

EDUCATION IS DEAD ! LONG LIVE EDUCATION !

Could we live more happily without attending school ?

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The present book review aims at drawing attention to a recent book, edited in France, in December 2012: *La fin de l'éducation?*¹ ; the author is the well-known international expert in education – Jean-Pierre Lepri.² He is mostly recognized as initiator and promoter of CREA (The Reflection Circle for an Authentic „Education”), that supports a sustainable alternative of education, so necessary for the mankind progress in the society of the future.

Here are some memorable statements from the book, which I consider sufficient to arouse any reader's interest in approaching it, be it a student, parent or education expert, pshychologist, sociologist or philosopher. „ Education is a problem, not a solution!”; „Education dies as any human institution”; „We *no longer* have to seek another alternative education, to favour the search of an alternative to education”.³

So, at first glance, we have to deal with a bold, shocking book. This is both a realistic and a utopian book, scientifically argued and visionary, cartesian and rhetorical at the same time. It is a work that delights and worries you, that gives you food for thought, but also gives you hope.

¹ Jean-Pierre Lepri, *La fin de l'éducation? Commencements...*, Éditions l' Instant Présent, 2012, avec une préface d'André Stern et postface de Zoe Neill, illustrations de DuBouillon.

² J. P. Lepri is CIRET active member ; search for further information at:

<http://www.education-authentique.org/index.php?page=qui-sommes-nous>

³ „L'éducation est le problème, n'est pas la solution (p. 137) ; L'éducation meurt comme toute institution humaine (p. 77) ; „abandonner la recherche d'une énième éducation alternative, pour privilégier la recherche d'une alternative à l'éducation” (p.136).

The title itself invites and incites to a serious reflection on the „institution” of education, on the education system as it is understood and as it works in the contemporary society. Presented as an interrogation, this title refers to the updating of both meanings of the word „*la fin*”: the „*finality*” of education and the „*end*”, „*extinction*” of education. In fact, both meanings also represent the ordering element of the first two chapters of the book.

The analysis that is devoted to the education goals dissociates the stated, official goals from the real, effective, noticeable ones. In such a context, a complete and complex analysis of those goals is achieved: both from a theoretical (conceptual) point of view and from a didactical and social practice point of view (dyachronically and synchronically). The problem of the goals in education is intimately connected to the problem of „meaning” in which and for which *education is performed*. A suggestive, somewhat allegorical expression of the issue could be summarized in the „motto” of the related chapter: „we can made the train run in time, but if they not go where we want them to go, why bother?”⁴

Thus, a noticeable aspect is the rift between the declarative existence of the educational aims and their effective absence, as well as between the „officially” stipulated aims and the observable ones in and from the practice. I intend to enumerate some of the observable goals. From a practical point of view, through access to the present day education, students have to learn: incompleteness, fear, dependence on the educator and on the system, conformism, subjection to what represents a „must” and not to their own desires; they learn to stand compulsion to an inappropriate learning rhythm and space, limitation of their ideas, the others’ lack of interest in what they think, believe and do, at the same time learning to mime an interest for shallow, irrelevant and useless things for them and their lives, but which they are required to assimilate. So, in the frame of the school system, students learn how to be competitive, alone among the others, how to be conformed to the social standards; they also learn what means „more”, not „better”, and how to focus on the appreciation of „quantity” and not „quality” (value).

The final conclusions of these two chapters lead to the idea that what is absolutely necessary is a depth study and an adequate understanding of the goals *sine ira et studio* attributed to education. What is also needed is an awareness and a responsible assumption of the obviously noticed truths; this implies the courage to overcome prejudices and crashes of thinking that were

⁴ p. 21, quote from Niel Postman, *The End of Education*, Vintage Books, 1996, p. 61.

paradoxically established by the same faulty „education”; in a nutshell, new goals are to be established in order to meet the real needs of each human being.

The second chapter raises for discussion the so-called „end” or the inevitable extinction of the „education”, as it was defined previously. This chapter starts from a detailed analysis of the education „roots” (diachronic perspective); it explains and describes possible scenarios of the extinction of the education institution in society; these scenarios are only alternative, looked upon as possibilities; however, the extinction of *this mentioned kind of education* is sure. Everybody (experts included) admit the crisis of the present day „education”. This crisis means a temporary loss of the „meaning”; overcoming it means establishing a „new meaning”⁵. The successive educational *re-forms* along the years, all over the world, have only succeeded in changing *a form* with another *form*; they did not touch the essence, they did not produce any educational paradigm mutation, able to lead to a new „meaning”. The conceptual skeleton of education has remained the same, i.e. what was defined on the basis of the educator-educated relation, a hierarchical relation based on the supremacy of the former, which subordinates the latter. The binomial master-slave, dominator-dominated, inducing a false need, the dependence of the *educated* on an *educator* has remained constant. A possible correction of this anomaly could be reached by shifting the focus from *teaching* to *learning* (in French – *enseigner/apprendre*).

The third chapter („*Vivre sans education*”) debates exactly this problem of escaping the tyranny of the „education and educator” and „teaching” institutions, in order to establish the *learning autonomy*. **Learning or the act of learning are looked upon as a naturally given fact of the human being**; e.g. „to learn” is similar to „to breathe” or „to sleep”. The act of learning is different, distinct, independent from the act of „teaching”: *learning* is something natural, organic, while „*teaching*” is something artificial, conventional and socially established. „To learn” is an inevitable, free, unlimited act; so it cannot be restricted or prohibited; learning generates pleasure and progress for the human being and the understanding of the world and the self as well. „To learn” means „to incorporate”. In short, the author’s argument leads to the idea that learning and living are synonymous: learning means living, and living means learning⁶.

⁵ Cf. Viktor Frankl, *Nos raisons de vivre*, Inter édition, 2009 (quotation p. 78).

⁶ „Apprendre, c’est vivre...et inversement”, p. 85.

But the transition process from „to educate” to „to learn”, shifting the focus from the former to the latter is a difficult, complex and long run one. Any collective mentality change is made laboriously and slowly. Transition is analysed from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint; the author has in his mind possible solutions too. He is searching for acceptable answers to questions such as: *How can we learn without education* ? (outside the existing institutional framework); Can we live without education? How ? Would it be better or worse ? Why does society keep the institutional sanctioned „ pattern”/”algorithm” of education, despite its obvious failure ? What does a change/reform and revolution in education effectively mean? What could be possible, necessary and right in changing the concept of „education”, for the benefit and self fulfilment of the human being? What social-political mechanism should be acceptable and accepted for such a *re-thinking* of the education concept and goals ?

The last part of the book concerns the highlighted „beginnings” in the very period of this transition. „The end of school and education has already begun !”⁷ What is next, depends on all of us.

A recent newspaper article – published by Edgar Morin in „Le Monde”⁸ – draws attention to the fact that it is high time for a deep reform of all our vision on things, i.e. our thought structures. This deep reform of the conscience and thought is to be achieved through a *different* „education”. This is the only way to solve some problems that were previously ignored by the present day educational system, i.e.: the problems of the conscience, identity, human condition, the global era, the understanding of existence in a global society, the modern human ethics.

The achievement of this desideratum also needs a political, social and cultural consensus. It is necessary to exceed the dangerous „experts’ learned ignorance” that generates the illusion of finding out „immediate, cheap and efficient solutions” which are also fragmentary and temporary. A deep re-setting up of conscience and thought cannot be achieved without re-defining and understanding the global „meaning” of our existence in the world. In order to

⁷„La fin de l’école est commencée. L’école devient obsolète par rapport à sa finalité profonde: inculquer et cultiver le rapport dominant-soumis. C’est un premier type de commencement (celui de sa fin), p.127.

⁸Edgar Morin, *En 2013, il faudra plus encore se méfier de la docte ignorance des experts*, Le Monde, January 1st, 2013, accessible at http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/01/01/en-2013-il-faudra-plus-encore-se-mefier-de-la-docte-ignorance-des-experts_1811813_3232.html

became a reality, this fact needs time and a reconsideration of the planetary education foundations.

In my view, Jean Pierre Lepri's book succeeds in triggering a triple impact: it is at the same time an *alarm signal*, a serious and severe *interrogation* on the contemporary education decline/failure, but also and *incetive* for searching and understanding the real needs of the human being. This is an authentic act of courage that reveals basic (less pleasant) truths and overcomes bias. The author faces and queries the social-political and economic factors, without aggression, but wisely and sparingly, for every argument and question in case.

The book testifies to a real, sincere concern of an eminent expert in education about the future of it. No honest intellectual, no man of good faith can ignore the truths that were proved in this book, or its serious interrogations and anxieties.