

Joaquín Xirau's pedagogy: Between tradition and modernity

La pedagogía de Joaquín Xirau: entre la tradición y la modernidad

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Abstract:

The aim of this work is to examine the pedagogical work of this Catalan philosopher (teacher, never better said) and offer a summary of his thought. The methodology comprises an exhaustive review of the primary sources (complete works) adding secondary sources that are considered relevant. As a result, we identify the sources he draws on for his pedagogy: primarily Cossío, but also Husserl, Scheler, Fichte, Vives, Llull, Rousseau, and Bergson. We then trace what his systematic pedagogy might be: the final cause, the efficient cause (the teacher), the material cause (the student), the method, the educational action and the pedagogical antinomies. On the one hand, we discuss the content that education should have and the values that should guide it, and, on the other hand, the three basic stages of the educational process, primary, secondary and higher education, according to how Xirau conceptualises them. To

conclude, we analyse some common commonplaces from then and now in the world of education, to which Xirau pays particular attention.

Keywords: pedagogy, philosophy of education, Joaquín Xirau, School of Barcelona, Spanish philosophy.

Resumen:

El objetivo de este trabajo es profundizar en la obra pedagógica del filósofo (maestro, nunca mejor dicho) catalán, haciendo una exposición sinóptica de su pensamiento. La metodología seguida es la revisión exhaustiva de las fuentes primarias (obras completas) más aquella bibliografía secundaria que se ha considerado pertinente. Como resultados, señalamos las fuentes de las que bebe su pedagogía: Cossío, sobre todo, pero también Husserl, Scheler, Fichte, Vives, Llull, Rousseau o Bergson. Luego trazaremos lo

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que podría ser su pedagogía sistemática: la causa final, la causa eficiente (el maestro), la causa material (el alumno), el método, la acción educativa y las antinomias pedagógicas. Discutiremos, por un lado, los contenidos que debe tener la educación y los valores que deben orientarla y, por otro lado, las tres etapas básicas del proceso educativo: enseñanza primaria, media y supe-

rior, según los piensa Xirau. Como conclusión, analizaremos algunos tópicos habituales de ayer y hoy en el mundo de la educación, en los que se detiene especialmente el autor.

Descriptor: pedagogía, filosofía de la educación, Joaquín Xirau, Escuela de Barcelona, filosofía española.

1. Introduction

The work of Joaquín Xirau (1895-1946), which was cut short both by his exile as a result of the Spanish Civil War and by his premature death, has been rediscovered and systematically studied in recent years, above all thanks to the publication of his complete works. Although Xirau's three major centres of interest were the philosophy of values, pedagogy, and hispanism, the plethora subjects in his short biography is remarkable: law (Rousseau, philosophy of values), psychology (Gestalt, Viqueira, Emilio Mira), philosophy of biology (Pi i Sunyer), aesthetics (analysis of the smile, of art, etc.), and politics (Pi i Margall, Campalans, the peace process following the Second World War, and Ibero-America). For reasons of space, we will not consider the author's biography. A general outline of it can be found in the work of Vilanou (2001).

2. Sources of Xirau's pedagogical thought

Joaquín Xirau's relationship with pedagogy is not circumstantial but essential (Sáiz & Sáiz, 2010). During his doctoral studies in Madrid (1918-1919) he came into

contact with Bartolomé Cossío, a disciple of Giner de los Ríos, who in turn was a disciple of Sanz del Río. From 1923 to 1935 he collaborated in the *Revista de Pedagogía*. In Barcelona he organised the journal *Psicología i Pedagogia*, the university courses in primary school teaching and the pedagogy seminar. As we will see below, he was deeply concerned with the university training of future teachers at any level. In his exile he did not abandon this link with pedagogy but instead transplanted it to all of Ibero-America, being an adviser to the Secretariat for Public Education of the Mexican government, and above all through his disciple Joan Roura-Parella (Vilanou, 2002-2003; Álamo, 2012). Although the main source of Xirau's pedagogical thought was the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE), through the figure of Cossío, other figures contributed to his pedagogical philosophy, such as Husserl, Scheler, Fichte, Vives, Lull, Rousseau, and Bergson.

Cossío's influence is so great that, as with Socrates' thought reflected through his disciple Plato, it is never entirely clear what is Cossío's and what is Xirau's (and it could even be said that it is not known what

comes from Giner, or from Sanz del Río). To educate is to vivify, both for Cossío and for Xirau. Cossío was Giner's magnum opus; and for Xirau, Cossío was a true teacher, in the full meaning of the word. Xirau dedicates the longest work of all the ones he wrote to Cossío and he underlines the human quality of the teacher, contrasting it with the egotism of Unamuno or Ortega y Gasset (some authors inexplicably put Xirau in the area of influence of Ortega). For Cossío, education is a spiritual work, a task of salvation, and the teacher is a missionary of culture (Xirau, *OCII*¹, 1999, p. 95); therefore, it is no surprise that Cossío was the main promoter of the pedagogical missions, based on the religious popular missions promoted by the Jesuits and other religious orders that were so common in that period. Nonetheless, on some occasions Xirau does not avoid the esprit de corps of the thinkers of the orbit of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza: magnifying the impact of its founder, he appears to take on Giner's statement, according to which "if fifty per cent of the Spanish do not walk on all fours, it is because of the presence of Julián Sanz del Río"; or when he said that the protagonists of the ILE "worked tirelessly to wash away the traditional 'grime' from the Spain in which they lived their lives" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 18; see also Llopart, 2002-2003, p. 436).

Although Husserl's thinking does not in itself have anything to do with pedagogy, in Xirau it is essential to take it into account to understand some of his positions. For Xirau, Husserl represented the great bastion against the contemporary relativism that threatened the world of thought

and culture. This relativism also affected any formative theory because education depends on the conception of the world (Xirau, *OCIII*, 2000, p. 162). Xirau's pedagogy decisively backed truth (Xirau, *OCI*, 1999, pp. 3-76) against relativism. But truth cannot exclusively be certainty as modernity purports, nor mere coherence, nor much less utility: "The truth does not purport to be anything other than the coincidence of my subjectivity with the being in itself" (ibid). Xirau's thought and his pedagogy must be conceived from the Husserlian attempt to overcome the relativism that always threatens the world of thought.

Scheler was also not directly a pedagogue but there is no doubt that his philosophy of values influenced Xirau's philosophy of education, and was later followed by other authors in Spain, who did not always explicitly acknowledge their debt to Xirau (Marín, 1968, p. 117). The clearest point is the reflections on values and the meaning of life that the Catalan philosopher constantly offers in his pedagogical writings: He often repeats that "only a life dedicated to ideal values is worth living" (Xirau, *OCI*, 1998, p. 326). Education is not limited to life but must provide life with the end to aim at:

The fundamental error of vitalism is that it defines life as the maximum values. (...) Life is not valuable in itself, but instead is at the service of a valuable idea. In itself, it is pure nature, mechanics, indifferent to value, and it depends in its value on culture. It acquires value if it participates in the values that are raised above life (Ibid. p. 324).

And again, in contrast with relativism, not all values are worth the same: “In fact, there are hierarchies. It is necessary that they exist. It is only through them that a spiritual culture is possible. To eliminate them would be equivalent to sinking into barbarism and, ultimately, pure animality” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 439).

Fichte was indeed a thinker whose attention was focussed on pedagogy, among other things. Therefore, Xirau dedicates to him an introductory study to a selection of pedagogical texts (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 395). The German philosopher was living proof that pedagogy is not a second order subject or one that is of little importance, unsuited for philosophers with grand ambitions. Fichte’s favourite subject, around which he developed his pedagogy, was freedom. Philosophy that starts from the object becomes dogmatic; it is only by starting from the subject that we have a philosophy of freedom (and hence Fichte’s idealism). However, neither Fichte nor Xirau understood freedom as whim: because there can be no freedom without law nor autonomy without *nomos* (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 465). For Fichte, if the two elements of the subject are the representation and love, education will be aimed at knowledge and morality respectively (below we will see the importance of love for the pedagogy of Xirau).

Juan Luis Vives, according to Xirau, also proposed morality as the essential aim of education (Xirau, *OCII*, p. 505-512), and he undoubtedly attracted our author’s attention as one of the philosophers who had written on pedagogy with the most intensity. For Xirau, if the hu-

manism of Erasmus is more aristocratic, that of the Vives is more popular. His ideal of a Christian prince opposed to Machiavellianism, the rejection of war, eternal bringer of evil, the prudence and moderation of his thinking, could not fail to catch Xirau’s attention. The humanist education of Vives, seen as an ideal of humanity, coincides with the Greek *paideia* (on which Jaeger wrote his classic monograph, which Xirau himself started to translate in Mexico as Delgado notes [1998, p. 293]), and in this sense it coincides with the objective of all education. Another Christian philosopher from the same crucible as Vives was Ramón Llull, to whose pedagogical ideas Xirau devotes little in-depth examination, despite his extensive body of work and the close attention he paid to it (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 215-351). At most, the pursuit of clarity (fables, poetry, visual artifices) and the confidence in reason (the general art) of the Mallorcan philosopher attracted Xirau’s attention, as they attract the attention of anyone who approaches his works.

Other less important authors influenced Xirau’s pedagogical ideas, such as Rousseau and Bergson. Although Rousseau is a key figure in pedagogy, Xirau barely mentions him and whenever he does it is to deny that to educate is just to let live. Xirau’s pedagogical references to Rousseau go no further, even though he wrote a Mallorca thesis on his philosophy of politics and the law (*OCIII*, vol. 1, 2000, pp. 35-73). In the case of Bergson, however, we do find a clearer influence, above all in the opposition to any form of mechanism in favour of organicism (Xirau, *OCIII*, vol. 2, 2000, pp. 5-74), the basis of his criticism

of Communist education in Russia (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 381-385).

3. The pedagogy of Joaquín Xirau

Having seen the author's sources, we can now systematise his thinking. The first step will be to see what the aim of education is, and then we will consider the educator and the learner; afterwards we will examine the Mallorca method and particularity of the educational action, and conclude by mentioning the peculiar method of presenting pedagogy by means of antinomies.

Before setting out what the end of education is, one asks oneself if it is possible and necessary. Does it make sense to ask ourselves what we educate for? For Xirau this is not just an important issue; in fact, it is the foundation of pedagogy, which, as well as being a science, is also an art; and art is related to the purpose (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 355). The question, being obvious, is often forgotten, but it is the essential challenge of all pedagogy: Before us is a child, what will we do with it? Because once this is decided, the technical problem is secondary (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 377). But neither is the question obvious nor the answer trivial: "What will we do with the child? Sceptic or believer, blacksmith or scientist, artist or merchant ... In what hierarchy of values will we educate it?" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 358).

And here there are three basic conceptions of how to proceed with a child (or an adult, which in this case is the same thing): we attempt to mould it according

to a preconceived idea we have; we let it do what it wants; or we encourage it to develop its full potential. To put it another way: replacing what the other is with something I want it to be; letting it live and without placing limitations on it; or helping it to find its plenitude (Xirau, *OCI*, 1998, p. 133-263). Although Xirau does not say it, we could associate the first position with certain pessimistic thinkers (Hobbes) and the second with progressive and utopian thinking (Rousseau). Clearly, the goal of education for Xirau is in the second option, between tradition and modernity: Carrying this life to its fullest realisation (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 376).

The only aim of teaching, in the classroom and outside it, is to take the pupil out of the obscurity of torpidity and elevate him, through dialogue and closeness, to free investigation, to personal work, and to the straight orientation of his behaviour (Xirau, *OCII*, p. 74).

To educate is to "lead every life to the fullness of its own essence" (*idem*, p. 88).

An additional problem, once it is accepted that this life is worthwhile and that there are values to which education aims (beauty, justice, truth, or sanctity), is whether we educate for this life or for the other (*idem* p. 106). Do we educate for Earth or Heaven? Here we find all of the clash between religious education and a lay one; a clash that Xirau resolves following Cossío:

To live is to strive, to dedicate oneself. Only by educating for this life, in what is spiritual and lasting within one, is it possible to educate for the eternal life. Eternity

is implicit in each and every moment of temporality” (*idem* p. 107).

The efficient cause of education is the educator. We have already seen how in Cossío the function of the teacher is identified with that of the missionary, but its object is the realm of culture and not so much the kingdom of God. Two contrasting attitudes are possible: either the educator moulds the mind of the child to a great extent (as Herbart thought), or the educator is only a minimal circumstance who should tend towards nothing in the education of the child (as Rousseau thought). According to the end of education seen above, for Xirau the educator places the learner in the optimal conditions to be educated (on the line of Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Fichte). To do their task, educators need a vocation (love), knowledge (science) and will (determination), because if not we have indifferent, ignorant, or apathetic educators, that is to say, non-educators. Speaking of the educator, it would even be necessary to refer to God, given that the relative always leads to the absolute (*idem* p. 105). The reference is not out of place since, just as ancient cosmogonies narrate the journey from chaos to the cosmos, so in education there is a movement from shapeless matter to order through the work of the educator: “The naked animality of the child must be turned into humanity” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 358).

However, the teacher is at the service of the pupil, who is the material cause of education; but it is a living material because education exclusively concerns living beings; therefore, Xirau often speaks of pedagogy as a problem of biology (but this is

understood in a very broad sense, as we will see). The learner lives in society: on the one hand, it resembles the others and, on the other hand, it has something specific that distinguishes it; that said, will we shape it for the social or the individual? For the generic or the specific? For the common or what is proper to each individual? (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 103). If in antiquity the individual was not distinct from the state, as modernity progresses, the person becomes ever more individualised. Ultimately, it is a clash between socialism and anarchism: to educate for society or educate for the individual (*idem* p. 107). Although he does not go so far as to say so, Xirau would be wholly in agreement with the personalist view that the person is neither a fully autonomous individual, nor completely subordinate to society, but instead is a being able to cooperate freely with others.

This child we are going to educate, what is it like? According to the possible ends of education identified above, for some it is bad by nature (and so pedagogy would take charge of correcting it); for others it is good by nature (and so pedagogy should refrain from acting). Xirau repeats in various places (for example, in “*Idees fonamentals d’una pedagogia* [Fundamental ideas of a pedagogy]”, *OCII*, pp. 443-445) that the student, the human being, is neither good nor bad by nature, but rather indifferent (Delgado, 1994, p. 751). The learner must be vivified, and this coincided marvellously with the etymology of *alumnus* (*alere*): to feed, nourish, enable, give powers for life. However, the fact that students are neither good nor bad but instead *neutral*, does not mean that

they are all the same; nothing could be further from Xirau's personal vision. Speaking of the peace process following the Second World War, Xirau says that the League of Nations is destined to fail because it treats all countries equally, when no country is equal to another: the convention of considering all nations as equal individualities is a fundamental error (Xirau, *OCIII*, 1999, p. 316). Is the application of this example to pedagogy and to the child not clear? Because to educate is to "find the individual's ideal, to encounter the individual's idea, the individual's content, to achieve full conscience of a destiny and of a mission to fulfil" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 97).

What will the method of pedagogy be? Above all, as people belong to both the animal world and the specifically human one, they would be subject to purely natural laws and to other cultural or specifically human ones. All of them should be taken into account (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 377). Natural laws and cultural laws alike should be understood as the laws of life in a broad sense. Therefore, pedagogy is another chapter in biology, so long as the *bios* is understood in a non-reductive sense. Considering this, we could divide such laws into general and special ones.

We educate by "vivifying, without any doubt, feeding and nourishing the original sources of life" (Xirau, *OC II*, p. 108). The general law here is that it is not a matter of holding back or of giving free rein, because humans are neither good nor bad. Freedom is not given from the start but instead at the end point; it is something conquered rather than something given from the start.

Education moves in the dynamic equilibrium between impulse and inhibition (*idem* p. 110): the former must be favoured and guided but controlled when there is a risk of overflowing. If the child were good, it would be enough to stimulate; if the child were bad, it would be enough to rein it in, but it neither one thing nor the other. This idea is very interesting because it makes it means that pre-set forms that are the same for everyone can be eschewed. In the image of this dynamic balance, a fundamental law of education, between exaltation and control (Dionysus and Apollo), others are established between education for today and perennial education (past, present, and future); or education rooted in the homeland and cosmopolitan education (*idem*, p. 111). In all of these cases it is a matter of seeking a dynamic balance.

The special laws of the pedagogy of Cossío, which Xirau takes from his oral classes (*idem*, p. 77), consist of adapting to the personality of each student, because no two are the same. For this reason, there is "a need for the educator to have love and tact to adapt his own individuality to the personality of the individual in his care. If this is lacking, all else goes to waste" (*idem*, p. 114). The special laws refer to the health and illness of the student (natural level), and then to the three spiritual areas of every human being (cultural level) — feeling, loving, and knowing — which can respectively be valued according to quality and quantity. Depending on the student's intelligence of the student, he or she moves between truth and error; depending on the student's will, between what one is and what is other (authenticity-inauthenticity); depending on

the student's sensitivity between excess and lack. The teacher must adapt to each student, according to whether they are strong or weak, fast or slow, masculine or feminine (*idem*, p. 116). Following the classical norm, the principal command of the teacher is that "the child is owed the maximum reverence" (*maxima debetur puero reverentia*, Juvenal, Satires, XIV, 47).

Xirau, as a good phenomenologist, pauses to describe the educational action. What type of action do some living beings perform to shape others? There are four types of influence on other beings (*idem*, p. 86):

1. Action of resolution: the agent is confused with the subject of the action.
2. Action of contemplation: the material is impassible before the agent, who is external to it.
3. Action of fabrication: the agent and the material are distinguished and even opposed.
4. Action of feeding, suggestion or illumination: the agent creates the favourable or indispensable conditions for the full development of the material.

Starting again from the idea that education's function being to "vivify, capacitate, give powers for life" (*idem*, p. 99), it is clear that the relationship that develops between the educator and the learner is a relationship of the last type; different from purely theoretical influence, which is unilateral and not bilateral as in education.

But nor is it sentimental, because it does not tend towards confusion between the one who loves and the one who is loved. What is distinctive about the educational relationship is active stimulation.

In Xirau's thought, some of the antonymies that he considers with regards to the pedagogy of Cossío repeatedly appear (and that he takes from his oral teaching, as Xirau himself admits, *OCII*, 1999, p. 77). We have already seen some: do we educate by encouraging or inhibiting?; for the community or for the individual?; for today or for always?; for one place or for the whole world?; for this life or for the other? Others that Xirau suggests are: does pedagogy encompass the whole person or just part of it?; does one educate consciously or unconsciously?; for rebellion or for submission?; according to nature or according to the spirit? The question, Xirau acutely notes, only makes sense for those who understand these concepts as contradictory (*idem*, p. 83). It is surprising to observe the affinity between this approach and that of R. Guardini regarding polarity as constitutive of reality (Guardini, 1996).

Moreover, is pedagogy a science or an art? It is vital to eschew false dichotomies given that although science is not needed to practice the art, it is in order to achieve perfection (*idem*, p. 91). For the intellectualist, it is enough to know things to know how to do them; for the pragmatist, only one who knows how to do things knows them. But the error lies in separating theory from practice (*idem* p. 92). Facts (art) and the laws of the facts (science) are overcome by values, which should guide

everything, as Xirau observes and which we will consider below (*idem*, p. 97). We will then consider this false clash in greater depth with regards to some common commonplaces in the world of teaching.

4. The content of education

Having set the general framework of the pedagogy that Xirau proposes, it is necessary to examine what the content of education is. What are we going to teach? First we will see what we should attempt to transmit to each person. Next we will cover a specific question that appears in his works and is also related to education: religion.

On at least two occasions, Xirau speaks of the curriculum that any education should encompass. In so doing, he follows

the thread of the great classical works, like a good student of Greek philosophy. We should educate in truth, and for that we have science; we should educate for good, and for that we have morality; we should educate for beauty, and for that we have art. Along with these three major ideals that should guide education (truth, goodness, beauty) there is the culture of means such as the economy or law, which are not ends in themselves but which help the previous ideals; these are what belong to utility. Finally, there is the relationship with the All, which should also be the object of education and is what belongs to religion (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 356-357; 378-379). Again, the influence of the philosophy of values of Max Scheler can be seen in these considerations. Schematically it would look like this:

SANCTITY (Religion)		
TRUTH (Science)	GOODNESS (Moral)	BEAUTY (Art)
UTILITY (Law, Economics, etc.)		

The value of sanctity, as pertaining to religion, deserves some clarification. Can it be taught? Should it be taught? Xirau (and the Institución Libre de Enseñanza in general) felt that the answer was yes, but without dogmatism and respecting the conscience of the teacher. Xirau often reflects on commonplaces that pertain to religion or are connected to it (Xirau, *OCI-II*, 2000, p. 295; Arada et al., 2014, pp. 13-50). He criticises the dogmatism of Spanish confessional education with the same

force that he criticises the secularist atheism propagated in the schools of the USSR for being “dogmatic and unyielding. To the old dogmas it opposed the hypotheses of Darwin and Marx, sublimated and turned into undeniable truths; to the teaching of religion, the obligatory teaching of irreligion” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 384). Xirau argues not for a non-religious school (much less an irreligious one) but rather a non-dogmatic one. Two claims about this can be found in Xirau's works, as in



“El principi de llibertat i la consciència moral” [The principle of freedom and the moral conscience] (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 396-400): firstly, the child must be educated in religious values such as sanctity, but in a non-dogmatic way; secondly, the teacher should be free to be able to teach or not teach the Catholic religion (remember that at that time teachers’ duties included teaching Christian doctrine). Following the reflection of Vatican II on religious freedom and therefore of the freedom of teaching recognised for parents, and not conflating religious education classes and catechism, the divergence is not so much with the current positions of the Catholic Church itself.

5. Stages of the educational process

At various points in his work, Xirau discusses the different stages in the educational process. These can be summarised in the three familiar ones: primary education, secondary education, and the university. His work on Cossío dedicates a whole chapter to examining the state of the different educational levels in Spain before the Republic, and this serves as an excellent introduction to the history of education in Spain. Two educational stages fall outside Xirau’s interests: early childhood education, as this was not yet regarded as a true educational stage when he wrote his book; and professional education or technical teaching in general. These two educational stages do not deserve his attention.

Xirau understands that education is as necessary in childhood as in adolescence.

Therefore, with Cossío, he has various proposals: aligning the salaries of teachers with those paid in higher education; coeducation of boys and girls; extending the educational period in which the foundations of the subsequent education are laid; the school as place of play (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 117); increasing the number of rural schools; and proposing pedagogical missions to raise the level of schooling in Spain. What should we propose in this stage?

The school should make the child better, stronger, more intelligent, agile in spirit and body, full of interest in beautiful and just things, capable of the highest undertakings and the most noble ideals, giving him a personality that is robust and firm, energetic and confident (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 371).

If he had to reduce it to two words, Xirau says, the teacher should teach music and gymnastics: spirit and body, according to the Greek and Platonic ideal. Everything else is an addition, as he states in “La formación universitaria de Magisterio [Teacher training at the university]” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 438-442).

Calls for teachers to have a university education were continuous, and Xirau himself contributed to this, as noted above, by organising the degree in teaching and the pedagogy seminar at the Universidad de Barcelona. The fundamental reason for this is that he felt it to be absurd that the education of children should be less important than that of adults: we do not entrust children to healers because they are younger but rather to doctors with all of their

academic training; why do we not demand the same in education? Taking Cossío's idea, he says: "If the age of the student, which is all that changes, were to be the basis of the purported hierarchical order of the teaching role, we would find ourselves in the absurd position, which you all reject, of regarding a paediatrician as inferior to a doctor who treats adults" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 141). People are moved by ideas, and pedagogy is done through ideas; therefore, teachers must have a solid university intellectual grounding, because "if pedagogy disregards these and similar problems it is no more than empty pedantry and rigid vanity" (Xirau, *OCIII*, 2000, p. 267).

Secondary education, Xirau says, has set out to imitate university education and the harm has been more serious; therefore, pedagogical reform has started with this stage, as he affirms in "Sentido de la Universidad [Meaning of the university]" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 467-498). The reason for the above is historical, as secondary education derived from the old university faculties of arts. According to Xirau, the fact that this educational stage has been in private hands is to be deplored, a situation that was often encouraged by the state itself because this situation was advantageous for it. As innovations, following the ideas of Cossío, Xirau suggests doing away with dividing subjects by year as this does not favour the organic development of the child's intelligence; doing away with confessional teaching of religion because the children will experience the divisions caused by religion when they are adults; putting an end to discipline conducted by

people who are not teachers, as happened in Jesuit colleges, as this implies that discipline is less important than the theoretical lesson (although in reality this measure introduced by the Jesuits was more intended to prevent abuses); doing away with exams because all of the education focusses on them deforming, its meaning; and doing away with boarding schools because children should be with their families. This period should also be extended, as should primary education.

Finally, there is university or higher education, which Xirau turned his attention to on various occasions. For example, he explains the evolution of universities from Greco-Roman higher education (Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, etc.), where education in the Greek meaning of *scholé*, leisure (*otium*), opposed to business (*negotium*, *nec-otium*), was predominant. The medieval university, in turn, was another corporation at the service of a hierarchical and organic society, functioning as another guild (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 471-472). In addition, there were three European traditions of universities: the Latin one more concerned with professional training; the British more concerned with general culture, and the German concerned with research. Moreover, in nineteenth century Spain there were few faculties (philosophy and letters, sciences, law, social sciences, medicine and pharmacy), and the faculty of theology was abolished during the First Republic. For Xirau the very large number of exams that led to student discontent, the low wages of teachers, who had to seek an income elsewhere, and the elitism of the students, who ran the risk of falling into

snobbery, were unacceptable, as he argues in “La reforma universitaria [University reform]” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, pp. 420-434).

There are three conceptions of what a university should provide: professional training, general culture, and research; Xirau associates these ideas with the three European traditions mentioned above. This disciple of Cossío, with the instinct of a phenomenologist, tries to determine the exact content of these three vague insights and raise them to the rank of concepts (*idem*, p. 470). These three functions can only occur in the free spiritual communion between teachers and students (*idem*, p. 480). With regards to research and professional training, there is again no dichotomy, because there is no separation between theory and practice, at least not in the sense that is often intended. It goes without saying that in our university of the twenty-first century, teachers are often expected to emphasise teaching understood as professional training and research, often neglecting the role of providing culture. And what is culture for? As Xirau says:

The whole world is full of its shining traces. Palaces and temples, cities and pantheons, codes, poems, statues, symphonies ... are living witnesses to that age-old effort. They make up the atmosphere that we breathe. Only because in culture and through culture, it nourishes, man is a man and is separated from bare animality (*idem*, p. 492).

Without it, we would be animals: “What the human spirit does in thousands of years of history, each man does

in marvellous miniature in his short evolution” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 356).

6. Old and new commonplaces regarding education

In this last section we review some of the commonplaces that afflict pedagogy. We have identified six that Xirau addresses in his work and which can be summarised in the following slogans: “being practical is what matters”; “pedagogy is not a science”; “educating is just a technique”; “what matters is content”; “education inhibits the freedom of the child”; “school is useless”.

The first commonplace states that theory is of no use: we must be practical. In pedagogy this means that a law student must know how to win cases, a student of medicine how to put on a bandage, etc. Xirau affirms in “Pedagogía y practicismo” [Pedagogy and practicality] (Xirau, *OCII*, p. 360) that people think this way because they believe that ideas follow life, theory follows practice; or to put it another way: that what is true, good or beautiful must be subject to what is useful (*idem*, 360-361). But the fact is that theory improves practice: to do something, it is not enough to do it, it must be done well; and to do it well, theoretical knowledge is needed (*idem*, p. 363). As Xirau liked to say, in Italian, “*La teoría è il capitano, e la prattica sono i soldatti*” (The theory is the captain, and the tactics are the soldiers). In fact, if people had only concerned themselves with being practical and the utility of what they did, without dedicating themselves to pure speculation, we would still be carving rocks as we did in prehistory (*idem*, p. 364).

The second commonplace affirms that pedagogy is not a science. In a lively essay, Xirau provides a thorough analysis of the type of scientific propositions that pedagogy uses. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that this is one of the first attempts at analytic philosophy in Spain, although in Xirau, it is certainly an isolated example, and it does not stop him doing it from phenomenology (and yet he was one of the first translators of Russell). He starts by establishing that an educational theory comprises a system of rules that do not say how things are, but how they should be (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 365). The propositions of pedagogy are of the type "A should be B" (the child should be free, the child should be courageous, etc.). But for this precept to be a rule, its foundation must be sought in reason (*idem*, p. 366). The foundation of the rules is their value: A should be B because it is valuable. Yet value is not something that is "perceived" or "known", instead it is something that is "esteemed" (again Scheler here). Nonetheless, values (should be) refer to absolutes that are governed by what is, not by what should be. From the proposition "The child must be courageous", which is practical, we pass to theoretical ones of the type: "courage is a value" (*idem* p. 368). In summary: pedagogy comprises normative judgements, these entail duty and duty is based on a value.

The third commonplace argues that educating is a similar technique to the one that human beings use with the things of the world, and so love does not have formative relevance. We could summarise this by saying: "education is a question

of technical skill". In the final chapter of his magnum opus, "Amor y mundo [Love and world]", Xirau pauses to consider this question; to do so he analyses the expression "to educate is to love" and tries to see if there is something of truth in it (Xirau, *OCI*, 1998, p. 262). Xirau starts by separating love from physiological processes, because even though human love is related to them, it is not reduced to them. "Education tends to improve a given reality, to lead a thing from what it is to what it should be, to introduce into the world of education qualities that it does not have but that it is necessary that it has, and to eliminate defects it possesses and that it should not possess" (Xirau, *OCI*, 1998, p. 127-128). Educating is not just letting someone live but vivifying, because "a life that only consists in surviving is no life" (*idem*, 129). And technique is not enough to vivify and lead someone to their perfection: it is necessary to love.

The fourth commonplace we have identified holds that what matters in education is content, and that it is not the role of the school to impart values. Xirau responds to this by saying: "To the psychophysiological problems that rightly concern any educator worthy of the name, we must add the grave problems raised by the fact that human life is wholly immersed in and vividly polarised by the ideal field of values" (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 404). Xirau again poses the question that guides all of his pedagogy: before us is a child, what do we do with it?; what values do we place highest? We cannot forego setting values because "man always lives for something that claims him, in an

insatiable striving that leads him beyond himself and devotes him to something that makes life worth living. This is what differentiates educating people from raising animals” (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 461). So, as well as transmitting content, education is radically directed by values, and we have seen above what its hierarchy of values is.

The fifth commonplace would be to think that education restricts the child’s freedom. According to this one, any educational undertaking entails repression; the child should be left to roam freely, with as little intervention as possible. But what this entails, according to Xirau, is delineating a concept of freedom that goes beyond merely indulging whims; conciliating arbitrariness with necessity (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 418). The fact is that for our author there is no dichotomy between freedom and authority because only freely accepted authority is legitimate; instead the dichotomy is between arbitrariness and authority. Education is a mediation that helps the child be free: “To educate the will is to give it a particular and invariable law, on which one can rely” (*ibid.*). He shows us that there is no freedom without law nor is there autonomy without *nomos*, in the Kantian mode.

The last commonplace holds that the school is useless. Here Xirau would, to some extent, agree, as Nussbaum (2010) also states. As is well known, the word school comes from the Greek *scholé*, *otium* in Latin, which is the opposite of business (*neg-otium*) (Xirau, *OCII*, 1999, p. 83). So, in such a place, people are taught the type of activities that are valuable in them-

selves, and that are not at the service of others: “The school is in contrast with the workshop as leisure is with work, disinterested perfection with interested production, theory with practice, contemplation with action” (*idem*, p. 84).

7. Conclusion

We have established Xirau’s humanistic (Quintana, 2009, p. 223) and pedagogical influences. We have also analysed his pedagogical ideas and his focus on the values of utility, truth, goodness, beauty, and sanctity. We have noted what is specific to the different educational stages and finally have analysed a series of current pedagogical commonplaces and the response Xirau would give. It is in this last section that we can best appreciate the relevance of the Catalan thinker. Given that the commonplaces are by nature commonplaces, it is surprising how much they are still resent in our time, as much as in the time of Xirau. Xirau is positioned on the watershed between modernity and postmodernity, drawing on pedagogical currents that preceded him and opening up pathways to new ways of rethinking pedagogy, situating the person at the centre of the whole of the educational process.

Note

¹The citations are from the edition of his complete works (*Obras Completas – OC*) published by Fundación Caja Madrid/Anthropos, followed by the volume (I, II or III, which in turn comprises two parts), and the page, as is normal. All translations are by the author of the present work. The reference list includes all works cited in this article.

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