

## **JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET AND EDUARDO NICOL: ALTERNATIVES FOR PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN LATIN AMERICA**

"Among the various activities of love there is only one that can attempt to inform others with, the zeal of understanding"

### I. Jose Ortega y Gasset--Educating for Life

Jose Ortega y Gasset was a philosopher genuinely concerned with education. His vocation for knowledge always required communication, therefore he never sought truth to make of it a silent cult, instead he sought it as a means to approach truth together with others. Only under the light of such intellectual and pedagogical vocation can the ortegian concept of education be understood. His attempt to clarify the goals of education centers on the effort to elucidate two questions: What must be taught and how it must be taught.

So as to solve these perturbing questions the Spanish philosopher starts off from three fundamental points:

1. Economy in Teaching
2. Pedagogy through imbuing
3. Life as a Poetic Task

Economy in Teaching. Ortega himself tells us that this concept is so simple that it would seem superfluous to point it out. Were it not that it is frequently forgotten.

In 1921 the Swedish economist Gustave Cassel pointed out that man's economic activity has its origin in scarcity. Ortega applies this idea to education underscoring that if there is a need for education, it is due to the fact that in true teaching-learning phenomenon there is something rare and scarce. Learning is a rare gift and for the same reason a precious one. If a man can well ignore whatever he wishes, he cannot learn everything he wishes. Therefore it becomes necessary to foster the learning of what is fundamental of what is truly important for life.

But so as to define that which is important for life, we have to address ourselves to the ortegian concept of life.

Life as a Poetic Task. Life, says Ortega is the radical reality to which all other realities are directed.

However, life is not granted us ready-made, but to be made. Thus, it being necessary to integrate ourselves to the project of our own lives; life is a poetic task because we have to invent the man we will become. For that we have a guide; our vocation and a constrain: circumstance.

In order to achieve the project which our life is we must use reason. To live is to have no other alternative but to think. At every moment we have to decide among the alternatives that our circumstance offers us, and to do so we have to think.

Man cannot live without orienting himself, that is to say, without reasoning.

If we link both ideas: economy in teaching and life as a task, we can conclude that the goal of the educator is to help man face that task which is his own life, fostering the development of whatever permits to face that task: thinking, both in its formal aspect as well as in its creative aspect.

Now then, how can the educator achieve this purpose? At this point the third idea comes to mind; imbuing education.

Imbuing Education. Ortega maintains that nothing which is worth learning, can in

the strict sense be "taught".

The learning of that which is truly important is conquered through one's own effort, so that the educator can only imbue us with the impulse that can help us develop that effort.

What is commonly understood as the teaching of science is the cramming of students' minds with data, methods in a word, finished products of others' creative efforts.

This, evidently leaves out that which is essential to science: the movement of thought, the increasing search for sense in one's lived experiences.

On the other hand, each man being a germ of a unique personality with original wishes, needs and obligations there must never be imposed upon him solutions or answers proper to other men: "How many by chance are the fortunate ones who upon finishing their years of education bear engraved on their consciences the idea that whatever weak or strong or richly or poorly endowed they hold within their being the most delicate capacity for something, new, beautiful and fertile, and that life for them must be the most harmonious spectacle and the most courageous experiment?"(1)

But it is not only science that cannot be "taught" neither is art nor morality. These three supreme things: science, art and morality can not be "taught" because culture is not something already made or achieved once for ever, it is rather a constant movement of the spirit, an unceasing quest.

Philosophy, to Ortega is the conscience of culture and for that reason it cannot be taught, at best it is "spread" as if by contagion. That is why in the face of mechanized education that limits itself to the transmission of ready-made solutions he asserts the value of educating by "imbuing". It is the mission of the intellectual and above all that of the philosopher to proclaim his obligation to creative effort. That is why when an authentic philosopher appears on the scene, the community feels the sting of life. "I would be content to walk next to souls quieter than mine and let fall upon them the ferment of doubt, ambition and hope".(2)

Thus, education must foster, the primary and spontaneous life of the spirit. The most urgent need is not to educate for a ready-made life, but rather to educate for a life to be made, a creative life.

## II. Eduardo Nicol--Knowledge as a dialogical relationship

In his work, Metaphysics of Expression, Nicol tells us that all knowledge is in fact re-acknowledging, since knowledge is identified in relationship to other entities already known; memory participates actively in granting the condition of reality to that which is apprehended, knowledge is essentially temporal.

But in order to know an additional element is needed, since the subject alone placed before an object that he knows and recognizes, can only recur to the testimony of his own conscience to affirm with certainty the reality of the object. This element is another subject. An object constitutes itself as real, and acquires objectively through the word; every dianoia, requires a logos. But the word is not addressed to things, but rather to another subject: it is essentially dialogical, it has meaningful content and communicative intentionality.

Communicating is making known to others what I have apprehended in order for the word in common to attest that the object is a common reality.

In this way, understanding is the act of sharing meaning with others by means of words which designate realities. The thing that I grasped presents itself as independent of my subjectivity; the same in itself by itself. In this manner, dialogue concludes the primary phase of knowledge.

The word is apophantic presents and establishes the presence of being. It makes it present to another and to do so it delimits it, defines it. The sameness of the word, its

univocity corresponds to the univocity of the thing.

The unity of knowledge and the community of being are two inseparable linked principles: knowledge is apophantic since through the symbol reality becomes common to those who participate in the symbolic relationship. Being becomes common in the logos. Communication is not only the idea of community among subjects it is also the community of being.

The original evidence, which is the basis of all possible science is achieved in the communicative act of the dialogue through which the certainty that the act of being is common becomes evident.

The cognoscitive relationship is thus, triadic: the two objects engaged in dialogue and the being which both recognize in common. The community of reason is confirmed by the community of being.

On the other hand, to think well according to Nicol, is not only an intellectual matter, it is also an ethical or vocational matter. To think well means to tell the truth: Rationality is inherent to the act of being: in things there is the reason for being; things are explained by themselves, and disinterested knowledge consists of being faithful to their reason.

However, if knowledge is oriented towards truth, the necessity to clarify Nicol's conception of truth is evident.

Traditionally, scientific knowledge has been defined on the basis of two basic and complementary relationships: the logical relationship which defines the formal aspect of truth and the epistemological relationship which defines its material aspect.

Nicol points out a third relationship: a historical one which can only be integrated to the other relationships by means of a fourth relationship: a dialogical one.

In this manner, the problem of truth according to Nicol is framed in 4 fundamental relationships:

1. The Epistemological relationship--Is the primary link that is established between the knowing subject and the object to be known. It is an active process of thinking by the subject and therefore it is discursive constructive.
2. Logical relationship. Logic is the corrective instrument of the Logos. In order to guarantee truth we require this corrective self-vigilance of thinking in its internal coherence.
3. The Historical relationship to Nicol the sense of history is not synonymous with total change in the being of science. Something has to remain within it to maintain its continuity. Thus, the fact which makes us term a proposition scientific is not that it is true totally and immutably, it is instead, the manner or process followed in reaching that conclusion. This search for truth constitutes a form of continuity, of permanence.

The historicity of science implies the rationality of what is to come about. Authentic historicity underscores that man is the being of truth.

Historicity is common-unity, con-vocation, co-participation, co-responsibility; science is transubjective because it is intercommunicative research through time. Being is an inexhaustible datum, so that it follows, that there is need for methodical search and re-search in the quest for what is known as truth. The history of man is the history of the seekers of truth, that is why truth is historical.

NOTE: The difference between knowledge and scientific knowledge is, according to Nicol, specific but not generic. The logos is one and the same, but in science it is purified by a Method.

4. Dialogical relationship--Thinking (logos) is not reason only, it is also truth. Thus, every word is rational and reason is symbolic.

Thinking is entering into dialogue, so that every form of logos is communicative. It implies comprehensible meanings that allow the listener to address himself through them, to a given reality in a shared experience. Every meaning is common, that is to say dialogical knowledge does not only refer to a subject who knows and a known object. A receptor-subject is necessary; an interlocutor is indispensable in order for the words in which thought is expressed to have meaning, sense which must have a sense in common.

Thinking is not a solitary and private faculty of the individual, it is rather, a communicative function, it is the same function as shared 'understanding' which presupposes an interlocutor. Knowing something is a cognitive operation shared in common it is literally a means of cooperation.

Truth is common (to others) because it can be communicated dialogically, that is by means of symbolic co-participation that introduces the being; truth is apophantic since it is poetic, active, expressive.

The other, the interlocutor is not an occasional receptor he himself is the condition of the act of knowledge.

"The essence of truth is dialogue"--"Expression is man's freedom. And that dialogue through which we express the sense of being has a dialectic form."(3)

### III. Some possible contribution by both thinkers to Philosophy for Children

To Ortega, reason is vital in the sense that we cannot live without reasoning; reason is not an appendix to life but a fundamental need.

In this manner, the development of rationality understood as the mastery of the abilities required for reasoning which enables us to discover meanings in the world and guide our actions from the early stages of life is converted into a priority function of education.

Hence, a program for the development of reasoning abilities (critical thinking) is the concrete realization of this ortegian idea.

3.2 The idea that nothing worth learning can in truth be taught, but that instead it is "imbued" agrees with the methodology proposed in Philosophy for Children in which the teacher does not teach in the sense of transmitting subject matter, rather he co-participates with students in a search process in which his example (model) is decisive.

3.3 Lastly, in pointing out that each man is the germ of a unique personality, it follows that extraneous answers or solutions must not be imposed upon him; but that instead the child should be encouraged to search for his own answers or even for his own questions. It is clear that the program of Philosophy for Children represents the realization of that ideal of respect for the creativity and the potential of others. To Ortega, respect for children is especially important; he tells us that we should not try to form perfect men; rather we ought to educate children as such, by abstracting to the extent that it is possible, the fact that they will become men. We must not act against the child's childhood by introducing him forcefully into the adult world. He tells us, "How many times upon looking at a mature man's eyes we see sliding in the depth man's original child that crawls, still in pain as if bearing a lead pellet in its wing."(4)

3.4 It strikes us that Eduardo Nicol's fundamental contribution to a Philosophy for Children could be his epistemological exposition: knowledge as a dialogical relationship.

It is clear that every educational practice has its foundation in a given theory of knowledge.

If Nicol conceives knowledge as the relationship between two subjects who dialogue over a common being we can conclude that the ideal manner of gaining access to knowledge is the dialogue from a starting point of an object common to the speakers. Translated into terms of Philosophy for Children we become aware that the questioning community brings into practice this notion of knowledge.

3.5 Another central point is the importance of language as expression and for its communicative intentionality.

The word is the other face of the logos and through it we can establish the existence of being while at the same time, we make ourselves present to others and to ourselves.

The importance of language and its epistemological and ethical dimension, comes alive each day in the community of inquiry developed in many classrooms throughout the world.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Ortega y Gasset, J. The Mission of the University. (1982). Madrid: Alianza Editorial, p. 21.
2. Ibid. p. 45.
3. Nicol, E. Metaphysics of Expression. (1975). Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, p. 175.
4. Mission of the University. p. 131.

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