Kohlberg's moral education proposal and its legacy at university: present and future

La propuesta de educación moral de Kohlberg y su legado en la universidad: actualidad y prospectiva

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Abstract:

Kohlberg's theory about the development of moral judgement is regarded as being very important in educational practice. This article addresses his legacy and his influence in the current educational setting, especially at university level. It will also try to note possible criticisms and misinterpretations of his ideas. To this end, relevant literature relating to the author will be analysed and discussed. There are two areas of the current university pedagogical model that draw on Kohlberg as a source: an increase in methodologies that address ethical dilemmas and the idea of bringing the university closer to reality, promoting it as a community service. The article concludes with a discussion of possible deficiencies resulting from Kohlberg's theories. Areas discussed include the current approach to university education in terms of competencies, the pursuit of utility as a trend in university pedagogy, and the importance of understanding cultural formation linked to moral education and the vital system of community ideas.

Keywords: moral education, moral development, role of teachers, competency-based education, university.

Resumen:

La teoría del desarrollo del juicio moral de Kohlberg ha tenido una gran importancia en la práctica educativa. Este artículo aborda el legado e influencia de Kohlberg en el contexto educativo actual, especialmente universitario. Además tratará de señalar las posibles críticas y malas interpretaciones que de dichas ideas se hayan realizado. Esto se llevará a cabo mediante el análisis y discusión de bibliografía relevante sobre el autor. En el caso del modelo pedagógico vigente en la universidad hay dos aspectos que beben de la fuente kohlberiana: el incremento de las metodologías que abordan dilemas éticos y la idea de acercar la universidad a la reali-

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dad, fomentando que sea un servicio a la comunidad. El artículo concluye señalando las posibles contrariedades que se derivan de ello. Así se discute el planteamiento actual de la formación universitaria en términos de competencias, la búsqueda de la utilidad como tendencia de la pedagogía universitaria y la importancia de entender la formación cultural ligada a la educación moral y al sistema vital de las ideas de una comunidad.

Descriptores: educación moral, desarrollo moral, rol del docente, educación basada en las competencias, universidad.

1. Introduction

The impact of Kohlberg's theory can be gauged by how often his articles are cited in academic works. Kohlberg has a total of 116 publications: 12 books, 45 contributions to joint works, 3 entries in encyclopaedias, and 56 academic articles (Pérez Delgado, Frías, and Pons, 1988). His work was frequently cited in the early 1980s: 526 times in 1980, 545 in 1981, and 502 in 1982. His theory attracted great interest because schools in the United States were looking for a model for transmitting values, something they found in his indirect neutral model based on the idea of the student's interaction with the environment (Ryan, 1992). While many recent academic works have shown an interest in Kohlberg (Robles, 2013; Gibbs, 2014; Díaz Serrano, 2015; Zizek, Garz, and Nowak, 2015; González Córcoles, 2017), the initial impact of his approach appears to have diminished in recent years. This article sets out to examine Lawrence Kohlberg and his thinking and locate them in the context of current university educational practice, a topic that has perhaps been somewhat forgotten in later discussion of his approach. Therefore, it will, on the one hand, comprise a reflection on the ideas that his theory provides and their reception in the world of education, especially university education, and, on the other hand, criticisms of his approach and its future in the university context will be considered.

2. Lawrence Kohlberg in the social and educational context of the United States in the second half of the 20th century

The topic of moral education has been of concern in all eras and in recent decades interest in it has increased. Kohlberg, who is now regarded as the most important figure of recent years in the field of moral development, came to prominence in the 20th century. The originality of his thought, and his capacity to bring together his knowledge of different disciplines (psychology, philosophy, etc.) make him the most influential researcher in this area. His early experience in Europe with the Holocaust and as a volunteer with Jewish refugees probably shaped his life and his educational and philosophical thinking. Kohlberg's thought must therefore be situated in the educational, historical, and social context of the second

half of the 20th century. This will help to understand its reception in the academic world, especially the university setting, this article's area of interest.

As stated above, the moral education of new generations has been a constant concern in educational practice. Throughout history a variety of currents have tried to answer the question of how people acquire moral attitudes and habits. Two main focuses can be identified in recent years: on the one hand, the conventional school of thought, and, on the other, the values clarification movement. In the former, the learner internalises a series of values of the society she lives in through the socialisation process. In this system, moral education would be based on presenting values based on tradition. This normative approach, based on assimilating values, is typical of currents such as character education or social learning theory. In the early 1970s, the values clarification focus appeared in reaction to this position with the idea that each person decides on her own values for herself (Fernández Herrero, 1993). This focus began with the publication of the book *Values and Teaching* by Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1966), influenced by the oeuvre of John Dewey. This is a focus that appeared in the setting of the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, a period of profound social and political change. It aims to emphasise a neutral attitude by asserting that there is no objective foundation for morals. Teachers do not teach values but instead their function is to encourage children to clarify their own values, thus avoiding any attempt at indoctrination, a fear that partly underlay criticisms of character education. Moral education thus presents an individualist vision based around simple personal choice, underscoring moral relativism (Naval, 2000).

The cognitive-evolutionary focus, which Kohlberg is part of, is a counterpart to these two schools of thought. In this school of thought, morality is rational, in other words, it is based on rational principles and is the heir of the Kantian moral tradition. For this reason, the autonomy of the subject is sought. At the same time, just as Naval (2000) states, rational principles will be universal and so react to the relativism of schools of thought such as values clarification. Kohlberg's oeuvre and thinking are therefore located within the cognitive-evolutionary focus in moral education, where the development of moral judgement has a fundamental role. In this model, the subject is expected to progress from one stage of moral judgement to another higher one. The task of moral education is, in this case, to make this ascent possible through the appropriate strategies and techniques for promoting moral reflection. Kohlberg's research (1987) discusses three levels of moral development (pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional level), with two stages each. These stages are universal in all cultures and traditions. According to Fuentes (2013), the final stage is the highest point of development and maturity and is the same for all human beings. The individual successively moves from one stage to another successively without moving backwards. Kohlberg thus underlines the importance of moral judgement and of stimulation in post-conventional stages.

This theory is rooted in liberalism, where the person is a complete reality in itself, the source of her rights. It is not, therefore, a matter of acquiring the moral values of the society one lives in, but of developing students' moral judgement through moral dilemmas. The sources of this theory are Kant, Dewey, and Piaget. Kant maintains that the person is autonomous and acts morally when responding to her conscience. Dewey's influence above all lies in the idea of education as development, here applied to moral education. He presents three levels of moral development, in the last of which the individual decides what is moral independently of the group (Dewey, 1975, 1998). Kohlberg's theory, in contrast, is deeply rooted in Piaget's thinking. For Piaget, moral judgement is a cognitive process that develops naturally; he refers to stages in moral development and regards moral education as the move from one mental structure to another more developed one (Piaget, 1987). According to Goñi (1998), in Kohlberg's historical and academic context there starts to be a greater receptiveness to Piaget's theories, obviously because of his growing influence, but above all, because it is understood that regarding morality as the result of unconscious processes or processes from social learning leads to relativism. Given the historical and political climate of that era, this led to positions that were hard to justify. Kohlberg was one of the many American psychologists who returned to Piaget's work and built on it.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development has been the target of a variety of criticisms, some which are listed below because of their importance for the objective of this work, namely to examine its academic reception in the university world and relating this reception to its subsequent legacy.

One of the most important criticisms relates to the formalism of Kohlberg's approach, given that it ignores the emotional and affective aspects that are present in moral actions. Furthermore, Kohlberg also rejects the teaching of content in moral education, regarding it as an obstacle to the development of the autonomy of moral judgement. These two criticisms were made by Peters (1984), who asserts the emotional and affective elements of any moral action. Peters also notes the shortcomings of the Kohlberg's position regarding content in moral education, as he avoids the task of acquiring habits, which he considers to be opposed to the development of the autonomy of the subject. Peters specifically notes that the last two of Kohlberg's stages comprise the «bag of virtues» he rejects (such as justice, for example).

Another group of criticisms are those made by his disciple Carol Gilligan (1977, 1982) and by Noddings (1984) based on the ethics of feminist care. These authors identify the need to reclaim the domain of care, traditionally linked to the moral identity of women. Following these criticisms, Kohlberg added an Aristotelian perspective, complementing the formalist dimension, and spoke of a new moral principle, responsible love, care, directing his attention to particular everyday settings (Gozálvez and Jover, 2016).

We find additional criticisms made by communitarian thinkers. The so-called liberal-communitarian debate also occurred in the educational sphere (Mulhall and Swift, 1996). Kohlberg's thinking, as we have seen, is rooted in an individualist vision. It does not reject the social and communitarian dimension, but it does subordinate it to individual development. Support for moral autonomy is the predominant idea in the so-called discussion of dilemmas. Kohlberg attempted to enrich this vision with his later Just School approach, following the criticisms of his theory, and after his experiences in the kibbutzim in Israel that underlined the value of belonging to a group in moral growth. In the Just School he attempted to propose an educational model that would facilitate the democratic governance of the school, in which democracy would be understood as a pathway for experiencing human existence where the educational community openly debates norms and any problems that arise. The idea of the Just Community is understood in the context of the 1970s, when there was a special concern in American society with creating school structures that would encourage decision-making by young people (Elorrieta-Grimalt, 2012). By introducing the idea of the collective, Kohlberg thus recognised the limitations of his theory (Kohlberg and Reimer, 1997).

Despite these criticisms, Bolívar (1987) states that it is also necessary to recognise the virtualities of this approach by Kohlberg: the cognitive element (moral judgement) is a pre-requisite for conscious moral action, and it is what can most easily be worked on in the academic context of a class, respecting moral autonomy (p. 405).

Consequently, this article will provide a brief overview of the historical, social, and academic setting in which Kohlberg developed his most important research into the moral development of the person. These reflections had a strong echo in the field of moral education, at the same time that the main criticism of his theory was appearing. The reception of Kohlberg's approach in academic practice will be considered below, along with its consequences in the educational sphere.

3. Kohlberg's reception in educational practice

Kohlberg and his theory of the development of moral judgement have had a notable influence on educational practice, in schools and universities, despite not formulating a pedagogic theory. This influence, which in the middle of the last century was truly revolutionary, has mainly affected the current pedagogical model in universities, since Kohlberg's popularity as a Harvard professor meant that many university teachers were interested in his approach. The question is why Kohlberg attained worldwide fame. Gordillo (1992) claims that this is because Kohlberg's thinking is very systematic. Similarly, DeVries (1991) states that Kohlberg achieved something important in making research on moral development into a part of education, a matter that had previously been belittled as a subject worthy of being taught.

The theory of cognitive development certainly caught the attention of the ed-

ucational community, but its success was not as prominent, probably because Piaget and his disciples attempted a moralised psychology while Kohlberg tried to psychologise morality (Lapsley and Narváez, 2005). The truly novel thing that captivated university teachers is that Kohlberg proposed morality as a fundamental topic in evolutionary psychology, thus reconciling moral psychology and moral philosophy (Lapsley and Narváez, 2005).

There is no question that it is fair to thank him for having created a new sensitivity towards ethical education at school (Ryan, 1992). His approach also appealed to teachers because it presented education as progress when suggesting moral development as the aim of education (Kohlberg and Rochelle, 1972). What stands out is that Kohlberg creates a systematic framework for progress towards attaining the virtue of justice, put forward as the aim of educational work (Elorrieta-Grimat, 2012). In this area, Kohlberg's merit lies in his having been able to develop a systematic theory of human activity, providing a means suitable to be pedagogically teached. As such, his contribution lies in combining a philosophy of justice with a systematised psychological theory to be applied as a moral education programme (Escámez, 1991). Furthermore, Kohlberg presented his theory with a serious and attractive conceptual foundation, facilitating its positive reception in the university setting (Mesa, 2012).

Kohlberg's theory is a search for the universality of the moral norm to avoid ethical relativism, ultimately attempting to solve the individual and social relativity of values (Nuevalos, 1997). According to Nuevalos, this universality is not guaranteed by the content of the norm, but by the structure of moral judgement. This explains how his theory of stages as a process for moral development is an attempt to justify this universality. The universal nature of the norm requires us to accept that moral development is based on the cognitive-biological development of each human being, as only in that way can Kohlberg guarantee that moral development is identical for all human beings.

Kohlberg's notable influence can be seen in four areas of education: firstly, in a type of teaching based on incentivising learning that contrasts with traditional education based on knowledge transfer through memorising content; secondly, the role of teachers is modified because their function is no longer to instil values, but instead to help construct them; thirdly, the appearance of a new pedagogical methodology, based on the use of moral dilemmas in the classroom, anchored in reflection and dialogue as a communication technique to encourage interpersonal interaction in this way; fourthly, the educational relationship between the teacher and the student ceases to be hierarchical because the teacher is neutral and must not adopt a superior position towards the student, given that his educational task is to stimulate learning, thus staving off possible accusations of indoctrination.

The teaching that underpins Kohlberg's moral education is not based on teaching a moral code presented as content, since this course of action would involve neglecting reflection and the student's critical spirit. Kohlberg proposes a

formal education because he upholds that Piaget's distinction between what *is* (heteronomous morality) and what *should be* (autonomous morality) implies that the change in moral conduct requires modifying moral and logical structures (García, 1998). Accordingly, the expected result of moral education is the autonomy of the subject who cannot be uncoupled from the responsibility to do good.

The rejection of content transfer involves losing the sense of character education because educating for acquiring habits entails non-reflexive and unconscious behaviour. Kohlberg disparages Aristotelian virtue, ridiculing the ineffectiveness of this teaching with his famous reference to a *bag of virtues*[1] regarding the ineffectiveness of transmitting moral content. Instead, he argues that doing good is a consequence of developing moral judgements about the goodness of an action. Kohlberg not only sees moral judgement as a necessary condition for doing good, but, according to his theory, it is even sufficient for doing good. In reference to this, Linde (2009) states that Kohlberg errs on the side of excessive anthropological optimism. Kohlberg's theory can be criticised as, if an individual makes a good moral judgement, it does not necessarily follow that her/his conduct will match this judgement. This loss of content as teaching material entails a change in the figure of the teacher, as in-depth knowledge of what is to be transmitted is no longer essential.

To some extent, Kohlberg contributed to modifying didactic methodology by shifting pedagogical interest from the lecture to reflection and dialogue. The question is whether this undervaluation of content really involved a methodological change in other fields of knowledge, both in the university sphere and at the school level. Nonetheless, this model of moral education that entails a need to modify teaching methods has acted as a reference point for new pedagogical theories that focus more on *know-how* than on *knowledge*.

Kohlberg (1976) maintains that to follow principles it is necessary to understand them. Therefore, the purpose of education is not to convince through arguments because the child must learn with experiences she herself has created. In this sense, Dewey (1975) affirmed that it is important to know what to do and how to do it. Kohlberg postulates that to do good, it is necessary to know how to do it rather than knowing what to do. His theory is based on doing rather than knowing, in other words, what relates to the competence-based character of learning. It could, to some degree, be claimed that Kohlberg's approach is a precursor to competence-based education.

With Kohlberg the teacher stops being a moral authority because he is required to be neutral (Ryan, 1992). As a consequence of this, Kohlberg rejects the direct teaching of values, proposing an indirect and essentially neutral model. The role of the teacher is modified because he now must inspire a capacity for independent development in the students through critical debate (Buxarrais, 1992). Nonetheless, if the teacher stops being a moral model, this will affect his commitment to the truth, as he will not be clear about what it is he is to teach. In this sense,

> It is not a matter of teachers *imposing* their values. There is no room for authoritarianism. That said, neither is there space for false neutrality or for indifference, and therefore the importance of an education that encourages reflection on what is a life worth living is increasingly insisted upon, something that requires social dialogue to determine the objectives and methods that should be promoted in the school to reach the goal (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017, p. 147).

Kohlberg contributes to methodological change in education with regards to the traditional model. His methodological contribution, based on use of moral dilemmas in a cognitive conflict introduced to the university sphere a question about what the most appropriate methodology would be. In this sense, Kohlberg's methodology was novel. It rejected the technique of analysing values in works of literature since he saw this as a way of embodying the transmission of certain specific values (Ryan, 1992). While it is true that Kohlberg does not directly propose interest as a driver of learning, it is implicit as he advocates stimulating the child's active thought (Santolaria and Jordán, 1987). Kohlberg states that the subject does not internalise social rules, but rather constructs new moral structures (Nuevalos, 1997), confirming that his thinking is based on the constructivist theory of learning, the true foundation of methodological change.

The fourth key is the relationship between teachers and students. The relationship between the teacher and the student is not hierarchical in Kohlberg, as the teacher does not have this position because he knows more than the student, but instead because he stimulates learning. Therefore Buxarrais (1992) affirms that Kohlberg's theory lies in maximising interactions between peers and student-teacher interaction through the proposed teaching methodology. It is vital for the teacher to create an atmosphere of trust that encourages the students' moral development (Palomo, 1989).

This reception of Kohlberg in educational practice has been essential in university education. Nonetheless, some possible deficiencies regarding this influence can be noted.

4. Applying Kohlberg in university education: potential deficiencies

The official documents that shape the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) call on universities to adapt to the reality in which they are located, and these institutions, for their part, have not ignored this way of thinking and have accepted it. Works such as that by UNESCO's prestigious Institute for Educational Planning reflect this (Onushkin, 1973). Over 150 universities from all over the world stated, as long ago as the 1970s, that they had over fifteen priority activities: reorganising existing syllabuses and implementing new ones; designing university extension courses; preparing teaching material, essentially to use the new information and communication technologies; working shoulder to shoulder with the government in power; meeting the training demands of industry; and, educationally speaking, not ignoring their local communities, are

some of them. Everything indicates that the number of activities will grow as the years pass. It could be said that university education has become deeply integrated the value and social utility that it is claimed it should guarantee (Bok, 1986), that it remains attentive to the changes in professions that the current neoliberal context involves (Gibbs, 2001; Olssen and Peters, 2005), and that university pedagogy is becoming ever more active and participatory (Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall, 2009). The EHEA replaces a discipline-based educational model with a model focussing on the student (Karseth, 2006). As some research notes, in relation to the last two aspects, this type of action appears to enhance cognitive, competence, and intellectual development (Cookson, 2010).

The question is little different when it comes to the field that really concerns us, that of moral education, ethics, citizenship, humanistics, of character, of what points to the student's growth as a person (Berkowitz, 2012). In this aspect, for example, two pedagogical measures have been taken: on the one hand, the number and variety of methodologies that address moral questions or ethical dilemmas have been increased (Sloam, 2008), and, on the other hand, the university has come closer to reality, with the intention that learning should be a service to the community, and that the community is understood as a place from which one can learn, especially from a moral perspective (Martínez, 2008). That said, this reality that draws on Kohlberg in many senses, is not without possible deficiencies. Three are set out below.

Firstly, university education in recent years has been reformulated in terms of competencies and these have, principally, been grouped into cognitive, instrumental, and personal ones (González and Wagenaar, 2003). This approach maintains a close relationship with the approach of Lawrence Kohlberg (1985a) who, from his doctoral thesis onwards, strongly influenced by the cognitive theory of Jean Piaget (1964), proposes moral development by stages. Kohlberg's contribution and the substitute Kohlberg-style approaches not only represent a way of conceiving the morphology or making of moral development, or of approaching this development based on diverse educational strategies among which moral dilemmas stand out (Kohlberg, 1985b), but they also symbolise a philosophical meaning of this development; Kohlberg's legacy is the translation of the liberal tradition to the field of education, as according to him, «the paragon of moral development was an autonomous person who could justify moral judgments from an impartial point of view» (Sanderse, 2014, p. 390). Nonetheless, this approach, poses at least three problems.

The first concerns what could be called the finitude of personal competencies in general, and moral ones in particular, something that could not be applied to technical or cognitive competencies. The competence to comprehend a text, manipulate a microscope, draw up a blueprint, or construct a winch, among others, has a beginning and an end, but competence in dialogue, honour, responsibility, or so many others that could be mentioned, are processes that never conclude, in

other words, attaining them is a process that continues through each individual's personal existence. These are long term, questions that occupy the individual all through her life and are usually identified with what for years now has been known as «lifelong learning». Trying to squeeze a limitless objective into a limited and increasingly constrained process is problematic.

The second obstacle concerns the enunciation of ethical and moral competencies. As currently formulated, these have a considerable degree of generality and so put pressure on different aspects of the university educational process, ranging from proposing a syllabus to evaluating these competencies, and including how they are handled in the educational encounter between teachers and students. Competences in dialogue, for example, must be defined in some way as this can easily be conflated with a mere exchange of opinions; it is very debatable whether a student skilled in dialogue is one who systematically displays thoughts, feelings, and emotions, or instead is one who barely participates and goes unnoticed. The former might increasingly move away from a balanced, reasoned, and constructive dialogue, while the latter approaches it little by little.

The third of these problems is a consequence of the previous two. The ongoing nature of personal competencies and their current commonality could combine to foster the impulse and establishment of moral autonomy. If a moral competence is something that is never fully attained and depends on each individual's life experience, it is also something that ends up being left in the hands of personal autonomy. And if it is also something that exists in the common realm and allows multiple interpretations, it is also something that ends up being entrusted to the self-control that every individual imposes, according to her views or ways of reasoning. All of this leads to the situation in which we now are, in our opinion, where the student proceeds through the moral competencies with a degree of autonomy that allows her to decide and choose how to orient herself before them or even whether she wants to tackle them.

This fact brings to the table a different question than the one raised by Kohlberg's educational models, or, to put it another way, it raises the need for a model of development of the virtuous character or an Aristotelian model of moral development in the university (Sherman, 1989; Kristjánsson, 2007). This model can clarify how one comes to be a member of the university community and a virtuous person, something that constructivist models of moral development take for granted but do not actually explain; unlike the other model, this one can suggest that moral development is not an independent development, but a complex combination of aptitudes and virtues that overlap with other types of development such as emotional, intellectual, or cultural. Finally, this model can clarify something that contemporary moral education has not managed to solve, namely, how mature people attain the plenitude of the moral stage they are in and progresses to the next one.

The second deficiency is that current university pedagogy has followed paths that represent a particular movement

that could be regarded as productive planning or profitable programming. Little of what currently happens in the setting of university education is not exhaustively planned and organised with the objective of taking care of a student who needs and demands a series of types of attention. Despite the successes achieved, this has led to a particular trend; university pedagogy is increasingly dedicated to utility, and to the respect for personal autonomy that this search needs to be effective and efficient. Nonetheless, university pedagogy must also serve another type of university education, one that we have come to refer to as moral excellence. From this perspective, university education enters into the specifically human domain. In this domain, university pedagogy does not set in motion relatively human actions, which, as García Morente notes (2012), are a means for achieving other things, including all of those that nature might provide, and that guarantee individual benefit or advantage. There is no space for technical actions here but instead those others that are an end in themselves, in other words, typically human ones, ones that are moral. In this sense, university education is education in the desire to be a moral person, to strive for the moral high ground, regardless of whether one reaches this peak or stays in the foothills.

Students and teachers should be able to understand clearly the moral domain they are really in, and where we are heading together. This demands serious implementation work, an effective embodiment of what university education is for in a moral sense. It also requires the previous process of ascertaining how to be a university community, in other words, the embodiment we refer to should be envisaged as a means rather than an end. Paraphrasing MacIntyre (1987), university education has a connection to the virtues, all of those qualities that once acquired allow the individual to attain the internal benefits of the practices in which she participates. This means that university education can be approached in several varied ways, but not in all possible ways.

The third and final deficiency is that claiming that contemporary university education is a cultural formation is not new or unusual. Nonetheless, this is a claim that permits different meanings. It can be claimed that university education is the heir to a magnificent and extraordinary tradition, a legacy of ideas, manifestations, and productions that must be conserved with the greatest possible care and transmitted from generation to generation. However, this is a statement that it has never been easy to uphold, and is usually overcome by another way of thinking, namely that the function performed by the classics can also be done by modern and contemporary sources, in other words, the ideas, manifestations, and productions presented by the latter can be just as valid as those ones the former provided. Today it is more effective and useful to come down from the shoulders of giants and set off in search of the new (Bacon, 2004). Scientists and technicians are the basis of the university as an institution, and consequently, direct and organise the education this institution provides. This question is not insignificant:

> This has entailed a transformation in the ethos of the academic himself. Before, it comprised awareness of a special responsibility. This not only meant that their results had to be correct, for otherwise a machine somewhere might explode, but it also related to the concept of research and truth as such, and their importance for the integrity of existence in general (Guardini, 2012, p. 47).

All of this has had a considerable influence on contemporary university education, insofar as a particular situation has been established; discovering and comprehending the world, the signature mission of university education, requires science, technique, and, therefore, objectivity. It is necessary for the person, as a person, to retire to a safe distance when approaching this process of discovery, so that they do not become too involved or too committed personally speaking. This leads us to at least two observations. In our opinion, cultural formation is moral education and, therefore, the risks of leaving this education in the hands of the student's personal and autonomous choice are too high. When we refer to cultural formation we mean both its prescriptive dimension —the appropriation of the best that has been said and done throughout the history of humankind— and its descriptive dimension —the acquisition of the structure of cultural knowledge and understanding. These two dimensions cannot be separated when the aim is for the student to absorb the vital system of the ideas of a community and of its historical setting, ideas that can be both archaic and current. We call this a vital system because they are ideas, beliefs, and approaches that have a life, in that they give shape to a moral ego, an ego that describes and comprehends itself thanks to them, and they situate the student in a position, as Taylor states (1994), to discover her own authenticity. Furthermore, and no less importantly, it re-evaluates the utility of those types of knowledge that today, for many reasons, are depicted as useless (Ordine, 2013). We should not ignore what some thinkers have suggested: that the less a type of knowledge can be justified in terms of utility and tangible benefits or according to a market price or share price, the higher its humanising level (Adorno, 2005).

The second observation concerns the role of university teachers. In this case we find something that strengthens the teacher's personal connection with students and the supply of moral resources. The university teacher is laid open, assuming that his principal task is for the students to manage to outstrip him, for them to be different to him. This is what the teacher's human and moral lessons comprise (Steiner, 2004).

The EHEA undeniably encourages teachers to be more open, participatory, and attentive with their students. However, this concept, that has not been neglected by the great majority of university teachers, and that has also been lauded by many of them, may have entered a phase where it is out of control. It could currently work against those teachers who, beyond being friends with their students, seek elevation and intellectual depth and do not wish to play down the importance of non-practical and useless questions of their field of knowledge. In other words, teachers who wish to stand alongside the

ideas that are clearly the ones they regard as best for their students.

Notes

[1] This was particularly criticised by R. S. Peters (1984). *Desarrollo moral y educación moral*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

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