, p.51). By following the intuition of the Spanish philosopher, we could affirm that education is ethical exactly because it is entangled in these three dimensions: it needs to present morals as the set of values that condition human action; it needs to question the importance of these values, justifying their preservation, reformulation, substitution or not; it needs to give meaning to these values (universality, otherness, recognition, reciprocity, for example), and to give indications for human actions, in dialogue with the world of life.

ethics in relation to the more normative and pragmatic nature of morals. She points, however, to the need for ethics to go beyond: to indicate more than the need or not for morals, but also which morals. From this standpoint, in addition to the suspension of current morals, Cortina would be warning that ethics must also be required to have a certain commitment in the world by indicating a temporary morality favorable both to the preservation of human life and to a world that safeguards a space of openness for the becoming of ethical reflection itself. For example, as important as thinking about what can be understood by justice is to consider the importance of human actions responding to the judgment criteria on what is just.

In this context, Kant intended and, in fact, believed it to be possible to achieve what Safatle (2013, p. 74) calls “ontological security”, that is, the ability both to define good and evil a priori, and to have a voluntary willingness that is purified from selfishness and the inconstancy of feelings in order to act in accordance with the principles, preserving us from practical indecidability. It turns out that the same cultural, affective, normative conditioning is so much a part of us that it is no more than an illusion to achieve an absolute displacement of the operability of life without moral blemishes. What, obviously, could not discourage us from seeking it, from the place taken by education.

The problem that inspires these writings lies precisely in this interstice: facing the practical normative character of morals and the reflective theoretical character of ethics, where and how we place education?

Such questioning is the outcome of a suspicion. As thinkers of education we do not fail to reason about the place, role and ends of education, but we would have done so less grounded in the stable, conservative and instituting field of morality, and much more under the critical and relativizing belt of ethics, thus, limitedly understanding the relationship between these philosophical notions and education. In order to distance ourselves from the former authoritarian and oppressive pedagogy, standardizing and rejecting subjectivity, we end up submitting education to a kind of moral asepsis. In this way we take positions diametrically opposed

to those criticized, based on a relativist perspective of values, opposed to any link with traditions or speeches of universal claims. As educators, we arise oscillating and insecure, or clinging to theoretical constructs which proposed the adaptation of certain philosophical perspectives in mere methodologies or simply taking a position of permanent mistrust, suspending norms and rules, from now on, also action. Therefore, if we don't lose autonomy and are hostages of salvationist fads and formulas, we naively adopt an attitude of constant mistrust and doubt, surrendering ourselves to an even desirable attitude from a philosophical point of view, but from an educational-formative standpoint, deeply controversial, since every educator feels obliged to engage, especially under the “distorted” nature of the human condition.

For this reason, next, I question what would be the basis on which we can justify not only the educational actions as a whole, but the link between ethics, morals and education: the matter of the human condition.

3. Anthropological regressions

It is possible to make a statement about the human being without hesitation: perhaps few concepts have received so much content, coming from such diverse areas as Biology, Psychology and Philosophy, but still remains empty. And perhaps it was Kant who gave “the paints” to make it so. He had the fundamental intuition that contingency surrounds human becoming, which is expressed in the paradigmatic saying that “man only gets to be a man through education” (KANT, 1996, p. 15). There is no natural need, determined biologically according to which every human offspring, will be human. We all know that their parents will undertake a great effort so that, from this fragile being, comes a human type.

Because we cannot find the human in nature spontaneously, however we use as an attribute what would be our own alleged condition, that of being human, and its arrival does not present itself logically and promptly as a response to the interventions of others, the human condition cannot be conceived apart from the multiple possibilities of its becoming

human. In other words, the richness of the human being is precisely due to its original indetermination, the absence of any teleological sense that points to a single way of being, and its value to the fact that each human being is exclusive, due to its capacity to be subjective in a unique way in each interaction. Hence, the multiple forms of personality, gender, color, culture, language, dispositions, possibilities or physical limitations, in part even modes of social organization and interaction with nature, manifest their differential in relation to other species and among themselves. Nevertheless, although we consider that the expression of all this exuberance does not manifest itself without other people's intervention, we must go a little further.

Whenever we need to express the reasons that lead us to educate humans (field of ethics) and what we do or should do to accomplish that purpose (field of morality), we need to examine some other variables, such as, for example, the ways of being human that enhance or prevent ways of being of other humans. If this has any relevance, then we must consider that there would be a precondition, a kind of primary pedagogical movement that is to welcome the newborn and make it human.

That is not all, because the tacit notion of humanity of this first educational act needs to be targeted in the world, which transcends the varied aesthetic-anatomic, physiological expression or sexual dispositions of these protohumans. Whether culturally conditioned or derived from free choice, whether the individual will be straight, homo, trans or bisexual, whether or not he or she will dye their hair, whether or not they will prefer to walk on clogs instead of shoes, whether they will dance to rain or follow the weather forecasts, whether they believe they are their male or female god, all this matters little. These aesthetic and behavioral attributes are not necessary when we consider the human condition and its educational needs, simply because they are not related to other individuals. We cannot derive from them, at least not immediately, implications for the exercise of humanity and the freedom of others - even if aesthetic attributes are the cause of violence, like ethnic and racial prejudice. From an ethical-moral point of view, it is important to us when some “ways of being” hinder the

“ways of being” of others, such as when someone resolves conflicts by means of physical or symbolic violence to the point of bringing harm to other individuals.

Such thoughts make us consider that even though the educational response makes no sense, the formative interventions intended to forge the human imply a problem that is, undoubtedly, of an ethical nature, because they challenge us to answer questions such as: what attributes make an individual of the human species an effective human being? Or is it enough for a newborn human individual to be welcomed by other human individuals to be human? Considering the subsequent interactions which hypothetically constitute the humanity of the neophyte, does any human “result” suit us? Is there a desirable way of being human?

I admit that such questions may cause some discomfort and even a degree of contradiction. It is intentional. Obviously, even before being born, the newborn baby already exists as a human in the mother's womb. It is not by chance that, in view of this, a place in the house is named, under certain conditions reserved for him, even legally he is already a citizen of rights. In part, therefore, he already inhabits a world that is symbolic, linguistic, preventing us from establishing a division and an absolute new beginning with the birth of each individual of the species, interrupting the human generational chain. My provocation goes in another direction. It requires us to temporarily put this previous condition aside, since, to a large extent, it is said that anticipation is biologically defined if not projected by the parents. Following the Freudian theoretical path, for example, we would say that it is not a child, a baby or a human being who is born, but only a crude being, a body-flesh, an insufficient condition for its subjectivity, even for its self-sufficiency. It is therefore necessary to be introduced into a desiring chain, which means that another person will show him or her the world, to be inserted into a culture, into an artificial, symbolic universe. This initial precarious condition of the human being in the world Freud (1895-1990) called *fundamental helplessness (Hilflosigkeit)*. A kind of space to be filled, of a blank page to be written, of something at rest to be stimulated so that it may come to be.

So, now back to the questions. If our answer to them is that we are indifferent to the *ways* of being human, we would need to admit that what education, what educators, what objectives, what interventions, what institutions, what processes matter little. However, if we answer that not all *ways* of being human are satisfactory to us, precisely because we aspire to be a special type, projected from certain outlines, then we need to admit something more: that we are guided by a set of values that allows us to define human attributes (including them as *inhuman* and ruthless), to judge human responses to this ideal and to undertake educational actions in its favor. To think and talk about whether this makes any sense, including whether or not we can aspire to this or that human profile, whether or not we can commit efforts to create conditions for its arrival, more than an educational ethical issue of first order, according to Graham Greene “is a moral duty [...]” (*apud* SAVATER, 2012, p. 23).

4. Ethics, morals and education

Savater (2012) reminds us well that it is not enough to be born human, but “[...] we must also become human” (p. 24). It means that our primal condition, even though supposedly human, needs to aim outside ourselves giving effectiveness to what would already be a possibility from the inside. *As a possibility*, because it is never too much to remember that the humanizing effort occurs at the expense of the innate condition of our species, which is precariously instinctive and animal. As a result, since birth, culture reserves *a* path to be followed by the human individual. *One* because even though we may consider the possibility of various fates and various expressions of the human, manifested singularly in each individual, the all-encompassing purpose of becoming a human being anticipates and implies any other particular purposes.

That is why we can say that the original distinction between being and must be announces the human condition as bearer of a freedom rooted in the total absence of nature, indeterminate in its origin. Faced with the openness of the human being, according to which there would be “[...]”

neither essence nor specific vocation”, and could therefore “[...] receive all natures and all faces [...]” (AGAMBEN, 2017, p. 52), we need, then, to count on the disposition of those already humanized to do so with those who are not yet. And this is simply because they will be unable to do so in absentia. More than knowing that no human comes from this openness, we realize that the plurality of human becoming is mixed with contingency. And it is in contingency, in this human atavistic predicate, that our great dilemma exists. If, on the one hand, openness indicates the value of the human, expressed in endless and unusual ways of subjectivation and existence, on the other hand, it justifies our reason for educating it. Simply because, perhaps, we are not so willing to take risks. Leopoldo e Silva (2009) claim that “this character of adventure that is part of existence is paradoxically sympathetic to both contingency and need, because if it is necessary to take all the risks, it is also necessary to justify them, since in this case the adventure is about engagement and purpose” (p. 75). It is the great paradox in which we are entangled: if we are convinced that the human is not made alone and if our conviction leads us to undertake some effort to educate him, bypassing the randomness and its vicissitudes, then we are morally engaged from the beginning. And so, in addition to having to assume the norms as an intrinsic element in educating, we find ourselves constrained to justify the reasons that allow some to interfere in the lives of others. Let us remember that, for the Greeks, this question has never been a problem. The original connection between ethics and education was unquestionable. It is for us that it has been losing evidence, reaching our days with the stigma of a crisis.

In the first topic of these writings, when we make up the paths that generated this imbalance, we saw the birth of an education that, from the excessive interference, leaned towards its inverse, or made itself unreasonably, regulated according to subjective needs and contextual idiosyncrasies, as well as by a speech sustained by the idea that all forms of education are violent and oppressive, or being guided by the educators' silent and self-centered certainty. In either case, it was inhibited by the need to collectively and publicly assume values and advocate for any perspective in favor of educational action.

It does not mean that criticism should be ignored for the sake of moral frameworks and adjustments, regulations and rules. The critical element is indispensable especially in cases where the human being, besides being the object of study and investigation, is at the mercy of the convictions and actions of others. Mistrust, criticism and reflection are conditions for an ethically oriented education. There is, however, another challenge to be faced that invites us to go a little further than the diagnosis.

It seems evident to us that we are experiencing an ethical and value crisis, ethical disorientation, generation conflicts, abandonment of adult responsibility, and so on, even though it is not the prerogative of our time. But we need more than just to recognize the crisis. Alongside thinking about morality, the ethical task requires us to take other paths when it comes to education. One of them is to choose the paths, despite the discomfort that this may cause us regarding the philosophical perspective that guides us. It is not by chance that we speak of educational *action*. Thus, as essential as thinking before acting is to be able to act in the imminence of an educational demand based on some framework.

Formerly, this moral commitment was accepted more peacefully, because it was a way of guaranteeing a minimum of stability to the groups involved in the reproduction of some behaviors. Far from defending the authoritarian dominance of community morals or the return to the dictatorial origin and dogmatic vocation of the discipline of Moral and Civic Education, the challenge is to think of something that can come in place of these morals.¹¹ Specifically in the case of Moral and Civic discipline, we were not even able to advocate something that would represent the fundamental values of our republican and democratic education. For some reason, we believe too much in the morale of each educator, or we imagine that they would leave it at home before coming to school, or by bringing it

¹¹ La Taille (2009) accuses the Moral and Civic discipline of having removed the universal boundaries of moral justice, reduced it to a set of uplifting values and at the service of a particular political ideology (p. 231), noting, moreover, that in this particular case, we were right to remove the discipline from school, but left the vacant position empty. We have not put anything in its place.

with them they might be able to make a practical and logically impossible movement: to suspend the morale while they act.

According to Aristotle, Gadamer (2006) highlights precisely the fact that it is impossible for us to reach accuracy in the ethical field, recognizing that the very effort to do so would already be an indicator of a moral problem. Thus, according to him, “[...] it clearly belongs to the essence of the ethical phenomenon that the agent can not only decide in action, but also know himself and understand how he should act [...]” (2006, p. 49). Every action, for Gadamer, must be preceded by reflection, simply because the experience is not enough to establish an ethical knowledge, being, therefore, always essential that the moral conscience is driven by a previous knowledge (2006, p. 51). But he admits that ethical knowledge is also insufficient given the unpredictability of life, incapable of subsuming, in principles, all living circumstances. That is why it must always be kept under pressure in the contingency of action.

In this sense, ethics and morals would be at different levels of human knowledge and action, but always communicable. Ethics would provide morals with guiding principles for action and morals would compel the being-agent to always remember that principles do not operate in a dimension beyond the world, but are developed in the world and aim at the world of life, of human actions. Education, on the other hand, would exist in a place as an intermediary, with one foot at each level: in part, it needs to rely on reflexivity and criticism in the face of the operability of life and the world, with the finite character of the human condition, and therefore, with the fallibility of its knowledge; in part, it needs to adopt a more or less stable position, rooted in some knowledge that allows and authorizes it to deliberate on the education of other humans.

Ramifications...

The precariousness of the human condition and the need for its educability, the decline of religious traditions in which morals were justified by the call to transcendent authority, the process of secularization that

sought to emancipate ethics from religion by strengthening the duty and moral obligation as well as the rational willingness and self-sufficiency of the human, the opposite side of this perspective which reduced its rational capacity and emphasized the sensitive, subjective and individual dimension, made us face a problem and a discussion without planned synthesis. All these factors, together with the discrediting of the great patriotic, revolutionary and religious ideals, would explain the ethical crisis in the West. A crisis accentuated by the progressive imbalance between the theoretical field of principles and the practical field of action, of deliberation, in short, by the ever more pronounced gap between the field of ethics and morals.

Ethics became a central theme of philosophical and educational debates, while morality was, if not banned, relegated to the sidelines, supposedly due to its more normative than reflective character. As if it was a problem that could be postponed in education. Although education cannot disregard philosophy, we must admit that it does not operate at this level necessarily, but also at the level of norms, regulations, prescriptions, restrictions, warnings, adjustments, without which, whether we like it or not, it is impossible to humanize it. We forgot that Psychoanalysis itself, in addition to having recognized and given a new statute to human subjectivity, has also taught us that there is only one subject as long as it is subject to it. We also forgot that discourses, wisdom, knowledge, tradition, everything therein - including within a curriculum - to be preserved and transmitted, or even rejected, is morally stained from the beginning. And that is for a simple reason, because our action is not instinctive as the action of animals. We are deliberating agents and when we act, paraphrasing Hegel, we lose all ingenuity (1996, p. 389).

When interpreted unilaterally by some philosophical movements, morality became a synonym for oppression and even for violence. Not that it wasn't in the past, and in some cultures, it isn't yet. But there is no need for it. As we always educate based on values, it is enough to define which values should be advocated. Morality will depend on this, and therefore we will have some guidance in defining the intentions and objectives of

education. In this logic, ethics would be a sort of state of alert, a permanent disposition for the revision of those values, which is only possible if we admit the finite character of our human condition and that our way of subject-being in the world is always in place. In other words, first we must admit that our thoughts and actions are shaped - it is worth pointing out, morally shaped - so that ethical reflection makes some sense. It means that, ignored from the philosophical, political, educational scenario, morality is no longer examined and publicly debated. And worse than dismissing it is its tacit permanence, managed privately by educators and managers, or by groups or leaders. Moreover, in the case of the school, even if it declares itself morally exempt, it cannot escape from its “institutional dimension” (MARQUES, 1996). That is why its eventually claimed neutrality is both impossible and undesirable.

The criticism of moral renunciation is directed against this scenario. If we cannot be morally free, the first order ethical claim to education is, first of all, by the consent of the moral conditioning to which we are all subjected, not by chance the education itself. Then, as far as possible, by unveiling the values that guide education one by one, giving visibility and public justification to those values that we believe deserve collective support.

In this sense, education is placed between morals and ethics, as different instances at first, but to be reconciled later. The moral plan would indicate the need to always have to decide and act, often without much negotiation. A certain amount of pragmatic contingency would inevitably summon us to take a stand. The plan of ethics, in turn, would be the very openness to a possible distancing from the operational level and that would preserve us from being swallowed up by everyday life, by the imperative of culture and customs. A possible and essential distance so that we can reflect on them, if it is convenient to deny them or, to embrace them consciously and voluntarily. However, a distance that cannot exist from a special *locus* for analyzing what is to be examined, pristine from the contingent, historical and cultural point of view. It is also never given over to such factors, since ethics is expected to reflect on some principle that presents itself with the

potential for universal articulation before the dogmatic posture that stubbornly stands at the rear of normative positions.

The challenge of education, in this sense, would be much more than allying ourselves to the course of the world - as if it existed! - or to satisfy the burning desires or “whims” of those who need to be introduced into the world. Nor would it be simply to think about all this, unpretentiously. However, thought is a condition for educating, considering human development, education of children, schooling, thought needs to be followed by propositions and these by actions. As educators, we could very well deny ourselves this. But at what cost? Only to express vainly our criticism? Or because it is easier to let others decide for us, freeing us from any responsibility?

In the foreword of *Minimum Ethics*, Adela Cortina (2009) states that the great and urgent challenge for education would be “[...] to build, from our traditions, our political and economic conditioning, our praxis and reflection, the lines of a morality for the secular city” (p. 17), thus adding to the idea that education needs to be bold and mark a place in this highly diffuse world in terms of values and educational sources. The family, as we well know, for countless reasons has participated less and less in the education of children, the radical and segregation religious discourse has grown, television has played a central role in the homes and attention of families, the mobile devices incorporated so symbiotically into the lives and bodies of children and adolescents that they can no longer conceive themselves and the world without them. Not to mention various groups and “tribes” multiplied in types, dispositions, performances and intentions. Subjectivities became fragmented, according to contingencies, in the influx of those who “scream” louder, those who provide more pleasure, those who promise all the accomplishments in life and peace of conscience *post-mortem* (for a “fair” price, of course!).

What would be convenient for the school? A plausible start would be to critically revisit the traditions and identify values worth preserving, re-signifying, or even replacing. Tradition is not a fatality, but I suspect that we are capable of creating other ways of existence apart from its reference,

even if it is denied. Maria Rita Kehl (2013) recalls that this culture that has incited us to live away from traditions, has also kept us out of any possibility of conveying experiences, leaving us, as adults, in a place of difficult symbolic support, including taking the parents “[...] into the contingency of imposing limits and passing on ideas to their children” to do so “on their own and at risk”.

The task that lies ahead for teachers and the school as a whole is by no means a minor one. Because they are also expected to assume this responsibility, which is required of every generational meeting. On the one hand, they would have credibility and authority that is both epistemic and moral, as their knowledge has always been educational in nature. Only because of this does a teacher authorize himself to be a teacher, in other words, that he can be recognized as a special educator. Simply because parents are also educators, but they are incidental educators. Teachers, on the other hand, are specialists in education, with minimal knowledge of the human, legally accredited not only to say something about what is more or less reasonable about the education of children and adolescents, but also to act in this regard. Therefore, as a place of excellence where human education is provided, the school would have to have something to say about education and about humans. If it doesn't feel authorized - by developing skills for it - then we shouldn't be surprised at those who say “they don't know what to do”, like some parents, or who say they know too much, as we've heard from conservative politicians, economists, administrators, and religious. Thus, it would be implicit in being a teacher, as a professional or educational worker, a kind of contract that would tie him to a certain moral status quo - obviously not private - derived from his unequivocal commitment to the set of values shared by the community in which he belongs and whose educational intervention is legitimized by the modes of justification of this *ethos*. On the other hand - and here there is a deception - the educator could never be just a *representative* or a *conveyor* of such legitimation, but the very inquirer of the current morals, both for being a possible denouncer of oppression, violence, discrimination, which such morals can mask, and for the commitment and responsibility assumed towards the generations he is

dedicated to educating. He would assume two roles in parallel, if that was possible: the one of being conservative and also a critic of the morals he professes.

As paradoxical as this situation may seem, it is typical of the ethics of education to engage, never forgetting that the truths in which we engage are provisional. The awareness of this fallibility, according to Safatle, “[...] is the most important of the moral virtues” (2013, p. 75), which implies much more than adhering to a principle, but the “[...] effort to think against oneself and review the consequences of what, at a given moment, is clear to us” (2013, p. 75). This, it seems to me, is the ethical posture required regarding education, so that when faced with the question *can* the educational task engage morally?, I dare to answer, even under judgement, *it should*, if we admit that it is too great a risk to let the life of the new be abandoned at random.

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Data de registro: 21/05/2020

Data de aceite: 29/09/2021