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# ETHICS WITHIN A SPIRITUAL/ METAPHYSICAL WORLD VIEW TOWARDS INTEGRAL VALUE-BASED EDUCATION. WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: PLATO, KANT, ROUSSEAU AND HEGEL

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**Abstract:** It is well-known in Western scholarship that Rousseau has been the forerunner of integral value-based pedagogies; in any case, his name stands as one of the main educationists of the West. However, the pedagogic reflections of two major philosophers of modern Europe, Kant and Hegel, have been largely overlooked, especially in the last decades. Dr. Ferrer shows in this paper that Kant and Hegel can also be regarded as forerunners of holistic value-based pedagogies. Their enlightening contributions to philosophy of education and ethics, deeply complementary with Rousseau, can enrich the educational scenario of the Western world, dramatically impoverished by materialism, utilitarianism and technocracy. Before them, Plato already outlined a profound philosophy of education that can be regarded as integral and value-based; beyond

contextual factors and the historical distance, Plato can still inspire Western education in a spiritual, ethical and humanistic horizon, just like Rousseau, Kant and Hegel.

**Keywords:** *philosophy of education, comparative education, pedagogy, integral/holistic education, education in human values/value-based education, ethics, Platonism/Neo-Platonism, Enlightenment, Romanticism, German Idealism, Bildung.*

## INTRODUCTION

The XXth century has witnessed the emergence of holistic value-based pedagogies both in Europe and North America that have deeply questioned mainstream schooling while making a strong case for values and ethics in the educational process. In the old continent, Steiner and Montessori have been the major sources of inspiration within a more spiritual world view; in the new world, Dewey and Kilpatrick have played a major role. It is commonly acknowledged that these modern forerunners of integral value-based education were somewhat anticipated by the pioneering work of Rousseau and his direct heirs, Pestalozzi and Froebel. But Western educators and scholars have often forgotten that holistic value education can be supported by the giants of European philosophy, in particular, Plato, Kant and Hegel, and with the last one, the whole movement of Romanticism and German Idealism, with their central notion of *Bildung*.

Kant's philosophy acquires a special significance, since nobody will question that he represents the peak of European Enlightenment, and nobody can deny either that modern civilization in the Western world claims to be based upon the ideals of Enlightenment. This paper tries to show that this influential philosopher paid attention to education –which is often overlooked–, and even more important, that his educational philosophy is undoubtedly value-based, deeply ethical and also integral, much closer –in depth– to Hegel than many scholars would assume, and certainly much closer to Hegel than to mainstream schooling.

Hegel, and with him German Idealism and Romanticism, has also outlined an educational philosophy that is ethical, value-based and integral within a spiritual/metaphysical world view while consciously being the heir of Plato. The cultural influence of Idealism and Romanticism in Western civilization cannot be underestimated, which reveals the his-

torical significance of this kind of Idealistic and Romantic pedagogy –obviously connected with renowned figures such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel–.

Last but not least, Plato advocated in a totally different context a philosophy of education that is deeply coherent with modern Idealism, Romanticism and even Kant, since it opens the pedagogic process to an integral horizon while emphasizing at its very core the ethical foundation within a spiritual/metaphysical vision.

It is widely accepted that Plato has had a tremendous impact throughout the history of Western philosophy, but we must take into account more specifically the Platonic influence upon Goethe and the whole Romantic movement and Philosophical Idealism.

“Over the years Goethe came to have the highest regard for Plato’s accomplishment. (...) Goethe displayed his anti-Newtonian stance and adherence to a Platonic view of Nature.”<sup>1</sup>

In this paper we try to show that this “anti-Newtonian stance and adherence to a Platonic view” stressed by Goethe lies at the very core of integral value-based education within a spiritual/metaphysical world view as defended by Hegel and the Romantics and after them by authors such as R. Steiner. It is well-known that Steiner repeatedly made reference to both Goethe and Plato as major sources of inspiration.

Certainly, Kant –and with him Enlightenment– would not outline this kind of mystical/metaphysical horizon nor a clear adherence to a Platonic view. Still, Kant would share with Idealism and Romanticism a sharp criticism of the limitations inherent to the typically utilitarian mainstream schooling, and would share with them an ardent defence of the ethical value-based dimension of education towards human emancipation.

In this paper we also try to show that this kind of spiritual/metaphysical world view is common to both Europe/the West and India/the East. And in the modern world, both European and Indian spiritual philosophers –such as Steiner or Aurobindo– have been fully aware that their metaphysical vision constitutes a dissident thought in front of the predominant paradigm –which is, to use Goethe’s words again, Newtonian, that is, materialistic, mechanistic and utilitarian, and ultimately technocratic–.

<sup>1</sup> Lillyman W.J., 1893, p 129.

Within this prevailing utilitarianism –also at the academic level– the weight of the historical/cultural context has been overemphasized to the detriment of the comprehension of reality itself. Prof. Raimon Panikkar questioned this frame of mind that has overlooked some aspects of reality. Panikkar used the term “homeomorphic equivalents” to refer to human experiences –such as the mystical/metaphysical– that are universal though expressed through relative contextual expression.

In Panikkar words, “Homeomorphism (...) represents a functional equivalence discovered through a topological transformation. Brahman and God are not merely two analogous names; they are homeomorphic.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, spiritual/metaphysical philosophers from various regions and centuries (Europe/India, Antiquity/modern world) have expressed a world view and a view of education that in spite of relative context and expression present profound similarities because they are rooted in common experiences that are human experiences, and by being human they are universal; they constitute “homeomorphic equivalents” through topological transformation.

## 1. ANCIENT GREECE: PLATO AND NEOPLATONISM

### A. PLATO (424/423 BC – 348/347 BC)

As we said above, Plato’s education would be holistic, since it embraces academic knowledge, vocational skills, physical exercise, music, art, ethics and philosophy/wisdom. Though his educational philosophy leans towards meritocracy and aristocracy, still he prefigures later democratic philosophy of education. Plato proposes the differentiation of children according to their intrinsic qualities suitable to the various social groups; the most gifted would receive the highest education so that they could act as guardians of the city. From this point of view, he would oppose a demagogic imposition of the same pedagogy for all irrespective of the talent or inclination of every child. Any sensible educationist today would acknowledge that this kind of populist standardization has not worked in the modern age; hence Plato’s ideas would make some sense. Moreover, his educational philosophy would be democratic in a crucial point: talent may be found in children irrespective of the social class where

<sup>2</sup> Panikkar R., 1999, p 17.

they were born, for which his proposal would be purely meritocratic, never elitist as we usually understand it: through inheritance.

### **The educational philosophy in “The Republic”:**

**Socrates’ first account of education:**

Aim of Guardians’ education

Musical education

Narrative style of tales

Gymnastic Education.

**Socrates’ second account of education:**

Aims of education

Knowledge of The Good

The Cave Analogy

The Philosopher-King’s education.

### **Socratic education in Plato’s “Republic”**

The whole dialogue known as the “Republic”, which leads to the Cave Analogy, appears to be an example of Socratic education. Nevertheless, many of Plato’s dialogues are concerned with education, which the great philosopher was certainly very interested in. His legacy has inspired Western thought for 25 centuries till today. The most comprehensive and mature holistic pedagogy in the modern Western world, Steiner’s Waldorf Schools, has been deeply influenced by Goethe and Plato.

Especially significant for education would be the **Cave Analogy**, presenting prisoners in a cave, chained and unable to turn their faces, seeing only what is directly in front of them, that is, shadows cast by objects behind them which are illuminated by firelight further behind; the objects are carried along a low wall behind the prisoners, and the bearers of the objects are hidden behind the wall. This well-known metaphor refers to the greatest metaphysical illusion of the human mind, explained by the great philosopher of India, Shankara, through the metaphor of the rope and the snake. In Plato’s words, the shadows of artifacts constitute the only reality people in this situation would recognize.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf “The Republic”, book VII.

The implications for education are tremendous: mainstream schooling teaches students about the shadows, whereas a more profound kind of education –integral or holistic– must help the growing human being to become aware of the illusion and grasp the deepest truth. The prisoners of the cave do not realize that they live in total illusion, cut from truth or reality; both concepts are expressed by the same word in Sanskrit, Satya. True education must bring the growing human being from illusion to truth or reality to its deepest metaphysical layers. In this educational process, the approach must be holistic, and ethics and philosophy acquire a prominent role.

Even the exercise for the body –“gymnastike”– is primarily aimed at the soul, and of course cultural studies –“mousike”–. Story-telling, poetry, music and singing, dance, should instil in the youth’s soul rhythm, harmony, grace, good character and love of beauty. However, mathematics and philosophy play a primordial role to operate this shift in consciousness from the illusion to the ultimate truth. “Gymnastike”, “mousike”, mathematics and philosophy would be complementary facets of a holistic pedagogy, successive steps in the educational process or upward journey allowing the prisoner/human mind moving up and out of the cave/illusion into the light of day/metaphysical truth or reality. Here lies the major goal of education according to Plato, which corresponds to the transformative aim defended by the forerunners of integral education: the transformation of the human being towards a more ethical being and higher states of consciousness and reality.<sup>4</sup>

The typically modern scholar has often misunderstood Plato’s philosophy, so akin to Indian Vedanta in depth, and also to the conclusions of contemporary quantum physics stating the primacy of consciousness and its transformation towards higher levels.<sup>5</sup> This pedagogic ascent from the cave to the day light is basically seen as a cognitive process, whereas it is clear that it has an ontological depth transcending the mere intellectual level, the only level that modern culture has acknowledged. Like Shankara and also like quantum physicists, Plato was aware of other layers of consciousness and reality, and the Socratic pedagogy accompanies the growing youth through

<sup>4</sup> Cf “The Republic”, book III: 398-403 and book VII: 522/525, and “The Laws”, book I: 627-631, book II: 653-664 and book VII: 796-802, 809-813 and 816-822.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Russell P., 2003.

this metaphysical ladder from lowest to higher planes. Plato's educational philosophy is nothing else but mystical philosophy, the most emblematic representative in Western civilization for Philosophical Idealism.

In this kind of world view, ethics cannot be reduced to a merely cognitive/mental process of the ordinary mind nor to merely sociological/cultural factors; ethics is ultimately grounded in metaphysics, in the awakening to higher levels of reality and consciousness through this upward journey of the soul from the cave of illusion to the light of higher truths. This is the theoretical foundation for genuine integral value-based education as expounded by R. Steiner in the West or by Aurobindo in India, something amazingly coherent with the discoveries of quantum physics and astrophysics in the last decades, in particular the notions of a multiverse and a multidimensional holographic cosmos incorporating an implicate order, a unified field, hyper-dimensions or akashic fields, etc, under the primacy of consciousness – a multidimensional and holographic consciousness too.

The Socratic pedagogy is essentially ethical, transformative and liberating, and all this means metaphysical and spiritual, i.e. mystical. Platonic education attempts to free the soul from the illusions turning it upward while reorienting it towards the awareness of the highest truth. The main aim of Plato's educational philosophy is nothing else than self-realization, in terms deeply akin to Buddha or Vedanta. Here lies the greatest formulation of Philosophical Idealism and holistic value-based education for the Western world, something that great philosophers of India like Aurobindo will always acknowledge.

## B. NEO-PLATONISM TILL THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

The key ideas of Plato's philosophy of education are not totally original; many aspects of his pedagogic design directly stem from the **Pythagorean tradition**, and even from older schools like **Orphism**. In any case, Plato inherited the most profound mystical philosophy from Greece and gave a new shape to it, leaving the major legacy of Philosophical Idealism for centuries to come in the Western world.

Plato also founded a memorable school, the **Academy**, that would last for a long period of time, and would still be revived by spiritually inclined scholars and intellectuals in the Renaissance. A grand tradition

of **Neo-Platonism** has developed the Platonic heritage for 25 centuries. Already in the Ancient world, a whole lineage of Greek and Roman learned men continued to design curricula for boys from the higher classes under Plato's aura. This Neo-platonic education would be transported into the Middle Ages with the needed adaptation to the new Christian context.

The Neo-platonic syllabus crystallized through two academic frames: the **Trivium** (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the **Quadrivium** (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music theory). With Roman authors such as **Cicero** and **Seneca**, the Neo-platonic legacy from Greece was reshaped as the **Artes Liberales**, suitable for the education of a Roman boy from a good family, though studied not for practical reasons but for the sake of knowledge as a training of thinking.

In the Middle Ages, several authors such as **Martianus Capella** or **Isidore of Seville** developed the Ancient curricula with the needed adaptation to a Christian world. The first universities like **Paris-Sorbonne** or **Oxford** were still built under the influence of these old ideas. However, as it always happens in human condition, the medieval syllabus became a dull dry scholastic shell void of the depth and inner life of the original Platonic pedagogy, or the previous Pythagorean or Orphic philosophy.

That is why the **Renaissance** genius, in its quest for freedom of thought and its spirit of inquiry, would question and reject the ossified scholastic heritage from the Gothic period. At the same time, there would be a rebirth – “renaissance” in French – of the true spirit of the Platonic heritage and the whole of Greek civilization. The greatest man from Italian Renaissance, **Leonardo da Vinci**, was imbibed with this new Platonic revival, and the creation of the Platonic Academy of Florence or **Florentine Academy** is meaningful enough.

Later on, the deepest spirit of Platonic philosophy would nurture the last great cultural movement of Western history: **Romanticism**. Even the most mature system of integral education in modern Europe cannot be understood without Plato's influence; it is well known that **R. Steiner** inherited Platonic mystical philosophy together with the major Romantic ideas, in particular through **Goethe**, who was in turn already influenced by Plato. Hence, we can reasonably conclude that all the history of Philosophical Idealism and integral value-based education in the Western world has evolved under the light of Plato's aura.



## **2. MODERN EUROPE: ENLIGHTENMENT AND ROMANTICISM. THE BILDUNG. KANT, ROUSSEAU, PESTALOZZI, FROEBEL AND HEGEL**

### **1. KANT AND EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT**

We cannot understand such a great cultural movement of Europe and the Western world as Romanticism without the Platonic legacy; but we cannot understand it either without taking into account the influence of the brilliant professor from Königsberg (Kaliningrad) who would decisively shape European and Western Enlightenment: Immanuel Kant, whose ideas about education and ethics are particularly important for the Western world. Romanticism is the heir of both mystical philosophy and Enlightenment, Plato and Kant, and probably, in this dialogue between the wisdom of spiritual philosophy and the emancipating project of Enlightenment lies the future of Western civilization and our world.

The XVIIIth century of Enlightenment has been described as the age of pedagogy. Just like many other Enlightened thinkers, Kant turned his sharp attention to education on ethical grounds. The major legacy of European Enlightenment would probably be subjectivity: to see the human being as a subject. Heirs of the XVIIIth century like A. Renaut acknowledge that Enlightened subjectivity has been degraded into individualism and alienation by the lowest tendencies of the modern age. However, this was not the Enlightened dream of human dignity, and the Western world and the whole mankind owe Kant a debt of gratitude for his deepest formulation of the human subject.

As a professor in a faculty of philosophy, Kant was required to give lectures on education, and in general terms he took great pains to have a suitable pedagogic attitude towards students. Especially meaningful would be his lecture “On Pedagogy” (1776-1787).

**The two cornerstones of integral value-based education are already present in Kant’s pedagogy.**

- The transformative basis of holistic value-based pedagogies is explicit in Kant’s philosophy when he argues that children should not be educated simply to achieve the present level but

towards a possible better future level of the human race in ethical terms. In the philosopher's words, it is delightful to imagine that human nature can be increasingly enhanced through education.<sup>6</sup>

- The ethical foundation of integral value-based pedagogies becomes clear in Kant's statements on education when he concludes that good education is itself the source of all that is good in the world.<sup>7</sup>
- Finally, anybody in the field of integral value education can only share Kant's Enlightened dream of human dignity lying in a mature ethical subject that has reached the historical majority of age.
- Moreover, the cosmopolitan spirit of modern holistic pedagogies and the International Baccalaureate is also present at the core of Kant's philosophy of education; for him, educational strategies must follow a cosmopolitan spirit with a commitment to all that is best in the world.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Ethical education based upon human values finds a solid foundation in Kant's philosophy.**

- From his point of view, the educational process must develop in the growing child an attitude so as to choose good purposes only, that is, those which may at the same time be the purposes of everyone, and therefore may secure universal approval. To mould the moral character of children by imparting moral rectitude should be one of the major functions of education.<sup>9</sup>
- This moralizing function is indissolubly twined to the dignity of the human being and its coming of age towards the historical majority of age and emancipation of humanity.
- However, Kant is aware that this constitutes a historical process, in which education has a major role to play. Then, good education can bring about a gradual improvement of mankind. It is a task for many generations, each taking one step further towards the perfection of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, I. p. 74-78.

<sup>7</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, I. p.73

<sup>8</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, IV. p.150.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, I. p. 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, I. p. 77.

- For Kant, human dignity is universal; education must teach a rich child to give the same respect to poorer kids. Compliance with universal human rights must be at the very foundation of value-based education.<sup>11</sup>

We can easily realize that the Enlightened project of Kant's philosophy provides the soundest philosophical foundation to integral value-based education.

In spite of contextual differences, Kant's discourse on ethics and values within the educational process is strikingly coherent with that of modern sages of India such as Vivekananda or Sathya Sai Baba. It is amazing to realize that somebody who left a poor school of rural India at 14 –Sathya Sai Baba– provides an entire discourse on education in human values deeply akin to Kant's philosophy of education. The godfather of the Hindu Renaissance and Neo-Vedanta –Vivekananda– also put forward many ideas totally coherent with Kant. This kind of parallelism may help the advocates of holistic value-based pedagogies become aware of the philosophical depth of this kind of education in front of the materialistic and utilitarian reductionism of mainstream schooling. From Kant in Europe to Vivekananda or Sathya Sai Baba in India, we get a philosophical reaction in front of the prevailing utilitarianism inherent to modern mainstream schooling; Kant could see the beginning of the modern school in XVIIIth century Germany, Vivekananda and Sathya Sai Baba witnessed the development of modern schooling by the British in XIXth/XXth century India; in the three of them, the humanistic reaction claims for an ethical value-based pedagogy that is an education for consciousness and an education of the human being as such, beyond mere functional academics.

With Kant's work in our hands, do we need any further justification in front of that army of cynics or sceptics who were already criticized by the Enlightened philosopher from Koenigsberg? Holistic value education –both in the West or the East, with Steiner or Vivekananda– manifests the sharp limitation of mainstream schooling consisting of reducing the educational process to mere utilitarian academics, valueless and soulless. This is exactly the major critique that Kant put forward at the end of the XVIIIth century. Kant and the whole of Enlightenment shall clearly support the claims for integral value-based education in our time.

<sup>11</sup> Cf Kant, 1989, IV, p.149.

The philosopher of Koenigsberg brought **other invaluable contributions** to ethics and pedagogic thought, like the middle path between freedom and discipline/compulsion, the orientation of academic training towards free thinking, or the notion of a cosmopolitan education towards world citizenship, which is at the core of the prestigious International Baccalaureate. Kant is well known for his transcendental– critical method of philosophical inquiry, and he is commonly considered to be the founder of German Idealism and probably the greatest figure of European Enlightenment.

Unfortunately, some scholars have overlooked the significance of his educational philosophy for holistic value-based pedagogies. He can be regarded as one of the modern forerunners of integral education in human values, and his Enlightened pedagogy can certainly support the historical strive towards holistic value education beyond mere academics and technocracy.

## 2. THE PRECURSOR OF ROMANTICISM: ROUSSEAU

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) wrote the most influential treatise on education after **Plato's "Republic"**. In fact, this Romantic precursor presented a theory of human development quite different from Plato, though he paid his respects to the great philosopher of Greece. Whereas Plato held that children are born with various tendencies suitable to different social groups (not through inheritance), Rousseau saw a developmental process common to all human beings. This constitutes a natural process that sensible pedagogy must take care of without pre-imposing upon the child artificial constructs made by adults or society. Needless to say, both perspectives can be seen as complementary.

For the forerunner of Romanticism, the first manifestation of this natural developmental process in terms of behaviour would be **curiosity**, something so highly praised by Albert Einstein in education. For Rousseau and the Romantics, education can never be the **"tabula rasa"** of **John Locke and Liberalism**, but rather it should be an active process deriving from the child's nature adequately guided by the adult respectful of the tendencies of the child.

In his major work, **"Emile"** (1762), Rousseau warns against the negative influence of corrupt society, for which he advocates educational spaces removing the child from social life and raising him up in natural

settings.<sup>12</sup> Many educational institutions in the modern world, especially in India, have followed this typically Romantic mood. Rousseau is convinced that human beings are inherently good, but they become corrupted by the evils of society. For this, he recommends everyone to be in touch with Nature and to be as natural as possible.

In his famous “*The Social Contract*” (1762), he explores in depth his political philosophy, centred upon a **social contract** where people recognize a collective **general will** supposed to represent the common good or public interest. All citizens should participate in this process. The famous cry of liberty, equality and fraternity, certainly corrupted by the French Revolution and the subsequent French Republics, originally stems from Rousseau’s political philosophy, which has tremendous implications in education, fully developed in the immortal “*Emile*”.

Rousseau’s treatise on pedagogy outlines the individual tuition of a boy in line with the principles of natural education and **in coherence with “The Social Contract”**. Education should try to preserve as much as possible the original perfect nature of the child. Through education we must make the citizen good, says Rousseau. Two centuries later this statement would be echoed by a major spiritual master of India, Sathya Sai Baba, who repeatedly advised us to see good, do good, be good.

Rousseau’s model will always be **Nature** –a great Romantic theme–, and his influential philosophy will stress **wholeness and harmony within a deeply ethical world view**, for which the illustrious thinker from Geneva can be regarded as the direct forerunner of integral value-based education for the modern age.

- Holistic value-based pedagogies historically reacted against the overemphasis on the academic lecture method in mainstream schooling and also against the child’s treatment as a small adult irrespective of the characteristics of the different age groups. Rousseau anticipated this historical revolution brought by the greatest educationists of the XXth century such as Steiner, Montessori or Dewey.
- The Romantic philosopher put forward a view of children as different from adults, innocent and naturally good, entitled to freedom and happiness.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, p. 43, p. 50-51 and p. 100.

- He also insisted on the idea that the growing child develops through different stages, hence different pedagogies must be designed for the different periods according to the features of each age group. Steiner, Montessori or Dewey can be seen as the heirs of Rousseau from this point of view.<sup>14</sup>
- Another main feature of integral education would be its **child-centred orientation**. Rousseau was also one of the first intellectuals in the modern age to defend that the educational process must be individualized in order to unfold the unique nature of every child.<sup>15</sup>
- Moreover, he strongly defended the **self-education** of the child, especially after the age of reason, that is around 11/12, something that has been incorporated by many schools of holistic education in the XXth century.<sup>16</sup>
- If we analyze the International Baccalaureate, whose headquarters are in Rousseau's birthplace, Geneva (something almost symbolic), we can immediately realize the emphasis given on **free creative thinking** by this prestigious syllabus. This fundamental point of genuine academic excellence was also anticipated by Rousseau, who always underlined the importance of developing ideas by ourselves and make sense of everything in our own way.<sup>17</sup>
- Rousseau rejected the authoritarian role of the teacher, while claiming the etymological meaning of the Latin "**auctoritas**" i.e. closer to the spirit of the Indian Gurukula.
- In his immortal novel, the boy, Emile, is encouraged to draw his own conclusions from his own experience which lies at the core of the International Baccalaureate and holistic pedagogies like Steiner's or Dewey's.
- Rousseau defended other pedagogic tools which are characteristic of holistic schools, such as: observation and direct experience, learning by doing, research and discovery, play-way methods, teaching through the living example, etc.
- In parallel to this holistic pedagogy, the **teacher** is defined by him as a **guide**, something taken up again by Montessori or Dewey.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, the five chapters I-V corresponding to the five stages of growth and hence education. Cf p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, II. p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, III. p. 215-217.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Rousseau, 1993, III. p.215.

- For Rousseau, freedom should be combined with a pedagogic use of discipline towards a positive transformation of character.

**The natural development of the child and education through stages.**

According to Rousseau, the educational process must unfold the natural development of the child with its inner tendencies and skills. The ideal boy, Emile, should become a good human being before becoming a good soldier, churchman or magistrate. From Rousseau's point of view, education should basically aim at making the child a real human being. Here, the Romantic educationist anticipates the most reputed value-based education from India with sages such as Vivekananda or Sathya Sai Baba, who stressed the formation of character and human quality or values above academics.

Nevertheless, the concrete aims of education must change according to the age groups. For Rousseau, the child is not an adult in the miniature, and childhood is not uniform either, for which **the different stages of the child's development require suitable pedagogies for each age group.** Here, the XVIIIth century philosopher preconceives the developmental psychology of the XXth century –Piaget– and the concern for childhood of Maria Montessori.

- **Infancy and childhood: from birth to eleven.**
- At the initial stage, it is far more important to foster the development of the child's body and its senses. The infant can be taught many things through a normal conversation that also develops linguistic ability.
- From six onwards, Rousseau is still reluctant to use text-books; instead, he prefers to give the child a chance to learn through direct experience and observation. Here again Rousseau anticipates major themes of the XXth century holistic pedagogies. Rousseau does not want Emile's mind to be stuffed with loads of information through dry bookish learning. Emile must be given freedom to play and move at his own will –something impossible in the typical classroom of mainstream schooling; only then, can he go through a variety of experiences and learn through different activities, which will be later advocated by Dewey or Kilpatrick. The educator's role consists at the most of arranging pedagogic spaces, contexts and tools for this free natural self-learning of the child, which constitutes a major



theme of the Montessori method. At this stage, morality must be taught through the natural consequences of deeds.

- **Adolescence: from twelve to fifteen.** At this stage the adolescent is ready for a more formal curriculum, which, however, should not be reduced to the classical academic subjects, but should also incorporate all the arts and crafts, social life and manual training. Rousseau anticipates once more the holistic nature of the curriculum in integral pedagogies. Even at this stage, Rousseau would warn against an abuse of lecture methods and bookish knowledge, still defending direct experience and self-learning.
- **Youth: from sixteen to twenty.** At the last stage, Rousseau insists on spiritual and moral education together with cognitive/academic training, in deep coherence with R. Steiner. Experience should still be cultivated beyond books.

### 3. PESTALOZZI AND FROEBEL. THE ROMANTIC PEDAGOGY BETWEEN ROUSSEAU AND STEINER

#### A. Pestalozzi

J.H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was a Swiss pedagogue and educational reformer who inherited key ideas from **Rousseau** and who exemplified the “Weltanschauung” of **Romanticism**.

In 1801, he gave a full account of his educational philosophy in “**How Gertrude Teaches her Children**”. He established his own school at Burgdorf. He even did his best to try to influence Napoleon on a scheme of good national education. As we can easily imagine, the politician did not pay so much attention to the educationist.

Pestalozzi tried to reform the educational system of his time on two particular points:

- He opposed both corporal punishment
- and rote memorization.

Two structural flaws that have been erased from European schooling but are still massively common in Indian and Asian contemporary schools. Pestalozzi’s reform in Europe two centuries back is still pending in India and Asia.

Pestalozzi was praised by some of the finest spirits of that time, like Fichte, Humboldt or Mme de Stael. He stands as a lighthouse of the



educational reform that was started by Kant, Rousseau and Hegel, and would be culminated by Steiner, Montessori and Dewey.

- From an oppressive schooling based on lecture methods, memorizing, military discipline and physical punishment, treating children as adults irrespective of the age group;
- towards a humanistic, ethical and integral kind of education respectful of childhood, the specific needs of each developmental stage and the unique nature of every child.

The reform is still not finished, and in Asian countries like India we still must brandish these great educational reformers to eradicate massive flaws like rote memorizing or physical punishment.

### **B. Froebel. Pestalozzi's heir**

F. Froebel (1782-1852) was a German pedagogue disciple of Pestalozzi. He highly contributed to lay down the foundations of humanistic integral education.

- He insisted, for instance, on the unique needs and capabilities of every child, requiring a **child-centred pedagogy**.
- Hence, he understood the child as a **living whole**.
- He was also one of the founders of the modern idea of **kindergarten**; in fact, he was the intellectual who coined the word, now commonly used in German and English.

Froebel directly worked with Pestalozzi in Switzerland, though he started his educational career in Frankfurt. His major pedagogic treatise would be "**The Education of Man**". He founded several magazines and institutes. He even designed educational play materials known as **Froebel's gifts**.

This great educationist of the Romantic movement clearly prepared the pedagogic innovations of Steiner, Montessori and Dewey by emphasizing the child's need for activity and playing, and the pedagogic role of both. All the play-way and experiential methods in vogue today were anticipated by Froebel, who brought a decisive contribution to question the authoritarian school system of that time and transform it towards a more humanistic and holistic pedagogy.

Among the activities introduced by Froebel, we could mention:

- Self-directed plays, singing, dancing and gardening.
- The Romantic pedagogue coined another important concept: *Freiarbeit*/free work, while he understood in depth all the pedagogic potential of the game and play-way methods.
- In general terms, Froebel understood activities as **self-activity** developing **creativity** and **self-discipline** with genuine freedom.

Already in the XIXth century, and obviously at the beginning of the XXth, a number of kindergarten were established throughout Germany, other European countries and the USA, sometimes using Froebel's name. In 1892, some of his followers created a College of Education in London.

His name would soon become a synonym to educational reform, and we can certainly consider this Romantic pedagogue, disciple of Pestalozzi, as one of the most illustrious forerunners of humanistic and integral education in the modern age.

#### 4. THE GERMAN BILDUNG: INTEGRAL VALUE-BASED EDUCATION "AVANT LA LETTRE"

The German term "**Bildung**" originated in the XVIIth century in **Pietistic theology**, according to which Christians should cultivate (Bildung) their talents and dispositions in coherence with the image of God –which is already there, innate in the soul–. Still closer to the meaning of the Sanskrit Bala Vikas, the XVIIIth century godfather of Jewish Enlightenment, **Moses Mendelssohn**, used the German term in the sense of unfolding one's potential.

It is not surprising that German Enlightenment, Idealism and Romanticism produce similar notions to those of Vedanta and Indian Philosophy. The German Bildung totally corresponds to the Sanskrit Bala Vikas –the boy/child's blossoming from within–, and in this correspondence, German educational philosophy at the time of Enlightenment, Idealism and Romanticism lays the path for modern integral education.

It is meaningful enough to realize that from **Mendelssohn's** standpoint, Bildung becomes a synonym of Enlightenment. The educationist **J.H. Campe** developed the pedagogic implications of the Bildung, and through the whole Romantic period Bildung became a symbol of true education

and liberation from oppression. **Herder**, for instance, defines *Bildung* as human development into some sort of organic unity that will gradually unfold its deepest nature and abilities while it will also contribute to social progress. Herder's educational philosophy is essentially transformational –the quintessence of integral education–; education as *Bildung* will transform human beings and hence social life.

After Herder, **Goethe** brought another decisive contribution to the German *Bildung* theory. The younger Goethe of the Sturm und Drang movement was totally Romantic, while the elder Goethe of Weimar Classicism tried to encompass the deepest insights of Romanticism with the clear reason of Enlightenment. The genius of Weimar also sought the Kantian emancipation of humanity, and his vision is deeply integral or holistic since it attempts to unify all the domains of humanity, body and mind, reason and feeling, thought and intuition.

Goethe's novel "**Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship**" stands as the paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of formation. The protagonist strives for rising above a soulless bourgeois life, and aims at unfolding and serving a deeper or greater Good. Goethe's novel announces holistic pedagogies of the XXth century, while it echoes the integral education of Upanishadic India: the formation of the human being does not consist of imitating social patterns outside, but rather of unveiling the hidden inner character that is unique to everybody. Not surprisingly, Goethe would inspire the major figure of modern holistic pedagogies, R. Steiner.

**Gardner's contemporary Theory of Multiple Intelligences**, supporting holistic value-based pedagogies, is already outlined by Goethe, who clearly states that the educational process must take into account the diversity of talents that human beings present. A mature society will allow wide scope for the unique development of each person, which will globally generate the desirable social harmony. According to Goethe, self-realization and social responsibility are indissoluble.

## 5. HEGEL AND THE GERMAN BILDUNG

Another major figure of German Idealism, **Hegel** (1770 – 1831), was certainly influenced by **Goethe** and his neo-humanism. In particular, Hegel was first and foremost concerned with the notion of *Bildung* in terms of a double process: the self-development of the individual human spirit inseparable from the self-development of human society.

Some scholars have read Hegel's major work, "**The Phenomenology of Spirit**", as a Bildungsroman or novel of formation. The core of Hegel's philosophy deals with the individual's as well as humanity's self-development from within: the timeless perspective of Philosophical Idealism and integral education. As is typical of a Bildungsroman, Hegel shows in his "Phenomenology" the self-development of a sensitive soul in a complex society that lacks fundamental values. The protagonist, to some extent typically Romantic, encounters a variety of experiences, through which he unfolds his full rounded personality and inner depth.

Hegel also forecasted some major themes of **quantum physics**, like the Observer Effect. For the German philosopher, there is no subject/object dualism, because the self is one with his environment.

We can also realize that Hegel's famous **Dialectics** constitutes a form of Bildung or integral education. Periodically the self encounters an obstacle to its inner project outside, which Hegel terms a negation. Through analysing this negation, the self designs solutions that will affect the object and will modify its project. Then, consciousness can be reunified, and the self can resume its inner project with some kind of progress or growth. The self gradually unfolds from experiences of this kind, not only reunified but also enlarged, because it gains experience.<sup>18</sup> From this point of view, Hegel's philosophy of education claims to be more mature and profound than some Enlightened or Romantic conceptions about the alleged natural goodness of children turning into the typical idealization of childhood, cf **Rousseau**.

In Hegel's views, knowledge is basically drawn from experience, something that may justify the experiential methods in learning within the frame of holistic pedagogies in front of the abuse of the chalk and talk lecture method predominant in the mainstream school system.

Furthermore, for Hegel learning involves activity, which supports the active role of the child in holistic or humanistic pedagogies. In Hegel's standpoint, learning requires an ardent search for truth; it is conscious self-development involving personal effort and responsibility. For the father of German Idealism, the educational process would tantamount to self-knowledge or knowledge of the self, of our own nature and deepest inclinations and abilities, another major theme of integral education.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 133-139. (Pedagogic Report of October 23rd, 1812.)  
Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 41-44.

<sup>19</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 168-170. (Pedagogic Report of September 19th, 1810.)

For Hegel, activity also means work; children must work in some way, since work is inherent to humanity. This kind of educational work is inseparable from an activity-oriented pedagogy that requires understanding and direct experience. This means that Hegel was sharply critical towards the advocates of play-way methods such as Froebel.<sup>20</sup>

As it happened with Kant's enlightened philosophy, the German Bildung and Hegel's Idealism can deeply support the main claims of integral value-based education for the Western/modern world; all the major topics of holistic pedagogies were already present in the educational philosophy of such great figures as Kant or Hegel.

The father of German Idealism showed **the desirable middle path in education**.<sup>21</sup> While he was Rector of the Nuremberg Gymnasium (Higher Secondary School) he treated students with respect and encouraged discussion in class, which was quite innovative at that time; but he would never give students complete freedom as in Summerhill.

Hegel always put forward **the main goal of integral education**: liberation from alienation and oppression towards a self-formed person, though he warned about the social nature of the self, unable to totally transcend its social context.<sup>22</sup>

Spiritual masters of India, such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo or Sathya Sai Baba, insisted that education should be value-based while it should incorporate the deepest dimension of the human being, which we dare to call spiritual. The founder of German Idealism, undoubtedly one of the major philosophers of the Western world, defended that education must shape the subjective mind, impart a sense of ethics to the child, and work for the rebirth of the human being, for his transformation of his first nature into a second spiritual nature. This is the only way through which the human being can unveil and manifest his own true spiritual nature. The most profound contents of integral value-based education – axiological and spiritual – are present in Hegel's philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

In front of the prevailing utilitarian and materialistic trends of our civilization, it is important to stress that for both Hegel and before him Plato as well as the spiritual masters of India, true ethics can only stem

<sup>20</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p.40.

<sup>21</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 90-91. (Speech of September 14th, 1810.)

<sup>22</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 139-145. (Pedagogic Report of October 23rd, 1812.)

<sup>23</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 94. (Speech of September 14th, 1810.)

Cf p. 102-103. (Speech of September 2nd, 1811.)

from genuine spirituality: the inner dimension, which means all the depth of consciousness within a metaphysical world view deeply akin to quantum physics and contemporary astrophysics, with theories such as quantum mechanics, Strings/M. Theory, the multiverse, the multidimensional/holographic nature of the cosmos, etc. For Philosophical Idealism, both Western –from Plato to Hegel– and Indian –from Vedas to Neo-Vedanta– the ontological nature of ethics unfolds from within, from the depth of consciousness, and it can only be fulfilled through a transformative process that is truly spiritual.

The profound parallelism can be explained by R. Panikkar's concept of "homeomorphic equivalents"; in the modern world, all spiritual philosophers –both in the West and the East– defend their inner vision –homeomorphically equivalent– in front of the prevailing technocratic trends of mainstream civilization. Through the XXth century, quantum physicists have debunked modern materialism and stated the primacy of consciousness, aware that human condition is ultimately transformative and –for many of them– reality essentially spiritual.<sup>24</sup>

Quantum physicists have totally agreed with Hegel, Plato and Vedanta on two fundamental points: I. consciousness is the key. II. The cosmos is not a machine but pure consciousness and vibration. We try to show in this paper that this kind of spiritual philosophy –both Western and Eastern, ancient and modern– constitutes a sound philosophical foundation for integral value-based education –as expounded by Steiner or Aurobindo–, since all holistic value pedagogies share the basic assumptions of spiritual philosophy in their homeomorphic equivalence.

Within this metaphysical/ethical world view, Hegel underlines two other principles of integral value-based education that Indian sages have always emphasized.

- Firstly, he makes it clear that this profound transformation cannot be imposed and is only feasible if the human being drops the selfish most superficial desires and caprices. In parallel terms, Sathya Sai Baba repeatedly taught the ceiling on desires.
- Secondly, he would totally agree with the Indian sage on the double principle of a humanistic pedagogy: love and discipline.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Goswami A., 2009.

Without idealizing childhood or adolescence –so getting ahead of Rousseau– Hegel showed that kind of empathy towards the students through his professional career; at the same time he always insisted on the necessity for discipline, which made him pretty reluctant to play-way methods as emphasized by Rousseau's heir, Froebel.

In any case, Hegel's pedagogy is integral and deeply ethical, and ultimately spiritual and metaphysical. While being sharply critical with the pedagogic system of his age –utilitarian and authoritarian–, he defends a kind of education that integrates the academic/cognitive, the active/ethical, the aesthetic, and the transformative/spiritual domains. In front of the purely academic mechanical pedagogy of Industrial Revolution promoting selfishness and ultimately alienation, Hegel shares Kant's Enlightened dream of human liberation and realization, which lies at the core of integral value-based education as expounded by R. Steiner or Aurobindo.<sup>25</sup>

That is why Hegel did not like Sophist pedagogies of Ancient Greece, which reduced all the depth of education to merely individualistic, selfish valueless and strategic interests –without any deeper system of reference–. Hegel wanted to bring back to modern education some deeper system of reference –which he found in Plato's Idealism as opposed to Sophism–. In this point, his educational philosophy directly supports integral education.

The eminent German philosopher was the Director of a Higher Secondary School –Gymnasium– and University Lecturer like Kant. Above all, he made a decisive contribution to philosophy of education that has unfortunately been often overlooked by narrow-minded scholarship. Like Kant again, and also like Rousseau, his educational philosophy criticizes the mainstream schooling of the modern age and opens the door to a more humanistic and holistic kind of education. In spite of the differences among them, these three major figures of European philosophy unfold a radical criticism of mainstream schooling and an ardent defence of integral value-based education.

Hegel opposed “the misery of endless inculcating, reprimanding, memorising”, etc. He put forward the respect for the student and his freedom of thought. Still more important, he brought back to education that philosophical depth that was at the core of Plato's pedagogy but was totally lost by the advent of a materialistic soulless civilization.

<sup>25</sup> Cf Hegel, 1991, p. 59-68.



## CONCLUSION

Enlightenment, Romanticism and Idealism, that is, the most profound and influential cultural movements of the modern Western world, have never supported the mainstream school system, essentially technocratic and utilitarian, and hence reductionistic and alienating; rather, they have endorsed integral value-based, deeply ethical and child-centred pedagogies. This historical fact can bring an undeniable philosophical support of holistic value-based pedagogies among contemporary debates, and it should be seen as an invitation for public authorities to reconsider the reductionism of mainstream schooling and seriously contemplate the deepest meaning of holistic value-based pedagogies with their earnest ethical concern (and in their deepest formulations, within a spiritual world view).

In an atmosphere of economic crisis, conflict among nations, questioning of welfare policies, etc., Europe seems to forget its cultural heritage and come back to the sharpest technocracy and utilitarianism of the modern age. An increasing number of intellectuals and educators weep upon the collapse of European humanism, and the tendency to suppress philosophy as a subject in higher secondary school or philosophy of education for the training of teachers is seen as a symbol for many. When the European crisis seems to bury philosophy of education in a climate of cultural decay, this paper tries to show that the humanistic and spiritual questioning of mainstream schooling towards more holistic and value-based pedagogies can find an undeniable and solid support in the major figures of European philosophy: Plato, Kant, Rousseau and Hegel, for whom there is no true education without a sound ethical foundation, and ultimately, without a spiritual vision.

We also claim that this kind of ethical and spiritual philosophy of education is deeply akin to similar formulations in India, which becomes especially significant in the modern age. Panikkar may help us to understand the parallelism in depth through the concept of “homeomorphic equivalents”. However, sociological inputs will make us realize that all humanistic/spiritual philosophers in the modern world –both in the West and the East– share a common reaction against the prevailing trends of civilization, utilitarian and technocratic. All of them somehow feel that anti-Newtonian stance expressed by Goethe.

One of the most fascinating developments of the xxth century would be the advent of quantum physics and what has been called as “new science”. All the major figures of quantum science have reached the same



conclusions than spiritual philosophy, and very especially, they have been aware of the convergence and have explicitly talked about it.<sup>26</sup> They have all outlined a new holistic paradigm coherent with spiritual philosophy that has certainly a pedagogic translation: not the utilitarian mainstream schooling anymore, but rather integral value-based education, that is, an education for consciousness that has a sound ethical foundation, that educates the human being as such, i.e. beyond mere intellectual skills or amounts of information to be poured down through mechanistic exams.

It is an irony of history that scholars and educationists must recall the deepest contributions of the major philosophers of Western civilization when the continent that nurtured them, Europe, takes an increasingly technocratic evolution in a dull scenario of economic crisis that tends to suppress philosophy from the school and university system. Whether European or Western public authorities will pay attention to this message goes far beyond the scope of this paper. But it is in our hands to remind Westerners and in particular Europeans that the prevailing mainstream schooling, essentially technocratic and utilitarian, can be questioned by the most profound thought that has shaped the Western world: from Plato to Hegel and Goethe, and before the two last, Kant and Rousseau.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf Wilber K., 1987.

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