

Education that limits is education that frees

La educación que limita es la que libera

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Abstract:

Today it is more common to find the concept of education linked to terms such as emancipation, autonomy, or freedom, than to norms, discipline, authority, submission or boundaries. This article sets out to show that limits, norms, rules, and even physical limitations are fundamental in education because they are an essential part of human reality and the human condition. Its main thesis is that rules not only regulate human activities from outside, but they also operate from the root of the activity itself as an expression of the peculiar rationality of human beings and their way of being in the world. The article firstly demonstrates this thesis by examining certain physical limitations that are approached educationally, and then in various other human areas, such as language, play, ecology, the Internet, and sexuality. It also shows how rules, by limiting the

possibilities for how certain actions will develop, allow us to intuit or glimpse other types of limits and other possibilities —not always better ones— for human development and its standards. From an anthropological perspective, this has led us to suggest how an individual's future possibilities expand, increase, and develop if her family, school and social settings for growth are spaces bounded by limits and norms. These allow her to feel safe enough to begin a process of critical assimilation of her received inheritance. The subject better understands reality, and the different possibilities for evaluating that reality, when the process of evaluation starts from a relatively enclosed perspective (with limits and norms) on the received tradition.

Keywords: limits, rules, authority, freedom, emancipation, tradition.

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Resumen:

En la actualidad es más común encontrar relacionado el concepto de educación con términos como emancipación, autonomía o libertad, que con las palabras normas, disciplina, autoridad, sometimiento o límite. El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar que los límites, las normas, las reglas, incluso las limitaciones físicas resultan fundamentales en la educación porque forman parte esencial de la realidad y de la condición humana. La tesis principal es que las reglas no solo ordenan o regulan desde fuera una actividad humana sino que operan desde la raíz de la misma que surge como expresión de la racionalidad peculiar del ser humano y su forma de estar en el mundo. El artículo muestra esta tesis, primero, en el modo de abordar educativamente ciertas limitaciones físicas y, luego, en diversos ámbitos humanos: el lenguaje, el juego, la ecología, el Internet y la sexualidad. El artículo muestra también que las reglas, que los límites, precisamente por acotar las

posibilidades de desarrollo de una determinada acción, nos permiten intuir, vislumbrar, a su vez, otro tipo de acotaciones, otras posibilidades, no siempre mejores, del desarrollo humano con sus correspondientes normas. Por eso hemos indicado también, desde un punto de vista más cercano a la antropología pedagógica, que las posibilidades futuras de un sujeto en su forma de estar y vivir el mundo se expanden, acrecientan y surgen si durante su crecimiento familiar, escolar y social ha vivido en un espacio acotado de límites y normas que le permiten sentirse lo suficientemente seguro para iniciar un proceso de asimilación crítica de la herencia recibida. Se entiende mucho mejor la realidad y sus diferentes posibilidades de valoración cuando se ha partido desde un punto de vista relativamente cerrado, con sus límites y normas, sobre la tradición recibida.

Descriptor: límites, reglas, autoridad, libertad, emancipación, tradición.

1. Introduction

We tend to group words and ideas according to very simple clichés, and so it is necessary to analyse them carefully to understand the element of truth they contain and the part that is no more than an uncritical expression of dominant thought. One of these clichés links education to emancipation, autonomy, and freedom, concepts which are in contrast to another set of words such as norms, discipline, authority, submission, limits (Barrio, 1999; Spaemann, 2003). Excess emphasis on this type of term instead of those on the

first list would link us to an old-fashioned, sad, hard, joyless, mechanistic, dictated, authoritarian model of education, in essence, one that is opposed to the spontaneity and creativity necessary to face a new world and unpredicted situations, as free human beings seem to be the only ones able to oppose the rule. In this cultural environment, it is hard to resist all of the proposals that break with this classical framework.

Nonetheless, in this article we will try to show how limits, norms, rules, even

physical limitations, are vital in education since they are an essential part of the reality of the human condition not an inevitable evil that must be considered. This line of thinking is, in a way, counterintuitive as from childhood we see rules as restrictions that prevent us from doing what we want, but what if we do not really know what we want? What if our desires need discipline to be truly valuable?

‘Is what I now want what I want myself to want?’ And do I have sufficiently good reasons to want what I know want? [...] whether a life goes well or badly may depend and often does depend on whether in the types of situations that I have identified someone thinks well or badly about their present, past, and future desires (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 4-5).

In education we have experience of freedom functioning on the basis of limitations. Many studies in clinical psychology show the relationship between a lack of attachment or an unstructured and inconsistent attachment and the emergence of juvenile delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2012; Hoeve, Dubas, Gerris, van der Laan, & Smeenk, 2011; Kofler-Westergren, Klopff, & Mitterauer, 2010; De Vries, Hoeve, Stams, & Asscher, 2016). Moreover, great educators, like Alain, already showed this a long time ago, opposing more romantic models that have done and continue to do so much damage to education and pedagogy:

I should now state that education should not be guided by the features of a vocation. Firstly, because preferences can matter. And also because it is always good to find out about what one does not want

to know. So we should challenge tastes, firstly and at length. This pupil only likes science; so he can cultivate history, law, literature; he needs it more than some others do... (Alain in Château, 2017, p. 378).

Some authors are also currently following this path. Sawyer, in opposition to the well-known theses that school kills creativity, claims that schooling is an essential element when developing creativity because it requires a high level of command of knowledge and school is good at fostering this learning in students (Sawyer, 2012, p. 390). Similarly, there are many examples that show the value of discipline and sustained exercise in everyday life. In a recent interview, the famous Armenian violinist Malikian said:

My father was obsessed with the violin and he made me play it almost from the day I was born. When I was 7 or 8, I wanted to play with the other children, but he didn't let me and made me stay in a room and practice for hours on end. I often remember one time when I was crying while I played because I didn't want to any more. But now I am eternally grateful to him because I am very happy being a violinist (in Iváninkova, 2018).

Although further on in the same interview, talking about his son, he contradicts himself, saying: “Children are made to play, I have tried to make him play the violin and he threw it at my head. [...] Learning has to be a game for children”. There is no doubt that something has changed between the world of his father and his world and this something is part of what we are trying to trace here.

Human development does not follow a single path. Things turned out well for the father of the violinist, but they could have turned out very badly, at the cost of his son's happiness. We are not free from making mistakes. We are never entirely sure of whether or not we are right with our choices of educational limits. That said, it nowadays seems necessary to argue again, from the particular cultural contexts we find ourselves in at present, that the very personal structure of the human being in its possibilities for development can only unfold with meaning and order if someone limits us. Of course, it is vital to know how to articulate these limits prudently and tactfully, but what we want to emphasise in this article is that, as Gomá explains referring to Goethe, "to limit oneself is to stretch oneself because the being is not fulfilled in its potential but in its action and implementing this requires it to be decided" (Gomá, 2011, p. 13).

The main thesis we will try to demonstrate in this article can be summarised as follows: rules do not just order or regulate an activity *from outside*, but instead they work from the human root of the activity itself, which develops as an expression of the unique rationality of the human being and its way of being in the world. From here, various corollaries of particular pedagogical significance appear which we will reveal. The order in which the argument is set out is as follows: first, we describe the root of the problem, which we locate in the fact that the blurring of the idea of truth destroys or relativises the idea of limits. We then consider the educational effects that are no longer achieved in hu-

man development because of how biological limits are sometimes considered. In the next section, the largest, we analyse the humanising relevance of limits in various human domains: language, play, ecology, the Internet, sexuality, and we finish with pedagogical conclusions.

2. Seeking the roots of the problem. Desire as an ontology of the human being

Are thinking and playing with words different activities? If thinking and playing with words are different activities, this must be because the former affects reality while the latter affects rules. The limitation on thinking that enables us to speak of thinking as something valuable therefore lies in how it relates to reality, and the criterion we use is the truth. What makes thinking valuable is not entertainment or showy dazzle—aspects we do seek out when playing with words—but rather its ability to adapt to and measure itself against the reality it attempts to reflect. Nevertheless, something has changed. We are now in a period where realist philosophies have lost prestige and metaphorical and sentimental games, with words which we could group under the term postmodernism, are on the rise. It is not so much that the existence of the truth is denied, but that the quest for it has, for some, become absurd and incomprehensible (Rorty, 1996), "they understand that reason is not the universal form of thinking and that only pride can induce the individual to leave the narrow story of his specific experience" (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017, p. 41).

In 1905, Chesterton published the book *Heretics* (Chesterton, 2007), which starts with the fascination which, in his own time, he felt for the word heretic. In the past, according to Chesterton, every person was interested in being in the truth, and so being orthodox. Even those declared to be heretics were heretics to others because they themselves believed that they were orthodox and that the people who called them heretics were the ones who were wrong. However, Chesterton detected in his era a change in meaning and a certain pride in being called a heretic. Heretic becomes a metaphor for what places you at the margin of the established truths accepted by everyone. The truth is no longer regarded as something permanent because truth does not exist; dominant social conventions in permanent conflict and mutation are all that does exist. The heresies of today will be the truths of tomorrow and the truths of tomorrow the heresies of the day after. As the substantive idea of truth ebbed, it left behind only the ego, the ego's *pride*, in its growing attempt to endure without brakes or limits. There is no human condition, just mutation, transformation, becoming, and the individual desire, the driving force for change, to finally subjugate reality. The wonder Chesterton showed in the early years of the twentieth century before this situation has clearly escalated: the ego, its desire and opinion, as the defining criterion for the truth. My limit: desires. And so, without limits, we see the disappearance of "the function of No, something which affects the most basic achievements that made humanisation possible. As this function disappears, the emergence of ideal instances of personali-

ty is not viable" (Villacañas, 2015, p. 104). And without exemplary lives, how can we teach?

The root of the problem, then, lies in the fact that the blurring of the constitutive force of the intellectual and committed recognition of the possibilities of what we progressively reveal as true has in turn brought with it a perception of any type of limit, of any type of denial or prohibition as an impediment to human development. And so it seems that, on occasion, a concept of education is upheld as "a process not of learning of what is human about *limits* but, precisely, for some, in a learning of what is *inhuman* about imposing limits" (Gil Cantero, 2018, p. 44; italics in original). Education erroneously comes to be seen as a process of critical learning which avoids any order of meaning that does not originate in one's own desire and, so, the calls to action that create that education involve tearing down, eliminating, and questioning any type of limit to one's own cravings. Any social or moral order is, then, experienced as an imposition which has to be resisted in order to be oneself. What is of value for education in this resistance and what in it is lies? How does limitation work in human beings?

3. Biological limitations. For a *metaphysics of effort*

The quest for the happiness of one's children is a natural movement. It is also natural for this help to include the possibility of removing or alleviating the obstacles that seem to spoil the lives of one's children. Nonetheless, there are many ex-

amples showing that difficulties and limitations have unexpected and paradoxical effects which can be dazzling. Nussbaum describes one of these cases:

My daughter was born with a perceptive-motor defect (not definitively genetic, but we believe it was) which would clearly put her beneath the threshold that demarcates the “normal functioning of the species” according to the authors. This defect is severe enough that any decent mother would have opted, *ex ante*, for a genetic “fix” (she learnt to read at the age of two and to tie her shoelaces at the age of eight). She has had to confront insults and mockery all through her life. Her idiosyncratic, dynamic, fun and totally independent personality is inseparable from these struggles. Not only would I not like, *ex post*, to have had a different daughter, but I would not even have liked to have had her “fixed”. Putting to one side maternal love (if that is possible), I just like this sort of unusual person who does not fit in, much more than I would have liked (or at least that is what I think) the head cheerleader I could have had. And with all certainty, I do not want a world where all parents “fix” their children so that nobody is unusual, and this even though we all know that life is not easy if you are unusual (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 16).

The limitation, in this case, acts as a condition of possibility for achieving a higher good or an extraordinary action which, without this limitation, could not occur and would not be needed. Let us return to the paradoxical structure of the human being. It appears *we are more and better* if we have experienced frustration — always fought against, insofar as it is possible— since, as a result, we can recognise

our limits and, based on this acceptance, one *is* more authentically. Steiner (2016, p. 12), when referring to all of the challenges his mother made him face to alleviate his physical limitations —he was born with a withered right arm— said: “It was a metaphysics of effort. It was a metaphysics of will, discipline, and especially happiness”.

Keller and Vujicic are just a few of the many examples we could give. Clearly, this does not mean that we should not try to remedy limitations, especially the most severe ones, but they do alert us to what the human being is and the effects —not always negative— limitations might have on it, in this case physical ones. Why? Because through limitations, human beings can bring into play aspects which would otherwise remain hidden and which manifest important virtues like strength in adversity or what is known in modern literature as resilience (Dunn, Uswatte, & Elliott, 2009; Quale & Schanke, 2010). There is no doubt that struggling against physical difficulties that result from illnesses or accidents is necessary and legitimate, but the attempt in a mad post-humanist rush to eliminate any physical imperfections, as all of them restrict us in some way, could leave us in a world where the virtues acquired through education are unfamiliar as we forget that any virtue is trained through exercise in the face of limitations. Without regret after bad decisions, we would struggle to learn to be prudent, without any experience of injustice, how would we learn to cultivate justice? Without difficulties to confront, how could we exercise strength? In education, the humanising value of its aim has to

be maintained and expressed in resources, and so not all methods of putting an end to what limits us are appropriate, and furthermore, “the headlong flight from imperfection contains in itself the seed of the dissatisfaction that, far from acting as a driving force, runs the risk of becoming pathological” (García-Gutiérrez, Gil Cantero, & Reyero, 2017, p. 28).

In this frenetic flight from and elimination of limits, it is now the turn of the most insurmountable limit of all: death. Nevertheless, accepting death, our definitive limit, allows us to free ourselves from the fear of it and so live in reality more fully as:

It is the awareness of death that makes life such a serious matter for each one of us, something on which we must reflect. Something mysterious and terrible, a sort of beautiful miracle for which we must fight, for which we have to make an effort and reflect. If death did not exist, there would be much to see and plenty of time to see it in, but very little to do (almost everything we do is to avoid dying) and nothing to think about (Savater, 1999, p. 8).

4. Cultural limitations. The denaturing of the human condition

For human life, it is not just important to accept physical limits; almost all human activities are linked to rules that do not just limit activity but on many occasions make activity possible, precisely because they limit it. Let us look at some significant cases to analyse their educational scope.

4.1. Language

The first of these areas, and perhaps the most paradigmatic, is language. Human languages are subject to strict rules that allow linguistic expression. Knowing these rules, whether tacitly or explicitly, is a *precondition* for complex communication. One of the typical paradoxes of human liberty is thus manifested in the possibilities of using language: rules, precisely because they constrain and restrict us, are a condition of possibility for speech. It is, therefore, worth saying this clearly, especially in teaching. The typical school tasks of a few years ago, the traditional activities of correcting essays or dictations and looking at spelling mistakes, are not absurd activities that restrict freedom of expression and creativity but rather are aimed precisely at permitting them, as for a long time now we have known that there can be no correct expression without a thorough limitation first, as shown in this remark by a primary school teacher from 1910:

The child will only be asked to express his thoughts in writing when, through notions of grammar and syntax, he has been given the means to do so as correctly as possible. Until the fourth year, the beginner will not be asked for any manifestation of personality or of originality, which would just be verbosity and mimicry (In Château, 2017, p. 313).

In this case, as with the study of musical language needed to play an instrument, rules, limits, allow for the development of *new forms of expression* that do not appear in pure unworked spontaneity.

But there is something more important: these rules of language are not to be seen as accessories or interchangeable elements, as clothes for dressing a doll might be, but instead their *foundation* originates in and is guided by the human aspiration to understand reality. It is clear that the desire to understand does not free us from possible errors, as history shows. But what we want to emphasise at this moment is that using rules of language enables us to communicate, and, above all, they express our *human way of being in the world*. This is important for our educational argument; when a rule expresses an obligation or limit in a specific learning situation, this obligation or limit is not just an institutional “regulatory rule” or one of limited practical application which is consequently interchangeable in any way or even dispensable with regards to the very fact of the obligation. On the contrary, it corresponds to a *prior rational* consideration about the desirability of *something* for the development of the human being. The norm, rule, or limit in question aims to regulate this *something*, with more or less success, but the regulation sought par excellence, as Hadjadj has observed (2016, p. 40), involves recognising that we are trying to find the best way of adjusting to a “given order”, not the best way of shuffling an “available fund” at our whim, depending on the interests of whoever holds power. Therefore, keeping or breaking a promise, for example, is not merely a linguistic or expressive game. “Recognising something as a duty, an obligation or a necessity already entails recognising that we have a reason to do something that is independent of our inclinations at that moment” (Searle, 2006, pp. 102-103).

4.2. Play

Play is one of those fields which, when observed from a superficial perspective, seems to be opposed to rules and is often linked with the highest levels of creativity as it lacks limitations, especially so-called free play. So, in current pedagogical literature, we find ideas like the following:

Educational play should not be excessively rigid or predefined because this would not leave room for the imagination. However suitable a game might be, if it inhibits all initiative, as the rules are clearly defined, we turn play into a mere instrument (Jiménez & Muñoz, 2012, pp. 1103-1104).

There are several errors here similar to the ones we saw above with regards to the restrictive perspective on rules in language. First of all, the limits of play, as well as most of human activities, should not just be seen as boundaries external to them, in other words, focussing only on what we *cannot* do, but instead focussing on the expansion or internal opening that creates possibilities for acting from within the limits or rules of the game itself. Therefore, Gadamer believes that:

The rules and instructions that prescribe the implementation of the ludic space are the essence of a game... The playing space in which the game takes place is bounded by the game itself from within, and is limited much more by the order that determines the movement of the game than by that which the game collides with, in other words, by the boundaries of the free space that limit movement from the outside (Gadamer, 1977, p. 150).

Let us consider the following case. Imagine we lend a chess set to a pair of children aged 8 or 10 who do not know the rules and we ask them to play with the board and figures. They will probably entertain themselves for a good while, in their own way, but it is unlikely they will get as much from it as they would if they knew the strict rules of chess, possibilities which, in addition, would be with them for *their whole life* at any age, and wherever and with whoever they might be.

Therefore, it is not exactly true that the human imagination—that of children and that of adults—develops most fruitfully outside any limitation or rule. On the contrary, the imagination develops much better in well-regulated settings. These are the ones that let us *go to the other side*, literally, push boundaries, cross limits, change the rules, place ourselves in the margins. In any case, “the imagination considered in its suspensive function produces the break with the order of the real” (Ricoeur, 2009, p. 30). In other words, the source of imagination is always the real.

There are other interesting aspects it is worth emphasising in our educational argument. Effectively, the limitations or rules of a game can have a vital expansive effect in two directions because, on the one hand, as Huizinga notes (2007, p. 25) the player has to test “his bodily strength, his stamina, his ingenuity, his courage, his endurance and also his spiritual strengths, because, in the midst of his desire to win the game, he has to stay within the rules, of what is allowed in it”. And on the other

hand, the player “cannot abandon himself to the freedom of his own pleasure unless he transforms the objectives of his behaviour into mere tasks from the game” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 151).

What is the pedagogical scope of these reflections? Establishing as an educational norm the idea that students learning to comply with a meaningful sequence of actions—a set of rules or limits that they have not imposed and that they cannot modify to their preferences at the outset—is better at setting educational conditions for future education than an approach that seeks to eliminate, downplay or even ridicule any type of limits or rules.

4.3. Ecology

Ecology is another area where we can see the extraordinary significance for the development of human life and coexistence of the importance of limits, norms and rules in a similar way to what we have explained thus far.

The loss of direction—material and moral—in industrialised societies is accompanied by and has a feedback relationship with a worrying phenomenon of *loss of limits*, whether we are talking about ecology and biotechnology, or human reproduction and economics. Conversely, technoscience can only be reappropriated in a human social order (that is to say, tailored to the human being) *if we collectively learn to delimit, draw up and preserve the limits that are of vital importance*.

This learning refers to *qualitative limits*: we have to redefine *notions of development, progress, quality of life and the “good life”* [...].

Recognising limits means —among other things— moving from childhood to adulthood. On this we agree: on the work of *building industrial societies that are culturally and morally adult* (Riechman, 2005, pp. 46-47; italics in the original).

Two ideas can be drawn from this quote. Firstly, human beings can recognise the constrictions on our behaviour in relation to the environment. Limitations that derive from knowledge of the laws that apply to its functioning. But, having said this, it is striking how our society accepts limitations, often even unquestioningly, in this field when, as we have seen above and will see below, it rejects the concept of limits in more profoundly anthropological areas. How is it possible that the acceptance, promotion and establishment of limits in the field of ecology is seen as so obvious and necessary but not in other areas of human reality? Perhaps because only what is previously considered natural and is not subject to or dependent on culture is generally regarded as being subject to limits, hence why the concept of human nature is not accepted nowadays and so we are witnessing a process of progressive denaturing of the human condition, something which is not neutral and which influences the very development of the current environmental consciousness. However, what makes it possible to read more effectively the limits that should shape our relationship with the environment is a correct reading of human nature without falling into the conceit of environmentalism. In effect, the most radical current environmental trends, as they derive from an absolute draining of the human condition, are incapable of responding to the primacy

of human beings over other species, even going so far as to criticise any type of experimentation on animals as speciesism or justifying violence to defend animals (Llorente, 2016).

4.4. The Internet

There are many studies that show the negative effects of an absence of clear and well-maintained limits or rules, not just in childhood but in the different stages of human development (Hoeve, Dubas, Gerris, van der Laan, & Smeenk, 2011), such as a tendency towards depression, among other outcomes (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007). One particular case, which has been widely studied, although there is clearly still much work to be done owing to its newness, is the effects of the Internet on the cultivation of attention, dispersing it, affecting mood, and creating dependency both in adolescence and in adult life (Pontes, Kuss, & Griffiths, 2015; Carr, 2011, 2014). The fact is that complex work and attention cannot appear without rules.

We're happiest when we're absorbed in a difficult task, a task that has clear goals and that challenges us not only to exercise our talents but to stretch them. [...] Our usually wayward attention becomes fixed on what we're doing. [...] Such states of deep absorption can be produced by all manner of effort, from laying tile to singing in a choir to racing a dirt bike. [...] More often than not, though, our discipline flags and our mind wanders when we're not on the job. [...] Disengaged from any outward focus, our attention turns inward, and we end up locked in what Emerson called the jail of self-consciousness (Carr, 2014, p. 16).

For philosophical anthropology, this is not a new phenomenon. In this vein, Pieper, speaking of different erroneous ways of looking at reality, refers to the “*evagatio mentis*”, which is highly relevant in this case and has clear effects on the person as sadness or spiritual unease.

This spiritual unease then manifests itself in the flood of idle talk, in loss of control and in the desire to “escape from the walled enclosure of the spirit, to overflow into plurality”, in inner disquiet, in instability, in the impossibility of settling in one place and deciding on one thing; specifically, in what is called insatiable “curiosity” (Pieper, 2003, p. 291).

The defects expressed by Pieper are corrected in traditional anthropology through temperance, the capacity to control desires, which undoubtedly relates both to the limits imposed by restraint and those provided by the recognition of pre-eminence among different desires.

4.5. Sexuality

The last sphere we will analyse is sexuality. In this case, as in the previous ones, but perhaps more exceptionally, questions relating to the very limits of the human condition are unveiled.

In the current stage in the theory of gender, the rejection of limits has even reached sexual identity which is spurned as an oppressive cultural construct because, faced with changing desire, it induces permanence. This is why Butler says:

But doesn't there have to be a set of norms that discriminate between those

descriptions that ought to adhere to the category of women and those that do not? The only answer to that question is a counter-question: who would set those norms, and what contestations would they produce? To establish a normative foundation for settling the question of what ought properly to be included in the description of women would be only and always to produce a new site of political contest. That foundation would settle nothing, but would of its own necessity founder on its own authoritarian ruse (Butler, 1995, p. 50-51).

Any objection to the plural and changing desire of sexual identity and its respective —or not— sexual orientation is, consequently, seen as an attack on freedom, a form of oppression. It is no longer, then, a matter of expanding or modifying the category or limits but rather of directly putting an end to them.

This is not the moment to analyse these approaches in detail, but instead, as in the previous sections, to show the humanising and educational need to think about human sexuality, identity and orientation within limits.

For a start, it is a misunderstanding of the cultural sphere to believe that as human sexuality is shaped by culture, it cannot be subject to any norms or limits, or that any norm or limit in this area is unimportant or interchangeable as it is merely arbitrary. Culture, like language, can reveal aspects of reality but it can also draw a veil over them. Therefore, it is worth considering that some cultures take the wrong paths about what we are. And this is the question we should constantly

be asking ourselves as educators: does our contemporary culture accurately unveil human sexuality or, in contrast, does it obscure relevant aspects? It is likely that today, as in any historical moment, both situations are present.

Nonetheless, it is hard to argue, in a simple strictly formal sense, that if “limits expand us” somehow in all of the areas we have analysed and many more, they do not do so in this one when, as we have argued thus far, it is an anthropological outcome of our human condition and not just a cultural requirement for coexistence. As in other areas of life, from food to physical hygiene, the proposal of ordered normalisation within limits, norms or categories that do not suppress, obviously, their multiple cultural forms of expression, clearly liberates us. On the other hand, it seems that there is a clear limit to the survival of the human species in the fact that “mutual sexual attraction between man and woman is the basis of present and future existence” (Spaemann, 2017, p. 27). Thirdly, it is also hard to think, on the basis of new ideas from gender theory, unless we accept a renewed and confused platonic dualism, that on the one hand there is personal identity —being a person, rational-animal, *homo sapiens sapiens* with all of its *inherent limitations*— and on the other hand that this very identity has a tangential, casual and marginal and non-essential relationship with being male or female (cf. Barrio, 2018). Finally, limits are not actually eliminated, but instead, for some, desire itself is the only norm that can govern us. In that case, faced with the romantic idea that desire is the most authentic

expression of our being and so to reject it is to betray ourselves, René Girard teaches us that all desire is mimetic and social and its supposed autonomy is a fiction. “We idolise liberty, we boast of our autonomy and originality in our relationships and our desire, but that is just a romantic lie; in reality we only desire what others show us and how they desire what they show us” (Barahona, 2014, p. 33).

5. Pedagogical conclusions

We recently heard this anecdote, which happened in a fourth-year Social Education class at our university. After writing a small semantic field for education on the board, the teacher asked all of the students to come up and cross out the terms they thought did not define education or impeded its comprehension and practice. The term crossed out the most was norms. In the same academic year, this time on the pedagogy degree, a teacher who had spent the term explaining the contributions to pedagogy by great educators from history, told us —and we were able to verify this— that, on the sign announcing the end of course activity in which the students were to present the pieces of work they had prepared, the students had put the title “Education without limits”. In our view, something must be happening to pedagogy and our society for this to happen in a Faculty of Education.

As we have seen, rules not only order or regulate an activity *from outside*; they also operate from the human root of the activity itself that arises as an expression of the unique rationality of the human being and its way of being in the world. We

have also shown that rules and limits, precisely by constraining the options for carrying out a given action, enable us to intuit and discern other types of limits, other possibilities—with their corresponding norms—for human development, not always better ones. Consequently, we have also indicated, now more from the perspective of pedagogical anthropology, that the future possibilities for an individual in her way of being and living in the world expand, increase, and develop if, during her family, school, and social growth, she has lived in a *space constrained by limits and norms* that allows her to feel sufficiently secure to start a process of critical assimilation of the heritage received. Reality and its different possibilities for valuation is understood much better when starting *from a perspective* that is relatively closed, with limits and norms regarding received tradition (Giussani, 2012). Educating is, then, knowing how to choose limits for the other, for those people you educate, so that they subsequently know how to assume their own ones. Limits are the only possibility for being and so delimiting proposals for good and bad, seeking clarity about what is desirable and undesirable and applying the consequences for teaching is an essential educational task. Establishing as an educational norm the idea that students learning to comply with a meaningful sequence of actions—a set of rules or limits that they have not imposed and that they cannot modify to their preferences at the outset—is better at setting educational conditions for future education than an approach that seeks to eliminate, downplay or even ridicule any type of limits or rules.

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