Educational reforms for a crisis. On the education of character in Plato and Aristotle

Reformas educativas para una crisis. Acerca de la educación del carácter en Platón y Aristóteles

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Abstract:

This work considers the current crisis in the Western world, caused by the pandemic, war, energy supply issues, and other related disturbances, and its potential impact on current educational models, which are being reformed in various countries and attempts to relate it with historical precedents from classical antiquity that were a reaction to crises of ancient democracy through more or less utopian proposals for the reform of the traditional educational system put forward by two great thinkers: Plato and Aristotle. Our aim is to try to summarize the importance for these two thinkers of the education of individual character in the pursuit of the common goods of various political communities by uniting the wills of the citizens. The methodology used is rereading the fundamental passages of the classical sources on character and education in the young, comparing them with the points of view of most of the research, summarized in the assessments of the great manuals of the history of education. Despite being a well-known theme, it is worthwhile returning to these passages for an updated reflection in our contemporary world. Thus, it is apparent that, in spite of the obvious divergences between the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle, there is a curious similarity in the case of character education as the key to solve the problems posed for a society in times of crisis.

Keywords: history of education, history of ancient philosophy, Plato, Aristotle.

Resumen:

En el presente artículo se trata de relacionar la crisis actual en el mundo occidental provocada por la pandemia, la crisis energética y bélica, y otras turbulencias relacionadas, y

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sus posibles repercusiones en los modelos educativos actuales, en plena reforma en diversos países, con los precedentes históricos que se dieron en la antigüedad clásica de reacción ante la crisis de la democracia antigua a través de propuestas más o menos utópicas de reforma del sistema educativo tradicional por parte de los dos grandes pensadores del mundo antiguo, Platón y Aristóteles. El objetivo es intentar resumir la importancia para ambos pensadores de la educación del carácter individual a la hora de perseguir los bienes comunes de las diversas comunidades políticas aunando las voluntades ciudadanas. La metodología que se ha seguido ha sido la de releer los pasajes fundamentales de las fuentes clásicas acerca del carácter y la educación en los más jóvenes, comparándolas con los puntos de vista de la mayor parte de la investigación, resumidos sumariamente en las valoraciones de los grandes manuales de historia de la educación. Pese a ser una temática muy conocida, no está de más volver a estos pasajes para una reflexión actualizada en nuestro mundo contemporáneo. Así, se puede constatar que, pese a las divergencias evidentes entre los sistemas filosóficos de los dos pensadores, Platón y Aristóteles, hay una curiosa coincidencia en el caso de la educación del carácter como clave de bóveda para resolver los problemas planteados para una sociedad en momentos de crisis.

Descriptores: historia de la educación, historia de la filosofía antigua, Platón, Aristóteles.

1. Introduction

In times of crisis, the political community often turns its attention to education in an attempt to establish whether the methods and pedagogy, and also, the content and the very spirit of the rules that govern the educational cursus, are appropriate. And also, whether they may have had something to do with the origin of the crisis or, thirdly, whether they might perhaps in some way provide a solution to it and prevent a relapse in the future. It appears to me that this has been proven various times throughout history, in moments of deep agitation in the past and, specifically, in the Classical World, which is the main object of this reflection. It goes without saying that these moments of crisis obviously do not occur in the present day, driven by epidemics, wars or invasions, and threats of annihilation of varying types. And in the Western World, we often look back towards the world which is generally regarded as paradigmatic and which is believed to represent the origins of our culture, or at least a paradigm for it, which is Classical Greece and Rome. Consequently, I would now like to cast an eye over the question of educational reforms and individual character education as a remedy for collective tribulations in times of upheaval.

It is no coincidence that the two major participatory systems in our political history date back precisely to this classical age of Greece and Rome — Athenian democracy and Roman republic —, nor is the fact that these are the most resounding and perhaps most repeated in the names

of the states currently represented in the UN: from the Athens of Pericles to the Rome of Cicero, the two models of a state had their zenith and their downfall at very close times and since ancient times they have led political theorists to speculate on the cycles of rise and fall of freedoms and constitutions. I think of the ideas of the mixed constitution or of anacyclosis, or cyclical change of constitutions, from Aristotle and Polybius to Machiavelli, Gibbon, Mommsen, Toynbee, and Spengler. But what is the place of education in all of this?

2. The model character of Classical proposals

In response to the question above, a clear historical parallel occurs to me: the proposal for complete reform of education for the individual and the collective in the case of the philosophers Plato and his pupil Aristotle, in the 4th century BC. The situation of Athens, after the Peloponnesian War, which includes the plague of Athens, is a total crisis of the system that led thinkers to look towards education. The political community had experienced a systemic failure in the case of Athenian democracy, and the world of the *polis* was also shaking. New reflections on the traditional Greek *paideia* arose, based on education: the educational system, as the foundation of citizenship, would occupy these thinkers in Plato's political trilogy (*Republic*, *Politics*, and *Laws*) and Aristotle in the *Politics*. In addition to this, there is the fact that their two great philosophical schools would continue in the Academy and the Lyceum until they reached late antiquity and would subsequently pass to the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Middle Ages leaving an indelible mark on the history of ideas in regards to education and politics: consider, as just one example, the near legendary figure of Aristotle as the great "wise man" in the Arabic tradition, which depicts him as the teacher of the no-less mythic Alexander.

The aforementioned crisis of the systems in the world of classical Greece and Rome, their participatory systems, and their liberal and private education led to an in-depth reflection on the educational models, followed by a series of proposals at different levels, both methodological and ethical. I think, recapping briefly, that of the original and later Sophistic, the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, the emphasis on Rhetoric as the core of education, with tendencies such as Atticism and Asianism, its great trends in the Roman era, and, above all, the more or less realistic ideas of reform or attempts at change in the mind of various philosophers who, as in the case of Greece, can be counted among the founding fathers of Western thought. I refer, obviously, to Plato and Aristotle. After the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the crisis of its democracy and of its educational system, which was based on Sophistic and private tuition for the elites in rhetoric, the first utopian endeavours of reform were undertaken, putting education right at the centre of the debate. Achieving the happiness of the collective requires an education that makes the citizen a member of a balanced body politic that must be well-trained in the arts and sciences, but also separately in technical disciplines, with an indelible

moral aspect that makes its members valued components of the city. The harmonious interlinking of individual virtue and the collective happiness of the political community is one of the clear aspirations of these reformists, starting with Plato but following with Aristotle. It goes without saying that these are profound ideas that will leave an indelible, "immortal seed" according to Plato's apposite expression in the Phaedrus, in the souls of our subsequent educational philosophers. It is with good reason that here we can also speak of a start to the philosophy of education.

Indeed, ancient Greece always pursued the integration of the individual in society through educational and cultural mechanisms, in what was known as *paideia*, which was conceived as a global and lasting process in the life of the person and the community. The individual is educated with a view to the collective in a number of phases: within the family and the kin (the *oikos* and the *genos*), in fraternal or cultural associations (the individual was defined in relation to various group such as the *phyle* or tribe and the *phratria*, or brotherhood), in education, with its diverse stages from the *paidagogos* to the *sophistes*, and, finally, in life as a citizen in the political arena. One key aspect of Greek *paideia* is the idea of the complete and continuing education of the individual, which, after Athens' period of crisis following the Peloponnesian War, is recovered, for example, by the orator and rhetorician Isocrates, a near contemporary and rival of Plato, with the ideal of the circular or integral education, the *enkyklios paideia*. Isocrates speaks of education and relates it to Greek culture, proposing an integral curriculum of gymnastics, grammar, poetry, mathematics, and philosophy. But he places the greatest emphasis on rhetorical education, as a means to give the citizen control over himself through public, political, or legal oratory. In effect, these three genres of rhetoric, analysed by writers of treatises such as Anaximenes of Lampsacus or, later, Aristotle, in Isocrates point at a civic and integrating humanism in a way that the great Cicero would later inherit in Rome. Here, Athens is still, despite its decline, the school of Greece, as stated in the famous metaphor of Pericles' *logos epitaphios* (funeral speech), that Thucydides includes in his History of the Peloponnesian War. And being Greek is not a question of race or origin, but rather of participation in *paideia*, the education and culture, that are the true homeland of the human being (Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 50):

> And, so far, has our city distanced the rest of mankind in thought and in speech that her pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world; and she has brought it about that the name Hellenes suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and that the title Hellenes is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share a common blood. (Isocrates et al., 1980, p. 149)

3. The Platonic reform

However, let us turn to Plato who, according to the traditional view, followed his master Socrates in the fight against the private and relativistic education of the *polis*, the form represented by the Sophists. His is the first in-depth consideration, in the 4th

century, of the need for a profound reform after the crisis. Like Aristotle later on, he proposed a reformed education, under the control of the state, that turns the traditional *paideia* into an integral training that continues all through people's lives. But the emphasis now should not be on rhetoric, as in Isocrates and before him the sophistic base of democracy, but on overcoming this, in philosophy and specifically in dialectics. This new complete education is already proposed in the *Republic*, but its higher levels can only be reached by the governing elite of society. The combination of tradition and innovation in Platonic education is of interest: a first stage focuses especially on gymnastics and music (understood as the "art of the muses"), to centre on the *soma* and *psyche* duality, during two initial stages, childhood, and youth, and two classes of citizens. After completing this first phase, those who according to their nature or excellence must continue to study to head for the upper stage (and, thus, the upper class) will continue with dialectics and mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music in a gradual ascent towards metaphysical knowledge of ideas. We should recall these classical statements by Marrou about the controversial educational project Plato proposes in the *Republic*:

> For in the last resort the practical educational problem for fourth-century society was how to bring up its various sections, and Plato's ambitious and difficult schemes left this concrete problem unsolved, his sole concern being to select and train a small group of philosopher-rulers who could take over the reins of government for the good of the State. But Plato himself had few illusions about the possibility of this kind of effective seizure of power: it seemed to demand such an improbable conjunction of physical and mental strength as to be — and he was the first to realize it — well-nigh miraculous. …
>
> In the end, Plato perceived the truth about his own nature. His teaching became concerned with one man only, or at most a small group of men gathered together in a school, a closed sect, a cultural oasis in the midst of a vast social desert. The Wise Man shall spend his life "cultivating his own garden" … the Wise Man, for Platonism had now achieved a personalist type of wisdom. Thus, Plato's thought, set in motion in the first instance by the desire to reinstate the totalitarian ethic of the ancient city, finally rises far above it and lays the foundations of what will remain the personal culture of the classical philosopher. (Marrou, 1982, p. 117-118)

However, we are more interested in Plato's second project, the one in the *Laws*, as it is more realistic and less utopian. The setting of the discussion is highly characteristic: three old men have a walk on a pilgrimage to the cave of Zeus, debating how the new ideal and more realistic constitution for the city of Magnesia might be. The dialogue is between an unnamed "Athenian Stranger", a Spartan, Megillus, and a Cretan, named Clinias. By focussing on the maximalist proposals of the *Republic*, the history of education as seen in Marrou, and also part of political philosophy, as in the case of Popper, has perhaps been unfair on Plato, simplifying his ideas or directly labelling them as regressive or even totalitarian[1]. The *Laws* must be taken into account and read as Plato's final, retrospective proposal. In this way, Altman's more

recent proposal (2012) seems more fair to me, about the order of pedagogical reading of Plato's dialogues — we know it from the Neoplatonists — and the idea that his doctrines sometimes present false, contestable, or paradoxical arguments as a shortcut that attracts students, before showing the more complex "long route": like an astute teacher, he likes to challenge his reader with various routes open to pedagogical research. Therefore, his work must be read as a progression, including the proposals from his last text, without disregarding the progressive and integrating aspects, the conscious contradictions between the early dialogues and the late ones.

Plato's last political work, the *Laws*, completing his political trilogy, deserves special attention in this regard and, especially, in contrast with the *Republic*. We should not forget that, as Socrates says in the latter dialogue, the Kallipolis or *beautiful city* that is presented as an ideal in this dialogue is no more than "a paradigm in heaven". But the *Laws*, on the other hand, contains a complete constitutional structure that starts with a preamble based very closely on music and on the chorus which, dedicated to different traditional divinities such as Apollo, the Muses, and Dionysus, will guide the education of the citizens in their different ages, from childhood to old age. Education in the *Laws* places special emphasis on the moral formation from childhood of good citizens and citizens who are good, where the ethical and the political come together the constant practice of virtue. What characterises this educational reform is its emphasis on a continuous education, from childhood to old age. We should recall the celebrated preliminary definition of education in the following dialogue (643c–e):

> Athenian. First and foremost, education, we say, consists in that right nurture which most strongly draws the soul of the child when at play to a love for that pursuit of which, when he becomes a man, he must possess a perfect mastery. Now consider, as I said before, whether, up to this point, you are satisfied with this statement of mine.
>
> Clinias. Certainly, we are.
>
> Athenian. But we must not allow our description of education to remain indefinite. For at present, when censuring or commending a man's upbringing, we describe one man as educated and another as uneducated, though the latter may often be uncommonly well educated in the trade of a pedlar or a skipper, or some other similar occupation. But we, naturally, in our present discourse are not taking the view that such things as these make up education: the education we speak of is training from childhood in goodness, which makes a man eagerly desirous of becoming a perfect citizen, understanding how both to rule and be ruled righteously. (Bury, 1967-1968, p. 63-65)

The crux of what Plato considers at the start of the *Laws* is how to educate the soul in self-control, in confronting pain, but also in the pleasures (wine and symposia are frequently mentioned) and so to work on virtue and courage. Therefore, he considers in detail the educational choruses, where citizens will sing and be educated collectively, from childhood to old age.

This emphasis on the lyric chorus — contrasting with drama, which Plato

always rejected for being related to democracy — recalls the Dorian world of common social education. The Dorian model was the most common experience of state-controlled education in the Greek world, with its *syssitia*, or common meals, and so it may be that Plato took inspiration in its mythical and literary figures at the start of the *Laws*. As for the lyrical and musical background of the *Symposion*, the basic institution of elitist Hellenic education since the Archaic Age, it appears to be reread here with a view to reforming it together with the *polis*. There is an extensive bibliography on the Greek symposium in general and the Platonic one in particular[2] that clearly displays the key role of this aristocratic institution as a model.

Pfefferkorn (2021) has recently re-examined the function of the three choruses of the *Laws* as a fundamental transition for understanding how the preamble to the dialogue is connected, and therefore with it the earlier tradition, both Greek educational and Platonic in particular, with the rest of the project of this final Platonic city. The most important chorus, in which I concur with this author, is the chorus of Dionysus, which is dedicated to the oldest group and has a greater political load, while those of Apollo and the Muses, for the two younger age groups, embody, for Pfefferkorn, a *lifetime* education on the basis of moderation or sophrosyne. Therefore, the regulation of the ages for drinking wine in book II of the *Laws* is so important: The Athenian stranger — perhaps representing Plato himself, in the only dialogue that does not feature Socrates as a character — distinguishes three categories in the regulation of the use of wine. Up to the age of 18, there is an absolute prohibition on drinking wine, enjoyment in moderation begins at 30 and from 40 people can take part in Dionysian indulgence (*Laws* 666a-c).

It is crucial to overcome pleasure as well as pain for this platonic character education, which is intended to reform the old *polis* in a way that is simultaneously both new and archaic: as in any deep reform, everything changes, but with roots in the traditional myths, religion, and symposia, and the lyrical and choral tradition, so that it seems that nothing changes. For "the victory over self is of all victories the first and best" (see 626e). So, when defining fundamental education, this memorable passage is very enlightening (*Laws* II 653a-c):

> I want us to call to mind again our definition of right education. For the safekeeping of this depends, as I now conjecture, upon the correct establishment of the institution mentioned.
>
> Clinias. That is a strong statement!
>
> Athenian. What I state is this, — that in children the first childish sensations are pleasure and pain, and that it is in these first that goodness and badness come to the soul; but as to wisdom and settled true opinions, a man is lucky if they come to him even in old age and; he that is possessed of these blessings, and all that they comprise, is indeed a perfect man. I term, then, the goodness that first comes to children 'education'. When pleasure and love, and pain and hatred, spring up rightly in the souls of those who are unable as yet to grasp a rational account; and when, after

> grasping the rational account, they consent thereunto that they have been rightly trained in fitting practices: — this consent, viewed as a whole, is goodness, while the part of it that is rightly trained in respect of pleasures and pains, so as to hate what ought to be hated, right from the beginning to the very end, and to love what ought to be loved, if you were to mark this part off in your definition and call it 'education,' you would be giving it, in my opinion, its right name. (Bury, 1967-1968, p. 89-91)

Plato's proposal for reform is of great depth, as can be seen, precisely because it revolves around character education. The most important thing is moral discernment: pleasure and pain must make people love what is just and hate what is unjust from the earliest childhood. Elsewhere I have considered education in pleasures through the rules of wine (Hernández de la Fuente, 2013), with special emphasis on the choruses of older people. We should note that moral character education continues, with great relevance, into old age: the elderly, under the sign of Dionysus, continued to sing and learn in their choirs. But the bases of this regulated education for reforming the *polis*, much more plausible than that of the *Republic*, extend through all age groups. And also, through both sexes — the freedom and equality of women in this Platonic utopia is notable — and all social classes. There is a certain striking egalitarianism in the *Laws*. The characters of the rich and powerful are often ruined from childhood by a bad education full of adulation. Consider this illuminating passage on this matter, with the always helpful appeal to Persian history (*Laws* III 695c–696a):

> Darius was not a king's son, nor was he reared luxuriously. When he came and seized the kingdom, with his six companions, he divided it into seven parts, of which some small vestiges remain even to this day; and also incorporated in the law regulations about the tribute-money which Cyrus had promised the Persians, whereby he secured friendliness and fellowship amongst all classes of the Persians, and won over the populace by money and gifts; and because of this, the devotion of his armies won for him as much more land as Cyrus had originally bequeathed. After Darius came Xerxes, and he again was brought up with the luxurious rearing of a royal house: 'O Darius' — for it is thus one may rightly address the father — 'how is it that you have ignored the blunder of Cyrus, and have reared up Xerxes in just the same habits of life in which Cyrus reared Cambyses?' And Xerxes, being the product of the same training, ended by repeating almost exactly the misfortunes of Cambyses. Since then, there has hardly ever been a single Persian king who was really, as well as nominally, 'Great.' And, as our argument asserts, the cause of this does not lie in luck, but in the evil life which is usually lived by the sons of excessively rich monarchs; for such an upbringing can never produce either boy or man or greybeard of surpassing goodness. To this, we say, the lawgiver must give heed, — as must we ourselves on the present occasion. It is proper, however, my Lacedaemonian friends, to give your State credit for this at least, — that you assign no different honor or training whatsoever to poverty or wealth, to the commoner or the king, beyond what your original oracle declared at the bidding of some god. (Bury, 1967-1968, p. 229-231)

The final reference to the mythical legislation of Lycurgus and to the mar-

tial egalitarianism of Sparta, which Plato admired for its project, albeit with the appropriate caveats, is very significant. Here we find an education that shaped citizens of a city that was to be happy. So, the city of Magnesia, in this dialogue in which Socrates does not appear, is closer and more pragmatic: it gives specific rules and curricula. But we constantly find there is a lack of attention to this dialogue in the philosophy of education: see, for example, the ambivalent but somewhat unfair verdict of Loshan (1998, p. 42-43), which is based only on the *Republic* and closely follows a somewhat anachronistic interpretative tradition that dates back to Popper: "Can Platonic education serve as a model for education in any city? ... In one way it can; in another it cannot. ... Critics and supporters alike have presented him as advocating totalitarian ideological control." In my opinion, a panoramic vision that includes the *Laws* could somewhat modify the traditional appreciation of Platonic politics. It must be read with care to find the key points of the educational reform and the formation of the character of the individual as a formula for times of crisis.

4. The Aristotelian reform of the character

Plato's disciple, Aristotle, after decades of philosophical education and exercise alongside his teacher in the Academy, could not be untouched by the debate about education in the crisis of the *polis*. When he struck his own path in the history of ideas, he made an important contribution to the theories regarding holistic education in the ideal city towards virtue based on the individual character of the citizens. He did this in the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, and in their natural continuation, the *Politics*. In books VII and VIII of the *Politics*, which revolve around the political system of the ideal city, the relationship with the collective is key, through reform of the education system, which also rejects, as it had to, the Athenian model of democracy with its sophistic and rhetorical foundations. The traditional outlook on his teaching can be seen in this quote from Bowen, which underlines his dedication to citizen virtue from the individual, from the "good man" of tradition (*kalos kai agathos*) with the "good leisure" (*schole*) dedicated to scientific and philosophical speculation:

> Beyond his methodology, Aristotle represented for the Hellenistic and succeeding eras the figure of the professor per se, the scholar pursuing the life of intellect for its own sake and professing his theories to the students of his following. With his ideal of the intellectual life — exemplified by his own systematically arranged and catalogued library, one of the first in existence — and his belief that the greatest good rests in the pursuit of intellectual arete, Aristotle introduced a new concept into the world. Plato had directed his school to the practical end of producing the enlightened statesman; Aristotle sought the goal of disinterested knowledge. To the sense data of observation he applied the methods of inductive and syllogistic reasoning to yield an established and ordered body of knowledge. This knowledge was designed to cultivate intellectual virtue and to liberate the in-

> dividual from the bonds of the vegetative and appetitive modes of existence; so in the Hellenistic era, under the influence of Aristotle, the concept of the liberal arts, initiated by Plato, was developed further. Already mathematics had been given form by Pythagoreans and then Plato, and such knowledge — arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmonics — emphasized content; the methods of ordering it were rhetoric and dialectic. To this Aristotle added logic and the beginnings of grammar, thus promoting the growth of the seven liberal arts which were to form the basis of education for the ensuing 1,500 years. (Bowen, 1972, p. 128-129)

In common with his teacher, of course, Aristotle has the certainty that this new education would be public or it would not be, that the *polis* must take charge of the system, in contrast with what happened in Athens, specifying the different educational levels (see in general Curren's monograph, 2000). Initially, at the ages of five to six years, it seems that children attend classes without taking part in them. They gradually progress through education, which, in its most important stage, distinguishes between childhood, from the ages of seven to fourteen, and youth, from puberty to the age of twenty-one. The educational system will be public and will concern itself with the body and the spirit in equal measure: reading and writing, gymnastics and music are the principal parts, and they serve to shape the citizen who will enjoy the leisure needed to elevate the spirit towards scientific knowledge and speculation, which are synonymous with liberty. The following is a classic passage in this regard (*Politics* VIII, 1, 1337a 10–35):

> Now nobody would dispute that the education of the young requires the special attention of the lawgiver. Indeed, the neglect of this in states is injurious to their constitutions; for education ought to be adapted to the particular form of constitution, since the particular character belonging to each constitution both guards the constitution generally and originally establishes it — for instance the democratic spirit promotes democracy and the oligarchic spirit oligarchy; and the best spirit always causes a better constitution. Moreover, in regard to all the faculties and crafts certain forms of preliminary education and training in their various operations are necessary so that manifestly this is also requisite in regard to the actions of virtue. And inasmuch as the end for the whole state is one, it is manifest that education also must necessarily be one and the same for all and that the superintendence of this must be public, and not on private lines, in the way in which at present each man superintends the education of his own children, teaching them privately, and whatever special branch of knowledge he thinks fit. … It is clear then that there should be legislation about education and that it should be conducted on a public system. (Rackham, 1944, p. 635-637)

According to Curren's (2000) reading, the key to the start of book VIII of the *Politics* is the equation of the constitutional interest with the acquisition of virtue: that is to say, legislators must concern themselves with imposing correct habits on the citizens so that they share a common goal, as members of a community. It is, then, impossible to conceive of politics, ethics, and education separately. The state must educate its citizens well if it wishes to maintain the constitutional

system and voluntary compliance with its regulations.

Among the ideas Aristotle suggests for achieving the general happiness of the community there is, as is to be expected, the necessary education of the citizen in the framework of the political system and as "political animal," following the general principles that his teacher Plato could also endorse of an education that is virtuous and structured in stages. Obviously, the greatest emphasis is placed on the education of the youngest, to which book eight of the *Politics* is specifically devoted, with analysis of the educational experiences in existence until that time — following the path of Aristotle's work in many other disciplines, from the constitutional to the zoological — and proposing a reformed *paideia* on the basis of the middle point of tradition, which gathers the earlier one, systematises it, and structures it. The similarity of the basic curriculum with his teacher Plato, when mentioning a division into grammar, gymnastics, and music, is of particular interest. But there is also work on individual virtue and ethos through the dedication to good leisure, the starting point of all formation. The insistence on musical education, for example, parallels Aristotle's politics with the works from the end of Plato's life, in particular the *Laws*, and recalls the dual meaning of the word *nomos*, which alludes both to the law and to musical modes. Let us consider a well-known passage on the subjects taught in the proposed city (*Politics* VIII, 3, 1337b 23-1338b 5):

There are perhaps four customary subjects of education, reading and writing, gymnastics, music, and fourth, with some people, drawing; reading and writing and drawing being taught as being useful for the purposes of life and very serviceable, and gymnastics as contributing to manly courage; but as to music, here one might raise a question. For at present most people take part in it for the sake of pleasure; but those, who originally included it in education did so because, as has often been said, nature itself seeks to be able not only to engage rightly in business but also to occupy leisure nobly; for — to speak about it yet again — this is the first principle of all things. For if although both business and leisure are necessary, yet leisure is more desirable and more fully an end than business, we must inquire what is the proper occupation of leisure. For assuredly it should not be employed in play, since it would follow that play is our end in life. But if this is impossible, and play should rather be employed in our times of business (for a man who is at work needs rest, and rest is the object of play, while business is accompanied by toil and exertion), it follows that in introducing sports we must watch the right opportunity for their employment, since we are applying them to serve as medicine; for the activity of play is a relaxation of the soul, and serves as recreation because of its pleasantness. But leisure seems itself to contain pleasure and happiness and felicity of life. And this is not possessed by the busy but by the leisured; for the busy man busies himself for the sake of some end as not being in his possession, but happiness is an end achieved, which all men think is accompanied by pleasure and not by pain. (Rackham, 1944, p. 639-641)

Aristotle's treatment of leisure recalls what Plato did with pleasure in the *Laws*, which is discussed above, as well as the vindication of play (*paidia*) in the framework of education (*paideia*), also with deep Platonic echoes. Indeed, our modern word for "school" ultimately derives from the Greek for leisure, that is, schole. And work or business (*ta pragmata*) are precisely the negation of leisure, *a-scholia*, with the alpha privative. The concept of free time is of great importance for Aristotle since, as he says, it is "the principle of everything," of all scientific speculation, of the occupation in the tasks of the government, and of course, of all philosophical reflection. More attention should be devoted to leisure given its importance in the social and political framework that Aristotle advocates: the essence of the Greek being is in leisure and Aristotle regards it as one of the fundamental characteristics of the free citizen (for a partial discussion see Hernández de la Fuente, 2012).

Another important question is the role of music and literature in the complete education in the Aristotelian system. As in the case of the choruses from Plato's *Laws*, Aristotle argues for education to continue into adulthood, which to some extent prolongs state control over the moral formation of the citizen. Aristotle mentions music, but here the great difference with Plato is the drama, in particular, tragedy, which we know that Aristotle sincerely appreciated, in view of what he theorises in the *Poetics*. As Reeve notes in his summary of Aristotle's pedagogical philosophy (1998, p. 61):

> Aristotelian education continues to some extent even in adulthood, both at symposia, in the army, in the school of experience, in institutions of higher education, like the Lyceum, and in that other distinctively Athenian institution where music played a fundamental role. I mean the theater.

Of course, the question of leisure and pleasure, as well as play, music, and the choruses of youths, adults, and the elderly, in both works, the *Laws* and the *Politics*, can be linked to the philosophical ideal of the *theoria*, of the contemplative life, as a means of remedying education, with the appropriate nuances and adapted for society in general. Hence, good leisure has an undeniably central role that can already be found in Plato, for whom it is necessary in the citizen community. However, it is undoubtedly Aristotle who deserves a more systematic treatment and more prominence for the topic, to which he gives an undisputed prestige when he postulates the emergence of philosophy and science as a result of free time for a ruling class that has its basic needs covered and so takes to mathematics and other sciences which do not relate "to the necessities of life" (*Met*. l. 981 b, Tredennick, 1933). The idea is to provide one class, at least, of citizens, which stands out from the others owing to advances in the educational system — or, even though this notion is controversial today, for their "liberation from the sciences of what is necessary," in other words, once their subsistence needs have been covered — a knowledge that is purer, more humanistic or of pure scientific speculation, that regards the contempla-

tive life (*bios theoretikos*) separately from the practical life (*bios praktikos*). It is clear that, as well as the educational nuances, in the background of the question there is the debate of how to "live well" (*eu zen*) of all of Greek moral philosophy, that of the so-called "genres of life."

In Plato, again linking the two thinkers, the government of the philosopher in the just city has its foundation precisely in the fact that the philosopher is always far from mundane matters, dealings not related to his *theoria*, as his perception should be directed towards the world of ideas. Perhaps the philosopher would not have to flee from all that surrounds him in this way in the perfect city, as it would be possible to live philosophically with each part of society fulfilling its function and with society in general being educated in virtue. Both philosophers place special emphasis on the educational function of the state and on cultivating music and the arts in order to educate citizens from childhood to old age, in an ambivalence between play, leisure, and education. However, there are obvious differences between the two philosophers, for example, regarding literary and artistic tastes and the role of different genres in the arts funded by the state. It is clear that Aristotle saw tragedy as useful, something Plato saw as an error thanks to its relationship with Athens' failed democratic experience, and so he came to favour the lyrical chorus.

5. In conclusion

As we have seen, both Plato and Aristotle focus on the need to educate young people who will be citizens in a system of values that gives cohesion to the whole of the city. In so doing these philosophers connect to the aims of the various political systems that Greek civilisation saw, from the archaic and classical periods, with the opposing models of Athens and Sparta, up to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, with their cities that adopt the model of the Hellenic *polis*, featuring gymnasia, schools, and palaestrae throughout all of the Hellenistic East and, subsequently, in the most unexpected corners of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Hellenic *paideia* tried to instil certain values in the population as a whole, always from the earliest age, with the conviction that the perfection of the political community is only achieved where there is a concord (*homonoia*) in the etymological sense, that is to say, a way of feeling and thinking alike, acquired from childhood. The cases of Plato and Aristotle are of interest as they come after the collective upheaval of the crisis of Athens after the war. Plato puts a whole pedagogical programme in the mouth of Socrates, which is developed in the city, in the framework of the society, as "the country places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people in the city do" (*Phaedrus* 230d, Fowler, 1925, p. 423-425). For Aristotle, there is no happiness in human life outside the *polis*, in whose political and educational framework complete perfection is achieved and which we must develop from the individual virtues up to the best possible political community.

Finally, we should ask what the great lessons of the philosophers of education from Greek history are, following the

much-discussed crisis of Athenian democracy and of an educational system that was fragmented and focussed on what was necessary. There is no need to recall here the emphasis of Sophistic education throughout the whole of the golden age of Athens owing to its rapid and easy triumph in the political and judicial assemblies. The misunderstood arts of rhetoric led to the situation that Plato criticised so much through the words of Socrates in his famous debates with the Sophists Protagoras, Gorgias, Callicles, and Polus in dialogues such as *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*, among others. Relativism and the interest in the short term, solely in *what is necessary*, and an education centred on those who had the means to pay for it, made the philosophers from the schools of the 4th century BC around the Academy and the Lyceum consider the imperative need for the state to take charge of a common educational system. But this does not mean that there had to be a uniform system. In the different stages and disciplines proposed for educational reform by the authors we have considered, a clear gradation can be seen. There are classifications of subjects — but not separation of humanities and sciences, as is wrongly done today — but there is no classification for reasons of economy nor a segregation between rich and poor. Merit and capabilities are the basis of the selection.

Can we make use of something from these ancient theories today? Perhaps by taking the best of each of them we might find a current rereading for times of crisis. From Isocrates we can recall the idea that the true homeland is culture. From Aristotle, overcoming the division between poverty and wealth and favouring a middle term, which is also a middle class, and a uniform education as the backbone of a moderate state with a commitment between the social classes. From Plato perhaps the ideas of overcoming discrimination against women and of continuous education in all ages of the human being that need stages of educational development. Nowadays, beyond questions of gender, age, social or economic class, and geographic origin, an appropriate reading of these philosophers can inspire reflections that are very relevant to times of crisis, like the one we are currently experiencing. Therefore, it is always good to read the classics, carefully avoiding the anachronisms that set out to align them with current parameters, which it would be impossible to find in a city state like Athens or any other from the Greek world. And I think of slavery, the question of foreigners and citizenship, or the question of women's participation in public life. However, if we use these emblematic texts as a conceptual and first laboratory, they will open up to us a wide panorama for study and debate for pedagogy. It is clear that Plato and Aristotle are pioneers in approaches to the sciences and humanities. And beyond what the classic manuals of history of education that have been cited say, Plato and Aristotle can be teachers of pedagogy for turbulent times like the current ones, as they were the pioneers in considering the question of educational reform for all of society from parameters of ethics and

the education of the individual *arete*, so I have, as a minimum, attempted to note it in these reflections on their classical passages regarding character education.

Notes

[1]As is well known, Popper's extensive work (1945) comprises two large sections: the first centres on Plato and his influence — with a critique that suffers from an excessive literalism and an absence of context — and the second focusses on his critique of Hegel and Marx.

[2] Summarising briefly, as well as the works of Oswyn Murray, who edited a symposium on the symposium (Murray, 1990), the most recent considerations of this institution's iconography and cultural context, from art on pottery to philosophy, are the works by Lynch, 2011; Hobden, 2013; and Wecowski 2014.

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