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**The idea of the discipline in education: towards an anarchist perspective**

In this article the outlines of the anarchist perspective on the discipline in education have been identified. In the beginning the relevance of the anarchism to contemporary educational debates has been justified. Then two opposite views at the discipline in education (by Durkheim and by Foucault) have been examined. Based on the Foucault’s critique it has been proposed how two meanings of the word ‘discipline’ referred to education connected. In conclusion it has been shown how rethinking education as a discipline from the anarchist perspective can inform educational research.

*Key words:* discipline, anarchism, philosophy of education, Durkheim, Foucault.

**WHY ANARCHISM?**

This kind of question might seem reasonably posed under the prevailing view of the anarchism as something that outlived its ‘golden age’ long ago and now could only be the point of interest for the handful of historians because of its irrelevance to the present days and utopianism. These features have always been attributed to the anarchist movement since its very beginning. One of the most popular and in many ways caricature images of anarchism was given by the prominent Russian anarchist P.A. Kropotkin, who in his famous lecture claims that many thinks that anarchism:

is a collection of visions relating to the future, and an unconscious striving toward the destruction of all present civilization… Did not the Parisian press, only two or three years ago, maintain that the whole philosophy of Anarchy consisted in destruction, and that its only argument was violence? (Kropotkin in Baldwin, 1970: 115).

Even though many anarchists, contrary to this, defended the constructive nature of the anarchism and rejected violence as a mean for achieving its goals, today, many years later, this picture of anarchism still remains ‘in the pages of newspapers’ and in the minds which prevents us as researchers from taking anarchism seriously. As a political theory anarchism is underrepresented in academic research, and in the sphere of practical politics it occupies an extremely marginal position. Little, if any, mentions about the ideas of anarchism in relation to education could be found in contemporary educational debates. A clear exception here is works done by the contemporary scholar Judith Suissa. Refusing to see anarchism as something just radical and utopian, she pointed out the positive role which it can play in education:

The anarchist position offers us an imaginative, critical and motivating vision of a good society, without proposing a program of revolutionary social change that can be worked out in advance, or a total overthrow of the existing system. In so doing, it suggests a very different perspective on the relationship between education and social change (Suissa, 2014: 156).

Reading her works convinced me that the study of the philosophical ideas of anarchism and a more careful look at the rich, often undeservedly forgotten history of the anarchist movement in the field of education could provide us with not only some interesting remarks on the problems discussed in philosophy of education, but also, as she puts it, expand the horizon of possible ways of speaking about education and, thereby, strengthen our philosophical imagination. However, even she saw potential problems in building a coherent anarchist perspective on education given the fact that it could undermine the most fundamental assumptions underlying our conception of education. This situation in many respects has been caused by the bias toward anarchism mentioned above.

One of the possible challenge for anarchist perspective on education deals with its view of the discipline. This problem becomes particularly puzzling in the case of education. It seems that even many anarchists themselves have been drawn into the ‘trap’ of the misconception of education presented as an ‘anarchist’. We can see it in the conflation of ‘anarchist’ and ‘libertarian’ positions on education, where the latter is strongly associated with the ideas of ‘free’ education such as a *laissez-faire* attitude to children’s upbringings. Suissa in her works shows how these two similar positions on education differ and why it is important to draw distinction between them. But in this article I will try to focus on what could be the anarchist view on the discipline in education given the fact that this term has different interrelated meanings. It is not the case that I’m going to present here a full and comprehensive conceptual analysis of the discipline in education, nor have I a strong view of how make our society and education less disciplinary or even what is the best perspective to look at this problem. Rather then I hope I will be clear in showing how the different meanings of the word ‘discipline’ referred to education relate and why anarchist perspective on this issue could be interesting.

**THE DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION: DURKHEIM AND FOUCAULT**

One of the most obvious but might not be a very philosophical way to find out the meaning of the word is to look at the dictionary. The first meaning of the term discipline could be found at the Oxford dictionary:

The discipline is the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience (Oxford dictionary, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/ definition/discipline. Accessed 13 September 2017).

In this sense the word discipline has been posed as a part of the process of education or at least training. We can use this word in different contexts (for example, military discipline or labour discipline), but the most widespread connotation of this word refers to the field of education, especially school education. Moreover, when we look closely at the etymology of the word «discipline», we will see that it originates from the latin word ‘*discipulu*s’ which means «student, pupil» — so it is education that has somehow always been connected with the discipline. Immanuel Kant was one of the most strong advocate for the necessity of the discipline in education. His views on education were based on the assumption that there is a fundamental difference between immature and mature human beings which lies at the idea of autonomy as a possibility of using of one’s reason as Kant saw it. It is education that provides this transition from immaturity to maturity and, according to Kant, the first step of this process requires discipline. He saw discipline as a negative but obligate part of education which prevents a man from being turned aside by his animal impulses from humanity, his appointed end.

Kant’s position represents some fundamental pedagogical ideas which have become predominant in the modern educational thought and that has exercised a great influence on modern educational practice. But this set of ideas isn't unproblematic and even in Kant’s own work on education we can find what is known in literature as ‘educational paradox’. Kant describe it this way:

One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite sub­mission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom. For constraint is necessary. How do I cultivate freedom under constraint? I shall accustom my pupil to tolerate a constraint of his freedom, and I shall at the same time lead him to make good use of his freedom. Without this everything is a mere mechanism, and the pupil who is released from education does not know how to use his freedom. He must feel early the inevitable resistance of society, in order to get to know the difficulty of supporting himself, of being deprived and of acquiring — in a word: of being independent (Kant, 2007: 447).

Attempts to solve this paradox take us beyond the traditional, mere pedagogical scope of questions as it reflects the connection between education and freedom. In others words, one finds it hard to answer questions such as when a child becomes independent and ready for the adult life, only appealing to the understanding of the child development provided by pedagogy and psychology. This question has a clear social and even political dimension which requires the different attitude to consideration of this problem.

One of the ways to look at this problem is to rethink the idea of disciplinary practices and to try to provide a positive notion of the term discipline. For instance, it was the task for Emile Durkheim in his influential works on education, especially in ‘Moral Education’, where he considers the discipline as an essential element of morality. For Durkheim it is particularly important to analyze the notion of the discipline in education not from a individualistic, psychological level, but from a sociological one, i.e. to put it in the social context where social norms constitute and help to maintain a certain social order. He claims, that

since moral requirements are not merely another name for personal habits, since they determine conduct imperatively from courses outside ourselves, in order to fulfill one’s obligations and to act morally one must have some appreciation of the authority *sui generis* that informs morality… We have seen, furthermore, that if this sense of authority constitutes a part of that force with which all rules of conduct, whatever they may be, impose themselves upon us, then authority has an extremely significant function; for here it acts independently. No other feeling or consideration is involved in the moral act (Durkheim, 1961: 34).

In this sense the discipline is necessary for both school and society because through it we become part of the particular social order and, hence, it always requires some changes in personal attitude and behavior that somehow make one ‘disciplined’. The principle of authority has its own limits: for instance, Durkheim strongly opposed the idea of physical punishments in schools. However he also rejected the notion that education had the task of changing society. Rather than it Durkheim saw education as part of the process of socialization where the discipline is the way to unite the child with larger society.

The functionalist view of education and discipline given by Durkheim seems to be quite reasonable for describing how social mechanisms work but it still leaves unanswered the question how it is possible for students to become autonomous at the end of education where the discipline takes such a crucial part. Durkheim himself argued that the result of education or, in his words, moral discipline should not be the mere socialization as an engaging students into the moral values and rules of a community but also the achievement of students’s autonomy and self-determination within society. In many ways his position reproduced the disciplinary struggles formulated by Kant in his educational paradox.

The very different perspective on this topic could be find in the works of Michel Foucault. His critique in ‘Discipline and punish’ helps to reveal the disadvantages of the disciplinary mechanisms not only in educational institutions, but within the whole society. Foucault in his book described the birth of prison in order to demonstrate how the disciplinary power works:

«How could the prison not be immediately accepted when, by locking up, retraining and rendering docile, it merely reproduces, with a little more emphasis, the mechanisms that are to be found in the social body. The prison is like a rather disciplined barracks, a strict school, a dark workshop, but not qualitatively different (Foucault, 1991: 223).

The technique of the disciplinary power does not include just limits and prohibitions, rather it serves to produce some kind of relations that somehow ‘makes’ individuals, regarding its both as objects and as instruments of evaluation based on the idea of the effectiveness. The main instruments of the discipline, according to Foucault, are hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and the procedure of the examination. It should be emphasized that these tools have a common task: to eliminate deviations and to correct the behavior — for instance, in schools we see that it is teacher’s task to hold disciplinary power over students through examination and punishment. Foucault puts it this way:

The art of punishing in the regime of disciplinary power is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression. The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchize, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes (Foucault, 1991: 183).

So, in the Foucault’s critique we see the very bad notion of the discipline: it ’normalizes’ students, turns them into conformists, it attempts to control all regimes of space and time. Even the school buildings, according to Foucault, as a tool of ‘correct training’, express the disciplinary power. The problem with this view lies in fact that it does not offer any positive program of how it is possible (if possible) to organize the system of education avoiding disciplinary mechanisms. The [situation](http://context.reverso.net/%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9/situation) is further aggravated by the Foucault’s understanding of power which implies that the disciplinary power does not have any single and stable source (like teacher in school, for example), it seems to be spread on the whole society and that is why it is hard (or even impossible) to resist this power.

**EDUCATION AS A DISCIPLINE AND «ALCHEMY OF PEDAGOGY»**

Nevertheless, Foucault’s critique has some additional insights which are extremely helpful for understanding how the disciplinary power works. He pays attention to the polysemy of the word discipline which remained unaddressed before. In fact, the word ‘discipline’ as an instrument of social control (first meaning) and as a branch of knowledge (second meaning) seems to be the best way to illustrate his concept of ‘power-knowledge’. But for education link between this two meanings of the discipline created a new perspective for the more in-depth philosophical analysis.

Traditional understanding of education as a process of the transmission of some special sets of knowledge which constitute the curriculum under this perspective requirers rethinking. If the first meaning of the term discipline reflects something that could be called the manner or the way of education, the second one is usually called the matter of education or the content of education. The idea here is to show how these two meanings connects. This aspect is highly important for practitioners and policy-makers as it is one of the key issues in different debates across education: the question «what should go on the curriculum?» should have a very certain answer which we can see at the syllabus, at the student’s textbook, at what teachers actually do when they teach. But it is not always obvious how the knowledge from a distinct discipline (usually scientific if it is an academic curriculum) transforms in something that happens in school and is expected to be «education». Given the fact that the content of education in many ways is deter- mined by the sociocultural conditions and can be transformed under its changes, this definition is closely connected with the first one: looking at knowledge as a social construct gives a reason to consider it as essential part of disciplinary mechanisms in education. Contemporary scholar Thomas Popkewitz gave a very persuasive explanation of this problem, which he called ‘alchemy’ of pedagogy as a process that turns scientific and social disciplines into modes of ordering and regulating people:

School subjects require transportation and translation tools that bring disciplinary fields concerned with knowledge production into the social and cultural spaces of schooling. Children are not physicists or historians, so something needs to be done with the disciplines so children can work with the ideas, narratives, and approaches to understanding. Like the 16th and 17th century alchemists and occult practitioners who sought to turn base metals into pure gold, the school subjects magically translate disciplinary fields through the languages of classroom management ant theories of learning and communication (Popkewitz, 2014: 10).

In other words, school subjects are never simply mathematics, science, literature and so on, but elements of those disciplines placed at the service of certain larger functions of schooling. This idea in fact has much in common with what Foucault concluded in his work: disciplinary mechanisms in order to «normalize» students produce the Norm and establish its power, which, in turns, appears through the disciplines.

The Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the *ecoles normales* (teachers’ training colleges) (Foucault, 1991: 184).

Later in the text Foucault described how the discipline in both meanings (as a technique of power and as a set of knowledge) organizes not only the school’s system, but education itself. In fact, education can be regarded as a subject of some distinct disciplines (such as philosophy of education, history of education, sociology of education etc.) or even as interdisciplinary area of studies which is usually named “educational studies”. Mostly, it is applied in the sphere of teacher education and in educational research. Foucault wrote about the establishment of pedagogy as a example of the connection between discipline as power and as knowledge:

The school became the place of elaboration for pedagogy. And just as the procedure of the hospital examination made possible the epistemological ’thaw’ of medicine, the age of the 'examining' school marked the beginnings of a pedagogy that functions as a science (Foucault, 1991: 187).

From this point of view current changes in the teacher education and educational research not least of which is the rise of managerialism and the dominance of the ‘culture of accountability’ seems quite reasonable. For instance, the establishment of evidence-based policy nowadays, which, by the way, conceptually has been seen as an extension of the idea of evidence-based medicine to all areas of public policy, including education, has reflected just one of the many ways how discipline works in education in its interrelated dimensions.

**THE ‘GOOD’ NOTION OF THE DISCIPLINE REVISED: AN ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE**

To claim that anarchism offers some ‘good’ notion of the discipline is quite strong thesis to advocate in this article as it requires further research. However in this section I will try to present what make one believe in the possibility of such statement given some of the points of the discussions mentioned above.

It is believed to be very struggling to see education without discipline because even the position of a researcher in education requires some kind of commitment to the discipline. It is not always realized how educational research reflects and reproduces disciplinary mechanisms embodied in education. Mainstream philosophy of education often fails in its attempts to criticize neoliberal discourse in education as it shares with it some basic assumptions. In order to reduce the disciplinary mechanisms in education it is necessarily to transform the perspective from which we see education. In this sense rethinking education as a discipline from the anarchist perceptive seems like a good starting point.

Anarchism allows to overcome what can be called the axiomatics of research in education — a set of ideas about education as a schooling and the state as its main source. Even in the case when the school education is proposed to be transferred from the state to "private hands", the state itself (albeit in its minimalist version) continues to exist as something inevitable. (For instance, see, Nozick, 1974). The anarchist perspective offers a unique alternative: the opportunity to imagine a good society based on equality, freedom and justice, the image of which at the same time is not pre-established, and there is no specific program of revolutionary changes that can be committed in advance. In our time, there are almost no such opportunities, and the few that appear are immediately, at best, ridiculed as utopian, and in the worst case, recognized as dangerous. But this should not stop the one who refuses to follow the "convenient" ways to speak about education.

In fact, education could be regarded not only as a part of social control in a given society, but also as a place where it is possible to undermine the very foundations of society through the movements of local communities. Allowing educational spaces to become sites for prefigurative practice, according to Suissa, is an alternative way to study education which, in its turn, requires a new notion of the discipline in a first meaning. As John Dewey put it,

Even the theoretical anarchist, whose philosophy commits him to the idea that state or government control is an evil, believes that with abolition of the political state other forms of social control would operate (Dewey, 1938: 32).

How can we describe these new forms of discipline and what dimensions will its have? It is impossible to answer this question generally, as anarchism is strongly opposed to any forms of dogmatism or predefine picture of the society. «The task of the anarchist philosopher — wrote Herbert Read, — is not to prove the imminence of a Golden Age but to justify the value of believing in its possibility». (Read, 1974: 14). The only way for educational theory here is to look at the history of education and to try to find out how the alternative social control works or to observe some current educational practices, engaging with them and defending their possibility.

In doing so philosophers of education could enter the territory of political in the way that unavailable for authors who work in other traditions. In this way it becomes possible to reject mere ‘psychological’ understating of education in contrast to see it as a place where freedom can occur and there might be space and time to exist politically. Furthermore, defining the discipline differently from anarchist perspective could lead to rethinking of how society can be organized and how social changes are possible.

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