Please, show me your world! A sophistical practice of teaching[1]

Por favor, ¡muéstrame tu mundo! Una práctica sofística de la enseñanza

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Abstract

This paper explores how education and teaching is or can be a sophistical practice. It takes inspiration from Cassin's readings of the sophists, Rorty's critique of Platonian philosophy, as well as Rancière's understanding of teaching as linking different worlds. The paper develops in detail what makes teaching a process of democratisation based on a sophistical discursive practice. The paper also develops a precise critique of the Platonian/Aristotelian line of thought within education through the work of Cassin and Jaeger. It shows how Platonian/Aristotelian thought establishes a foundational pattern of domination over education by philosophy and other disciplines. Such 'scientistic educational theory' is shown to link man and state through a socio-psychic pattern aiming at the perfection of both. The article is making problematic the original and patriarchal social scene at the heart of such theory and intends to replace such image with 'the mixture'; of interaction people in the everydayness of liveable life instead as the starting point for educational thought and practice. The insight shared with Arendt, that we live in an irreducible plurality of other people that are different from us and that we, therefore, need education and teaching to

find out 'how to move' with and among others is developed in full in this paper. The paper concludes by making a case for a liveable life for all as that which motivates education and teaching to be something else than domination and control.

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo la educación y la enseñanza son o pueden ser una práctica sofística. Se inspira en las lecturas que Cassin hace de los sofistas, en la crítica de Rorty a la filosofía platónica, así como en cómo comprende Rancière la enseñanza como la unión de diferentes mundos. El artículo desarrolla en detalle qué es lo que hace de la enseñanza un proceso de democratización basado en una práctica discursiva sofística. El artículo también desarrolla una crítica precisa de la línea de pensamiento platónico-aristotélico dentro de la educación a través del trabajo de Cassin y Jaeger. Muestra cómo el pensamiento platónico-aristotélico establece un patrón fundamental de dominación sobre la educación por parte de la filosofía y otras disciplinas. Se muestra que esta "teoría de la educación cientificista" vincula al ser humano y al estado a través de un patrón socio-psicológico que busca el perfeccionamiento de ambos. El artículo problematiza el escenario social original y patriarcal que se encuentra en el centro de dicha teoría y tiene la intención de reemplazar tal imagen con la de "la mezcla" y la interacción de las personas en la cotidianidad de la vida vivible, como punto de partida para el pensamiento y la práctica educativos. El artículo aborda la idea, compartida con Arendt, de que vivimos en una pluralidad irreductible de otras personas que son diferentes a nosotros y que, por lo tanto, necesitamos educación y enseñanza para descubrir "cómo movernos" con y entre otros. El artículo concluye defendiendo una vida digna para todos como aquello que mueve a la educación y la enseñanza a ser algo más que dominación y control.

Introduction

In this paper, teaching is explored as a sophistical practice, through a close reading of particularly Barbara Cassin's (2014, 2016), Werner Jaeger's (1939, 1943), Richard Rorty's (1980, 1982, 1990), and Jacques Rancière's (1991, 2007) work, among others.

The paper is mainly an exploration guided by three questions; firstly, how come that Sophist educational thought, so crucial for the very birth of western democratic culture as we know it, is dominated by philosophy and other disciplines? Secondly, what consequences, or effects, does such domination have for the possibility of a Sophist educational tradition of thought and practice today? Thirdly, how can teaching as a sophistical practice be reclaimed as a practice (discipline) of democratisation and democratic culture from which it emanates? Those questions serve as direction to the exploration rather than as a demand for a definitive answer. They are as such part of a larger project of reclaiming educational thought and practice, to which I am contributing (Todd, 2009; Säfström and Biesta, 2011; Biesta 2014; Masschelein and Simons 2013; Säfström and Saeverot, 2017; Hodgson *et al.*, 2018; Yosef-Hassidim and Baldachino, 2021).

The first section explores particularly the making of the Sophists as the enemy per preference for philosophy, and the constitution of a Theory of education through a Platonian/Aristotelian domination of educational practice. Such Theory of education is shown to establish the relation between man and state, give meaning to the idea of schooling, and defining teaching as reproduction of an original social scene. The following second section, break away from a Platonian/Aristotelian education Theory and make problematic its foundations in science-based education[2]. In a third section education is discussed as a certain performativity of pedagogy, as pedagogy and education are understood as sophistical practice. In a fourth section, teaching is explored as a sophistical practice of democratisation and some aspects that follow

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[2] With 'science-based education' I will primarily mean educational thought founded on 'science as first philosophy', and formal logic as founded by Aristotle, and today as expressed through positivistic or quasi-positivistic desires. The so called 'evidence-based' movement in the fields of educational research is an example (see Biesta, 2006). I will also mean, as the article develops in detail, any attempts to ground educational thought on 'ontology', in order to argue for (absolute) truth in educational endeavours as science based.

for teaching are developed in detail. Particularly the poetic moment in teaching is examined through the Greek concept of *Kairos*. Here the precise moment of democratisation in teaching is made clear, as well as the exact point at which an Platonian/Aristotelian education turn violent, as well as the nature of such violence. In a fifth concluding section, a sophistical practice of education and teaching is summarised as contributing to a liveable life in democratic culture beyond the *stasis* of Platonian/Aristotelian education (and state).

The making of the Sophists and the subjugation of educational thought and practice

The Sophists are primarily treated in intellectual history, if at all, as orators for the sake of oration without any real attachments to Truth (with capital T), and therefore as excluded from philosophical thought altogether (Cassin, 2014). Traditionally philosophy, in other words, is construed as the radically opposite of what the Sophists taught, and sophism as the very negation of everything that philosophy aspires to be.

From this follows also that since the Sophists introduce educational thought into intellectual history, and as guidence for life in the city-state, philosophy, in order to establish itself as the founders of Truth for its own sake needs to be controlling the teachings of the Sophists. Needs to be securing Truth, by denouncing the Sophists, and by so doing leaving educational thought in a precarious situation. What is created, as will be explored in the following, is a 'logic' in which educational thought always is in need to be paired with other disciplines, controlling the 'half-truths' of educational thought. The domination of philosophy over education signifies straightforward colonialisation of educational thought, motivating, among other things, the need to be taming education.

A similar point is made by Masschelein and Simons (2013) in their studies of schools/education; the Greek *Scholé*, as they explain is a form of equality implicitly public and democratic, therefore: "The taming of the school (…) implies the re-appropriation or re-privatisation of public time, public space and 'common good' made possible by the school", and they suggest that the history of school could be read as "a history of taming; a series of strategies and tactics to dispel, restrain, constrain, neutralise or control the school" (p. 51).

While Masschelein and Simons (2013) develop an argument and analysis in which they specify different ways the school and the teacher are getting tamed through politicisation, pedagogisation and naturalisation, the following will contrast focus on the theoretical ideology[3], in which the taming is made possible. The interest is in teaching, not the teacher, and education, not the school *per see*. What is explored is the very discourse practices[4] establishing this as that, discourse as a reality lived, as embodied discourse (Cherryholmes, 1988). Therefore, and in line with such an approach the taming of educational thought and action is not so much a taming of form, as it is a history of domination of educational thought and practice itself.

According to Werner Jaeger (1939), the subsequent domination over educational thought and practice is prepared for by Plato in his aversion towards the Sophists. With their acceptance of a limited truth within the finitude of living and the experiences of practical life as the bases for thinking and acting, the Sophists challenge Plato's aspirations of establishing philosophical thought as the essence of Truth and as unlimited in its claims. The Sophists challenged philosophy by showing the limits of philosophy: "The doctrine of the sophists is indeed an operator that serves to circumscribe and define the scope of philosophy" (Cassin, 2014, p. 30).

What follows from Plato's visions is not a society possibly changing as an effect of how people interact or perform culture, as it did for the Sophists. Instead, how one is to take place in culture is, in Plato's universe fixed in which *the original scene of the social*, as presented in the *Republic* by Plato, is already set and reproduced over time; "the farmer is a farmer and the potter a potter" (Cassin 2014, p. 123; Bloom 1991, p. 98, 421a, in *the Republic*). As such, *areté*, the embodied and performed culture and its values, is for Plato fixed and cannot be taught but only inherited, while the Sophist claims the radically opposite, that *areté* is first and foremost *taught* in different ways of performing culture (Jaeger, 1939). Also, as Rorty (1980) says, Plato "invented philosophical thinking" (p. 157), and in that invention distancing himself from educational

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[3] I understand theoretical ideology as developed by Brante (1980) and others as that foundation that cannot be proven but which needs to be taken for granted for a particular theoretical structure and object of knowledge to carry any meaning.

[4] Practices, like discourse, says Cherryholmes (1988), "are constituted by connected and overlapping sets of rules that organise and give them coherence" (p. 4). Moreover, rules, he says, is what we value as such.

thought and practice of the Sophists' who understood education strictly to be about 'how to move' well among others within the every-day of social life[5]. It means, that within a Platonian style philosophy there is a strand of anti-sophist and anti-education sediments inscribed as defining characteristics of a tradition of philosophy. Such anti-sophist and anti-educational sediments continue, through Aristotelian systematisations of a Platonian philosophy and universe to undermine educational thought (see Jaeger 1943, pp. 22-24, and pp. 80-81; Cassin 2014).

While the Sophists' "must take account of the diversity of opinions, the mediocrity of peoples' actual behaviour, and finitude in its lived reality" (Cassin, 2014, p. 117), Aristotle rather, and in line with Plato's invention of philosophical thinking, did not need to be concerned with the mediocracy of people's actual behaviour or diversity of opinion. The very aim of an Aristotelian first philosophy of science was rather to control and master the ambiguity of the everydayness of the Sophist's spatial-temporal world in order to perfect dysfunctional human behaviours, and thereby to be perfecting the state (see Jaeger, 1943, and below).

The Platonian/Aristotelian universe was to dominate the Sophists' praxis-oriented world in establishing theoretical science "to be the true, the 'highest' kind of culture and replace or *dominate* the current educational discipline" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318; *my emphasis*).

A Platonian/Aristotelian Theory (Science) is linking the *absolute* (Truth), to the *hierarchy* (the Highest), as well as to *colonisation* of the everyday life (as expressed through the domination over education). Ironically establishing a *foundational anomaly* in which philosophy/theory is to dominate education/discipline, from within a renewed understanding of education: "Plato and Aristotle were the first to work out the full educational importance of pure science" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318). That is, pure science[6] was to dominate educational thought and practice, rather than the educational discipline of ordinary life (*areté*); this "new subject [science] which demanded so much time and energy for purely intellectual studies divorced [educational thought and practice] from the interests of ordinary life" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318).

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[5] Plato, says Rorty (1980), introduced the split between eternal ideas and the spatial-temporal world, while the Sophist denied such distinction and stayed within the spatial-temporal world as such, or what I call 'the everydayness of life'.

[6] On the subject of 'pure science', se also von Wright (1989), who distinguish between two forms of rationality within science, very much in line with the distinction made in this paper between Platonian/Aristotelian and Sophist educational thought.

The operation in which educational thought is subsumed by philosophy and science are complete with the Plato/Aristotle domination of educational thought of the Sophists. From this point of domination, they argue that the Sophists' emphasis on ordinary life and *paideia* as eminently political and ethical is at the risk of what they saw as producing "half-truth". Since the Sophists were not concerned with Truth for its own sake, with Theory and formal logic, the Sophists: "was in danger of teaching half-truths–unless [morality and issues of the state in praxis] it could be grounded on genuine and thorough political thought, searching for the Truth for its own sake. From this point of view, Plato and Aristotle later attacked the whole system of sophistic culture and shook it to its foundation" (Jaeger 1943, p. 293).

This anti-sophist and anti-educational stands are brought to its final close, in which the Sophists' becomes *the* enemy of philosophy by the Aristotelian dehumanisation of the Sophists (Cassin, 2014, pp. 32-34): "excluding all those who do not fall under his [Aristoteles] demonstration from humanity, from the outset, 'for such a man, as such, is like a plant, from the outset'" (Cassin, 2014, p. 35). The dehumanisation of the Sophists is based on an Aristotelian principle of noncontradiction, in which "to speak is to say something that has meaning, and that this meaning is the same for oneself and for another" (p. 34), which, among other things leads to that in denying the principle of noncontradiction one has already been forced to accept it "at the very moment he denies it" (p. 34) by confirming its meaning negatively.

Aristotle makes this argument as foundational as ontology, says Cassin, and as a condition essential for defining what humanity is, and who belongs to humanity. This move says Cassin is first and most an "a war machine against *homonymy*" (p. 35), in which a word can have identical spelling and pronunciation whilst maintaining different meaning. However, says Cassin, "by making an entire dimension of speech philosophically and ethically inaudible, one has confused otherness with nothingness" (2014, p. 36). I will come back to the Sophist's views on *homonymy* below when discussing how such thinking in which homonymy is not a problem relates to the way the Sophists understood politics of equality and consensus. The latter in which plurality remains and are not erased by a consensus, and as such necessary for the foundation of the (democratic) city.

My point here is that the construction of what can be called Platonian/Aristotelian education excludes per definition education as *praxis*, as performing culture and as inherently bound to the everydayness of lives lived by a plurality of people interacting with each other in a concrete environment. As filtered through a Platonian/Aristotelian style philosophy, education is implanted with an understanding of Theory and formal logic, internally linking Truth with hierarchy, and education as inferior to philosophy and the Sophist as a plant outside humanity. In short, Platonian/Aristotelian style education implies Theory of the 'One' unlimited Truth and social hierarchy dependent on such Truth, while Sophist education rather implies discipline in order to live well with a multiplicity of others in the city-state.

The perfect man and the perfect state

In returning to what I above called the original scene of the social, to Plato's Republic, one can now see how such foundational scene in the Republic is fixed in more than one way and, in the fixation, establishing social reality as foundationally hierarchical. Such reality is mirrored in a scientific educational Theory and fixated by absolute Truth distancing education from everyday life, from its worldliness. Theory, instead of being thought of as belonging to the everydayness of life, now imposes and dominate such worldliness 'from the outset'. Educational Theory hereafter aspires to control the 'messiness' and multiplicity of opinions more effectively by replacing the ambiguous and changing everydayness of social life with a foundational structure supposedly stabilising and ordering social life in the *polis*.

Plato's *Republic* says Jaeger (1943) is "primarily a book about the making of human character" (p. 259) and as such is vital in establishing education as *purification* of human character, of the essence of man, with how the perfect state is to be produced. The *Republic* is forming an authentic self in the image of a perfect state or nation: "The perfect man can be shaped only within the perfect state; and vice versa. To construct such a state, we must discover how to make such men. That is the ground for the universal correspondence between man and state's inner structure, for the resemblance between both patterns" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 259).

The resemblance of patterns establishes *the inner structure of man and state* as a psycho-social pattern, which gives rise to the original scene of the social. Such scene needs to be static; "the system needs to be static" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 237) since its function is to secure the stability of the city-state itself. In consequence, Platonian/Aristotelian education is aiming at establishing this psycho-social pattern of the original scene as the Theory of education, dominating the worldliness of sophist education and guiding the perfection of man and state, and "[a]ny departure from its standards is degeneration and decay" (p. 237). Therefore, such a pattern is also immanently patriarchal *stasis* and leads to severe problems for the possibility of equality and change up to this day in the form of far right nationalism, but also in modern liberal democracies (see Orellana and Michelsen, 2019; Säfström, 2019; Butler, 2015).

The ideal of schooling

The ideal schooling then in a Platonian/Aristotelian theory of education is a system of processes, institutional expectations and desires representing as well as creating the perfect man and the perfect state through purifying the psycho-social structure in which the connection exists already: "the one essential thing is that education should not be changed" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 237), since it is to guarantee the stability of the city-state over time. As such, establishing schooling as a pattern through which man and state are forever linked through what can be called 'the original myth of schooling' (see Säfström, 2011, pp. 94-95; O'Toole *et al.*, 2021; Hunter, 1994) and which serves as an absolute point of departure from which everything that goes on in the actual school can be determined and judged. As such defines the real of schooling and society through mirroring each other as fundamentally hierarchically structured.

According to such a pattern, any grading system in schooling can be regarded as fair, in so far as it can be claimed that it reflects the hierarchical inequality of the real as such, an inequality to be perfected through the procedure of teaching. Furthermore, when inequality is distributed over the social spectrum, everyone has his or her proper place in the hierarchy and according to his or her "character"(or abilities and talents, or intelligence, or class), stabilising society in its natural hierarchy, making the city-state (or any state or nation) harmonious and

prosperous[7]. In modern education, the hierarchically ordered reality of schooling works in naturalising inequality motivating and justifying that some are included already, and others are included as excluded through schooling (Rancière 1999, p. 38; Rancière, 2007, p. 23).

Breaking the crust of convention of Platonian/Aristotelian scientific education

For the pre-Christian, pagan Greece, the gods could take human forms, meaning that any stranger always had to be approached with care; he or she could be a god; "he or she may be divine" (Cassin, 2016, p. 10). In other words, the other needed to be approached with a foundational ambiguity in mind, not as one or the other, but as the prefix 'Ambi-' suggests, both god and human at the same time, which already makes the law of noncontradiction problematic and complex. Since it would imply that 'one' and the 'same' carry two radically different meanings, and both have entirely different consequences for establishing the consensus needed for the city-state to appear.

Either "same" is understood as self-same as in identity in which consensus represent this self-same in the same way, in which everyone reaches the same meaning at the same time; "same" here instead becomes One, it unifies the city and the soul of those who is counted as belonging to the whole of the city. Which is Plato's position in which the whole, "the city/soul functions like the body" (Cassin, 2014, p. 123), and in which the parts "conspire to become whole" (p. 123). This strive to become whole also means that no part can claim autonomy but are always defined from the whole (body). Moreover, it is here the Sophists deviates since Plato's whole "Unlike the sophist [Plato's] whole [do not allow for] open competition among the singularities that constitute it" (p. 123). There is no plurality possible.

In contrast to Platonian consensus, a sophistical consensus is possible without everyone thinking the same thing at the same time: "sophistical consensus does not even require that everyone think the same thing (*homonoia*) but only that everyone speak (*homologia*) and lend their

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[7] See further Säfström (2020), in which the distributive paradigm of education and schooling is identified and deconstructed.

ear (*homophonia*)." (Cassin, 2014, p. 33). A sophistical interpretation of *homonoia* then "takes as its model not the unity of an organism but the composition of a mixture" (p. 124). It is "a case of interpreting the 'same' not as a 'one' but as a 'with'" (p. 124). Being with already imply a division of One and relation between parts which allows for singularity as such, without being reduced to a "hierarchical subordination" under a "whole" (p. 130).

What is essential in a sophistical practice then is not a Theory of education representing a whole, but the discipline *in* speaking well and listening carefully to others, without imagining the words of others as already being within one's world of meaning, but as an expression of another move, another practice in the mixture. The original scene of the social for the Sophists (or to follow Cassin; sophistics) then is not hierarchised and differentiated from a fixed point of One (whole-body) but implies a relation of at least two (being with) in the mixture instead and is so far inherently plural. That is the original scene in 'sophistics' is already plural and established as *praxis*, as open and on the move, populated by multiple singularities who are ambiguously negotiating their own as well as others divine humanity, in order to go on together (the mixture) but not necessarily in the same way. *Isonomia*, equality required for the political organisation of democracy then, is here understood in terms of plurality (in difference) rather than self-same and as performativity within a particular discourse practice rather than as reflecting a particular *stasis*.

Cassin (2014) exemplify a sophistical consensus with Hanna Arendt's insistence on an irreducible plural condition of humanity since an Arendtian political theory "defines the specificity of the political by the 'with,' which is characteristic of an irreducible plural condition" (p. 133). The Arendtian sophistics also shows in how Arendt understand the city, not as with Heidegger as "tragically, ecstatic of itself", but in the "extraordinary and entirely everyday circumstance of 'living together' (*suzên*), through the 'sharing of words and deeds.'" (Cassin, 2014, p. 133; Arendt, 1993, p. 157).

So, "who is afraid of the sophists?" as Cassin (2014, p. 25) asks, and why? The making of "the Sophist" into an enemy to philosophy, in which the philosopher writes off the Sophist, not only from the domain of philosophy but "even from humanity itself" (Cassin, 2014, p. 30). Such move can now be understood at the backdrop of how sophistics limits

philosophy's claims to Truth, and by moving on beyond any fixation of this as that as eternal, and an end in itself. Sophistics destabilises any political project which is Platonian and Aristotelian, and which is not inherently and extensively plural and democratic.

A sophistical practice destabilises not only the *fixion*[8] of the original social scene from the point of education but is questioning the very originality of the original social scene, its secured position as founder of the city-state's reality, and as fundamentally and necessary hierarchically organised. A sophistical practice of education is questioning that "the whole *intellectual and spiritual world* revealed by education, into which any individual, according to his nationality or social position, is born." (Jaeger, 1939, p. 303; *emphasis in original*) is so fixed as Jaeger seems to be saying in the quote. For a sophistical practice denies precisely that one is born into something so fixed as an original structure representing the intellectual and spiritual world and to which one per definition is supposed to be destined by faith and to return to through education and teaching (see also Arendt (1958) on this point). Education as a sophistical practice is instead formulated beyond the idea of the fixed as eternal, the fixation, the *fixion* of the original social scene as representing the soul and state of eternity.

The beginning of the sophistical breakup with philosophy is, according to Cassin (2014), mainly to be found in the attitude of Gorgias (483-375BC). Since he "always asks one question too many, he always derives one consequence too many" (p. 30). There is something deeply interesting in this 'too many' because it signifies from within philosophy the very limits of philosophy, at the same time as one can only apprehend the limit from outside of philosophy. The 'too much', signals a foundational ambiguity.

Rorty's (1980) version of sophistics speaks directly to the 'too many' of Gorgias in the form of Rorty's "edifying philosopher". Such philosopher is to keep inventing new languages and the edifying consist mainly of "'the poetic activity' of thinking up (…) new aims, new words, or new disciplines" from which to "reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions" (p. 360). What Rorty calls an edifying philosophy is a philosophy for which there is nothing more to the world than the world as such: "there is [not] something out there in

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[8] "Fixion", in Lacan's meaning is, "a fiction that one chooses to fix" (Cassin, 2016, p. 38).

addition to the world called 'the truth of the world'" (Rorty 1982, p. xxvi). A sophistical truth, in line with Rorty (1982), is rather truth with small 't', and plural and as such a compliment we pay to certain moves within the everydayness of living life well with others within the spatial-temporal world.

The 'word and deeds' is always in and of the world itself: When we say, –please, give me your word! We are asking of someone to commit to what we ask for ethically, but in so doing we also ask for the world of the word to be present, the world of the other. We are not asking for a concept, a distancing from that world, making the relation dependent on a third point from which the relation is to be judged and which as such displaces the directedness of our different words and worlds.

Assuming a third point of (Platonian/Aristotelian) Theory is to assume a superior power, what Rorty (1990), concerning Putnam, calls "the view from God's eye" (p. 3). Such a godlike view implies that a relation can no longer be direct but are filtered through this third point, outside of the relationship and from which the relation is to be given meaning and be understood. A Platonian/Aristotelian education, based on the absolute (Truth), hierarchy (highest Truth), and science (First philosophy), dominating education leads education and teaching into an utterly difficult position of reproducing an extra-real reality of schooling, in which the reproduction of inequality already makes up the very foundational reality of that situation.

For a sophistical practice, this third point from which power and judgement flow is only a repetition of fixation, of a *fixion*, from which a wordless truth in a mental representation of a concept is supposedly filling up the world with meaning. For a sophistical practice, discourse is not about meaning *per see*, but rather that which "induce a change of state" and: "he [the Sophist] knows and teaches *how to move,* not, according to the bivalency of the principle of noncontradiction, from error to Truth or from ignorance to wisdom, but, according to the inherent plurality of comparison, from lesser to better state" (Cassin, 2014, p. 33; *my emphasis*).

There is only the plural richness of a spatial, temporal realm, in which speech is spoken through the practices practised, meaning that what we call the real are dependent on the discourse practices we engage in within the emerging ethical, political sphere (which is what *paideia* is for the sophists, see Jaeger, 1939, p. 300). Therefore, what is needed

for social stability in the city-state, is not a Theory of education and teaching but rather the discipline of pedagogy (as in practice). From which to teach how to be moving well with and among others, and how to speak and listening carefully to others as well as oneself, in order to participate (being with) in the mixture of the democratic city-state. It is a pedagogy of performativity in which a multiplicity of 'words and deeds' are possible beyond the limiting effects of society as one whole body to which all has to comply. Therefore, the aim of a disciplined pedagogy is always: "to perform the social function which Dewey called 'breaking the crust of convention', preventing man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions" (Rorty, 1980, p. 379).

The inherent plurality of comparisons and the discipline of pedagogy

In this section, I will specifically explore teaching as a sophistical practice of being continuously moving "from lesser to better states" through comparisons, or precisely through, "the inherent plurality of comparisons" (Cassin, 2014, p. 33). Such starting point needs some work, since it seems to imply "the new language of learning" (Biesta, 2006, p. 15) infiltrating education, and in which comparisons and their result are being sequenced within league tables and assessment regimes, and which, with Rancière (1991), always comes down to be comparing intelligence in order to be ahead to always wanting to dominate the other (pp. 80-82). It is "an activity of the perverted will, possessed by inequality's passion", and he continues "[i]n linking one person or group to another, by comparison, individuals continually reproduce this irrationality, this stultification that institutions codify and explicators solidify in their brains" (Rancière, 1991, p. 82).

As the new language of learning, such language and activity seem to imply and encourage understanding teaching as an act of 'explicators' using a particular form of rhetoric. A particular type of speech which "revolt against the poetic condition of the speaking being. It speaks in order to silence. *You will speak no longer, you will think no longer, you will do this*: that is its program" (Rancière, 1991, p. 85; *emphasis in original*). That is, teaching within the new language of learning is ultimately fitting an educational world in which teaching is being

trapped by the violence and domination implicit in the strive for always better through comparisons and domination over the everydayness of the students lived reality: It is teaching being trapped ultimately by the desires of modernity and capitalism to produce productive rather than responsible citizens (see Säfström, 2020).

Instead, from the point of sophistical practice, comparisons are not understood through a hierarchical vision in which inequality passion is reproduced, but rather through a mixture in which verification of equality is an aim for a disciplined pedagogy. To be comparing is therefore not understood at the backdrop of winning and losing, getting ahead of and defeating the other, but as an integral part of translating from one to the other and back in the mixture: "In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry, translates and invites others to do the same" (Rancière, 1991, p. 65).

To make comparisons is if you will an act of poetry rather than a tool in a war. Therefore, it is not about knowledge as such, since knowledge comes down to control and signify an end (to what was before uncertain), but also, if applied to persons, extend this control to be controlling others as well (Foucault, 1980). We do not need to know the student in order to interact with him or recognise him or her as a person. In a sophistical practice, we need to recognise and respond to the other in education and teaching; "not as students or as learned men, but as people; in the way you respond to someone speaking to you and not to someone examining you: under the sign of equality" (Rancière, 1991, p. 11).[9]

In speaking and recognising the other under the sign of equality and as capable of speaking, demands to be listening carefully as well, not in order to conceptualise the words of him or her, but in order to hear the world spoken by those words, in order to embark on a process of mutual translations: "All words, written or spoken, are translation that only takes on meaning in the counter-translation, in the invention of the possible causes of the sound heard or of the written trace" (Rancière, 1991, p. 64).

This process of mutual translation is ultimately a process of comparing words, comparing different worlds. In comparing different worlds different *speech*, translation is not the translation point by point[10], but

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[9] Seeing a person beyond the category doesn't mean that the teacher doesn't recognise a student, because he or she is already positioned as such, it means rather to acknowledge the singularity and possible autonomy of a person beyond the generalised category of being a student.
[10] See Bernstein (1983) on incommensurability.

here rather the poetic activity in comparing worlds without the need to fix such comparisons through a common fixed point or conceptual net from which to be claiming a consensus of meaning. Instead, what the act of mutual translation comes down to, following Rancière, but also what was central for the sophists (Culler, 2014, p. 92), is the need for improvisation, understood as "our intelligence's leading virtue: the poetic virtue", and Rancière continuous, "[t]he impossibility of our *saying* the truth, even when we *feel* it, makes us speak as poets, makes us tell the story of our mind's adventures and verify that they are understood by other adventurers, makes us communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings" (Rancière, 1991, p. 64).

In other words, a sophistical practice in education and teaching compares, not to defeat the other or examine her or him, but to be able to connect different worlds in the mixture of fellow adventurers. A mixture in which being with the other comes down to the mutual translation of a plurality of words and deeds, and as that which is necessary to be able to move ahead, together with but differently. Such teaching needs to be remaining in the plural world of others, to find out how to move in a plural world in which everyone has "the right to go on differently" (Bauman, 1999, p. 202). For a sophistical practice of education and teaching, being *with* is precisely why a democratic city-state is possible instead of based on domination and violence from the point of 'One', anticipated by an Platonian/Aristotelian Theory of education. A sophistical practice is instead a disciplined pedagogy in the practice of democratisation.

Teaching as a practice in democratisation

If being with speaks to a different original scene of the social than one of *stasis*, it is because a sophistical practice is performative (Culler, 2014, pp. 200-202), but also because being with does not exclude *being fore* the other and not only before the other, do not exclude ethics (see Säfström and Månsson, 2004; Levinas 1994).

Ethics, in this sense, needs no (First philosophy) Theory to make judgements on interactions and relations from above the everydayness of living, but is rather a particular practice (discipline) in living well with and among others. Such practice includes speaking and listening, to speak

one's world and listening to other's worlds to be able to connect and to engage in mutual translations of those worlds. In translating words, the world's worldliness is expanding, and such ethically infused expansion is here understood as democratisation in action. In other words, the publicness of the public extends through teaching in comparing and connecting different worlds in an expanding mixture, as such a mixture embodies the city-state's social and political organisation.

Teaching connects different sensibilities as a shared capacity to sense (Berardi, 2017), to make sense beyond a consensus of One, acknowledging that sensing is always both unique and shared (Rancière, 2007; *partage du sensible*). As such, teaching verifies sensing as a capacity among a plurality of speaking beings, not in order to melt their speech and worlds into one whole, but to be highlighting the sensible ordering of the real as inherently plural, and to understand our capacity in sensing as shared with others. If I can make sense, the other can as well (cf. Rancière, 1991, pp. 57-58).

Therefore, *to speak, to listen, to translate, to compare, to link*, are all pedagogical manoeuvres within a sophistical practice of teaching which does not examine the other in order to engage with him or her, does not engage from a distance in order to control him or her through knowledge. Teaching is *being* (as a verb) engaged *in* speaking, *in* listening, and *in* comparing, *in* linking, *in* being *with* (as fully as one can understand being with other people).

The poetic act of teaching

The poetic act of teaching is not only an intellectual virtue, as Rancière says, but as such, it also requires improvisation. The poetic activity of improvisations initiates an excess and a 'too much' into the normal ordering of natural inequality, and as inequality is mistaken for the true state of man in the social and natural world. Against such (patriarchal) *stasis*, the poetic act in teaching constantly asks one question too many, and it draws one consequence too many. *Poêsis* in teaching introduces a possibility to "dis-identify" (Rancière, 1991, p. 98) with the set order of inequality, it *instantiates* the possibility of change through destabilising the given, and therefore limit the range of claims of inequality as a necessary condition for education to be real.

Improvisation for the sophists means allowing oneself to speak about everything "by allowing himself to be led by opportunity" (Cassin, 2014, p. 92), which leads to the emergence of the *Kairos*, the almost untranslatable Greek word. Papastephanou (2014), though, translates *Kairos* with "lived time" (p. 719), which she contrasts with *Chronos* "measurable time". She does not see them as binary but instead intends to make room for a lived time as necessarily implied in measurable time, mainly when situated in the everyday practices of those events that are to be managed and organised by *Chronos*. Here I will discuss some aspects of *Kairos* to situate improvisation as the poetic activity *per preference* within teaching, to emphasise the moment of new beginnings implied by the Greek word *Kairos*.

First, *Kairo*s is "the moment of the opening of possibilities"(Cassin 2014, p. 93), recognisable in teaching as the moment in which one address the student as a person beyond his or her identity as a student of a particular order, and as such, secondly; "both opening and cutting"(p. 93) into the order in which the student is identified as already belonging to a particular place in the hierarchical order of inequality.

Thirdly, the moment of opening and cutting is also a moment in which its purpose is revealed as belonging to that very moment, "*Kairos* is autotelic, it contains its purpose within itself. It is the moment in which *poêsis* and *technê* […], at the height of their inventiveness, approach *praxis*, approach a divine interiorisation of purpose" (p. 94). It is the moment in teaching in which a person speaks in a way as he or she has never spoken before, neither repeating what was already said nor responding to the desires of the institution, but within the moment brings something into existence that did not exist before. It is a moment that unfolds from within the act of teaching. *Technê* in teaching is the art of hearing and verifying someone as speaking (in its most total sense) and guide the unfolding of the newness of the event. *Kairos*, in short, can so far be understood as *poros*, "the 'passage'" (p. 94) through which the *technê* of teaching and the *poêsis* of the moment(s) in teaching enters into education: Teaching becomes *praxis,* a democratisation process of the events that unfolds.

Kairos is perfectly adapted to the moment in which *poêsis* and *technê* appear; since *Kairos*, says Cassin, is a singularity: "with *Kairos*, one is engulfed in a particular case, and there is nothing apart from the case, all invention is singular because it is perfectly adopted" (2014, p. 94).

In teaching as an instance of *Kairos* then, the teacher is fully present in the poetic activity of improvisation, in the singularity of a case in which someone enters the scene. The teacher recognises and verifies that someone is speaking their world, their truth, as it unfolds through the moment's purpose. Such purpose is approaching *praxis* "the divine interiorisation of purpose" (Cassin 2014, p. 94) to which the educative moment belongs. The significance of the moment as a series of unfoldings is also the reason why the effects of teaching are unique in their *poêsis* and singularity and not possible to generalise, while *technê* in teaching is the art of keeping the process moving, by *listening*, *speaking, comparing* and *linking* different worlds.

The moment of *Kairos* in teaching then is also the moment in which Platonian/Aristotelian education becomes violent in suppressing the singularity of the moment and all involved therein by demanding generalisation, through scientific education (it is Aristotle "who demands generality", Cassin, 2014, p. 94). Platonian/Aristotelian education then works against the poetic act in teaching, in the exact moment when the singularity of the one speaking is generalised and conceptualised, in order to return through Theory (science, scientistic, scientism) to *dominate* the speech of all involved. Such education and teaching dominate through how a speaking person becomes a thing (concept) in schooling, through setting up a *telos* outside the singularity of the moment and to which all have to adapt; "and all we have to do is to follow the predetermined route" (Cassin, 2014, p. 94). Such *telos* closes down and restrict the poetic activity in education, to control *poêsis* and *technê*, or rather when the latter is made into science controlling teaching and linking it to a predetermined route to a given goal. Whereas with the poetic act in teaching, in improvisation, the spur of the moment takes on the art of opening and cutting for a new beginning to appear; "with *ex tempore* [as an effect in *Kairos*] we have the autotelic opening of the beginning" (p. 94).

Teaching, the poetic activity in improvising, opens a plurality of possibilities at the moment in which multiple beginnings and purposes continuously unfold. To compare those beginnings and link them is expanding who can be seen and heard and introduce multiple ways in which one can move *with* others in the world. Teaching then, as a sophistical practice, is not the activity of securing the *stasis* of an original scene of the social, but rather speaks to a different social scene in which

democratisation is located precisely in the unfolding of new beginnings, as those take place in the moments of improvisations in a concrete classroom.

Conclusion, a sophistical practice in liveable life

In conclusion, beyond the philosophy defined as such through domination of Sophist educational thought, a sophistical education and teaching practice contribute to a liveable life in a democratic culture. It brings into the light the possibility of multiplicity, of pluralism, which is not imploding in the image of consensus (-ontology) and as represented by a whole social body, nor demands of all to enter into the same thought at the same time. Nor demands to step into the line of *telos* in which the steps taken are defined already from an absolute position of power. A sophistical practice is rather a practice of democratization beyond the *stasis* of an original social scene composed of hierarchy and patriarchy and shows a possible route beyond the violent effects of *stasis*. A sophistical practice, by being articulated, limits the effects of an unlimited philosophy, and profoundly question Platonian/Aristotelian Theory as foundation for education, as such education is reproducing a monoculture of 'One'. A monoculture in which each and every one has his or her place already carved out in the social body. Rather, the concerns of a sophistical practice are how to move among and with others in order to live well with a multiplicity of others in the mixture of a democratic city-state.

The *poêsis* of improvisation, central to teaching, opens for the autocratic purposes of each moment linking education with *praxis* and democratization. Sophistical education then, understand teaching being an art (*technê*) in which *speaking*, *listening*, *comparing* and *linking* are the main techniques used in order to guide the unfolding of the newness of each moment (*poêsis*). In such teaching, the teacher recognises and verifies when someone speaks beyond the desires of an institution and in a way he or she has never spoken before. A sophistical practice teaches from within the finitude of our lived reality and verifies a multiplicity of possible ways in which we can move forward *with* others in the everydayness of our shared lives. The sophist teacher says: – please, show me your world within your spoken words! Such teaching, informed

by a multiplicity of ways of being in the world, links new beginnings to the expansion of liveable lives in our democratic societies.

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