

Democracy, culture and education as a question of form

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The categories of *eidos* and *morphe* were elaborated in Aristotle's *first philosophy*; as such, they weren't central notions of his *practical philosophy*. However, general philosophical approaches in modern times can't be imagined without the category of *form*, neither in the field of pure ontological or epistemological issues nor in the confrontations of social philosophy. »Formal democracy« seems to be impossible in Plato's *Republic* or in Aristotle's *Politics*, and it looks convincing to make an analogy between the categorial couples *hyle* – *morphe* and *natura* – *cultura* (if the latter is understood as the appearance of »our second nature,« phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically). Nevertheless, there is a place that enables us to make such analogies.

Aristotle knew very well that education – basically – only makes up »the deficiencies of nature« (*The Politics*, 1337a).¹ Discussing what education should be at the end of the seventh book of *The Politics*, he raises specific questions: is it necessary to lay down any regulations about the upbringing of children? should the care of them be the concern of the state or of private individuals alone?

At the very beginning of the eighth book, he sincerely states his opinion: education principally can't be a matter of private individuals. It should be »one and the same for all,« it should be »public and not private,« it is above all the duty of the legislator. Aristotle laments that the care of children as a private concern »is in our own day the common custom« and that »at present every one looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best.« Such blindness about the common interest »does harm to the constitution.« It's not the willfulness of a dictator but the fundamental reason of *being-in-polis* that »the citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives« (1337a).

In an earlier place (1310a) he wrote that the adaptation of education to »the form of government« contributes most to the permanence of constitutions. (Besides, here we can read again that »in our own day this principle is universally neglected.«) It seems to be obvious to Aristotle that undisciplined individuals – and it really sounds modern! – hinder the realization of

1. The translations of passages from *The Politics* are cited by *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. X., Oxford 1952 (3rd ed.).

community, city and state that they contradict »the true interests of the state.« Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that the category of the state here can't be understood in modern way, for example, as pure abstract force under individuals. It is not a question of different notions, but a question of different social worlds. Despite defending the right of – as it looks like – government to be concerned about upbringing children, and despite neglecting – as it looks like – the parents' rights, Aristotle can't be aligned with the sources of modern totalitarianism. In the same place just cited, he says: »Now, to have been educated in the spirit of the constitution is not to perform the actions in which oligarchs or democrats delight, but those by which the existence of an oligarchy or of a democracy is made possible« (1310a). He speaks about the adaptation of education to the »form of government,« not to the material self-will of the master. For Aristotle, ethics, politics and economics are parts of a whole and it is a question of numerous historical transitions and mediations why they are separated today.² In the same context it could be said that Aristotle's concept of *the adaptation of the education to the form of government* doesn't concern the *modern notion of politics*, but rather that of *culture*.

So, the improvement of deficiencies of nature as »the entrance to to civilization«, if the modern concept is used, is understood as a step to the *polis* and as the preservation of it. This step is – among other perspectives – defined by the famous ancient idea of *searching for virtue or the best life*, that is, by certain accumulated knowledge (*the wisdom*) and by certain civilised (here it can be even said »policed«) behaviors that we are able and obliged to learn and to teach. Let's accept the consensus that the pure notion of the education – i.e., education not as an instrument of domination, not as a self-will of master, but the education as a mode of »culturation« – is possible only in the form of common, public and, to a certain degree, unitary education. However, it is obvious to Aristotle that there are issues that remain to be considered: »what should be the character of this public education and how young persons should be educated?« (1337a). Speaking pragmatically, the question of *curriculum* is opened here and, as we are acquainted with the mentality of educators (specially with so-called »pedagogues« of our own day), every educator insists that his own subject is the basis and the last sense of the education. »As things are,« Aristotle established, »there is disagreement about the subjects.« It is not only the case that there is no agreement about the things to be taught, »neither is it clear whether education is more concerned with intellectual or with moral virtue.« If we try to transfer again into modern discourse, e.g., in that of »the eastern« experiences, here is the relationship between enlightened, liberal instruction, developing of the reason, on the one hand, and partisan (»partial«), ideological (»the right course,« »universally accepted ethics« etc.) moulding of people's behaviors on the

2. This is the issue of recent re-elaborations in the ancient concept of the *practical philosophy*.
– Cf. e.g. W. Hennis, *Politik und Praktische Philosophie*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1977.

other. It is evident that in Aristotle's time there was no agreement on the principle to be followed in education: »should the useful in life (*poiesis*), or should virtue (*praxis*), or should the higher knowledge (*theoria*) be the aim of our training?« The famous Stageirian usefulness distinguishing between *liberal* (»if he does or learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends, or with a view to excellence«) and *illiberal* occupations has to be considered (1337b), but it was also clear why there is no agreement about the means of education: »for different persons, starting with different ideas about the nature of virtue, naturally disagree about the practice of it.«

Ancient *polis* ended at the very walls of *oikos* (which have hidden children, women, slaves), and in this ancient discourse it primarily hasn't appeared as a place of conflicts and exclusions. It has much more been the mediation between the still-limited concept of public and the inhibited (patriarchal) concept of private and therefore it has appeared as the relatively harmonic regulation of the relationship between *natura* and *cultura*. In such understanding of *polis*, many aspects are linked that modern social knowledge carefully distinguishes or even comprehends as totally incompatible.

As the modern age arose, the idea of education as an improvement of the deficiencies of nature was in front again. In his paper *On education*, Kant defined a man as the only being that must be educated (*das einzige Geschopf, das erzogen werden muss*). He maintained that a man can become a man only by means of education.³ In his hand-written legacy (fragment 1423), we can even read that a man is »an animal that has the need of education«. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, began his *Émile* with the assertion that education provides us what we lacked at time of our births and what we need later.⁴ But a moment that radically distinguishes Rousseau from Kant is grasped in the first sentence of the book: »Coming from the hands of the Creator, everything is good; everything corrupts in hands of a man.« The displacement of the accent has a deep conceptual importance for the understanding of the relationship between education and civic order, too: politics becomes a bitch.

Education is no more reflected as an instrument that can best assure the permanence of constitution, as an entrance to *politicum* understood as the very fundamentals of civilization. Ancient harmonic understanding of basic civilised relationships decayed with the progress of the civilization. Wisdom was replaced by knowledge. Ethics and politics can't coexist in the concept of virtue any more, and a human being as an ancient freeholder divides into a man and a citizen. For Rousseau, we are forced to fight either against nature

3. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik*, 1, 2; in: *Kant Werke in zwölf Bänden*, Bd. XI, XII, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1964, p. 697 and 699.

4. Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*; in: *Oeuvres complètes*, T. IV., Gallimard, Paris 1969, p. 247.

or against social orders; therefore, the question is whether to mould either a man or a citizen: both at the same time are not possible.⁵ Despite taking examples from the antiquity, despite becoming enraptured with Plato's *Republic* (»the best discussion on education ever written«), Rousseau lives in an entirely different world. »Public education (*l'institution publique*) doesn't exist and can't exist any more; for if the country (*la patrie*) ceased to be, there could be no more citizens. The words country and citizen should be canceled in modern languages. I know well the reason why, but I don't want to put it down; it is not connected with my issue.«⁶

What happened to the country, e.g., to the state and citizens, that they caused them to disappear? What kind of reason does Rousseau hide and why doesn't he quote it? It seems evident that the answer can't be sought in his *philosophy of education*; a more promising place is his *political philosophy*. »Why then do people pay so much respect to ancient laws?« Rousseau asks in *The social contract* while researching »the death of the body politic.« The origin of this respect lies in »the excellence of these ancient decisions« (»for if the sovereign had not constantly found them salutary, it would have had innumerable opportunities to revoke them«), it lies in the continuing will of the *sovereign* (»whatever it once has said it wills, it continues to will, unless it revokes it«). He finishes the chapter with the following words: »and wherever, on the contrary, laws grow weaker with age, it is a proof there is no longer any legislative power, and that the state has ceased to exist.«⁷ For on the contrary, »if the constitution of a state is to be really firm and enduring, the natural fitness of things must be so well observed that the laws and natural circumstances coincide at every point and that the former do no more, so to speak, than to guarantee, accompany and rectify the latter.«⁸

Similar thoughts can be found out at the beginning and at other places of his *Émile*, too. If public education is not possible any more, as we have already seen, there is the concept of *domestic or natural education* to be considered finally. Its essence is *negative*: »namely, to prevent something to happen«. – »Therefore watch carefully over a young man; he will be able to protect himself from other things, but your duty is to protect him from himself.« In comparison with antiquity and its »synthetic« tonality (education as cultivation, i.e., »policing«) here is the opening of an entirely new aspect of differentiation in the concept of education: »Thus the first education must be purely negative. In no way it consists of instructing in virtue and truth; it has to prevent the heart from sins and the reason from mistakes.«⁹

5. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 248.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*; in: *Political Writings*, Nelson, London 1953, p. 97.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

9. Cf. Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*, p. 251, 663, 323.

As in Rousseau's *political philosophy*, laws »do no more, so to speak, than to guarantee, accompany and rectify« natural circumstances, so in his *philosophy of education* the educator can only »prevent the heart from sins and the reason from mistakes,« he can only »prevent something from happening.« The right government and the right education coincide in the same moment: both are *negative*. This negativeness is elementary. The power of »the first« education doesn't add anything to young people, it doesn't »consist of instructing in virtue and truth,« and the »excellent« power of law doesn't regulate the world beneath on the way well known from the first sentences of *Émile*: a man »mixes and muddles climates, elements, seasons. He mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave. He inverts everything; he disfigures everything: he likes distortions, monsters.«¹⁰

Historically, more and more progressive improvement of the deficiencies of nature (as »cultivation«) is seen just as the declination from nature. The initial act of education is »only« to improve the deficiencies of nature. However, education as a way to »perfect nature« is a process without end: it is a way to culture understood as a dualism of *original* and *mediated*, as an *alienation*. The same process is going on in the field of politics: »Let us assume that men have reached the point where the obstacles to their self-preservation in the state of nature are too great to be overcome by the forces each individual is capable of exerting to maintain himself in that state. This original state can then no longer continue; and the human race would perish if did not change its mode of existence.« But the inevitable *state of culture*, i.e., »substituting justice for instincts,« the formation of morality, etc., demands that a man »consults his reason before listening to his inclinations.« This transition is signed by a specific trade: »what man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty, and an unlimited right to everything he wants and is capable of getting; what he gains is civil liberty, and the ownership of all he possesses.«¹¹

Thus, the central problem of Rousseau's writing isn't »the glorious arising of the civilisation,« the appearance of specific human, the entrance to culture. Using the Freudian concept of discontents in the civilization (*das Unbehagen in der Kultur*), Eva D. Bahovec showed inside Slovene discussions on this issue that it is rather the question of something constantly present as »a certain disturbance or a stain which should be removed, but there is no success.«¹² Culture is not possible as pure replacement of nature, replacement without any reminder. In such process something always rests. The former moulds the substance, just »gives form« to the latter.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

11. Cf. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 14 and 20.

12. Cf. Eva D. Bahovec, »Podobe avtoritete pri Rousseauju: gospostvo, vzgoja, analiza« (in slovene; »The images of authority at Rousseau: domination, éducation, analysis«); in: *Teorija vzgoje: moderna ali postmoderna? (Theory of education: modern or postmodern? Materials from the colloquium with James Donald, Ljubljana, april 1990)*, University of Ljubljana 1990, p. 29.

Last, but not least, uneasiness in civilization arises from the polarisation of the original, from the inner evolution of *polis*, that results – through many historical mediations – as dualism of the modern *state* and modern *civil societies*. The elements being inhibited in antiquity have been actualised in modern times. With the French revolution, the concept of public education already openly indicated the possibility of institutional control over privateness. Education and the school as its main institutional form are gradually losing the prevailing features of their old character. It is not more or less the exclusive mechanism of privateness any more, that is, of the state – as we saw before at Aristotle – when »every one looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best.« The ancient *oikos*, the closed sphere of household economy, is opening now. It is no longer left behind the fence – together with women, children and slaves – when *paterfamilias* as a constituting element of public is going to the *forum*, to the life of the political. Thus, certain aspects of the ancient *oikos* transform into the capitalist market, and others decay into the modern family and some ruins. Parallel with this new economy, questions of education and school ceased to exist as the responsibility of the *paterfamilias* or the guildmaster (who, e.g., trusted his brewery prescription to his assistant at the death-bed, in extreme privacy); they become social investments and new ambitions of *an entirely new social discourse*.

However, the French revolution didn't create the school; it just came across it as a historical fact. As Furet and Ozouf perfectly showed in their study on literacy in France, the formation of the modern school was mediated through numerous processes: it is simultaneously »the outcome of three interacting factors: the Church, the State and the community« and the result of »the long maturing of social demand, independent of the evolution of institutions and régimes.«¹³ Already from the standpoint of the Church it is much more than »ideological counteroffensive« against the Protestant challenge. Mass literacy has a distinctive civilizing power and the school as its main instrument stands »at the crossroads of two different ways of thought: the first, religious in nature, picked up the Protestant gauntlet and sought to root orthodox Catholic piety in instruction. The second was instrumental, being concerned with normalizing social behaviour through the internalizing of a practical morality with a few simple rules: respect for one's parents, obedience towards one's masters, purity of thought and deed, turning away from evil.«¹⁴ Further, from the standpoint of the absolute State, »we find nothing comparable to what happened in the Church as regards elementary education: rather a movement in the opposite direction.«¹⁵ At last, from the standpoint of the third

13. Cf. Furet F., Ozouf J., *Reading and Writing. Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 59 and 82.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

interacting factor, »the community,« the concept of public school offered possibilities for social promotion. The growth and anchoring of the school inside the heterogeneous social body didn't depend only upon the institutional offer (the Church, the State). A very important factor in its success was an active demand from partial communities such as: »The school was a product of local societies before becoming a factor in their transformation,« »it was a social phenomenon before being a technical instrument: the image of an order to be created, or of prestige to be won.«¹⁶

The time of the revolution brought »the revolutionary school.« Even while it legitimated itself as »the national school,« i.e., as the institution of common interest, as a formation of citizens (not members of one or another faith), it played a paradoxical role of the performer of »the Church's conception of education.« Furet and Ozouf maintain that the French revolution created only its own school ideology, while the school praxis remained more or less the same. Despite its proclamation of the triumph of the light of reason over ignorance, it kept certain mythology of school. »The school became the central figure of society's limitless powers over happiness of the individual: under *Ancien Régime* its job was to produce Christians, but under the new order it was expected to make men happy and free,« say the authors, who continue in another place: »Turning the Counter-Reformation's educational obsession with fashioning minds and behaviour against the Church, the Revolution fought to gain control of the school, not to transform it.«¹⁷ The growing discontent with »the revolutionary school« – which was literally decaying – and the returning of »the old school« can be observed also as a rebellion of civil society against »general« education, as the mainly spontaneous reaction of – in the meantime deeply transformed – community against the alignment of the concept of »salvation« instruction among »educational« competences of the State.

The cross-points of politics and education in every fundamentalist praxis of the present time prove the same. It is not the issue of this paper, but I would like at least to speak against the recent »Slovene spring« among eastern experiences. Some Slovene authors have showed already that a large criticism of the state-planned school reform (so called »career-oriented education,« which began at the end of seventies and in reality aimed at a complete subjection of the school to the economy and management, at destruction of traditional intellectual and critical potentials of schooling, at fulfilment of the school as the main ideological state apparatus) among intellectuals and the public in general at the beginning of the eighties played a significant role in the accumulation of democratic potential at the late eighties. Furthermore, this criticism had even caused important democratic changes in the school system *before* the global reform of the political system in this country began.¹⁸ As the

16. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 83 and 93.

18. Soon after the constitution of the new Slovene government in spring 1990 – the Ministry of

quarrels on the independence of media and public institutions in general (which are going on inside and outside of the democratic national Parliament, constituted in the meantime) show, a new revolution has just passed the country, promising new absolute solutions. They show that the »absolute« liberation always ends with the reconstitution of domination. The only alternative against continued repetitions of the risk of restoring the school as an instrument of salvation and/or happiness, seems to be a well-known model that separates knowledge, instruction, minds from training of behaviours, certain life praxis, rituals, etc. This model foresees *public* education only as a *form*.

In modern societies, it is not possible any more that »everyone looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best.« Everyone is bombarded by several models of uniformity. However, modern democracy has to recognize the ability and the right of educating to each individual (parent) and, in certain degree, also to their numerous and specific partial (ethnic, racial, religious, class, etc.) communities. Supporting the idea of the *Only-One-Education* would quickly turn a wise sovereign into a totalitarian tyrant. Yet, at the first sight a paradox arises from such a solution. If it is allowed that »everyone looks after his own children separately,« that everyone strives – exclusively – for the type of the school education that corresponds his ethnic, racial, religious, national, class, gender, etc., persuasion, then it »does harm to the constitution,« as Aristotle had already noticed. The State would cease to exist and the civilisation is at risk... Instead of public education, there would be lots of partial schools bound to the existence and reproduction of many partial, more and more self-sufficient communities. In this way, public education as an instrument of developing democratic *politicum* and tolerance seems to be seriously put in

education was controlled by Christian Democrats – a discussion on restitution of religious instruction in schools began. While the Church carefully supports the idea of such restitution and while some other militant groups openly declare that »only return of religious instruction can save the deep moral crisis (divorces, suicides, abortions etc.) of our society«, the official standpoint of the ministry is that there is no need for restitution of *catechesis*, but religious aspects of certain issues are normal elements of school subjects and instruction. – These declarations were interpreted by Slavko Gaber as follows: »It seems that the recent uneasiness of the government, provoked by the school problems, lies in the fact that the reform of schooling had begun before the reform of political system. At least two things are obvious: 1) the school has done already with many images of previous (i.e. communist) »reformers« and it is going to build gradually a way not subjected to any entirely concrete power; 2) counter-reformers who stopped the assault of previous »reformers« and who are not the part of new political power would not give way to the possibilities of new assaults of new reformers«. – Cf. Verouk v šole?! (in slovene; *Catechesis to the schools?!?*), ed. by S. Gaber and Z. Kodelja, Ljubljana 1990, p. 10.

Cf. also contributions as follows: Eva D. Bahovec, »School Ideologies and Educational Theories: An Eastern Europe Case«; Zdenko Kodelja, »Decomposing Socialist Pedagogical Discourse: A Case for Althusser«; both in: *The School Field* (publ. in English by Slovene Society of Researchers in the School Field, Ljubljana), Autumn 1990, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 90-103.

question, particularly when these partial communities stimulate the parents to try for »generalizing« their goals, that is, to alter »private« opinion or certain life style to the »common«, »the one and the right« ideology. We know this dialectic very well.¹⁹

There is another possibility: to articulate the relationship between the State and the personal »educative fortune«, not by the mediation of certain partial community (Church, nation, race, class or gender, etc.) but by the citizenship of one's individuality. Public education has to consider a citizen, not as a member of a closed social loggia, and it has to consider several possibilities, not uniform behaviours of all. This approach has only to consider common human sense and common human rights. While numerous partial educations mutually exclude one another in regard to their different »material«, a truly »republican« (i.e., which belongs to *res publica*) public education is possible only as »a form« of practicing several social styles. Such a process doesn't only improve the deficiencies of nature, it should also »improve« uneasiness in the civilization, by acknowledging it as uneasiness, that is, not by transforming it into an ideologically promised perfection of the lost and forgotten nature: education of »an all-round developed personality« or that of »the good man.«

In this direction I understand – among discussions on education and human rights – Carole L. Hahn's definition of *the political education*: it is »the process by which individuals can acquire knowledge of their rights and the desire and abilities to exercise them.«²⁰ The conditions of exercising, nothing more. The process at issue doesn't educate in a strictly concrete sense: it trains no specific life styles, no techniques. It doesn't provide happiness and it doesn't promise any salvation; it doesn't search for a complete and absolute (closed) educational universum, saved from all uneasiness. It is not defined by this or that empirical life praxis or ritual. As their *form*, it can be only the *condition* of social variety.

19. Democratic politics' first principle today »is that there is no pure democracy and its condition is the uneasiness in democracy«. – Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, »Uneasiness in Democracy« (contribution from the international colloquium »Democratic Politics Today«, Ljubljana, March 1989), published in English in: *Filozofski vestnik*, Vol. X., 1989, No. 2, pp. 157-159.

20. Carole L. Hahn, »The Right to a Political Education«, in: *Human Rights and Education* (ed. by Norma B. Tarrow), Pergamon Press 1987, p. 173.