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INNOVACIÓN EDUCATIVA: HERDER Y SUS PROPUESTAS REFLEXIVAS

Educational innovation: Herder and his thoughtful proposals

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Resumen: Conocemos las devastadoras consecuencias del reduccionismo de la educación a aspectos meramente intelectuales. J. G. Herder lo vivió en primera persona, es por ello que en diversos textos aborda los problemas que experimentó y experimentaron los alumnos a su cargo, en el presente trabajo se mencionan sus reflexiones personales y propuestas para ayudar a los más jóvenes a aprender y experimentar su entorno en otros términos a los establecidos en ese momento.

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Consideramos a Herder uno de los precursores de la educación viva interrelacionada y este texto como una invitación a conocer más acerca de sus propuestas, que si bien, nos encontramos en otra época, esta perspectiva puede ayudarnos a abrir horizontes y llevarnos a la reflexión crítica de nuestros propios sistemas educativos actuales y convertirlos en espacios más humanos para nuestra vida.

Palabras clave: innovación, educación, cultura.

Abstract: We know the devastating consequences of reducing education to merely intellectual aspects. J. G. Herder experienced it in the first person, which is why in various texts he addresses the problems that he experienced and the students under his charge experienced, in this paper his personal reflections and proposals are mentioned to help the youngest to learn and experiment. their environment in terms other than those established at that time. This perspective can help us open horizons and lead us to critical reflection of our own current educational systems and convert them into more humane spaces for our lives.

Keywords: innovation, education, culture.

Introduction

Education was a constant cause of concern throughout his life, we can even find in several works the subtitle “for the formation of mankind”: The fate of Herder was not the best: nowadays is not even mentioned in this discipline. We are not able to find interest or spreading of his ideas, even though when his philosophical and literary work is embedded with great pedagogical value. Herder is involved in the spiritual mood that will later embody in the educational theories of Pestalozzi and others.

*On Grace in School*²²(1765) is written before the *Diary*. With just 33 pages, this work stands for his designation speech as teacher at Domschule in Riga²³, in July 8th of 1765, a day before Catherine the 2nd sat in the throne of Russia; this writing is dedicated to her. Later, in the diary, he will criticize many of her political actions. He offers us School in its most ideal face, as the youngest students would do, far away from cold disciplines. Throughout his life, Herder was able to reform several educational centers, including Weimar's Gymnasium.

The author is a declared enemy of "the serpentine elegance of our oratory teachers, who offer a sad skeleton rather than a live and flourishing body".

It's important for him, in relation to the contents of the educational plan, to teach Natural History, because he considers it helps the building of the Spirit and "unfolds the observation of multiple realities, besides usefully exciting the attention of kids". He wants to show the people's history within the school programs, so it will not be a "simple and dead skeleton" anymore.

In this work he formulates many ideas that later will be put in concrete form; he will write around these subjects throughout his whole life. It is possible to trace back pedagogic writings until the year of his death.

Development

He constantly wants to avoid school from turning into a place "where the unfortunate boy applies himself to learn the texts that he will have to forget later, vanishing in his mind that erudite fog that would drown his good mood and natural intelligence".

Throughout his speech Herder lets us watch the poor state of his contemporary teacher's, badly paid, undervalued by the parents; and treated without consideration by society. These things finally transform the teacher in a "meager monarch in his classroom and an economical peasant in his home". This situation changes in time and, like Norbert Elias says, the work of school teachers gained value.

²² Cfr. Herder, *Werke* IX, pp. 147-178.

²³This charge and the one which was assigned to him six years later in Weimar as a main clergyman and general superintendent were closely related to education.

Herder wants to show, specially, the teacher of grace, the ideal one, although he is aware of the impossibility of this through school reforms or plans. What is essential here is what one wants to reach and not to forget this yearning.

In order to be a good teacher, one must not be remarkably knowledgeable but to have an attitude to deliver sciences into the heart of the students; and he recommends: "Do you want to be a teacher of grace? Be joyful, like infancy; pure, like innocence; loving, like a father; free, like the truth; faithful to your homeland". The fidelity to the homeland is a crucial ingredient; even though in his case we cannot be sure to which homeland he refers to, because Riga belongs at this moment to the Russian crown, but which is heir of a strong German spirit. Another detail that makes this issue confusing is that at the end of his speech he says that he feels like a citizen, and that when he arrived to Riga he was a foreigner. Thus we ask; as the teacher that in that moment is, how can he be faithful to his country when he is a Prussian in Russia? And he speaks about -concurring with Gaos- the departure homeland, Prussia, or the destination one, Russia?

Of the contradictions that we can find in many writings, we can see at the end of this one that he wishes to promise little and to accomplish a lot. We consider that is not the case, because he has settled, from the beginning, huge goals that he will hardly accomplish.

We would also like to know what Herder understands for *grace* and, like with any other word, we have to define the context and limit ourselves to the actual writing. In this text, he says with Shaftesbury that "virtuosity of wisdom, of moral and of good taste: that supernal goddess of beauty I want to show under the human forms of a master and a disciple".

He also offers a paragraph to the persistent methods that he suffered himself in his childhood, bitterly remembered. He says that discipline has worked to punish, but not to wake up the desire to learn living knowledge in the students; by the same token he intends to transform the schools into "nurseries of the collective spirit". For Herder, the dangers for the pupils are in the cities, artificial places built by men, far away from the healthy traditions:

Luxury, refined comfort, the unavoidable consequences of the flourishing of a city, seduce our youth, taking them apart from the quiet treatment with the Muses (...) they will find themselves lost, unless a mentor, in the figure of a father or a teacher, extends them a hand. Both must be cordially associated in efforts to save the young from the dangers of an astonishing sensuousness.

Here we are able to confirm how distant he is from Kant's *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* of 1783:

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance (*natura-liter maiorennes*) nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity.

In this case, the dangers are the carelessness, apathy and cowardice. These belong to the person himself, therefore, the solution or remedy depends on the individual, regardless of the circumstances.

For Kant, the man is not used to freedom, although it's natural in him, because it requires an effort and to achieve the public use of man's own reason.

It is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome work for me. The guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have carefully seen to it that the far greatest part of them (including the entire fair sex) regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult. Having first made their domestic livestock dumb, and having carefully made sure that these docile creatures will not take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed, these guardians then show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone (Reiss, H.S, 1991, p. 25).

We could say that Kant believes in man and his human capabilities, while Herder's position approaches to a mistrust of him; because of that, he requires that a tutor "teach him to reject the voluptuous luxury and to preserve the austere balance of the spirit, trying that a protective divinity light up the science and scholar traditions".

As regards to Herder's text, kids and teenagers are the target in his mind; and it is possible that Kant is not considering this ages, but we want to remark that his goal is that man –who was once a child or an adolescent- manages to hatch from his underage and dares to think by his own knowledge, and, what would be best than helping him to gradually achieve freedom? Kant's writing, *The Educational Theory of Immanuel Kant* (1983), shows us his ideas regarding education (also in kids and teenagers).

Herder distinguishes also two types of values: true virtue and the merely political one, the outside mask.

With this ideas Herder wants to keep himself on the right performance as an educator in Riga and to avoid teenagers and kids from suffering the strict education of pietism.

The *Diary*, where we can find two phases. The first one leading to a better organized systematic teaching and, the second, related with the necessities of young people, flexible and tolerant. The *Diary*, 3rd work of Herder, was written in the same year than the *Critical Forests* were. As said by its title, it apparently describes a day to day narration, but it is not entirely so, he surprises us and, again, shows his originality, his detachment to explicit methodology and with what is usually understood as a diary. He merely labels eleven dates²⁴in 115 pages²⁵. Herder narrates his six weeks journey around the Baltic Sea, an extensive ocean, essential to regional activities which were as diverse as war or trade.

²⁴ Herder, when writing down the dates uses the Julian calendar first introduced by Peter the Great. He also uses those ones of the Russian calendar, which started from the creation of the world, in the year 5 508 BC.

²⁵The first one is on May 23th and the last one on the fourth of July. Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, 9, *JR*, pp. 11-126 (Ribas: o.c. pp. 24-129).

As one reads it, the great number of contents becomes obvious; one of them refers to the public affirmation of the things that rapidly boil in him, both in his head and in his mind; what has happened to him in the past as well as the things he wishes to accomplish in the future. He tells us about his route along the shores of: Courland (now west of Latvia), Prussia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Jutland²⁶, Holland, Scotland, England, and the Netherlands to France, Nantes and Angers²⁷.

At first, he intended to go to Copenhagen and visit Klopstock, then to Kiel and Hamburg, but his travel partner, apparently a Riga merchant, persuaded him to go to Nantes²⁸. He almost entirely writes the Diary there and stays 4 months in the family house of his companion (Fuentes, 1930, p.16). We shall remember Nantes lays aside the Loire River, from where Herder then, travelled to Paris.

The most referred authors in the Diary²⁹ are, in descending order: Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and Leibniz. The constant presence of the baron of Montesquieu (1689-1755), an enlightened man, is significant, especially considering that *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in Genève in 1748, discusses in the first part of chapters XIV and XVIII the weather subject and its near relation with the law. For him, before decreeing them, one must be aware that climate and geography must relate to people traditions and their diverse way of being³⁰.

²⁶Town of German origin which is established in the fifth century somewhere in Denmark and the north of Germany, this territory has belonged throughout its history some times to Germany and others to Denmark.

²⁷Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, 9, JR, p. 67 (Ribas: o.c. p. 76).

²⁸Because of his insecure and tormented nature, later on he would mourn for the great desire he had to be with him and dreams awake about everything he could have told him personally. Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, 9, JR, pp. 99-100. (Ribas: o.c. pp. 105-106).

²⁹ Cfr. Herder, *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1779*, pp. 11-126; *Opera Selecta*, pp. 24-129.

³⁰ We consider appropriate to transcribe the next paragraph to show certain relationship: « People are therefore more vigorous in cold climates. Here the action of the heart and the reaction of the extremities of the fibres are better performed, the temperature of the humours is greater, the blood moves more freely towards the heart, and reciprocally the heart has more power. This superiority of strength must produce various effects; for instance, a greater boldness, that is, more courage; a greater sense of superiority, that is, less desire of revenge; a greater opinion of security, that is, more frankness, less suspicion, policy, and cunning. In short, this must be productive of very different tempers. Put a man into a close, warm place, and for the reasons above given he will feel a great faintness. If under this circumstance you propose a bold enterprise to him, I believe you will find him very little disposed towards it; his present weakness will throw him into despondency; he will be afraid of everything, being in a state of total incapacity. The inhabitants of warm countries are, like old men, timorous; the people in cold countries are, like young men, brave. If we reflect on the late wars,³ which are more recent in our memory, and in which we can better distinguish some particular effects

We see Herder's accuracy in sketching an honest self-portrait. Result of the cold rationalization of the concept, a young man declares himself at 25 as an early elder. The reasons that take him to his contempt and horror of himself are related to the mistakes of the awful education that he, in part, suffered. He thinks this kind of education transforms the restless and vivid soul of the child and youth curiosity into something purely mechanical, a deathlike classics repeater. The problematic education will shape a common point with some issues of the *Critical Forests*, because of the controversy between Winckelmann and Lessing, the opposition between neo-classicism and the subjective strength of imagination is not just an academic or philosophical one, but a matter of educational policy. We believe so, because with the problem of classic art imitation, Herder was impacting in a personal and public subject: what was true Bildung? The consequences of restricting education merely to the intellectual people are reflected, with a self-critic note, thus we can read:

No me habría convertido en un tintero de cultura sabihonda, como tampoco en un diccionario de artes y ciencias que no he visto ni entiendo. No me habría convertido en un estante lleno de papeles y libros, en un estante que sólo pertenece al cuarto de estudio.³¹

In order to start a new paragraph on this self-struggle, he starts the searching for a new refreshed horizon, whose salt, dawns and sunsets makes peace in this soul's journey with the intellectual's abstract ideal and pure spirit of knowledge and of the sterile metaphysics, with the lived life, with the unknown nature that no longer has a steady position on earth. The images and remarkably poetic and pre-romantic language used by Herder move us to compare the environment of a philosopher's study, caged in his own library, with the adventurous mood that Herder was living, in

that escape us at a greater distance of time, we shall find that the northern people, transplanted into southern regions,⁴ did not perform such exploits as their countrymen who, fighting in their own climate, possessed their full vigour» Cfr. Montesquieu, *The spirit of laws*, s.f., chap. XIV This quote is a key for the understanding of the thinking of Herder about the opposition South-North that we will develop later.

³¹Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, 9, JR, p. 13 (Ribas: o.c. p. 27).

another workspace, a kinder one, caring, free, refreshed, new, and easy going, that for now is his boat.

The crisis of this bad and decisive situation he went through was deep as his own words reveal; we want to underline the incisive doubts he had through the journey, specially the one referred to the essence of what he has had as virtue's grounds.

He writes: "Until this day I know nothing by myself"³². This pre-kantian *daring to think* has a pre-romantic load as grounding of the pedagogical revolution he aims, with the direct contact of living, wild, nature: the sea, along its constant movement, color, temperature and scent changing: not the contact with that other stuffed, tidy, motionless, dead nature that inhabits our schools and museums. He will encourage alumni to become philosophers of nature, and not to just study physics but "ship's movement". What would mean the starting point of the Bildung.

Conclusion

We consider Herder as a precursor of a living education interrelated with the environment, and this text, as an invitation to learn more about his proposals. Although we are in another time, they can open our horizons and lead us to critical reflection of our own current educational systems and turn them into more humane spaces for life.

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³² Cfr. Herder: *Werke*, 9, JR, p. 16 (Ribas: o.c. p. 30).

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