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## **Philosophical Foundations of Education**

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### **Abstract**

The article is focused on the problem of defining the philosophy of education and its subject matter. It analyses different points of view on the definition of this term and tries to combine mutually exclusive approaches. To solve this issue, the authors use the vast experience in addressing it in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Russian and German philosophical and pedagogical thought. The authors believe that the similarity between that era and our times makes it possible to use the ideas of thinkers of the past for resolving the issues of today. Besides, the authors of the article try to define the subject matter of philosophy of education by examining the issues that can cumulatively constitute a subject of philosophy of education. They compare the terms “pedagogy” and “education” and show that shifting from one term to the other results in a loss of some meanings in an educational paradigm. They describe a specific importance of guidance in pedagogical activities. Another aspect of the subject of philosophy is the ethical nature of education. The article stresses the importance of moral development of a personality. The authors believe that it is very important to pay attention to the warning expressed by many thinkers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries on the danger of “technocratism”, i.e. prioritising technical education over humanities. Nowadays, this warning made a century ago has become even more relevant. The article further analyses the idea of correlation between guidance and politics and examines ideas of renowned thinkers on the problem of developing a free personality. Finally, the article touches upon the problem of nation-specific education. In the authors’ opinion, these issues cumulatively constitute the subject of philosophy of education.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of education, Education, Guidance, Moral, Technocratism, Freedom.

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## Introduction

Philosophical foundations of an educational paradigm are a specific and very important issue. Resolving it helps to understand a direction to develop a general theory of education as well as indicate prospects and possible development options for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, anyone who gets interested in this area of knowledge will realise that there is no common understanding of what it is, which is confirmed by many scholars. For example, John Clark writes: “There is widespread disagreement about how philosophy of education is to be understood” (Clark, 2006, p. 21). He also adds that the situation is not getting better but increasingly worse: “If ever there was a time when there was a generally accepted view of what philosophy of education consists of, this has now long gone” (Clark, 2006, p. 22). We want to identify what this area of knowledge is and outline its subject matter. To do this, we will refer to the time “when there was a generally accepted view of what philosophy of education consists of” and try to find a way to form a commonly accepted idea.

In the most general sense, philosophy of education means studies of philosophical foundations of pedagogical thought and pedagogical activities. Those studies comprise two trains of thought moving in opposite directions: from philosophy to pedagogy and from pedagogy to philosophy. The world of philosophy and the world of pedagogy differ in their approach and prioritisation in addressing the same issues, which seems to explain the variety of views on philosophy of education. There is no shortage of concepts on how to understand what philosophy of education is. We can identify at least three different viewpoints:

First concept: philosophy of education is part of philosophy. As Harvey Siegel puts it, “philosophy of education is that branch of philosophy that addresses philosophical questions concerning the nature, aims, and problems of education” (Siegel, 2009, p. 1). Philosophy of history and philosophy of law can serve as similar examples. These areas are connected with historical or legal studies but have the status of philosophical disciplines, addressing general issues of history or law on the philosophical level.

Second concept: philosophy of education is actually synonymous with general pedagogy with a primary focus on methodological issues. Thelma J. Roberson understands her objective as a teacher of philosophy as follows: “I needed to teach my students how to formulate their own philosophies and how to translate what they believed about education into classroom practice” (Roberson, 2000, p. 3). She thinks that philosophy should have a practical meaning for pedagogy: “Philosophy positively impacts what and how teachers teach” (Roberson, 2000, p. 5).

Third concept: philosophy of education is an independent area of study. It synthesises data from a number of theoretical and empirical sciences, subjects them to philosophical reflection and uses them as a basis for education-related scholarly data. For example, Soti Shivendra Chandra writes that philosophy of education “is a synthesis of educational facts with educational values. It is a philosophical process of solving educational problems through philosophical method, from a philosophical attitude to arrive at philosophical conclusions and results”. (Chandra, 2006, p. 32)

## Findings and Discussions

So far, there is no definite approach to understanding the essence of philosophy of education. In our view, philosophy of education differs from education studies albeit having closely connected

content. Philosophy of education is both reflection and a general system of views on education and the importance of its human component. It discusses fundamental patterns and trends, determines its paradigm and the position of people and their natural, social, and national specifics in an educational system. By its structure and function and, most importantly, its subject matter, philosophy of education combines study findings from all fields of knowledge because no separate science is directed at studying patterns that are common for natural phenomena, social development, and human cognition. These patterns constitute the subject of philosophy of education. Apart from that, philosophy of education should be used to solve interdisciplinary issues, when we have to consider the connection of a growing human being with the world, society, and nature. Philosophy may be a tool for analysing pedagogical activities.

It is a known fact that philosophical knowledge is specific in its ability of not becoming outdated over time. Philosophy is an outlook on eternal problems each generation has to solve by itself. However, it can rely on a practice of dealing with these problems by previous generations. We, therefore, suggest looking into the way philosophy of education and the scope of issues it resolves were understood in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was an era similar to ours by a number of parameters, which makes it possible to draw a certain parallel between them.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were a period of significant social transformations and a search for new points of reference for action. As a Russian thinker wrote, people felt at that time “as if they had left one shore and had not found another one yet, as if they had destroyed the old idols but not created new gods” (Rubinstein, 1920, p. 482). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, old commandments and norms, even “loving thy neighbour” and “happiness for all”, crumbled under the destructive force of critical thought. Neither “I”, nor “You”, nor the “Superhuman”, nor tenets of “practical reason” could be ultimate goals of moral activities.

In spite of the fact that the “pedagogical” 19<sup>th</sup> century had inherited ideas of the greatest educators of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so great was the discontent with its ways of teaching children, that the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by an accelerating trend to reform guidance in education. Everyone was unhappy with the existing state of philosophy of guidance, from official education authorities to parents, to educators, to children themselves.

We have to specify a number of aspects in philosophical and pedagogical issues, relevant to the present-day context. We believe that the totality of these aspects constitutes the subject of philosophy of education.

1. Contraposition of the terms “pedagogy” and “education”;
2. Reality of guidance
3. Ethical guidance
4. Technocratism
5. Antithesis of “loving thy neighbour” and “loving the furthest”;
6. Guidance and politics;
7. Personal freedom;
8. National guidance

Let us analyse the way German and Russian philosophers viewed these aspects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

First, as far as the contraposition of the terms “pedagogy” and “education” is concerned, replacing a term can turn into a misconception. It is one thing when we speak about deepening our knowledge on patterns of enlightenment. It is, however, different when it comes to a changing situation on an established “conceptual market”. The replacement of “pedagogy” with “education” shows obvious traits of dependence on the choice of a certain ideological strategy aimed at serving the existing practice of political and economic reform in Russia (Strelchenko, 1995, p. 7-8).

This debate on which way education should go is far from over. On the contrary, it is becoming even more heated, in particular, on combining the global axiological and epistemological tradition with the Russian model of education, on the philosophical and pedagogical concept of substance and community as well as the concept of individuality from the anthropological perspective, and ontology of the Russian cultural and historical constants.

Traditional pedagogy axiomatically considers guidance as its subject, which makes it uncompetitive on the market. Philosophy of education has to accept dominance of a particular subject over the “abstraction of society, morality, and ideals” and make a “pedagogical system” the subject of pedagogy (Vinogradov, 1995, p. 9-12).

Secondly, the main cause of the crisis in education is, in our view, the attempt to separate education and guidance, but education that lacks guidance is doomed.

Followers of G. Le Bon considered inherited character traits to be so rigid that they gave the lowest priority to guidance. According to them, it was impossible to overcome the tendencies accumulated by previous generations in the short period of an individual life. It took time for ideas to “descend from the fluid areas of thought to the stable and unconscious area of feelings, where motives of our actions are formed” (Le Bon, 1995, p. 206).

Consequently, we had to accept that, if moral guidance could raise the moral level of a generation and thereby produce a “slow and modest” effect on the masses, it would only bear real fruit with a rather insignificant part of those it is aimed at, but this minority was worth all the rest. Several few would eventually influence many, and the possibility of moral refinement of at least a few students should therefore “save educators from the outlook of hopelessness on the utility of guidance” (Sedov, 1911, p. 88).

However, idealistic educators and philosophers held their unconditional and unflinching beliefs in success of guidance, thinking that it could cure the “sick humankind” of its moral ills. They saw a systematic and carefully designed guidance as a cure-all for world’s evils rooted deeply in the human soul. Their idealism was based on their belief in the limitless strength of human spirit. (Aykhenvald, 1900, p. 14).

The problems of guidance in Russian educational establishments were explained by, first, the low professional level of teachers and, secondly, the wrong approach to guidance in education.

Some came up with the idea of using the American practice and renaming the public education authority into a “committee or department for public guidance”. A change of the term would probably mean a change in approach.

The antithesis of “loving thy neighbour” and “loving the furthest” is a serious issue in philosophy of education. On the one hand, “loving the furthest” means an ever-expanding love of

humanity, towards the people that surround us, and towards a living human individual. It is this expanding love that, from a certain perspective and to a certain degree, forms a deep psychological basis of almost all humanist doctrines and any cultural progress to serve the humankind. On the other hand, lacking a particular object, the “love of the furthest” that prevails over “loving thy neighbour” gives rise to cosmopolitanism, which is a fundamentally philosophical and pedagogical problem.

Russian philosophers foresaw the dangerous consequences of cosmopolitan guidance and warned teachers against fascination with those Western pedagogical theories that emphasised raising “cosmopolitans”: “devoted fighters for global social and cultural development” (Aleksandrova, 1989, p. 67-75). They insisted on a specific and subject-orientated guidance, especially at an early age, and broadening the children’s horizons step by step. The feeling should, “from the cradle of motherly love,... expanding further and further,... reach... the whole humanity, finally embracing all living things in the Universe” (Solovyov, 1996, p. 54).

Konstantin Wentzel thought that moral development of a personality was based on “moral love”: “a sense of harmony between people whereby one person forms a spiritual unity with another to the extent when it is possible to wish good things, happiness, and development for the said other for the other’s own sake, without a single thought of any personal benefit whatsoever”. To develop this sense, we had to teach the person to see himself of herself not as something isolated from the world and opposed to it but as something that forms a single unity with it. In spite of the seeming contradiction, it was the development of the ability to share the point of view of a more or less wide group of living beings that was necessary for development of self-awareness and what we call personality.

Wentzel pointed out that a personality reaching the highest degree of uniqueness, self-awareness, and freedom was, at the same time, a personality that felt its “deep connection with the boundless life of the whole humanity” to the fullest extent. Yet, the idea of the whole should be explained to children step by step, in line with the development of their intellectual abilities.

It was necessary to teach perceiving every person, especially those close to us, as a “possible servant of kindness and truth”, develop the ability to love every person with a higher moral love for the sake of the person and for the sake of the humankind. The main goal was to harmonise the maximum development of what is personal and individual with what is “impersonal and universal”.

The more the ideas, feelings, and acts of a personality acquired a universal meaning without losing its individual traits, the more moral its life and activities were. (Wentzel, 1896, p. 36).

The question of an acceptable proportion of education and culture, of specialised knowledge and universal values was resolved differently in history: from the ancient Greek ideal of unity of good and knowledge to the belief of German idealists in the refining power of true knowledge, from the principles of “knowledge is power”, “knowledge for the sake of knowledge”, and “knowledge is a capital” to the conclusion of morality not being an inevitable result of learning and intellectual development. (Ushinsky, 1948, v.2, p. 235). As a result, it was concluded that “isolated, science and education turn into a light that can show the way to both a saint and a murderer” (Rubinstein, 1913, p.19).

The profound disappointment in education, tuning into a huge protest against it, was especially pronounced in works by Leo Tolstoy. He approached science and education with a conviction that they had to serve moral and religious improvement and justification of people and their lives. Of course, Tolstoy did not exclude other purposes of science and education but he made it subordinate to the main religious and philosophical goal. That meant that any education, at its core, had to be filled with a spirit of philosophical and religious guidance. Despite the obvious one-sided nature of this statement, there is a deep truth of life behind it, making it possible to feel the other side of culture. (Rubinstein, 1913, p. 26-27).

Thus, back in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian thinkers voiced their concerns on dangers of “technocratism” and condemned the “sin of unilateral intellectualism” prioritising technical education over humanities.

Russian philosophers were convinced that national greatness was based on the “internal power of ideal, noble, and elevated aspirations” rather than on the “external splendour of huge machines”. Those aspirations had to be instilled into young souls to inspire belief in sublime, beautiful, and ideal things.

The insistent and rigorous moral demand stimulated exploration, helped to discover the experience of the Western “ethical movement” resulting from the “unreserved fascination” of 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers with solving life problems from an ethical perspective.

The Society of Moral Self-Improvement (1876) and the German Society of Ethical Culture (1892) were founded for implementing purely moral and humane principles rather than for economic or philanthropic purposes. Their goal was to improve personal morality and thereby transform society and improve social and economic relationships between both individuals and social groups. They focused on transformation on schools and on guidance in general. In their view, social, economic and political reforms could only be beneficial when people were ready for them, when the whole nation could adopt the new way of life, so it had to be trained for it.

The motto of a system designed by the German theorist F. Kemsies – “More moral guidance!” – was a result of the fact that schools prioritised intellectual development and put moral guidance on the backburner. Even though harmonious development of the child’s personality was declared as a goal and objective, guidance at schools was actually limited to studying. The philosopher stated that too much intellectualism hindered the development of feelings and will in a child (Kemsies, 1886, p. 13).

Intellectual training took a disproportionate share in the system of guidance because of the theory of importance of “ideas” for the child’s soul. “Ideas” were declared the most important activity of the soul and their intensity and method of occurrence decisive for development of feelings and will. However, ideas are ideal images whereas feelings and manifestations of will are real facts. Consequently, the more feeling children experienced, the sooner the strength dormant in their souls would awaken, Kemsies asserted. That is why all feelings should manifest themselves “correctly” and “as a powerful chord”: joy, sadness, compassion, anger, and so on. The prevalence of logic in child’s development distorted the development of feelings and deprived them of their initial spontaneity and “freshness”. Moreover, ignoring children’s feelings made them develop the “illness of the 19th century: nervousness” (Kemsies, 1886, p. 13).

Simultaneously with training of feelings, the philosopher recommended training the children's will and teach them to conquer themselves. Influencing the feelings and will of a child, it was necessary to develop the following virtues: love of truth, industriousness, sense of duty, consistency, fairness, moderation, thrift, courage, peacefulness, and mercy. Guidance should be strictly personalised.

In his system of moral guidance, Kemsies gave a significant priority to religious and national guidance. In his view, religious guidance had to be done by school. However, teaching God's Law should not be mixed with teaching of morals because religion should influence the feeling of children and morals should influence their will. Moral actions should be based on a moral code rather than on expectation of reward or fear of punishment.

National guidance should help children be aware of their nationality and love their people as well as respect other peoples. Kemsies insisted on establishing a unified popular school where children from different social strata would "get together in love of each other", which would result in establishment of an "ideal society consisting of brotherly people".

The thinker admitted that the slow speed of progress would be inevitable and justified, and the ethics-based reform of guidance would start at the end of the "future 20<sup>th</sup> century" (Ern, 1896, p. 36-38).

F. Foerster, another theorist of the German philosophical movement, unlike F. Kemsies, thought that it was necessary not to teach morals, but "awaken and exercise those abilities and strengths on which the moral order of life dwells". According to the philosopher, it was impossible to teach morals, but the issues of moral guidance did require a solution (Poggeler, 1980).

Drawing from the conviction that no virtue could win children's hearts with its abstract beauty alone, even if supported by "sentimental tales with a moralising content", Foerster believed that teaching morals had to, first, direct children's imagination to real human relationships shown as true-to-life as possible, secondly, make them live the moral feeling they were recommended, and, thirdly, instead of "aversion and ridicule" towards bad traits, get them interested in a history of their origin. (Poggeler, 1980).

Foerster agreed with the theory of inheritance that guidance could not change tendencies accumulated by previous generations or at least overcome them in the short span of an individual life. He explained that teaching morals was necessary because of the significant role of reasonable guidance since, first, opposed to adverse realities of life, it taught people to overcome them and, secondly, it trained a certain stratum of morally-prepared "cultural pioneers". The philosopher considered that result to be an achievable goal of guidance and necessary prerequisite to social reform.

According to Foerster, the "continuous refrain" of moral guidance and basic premise of reasonable teaching of morals motivated social activity (Lozinsky, 1905, p. 68-69).

In Russia, teaching morality was not part of curricula. Konstantin Ushinsky recommended explaining moral notions in his *Explanatory Reading*. Leo Tolstoy practiced moral lessons in his school in Yasnaya Polyana and considered them to be sufficiently successful (Tolstoy, 1991).

The model of guidance existing in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, common for all "Latin" nations, destroyed any initiative and independence of students with strict and pettifogging rules. The only obligation of a student is to study, answer in class, and obey.

The purpose of the new pedagogy was to raise a free personality motivated to improve itself. It was natural to ask for more free space in education.

Liberal educators were convinced that children had to go to school to discover limits of their freedom rather than to be disciplined by others. They had to discipline themselves, thereby learning self-control leading to autonomy.

At the same time, they highlighted the “multi-obligation idea of freedom” that was only possible with responsibility: “Freedom is chaos; it has a certain strict necessity built on awareness and motivation. Only a person with clear self-awareness and a well-trained will can be free” (Rubinstein, 1917, p. 23).

There existed two extremes in school: it either oppressed the children or left them to their own devices, the latter appearing as a result of the fact that a declaration of freedom was not followed by the next step: boosting responsibility in those who used that “great divine good”. It was therefore necessary to raise the bar and advocate a sense and awareness of one’s own responsibility.

A true freedom absolutely excluded a relaxed attitude, “nursing of children in place of actual care as well as pedagogical sentimentality of any kind, which is harmful for moral education” (Rubinstein, 1917). Equality of the parties in guidance primarily meant that each one should have the same amount of both rights and responsibilities.

Philosophers of pedagogy understood that it was a long, hard way to such guidance: only a step-by-step transition was possible to go from slave mentality to a free person who respected both his or her own rights and the rights of others.

The then-existing model of education formed historically as a consequence of the social and pedagogical environment of government pedagogism that had influenced the development of the Russian people. For the people, state patronage and obedience were natural. It was very dangerous to remove someone who was not ready for freedom from the influence of external will. Left to their own devices, they would be incapable of governing themselves. An external liberation would not be followed by an internal liberation, responsibility being its privilege, and the slave would turn into a savage. External freedom had to be consistent with an internal need that had to be nurtured; otherwise the external liberation would result in chaos and destruction. The philosophers, therefore, emphasised that it was unrealistic for Russians to hope for quick results and insisted on a gradual reform of Russian education and guidance (Obukhov, 1909, p.28).

Russian thinkers insisted on a gradual reform as the only way of development. It is sufficient to refer to Konstantin Ushinky, Vissarion Belinsky, Vasily Vakhterov, Dmitry Mendeleev, Semyon Frank, Pitirim Sorokin, Ivan Ilyin, Georgy Florovsky, etc.

In Russia, “free minds” and “visionaries” with autonomous spiritual personalities could only appear after guiding the people to a new Russian character, Ivan Ilyin convincingly argued. He called for stopping the debate between Slavophiles and Westernisers since Russia needed neither the “self-importance” of the former nor the “blind” imitation of the latter (Ilyin, 1994, p. 426-427).

The philosopher understood his own theory of national guidance as awakening of the unconscious national spiritual experience: “the spiritual instinct” (Ilyin, 1997).



Nationalism “militarised” school and “weaponised” new generations, Nikolai Kareyev highlighted. A national orientation of school was only acceptable when the universal and humanitarian orientation of education was preserved. It should not act as a tool for depriving other peoples of their identity. “School must not be a den of what is called jingoism, chauvinism, national egoism, national exceptionalism, vanity, and self-aggrandisement”. School would stop serving the interests of personality if a national component was introduced there to emphasise nationalism (Kareev, 1901, p. 3-5).

Concerning the interrelation between politics, pedagogy, and philosophy, we have to highlight, first and foremost, that imperial-era Russian philosophy considered it unacceptable that pedagogical goals might be subordinate to political ones.

Liberal philosophers thought that harmony between the individual and society would be achieved by simultaneous liberation of both, i.e. social reform on the one hand and reform of guidance on the other hand (Vakhterov, 1987, p.47-49).

Konstantin Wentzel insisted on coordinating political and guidance goals, convinced that “the child and his free development is the overwhelming goal of guidance and education, which tolerates no belittlement” (Wentzel, 1896, p. 31-32).

The philosopher underlined that the people and nationality that would be the first to implement a declaration of the rights of the child would also unveil the traits of people and nationality in the most colourful and rich way. It would be for the benefit of the humanity as a whole because “only a comprehensive, all-encompassing implementation of a declaration of the rights of the child will give the humanity in general an opportunity to achieve a revival and complete renewal of all sides of both private and public life and reach establishment of what religion calls “the Kingdom of God” on earth” (The Declaration of the Rights of the Child).

A way out of the pedagogical crisis was suggested by Vasilii Vakhterov, who vehemently opposed the then-existing pedagogical system. He insisted that it was necessary to introduce a “new” pedagogy based on a unified pedagogical concept integrating all valuable pedagogical experience from Greek education, humanism, realism, free guidance, and practical and utilitarian guidance, excluding any “fantasy and lie”. The “new” pedagogy asserted a premise of natural attraction of human nature to progressive development and uniqueness of child’s personality. An educator should follow children in their development but, being aware of possible flaws of their nature, awaken their ability of independent thinking, analysis, and synthesis (Vakhterov, 1987, p. 47-51).

The overloaded and unbalanced curricula with a multitude of subjects were cited as a serious problem. Vasily Rozanov came up with three obligatory principles of school:

1. The principle of individuality;
2. The principle of coherence that meant gradual in-depth studying of school subjects rather than increasing their number. It would take “a long time” to acquire knowledge, and insufficient knowledge would lead to “instable impressions” and would not form a worldview.
3. The principle of unity: “Man will never be an indifferent bag where one can put both a book on algebra and classical antiquity, both lives of saints and physics” (Rozanov, 1990, p. 92-94).

Rozanov doubted the ability of the state to resolve the issues of education and guidance. According to the philosopher, only the church and “family, which is close to it,” were able to do it. It was the state that had filled the delicate trade of a teacher with the deadly spirit of formalism and destroyed the individuality of the teacher and student.

According to Rozanov, a consistently moral personality “grows in the rays of uniform impressions”, which was unattainable for the patchy state school, “an intensively working factory” supervised by government inspectors and using government workers to produce human souls “almost the same way Paracelsus once created his homunculus” (Rozanov, 1990, p. 49-52).

Rozanov considered veneration of things created by one’s own people and accomplished by national tradition to be the cornerstone of school and family and basis of education.

### **Conclusion**

Summing up what has been said, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian philosophical and pedagogical thought was working on creation of a concept of a national system of guidance and education, looking into various problems. We can identify the following ones: 1) searching for a moral outline of education and guidance; 2) content and methodology of religious education; 3) reasons for teaching secular morality; 4) antithesis of “loving thy neighbour” and “loving the furthest”; 5) technocratism; 6) politicisation of school; 7) personal freedom of the child.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian philosophy of education came up with basic premises of a new educational paradigm, declared the ideal of a “consistent” personality, condemned the “sin” of technocratism, cosmopolitanism, and politicisation of school, and confirmed the need for a religious and moral foundation of education and its humanitarian focus.

Those issues have not lost their relevance to this day. In our view, reflection on them is the subject matter of philosophy of education. The experience in resolving those issues in Russian and German philosophy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries lets us take a new look on them.

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