

Contradictions in Educational Thought and Practice:

Derrida, Philosophy, and Education

Abstract

Through readings of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and 'The Age of Hegel', attention is given to two of the problematic types of relationships that philosophy can have with education (exemplified through Derrida's readings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and G.W.F. Hegel). These engagements, alongside a reading of 'The Antinomies of the Philosophical Discipline: Letter Preface', show how Derrida's thought can prescribe no educational programme and instead troubles educational proclamations and certainties. Throughout his life, Derrida negotiated his relationships to the educational systems and institutions to which he was responsible (notably in his own teaching and through GREPH), these negotiations, though, were not indicative of a belief in any ontologically grounded educational truth. Quite to the contrary, as I will claim, Derrida's thought is remarkable for its deflation of the myth, stretching at least as far back to Plato's *Republic*, that philosophy can discover and prescribe the practical means for its own educational good. The argument presented in this article is that Derrida's thought is particularly fertile when it comes to educational reflection precisely because it does not close down, presuppose, or prescribe, and that these characteristics also allow for generative contradictions in Derrida's educational and philosophical thought and practice.

Introduction

Many of the philosophers Jacques Derrida reads throughout his career tend towards certainty in their educational proclamations. By contrast, his own educational thought is at once more pluralistic and, in practical terms, involves careful but also principled negotiation of existing circumstances. First, drawing attention to two of the problematic types of relationships that philosophy can have with education (exemplified through Derrida's readings of Rousseau and Hegel), I go on to show how Derrida's thought can prescribe no educational programme and instead troubles educational proclamations and certainties, while encouraging philosophical teaching and learning in an impressively broad array of contexts. Throughout his life, Derrida negotiated his relationships to the educational systems and institutions to which he was responsible (notably in his own teaching and through GREPH), these negotiations, though, were not indicative of a belief in any ontologically grounded educational truth. Quite to the contrary, Derrida's thought is remarkable for its deflation of the myth, stretching at least as far back to Plato's *Republic*, that philosophy can discover and prescribe the practical means for its own educational good.

The argument presented in this article is that Derrida's thought is particularly fertile when it comes to educational reflection precisely because it does not close down,

presuppose, or prescribe. Instead, it pluralizes the ways in which philosophy might be the subject of, or contribute to, education, both within and outside of institutions. While Derrida's approach to education is highly inclusive, especially when compared to other philosophers, it is neither elusive, nor dismissive of the significance of highly formalised institutional education. In fact, Derrida's own explicit educational thought and practice tended towards more traditional, historically informed approaches to philosophy, even if his written work intended for publication was much more obviously radical in its form and style.

Derrida's approach to education is not simply an afterthought to his philosophy, rather, it is tightly integrated with his reflections on experience and the generalisation of writing that is so pivotal to his thought from the late 1960s. Challenging philosophers who subordinate writing to speech (thereby prioritising, as with the examples I will give here, certainties like nature and the idea), Derrida shows how their own thinking of supposedly 'immediate' relationships to words and ideas (or 'states' defined by words like nature), are themselves subject to the conditions of writing. This challenges many of the received certainties common to educational thought and practice, both in terms of content and pedagogy. It punctures any *ur*-concept of education, broadening an understanding of its means, and drawing much closer attention to the contextual specificity (and frequently questionable legitimacy) of its ends.

Earlier work on Derrida in the context of philosophy of education (e.g. Peters & Biesta, 2009; Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne, 2001; Peters & Trifonas, 2004) has tended to focus less on Derrida's own writing on education and more on interpreting the ethical and political implications of his association with specific concepts like 'the other' or 'humanism'. The first of these, the other, is usually approached more in terms of his readings of Levinas (although sometimes without reference to Levinas and frequently not engaging at all with Derrida's problematising of subjectivity), while the readings of humanism often seem to be more influenced by readings of Richard Rorty or Edward Said than Derrida. Work on Derrida and education coming more obviously from the discipline of philosophy has focused more on his own experience in and with educational institutions and his own writings on education (Haddad, 2014; Orchard, 2011).

In this article, I look at some of the more central aspects of Derrida's philosophical work, his thinking on *arche*-writing and the supplement and its implications for nature and knowledge, as well as the consequences of this thinking on how, in light of it, we might approach education. I enhance this reading of these substantial philosophical shifts with an examination of one of his most explicitly and broadly educationally focused texts, showing how it confirms that his thinking does not produce 'a pedagogy', but rather expands and puts in to question how we might conceive of education in its every occurrence, while, nonetheless, emphasising the contextually specific obligations it provokes. It is, then, the contextual specificity of our educational experiences and work that Derrida encourages us to explore, and, for us to do so in a manner that does not shy away from supposed contradictions that might exist across and even within those contexts. This means that, for Derrida, philosophy is central to educational practice and experience, as its questions and provisional

answers are not suspended simply because they are not subject of study itself. Philosophy, in this sense, infects every educational question, and deconstructs every educational certainty by emphasising its extensive and often intersecting contexts of assumptions, inheritances, and responsibilities. For Derrida, nothing we can teach or learn transcends context (although, as will be outlined in the first section of this article, his understanding of context is exceptionally broad and complex), and philosophy is the means by which we can both grapple and get to grips with the complexities and contradictions it meets us with.

Through readings of three of Derrida's texts, the first touching on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the second on G.W.F. Hegel, the problems of Rousseau and Hegel's application of their philosophical ideas to education become apparent. Their reliance on, respectively, the presuppositions of nature and the unquestionable authority of philosophically produced knowledge in the context of state education are revealed to be philosophically problematic and educationally prohibitive. What a tracing through of Derrida's readings reveals is, firstly, the capacity for deconstructive thinking to uncover such presuppositions, and also what it might mean to *not* think under its thematic. It will be argued that to work under the thematic of deconstruction in education is to inherit the future of education, while to ignore it risks perpetuating the presentation of education as if it was only a matter of either preserving the illusion of the natural (Rousseau) or producing philosophical truth for others to learn (Hegel). Derrida's objection to Rousseau is that his pedagogical practice is grounded in a false notion of the natural. His concern with Hegel, though, is that philosophy is seen to be the source of right education but not its means; philosophy being a discreet activity, reserved for a particular age and a particular group. For Derrida, philosophy and education should not and, perhaps, cannot be separated in such a way, and, instead, their relationship is proposed as being one of contextually specific adaption. There is no single optimal philosophical education or philosophically informed education, but rather innumerable varieties of philosophy and education's interrelation, bringing about different questions, means, relations, and results.

The Age of the Sign

To consider age in the cases of Rousseau and of Hegel has, at least, a double function; their use of biological age in defining the stages of education and the notion of their 'epoch' as a 'structural figure' or 'historical totality'. It is particularly in relation to pedagogy that this dual function of 'age' comes in to play. In the Preface to *Of Grammatology* Derrida carefully associates his definition of epochal 'age' as 'text':

Although the word "age" or "epoch" can be given more than these determinations, I should mention that I have concerned myself with *a structural figure* as much as a *historical totality*. I have attempted to relate these two seemingly necessary approaches, thus repeating the question of the text, its historical status, its proper time and space. The age already in the *past* is in fact constituted in every respect as *a*

text, in a sense of these words that I shall have to establish. As such the age conserves the values of legibility and the efficacy of a model and thus disturbs the time (tense) of the line or the line of time. (Derrida 1997: xc)

Reading an 'age' (or the past) as text is significant not only in being provisionally able to define an 'age' but also in dismantling the presuppositions of the two ages here in question, precisely by deconstructing them on the basis of their own presuppositions. As such, the supposed linearity of history, either natural or of the idea, becomes plural and contradictory and yet is no less presentable as a 'structural figure' once the logic of the 'trace' and of 'repetition' has been taken into account. Derrida explains his use of the notion of 'history' in *Positions*:

But I have never believed that there were *metaphysical* concepts in *and of themselves*. No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed. This explains why, although I have formulated many reservations about the "metaphysical" concept of history, I very *often* use the word "history" in order to reinscribe its force and in order to produce another concept or conceptual chain of "history": in effect a "monumental, stratified, contradictory" history; a history that also implies a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*, for it is difficult to see how there could be history without it. (Derrida 1981: 57)

It is with these definitions in mind that it becomes possible to examine the structural figure and the 'idea' of a history as text – which involves all the conditionalities of text and thus arche-writing and arche-trace in general. This understanding places the reading of both of these ages under 'the age of a certain thematic of deconstruction' (Derrida & Ewald 1995: 287).

In the age of the sign, which is also the age of metaphysics and of Hegel and Rousseau, 'writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, doubling the signifier: phonetic. "Sign of a sign," said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel.' (Derrida 1997: 29) Thus, this reading of an age of an epoch as text would already be at a remove from the natural or the idea. The history lesson that Derrida gives is a challenge to these ages as it unpicks the integral, intentional, general, interior, singular 'nature' of the idea (or the idea of nature) in this age of the sign. This age of the sign is related to 'natural' education through the presupposition of writing as being secondary to speech. This age of the sign (and of writing as the sign of the sign) is what Derrida famously called logocentrism or phonologocentrism. In Derrida's reading, being (*ousia*) as presence and the presence of the idea (*eidos*) remain central in metaphysics up until and including Hegel. Under the section from *Of Grammatology* titled 'The "age" of Rousseau', Derrida writes:

If the history of metaphysics is the history of a determination of being as presence, if its adventure merges with that of logocentrism, and if it is produced wholly as the reduction of the trace, Rousseau's work seems to me to occupy, between Plato's

Phaedrus and Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, a singular position. What do these three landmarks signify?

Between the overture and the philosophical accomplishment of phonologism (or logocentrism), the motif of presence was decisively articulated. It underwent an internal modification whose most conspicuous index was the moment of certitude in the Cartesian cogito. Before that, the identity of presence offered to the mastery of repetition was constituted under the "objective" form of the ideality of the *eidos* or the substantiality of *ousia*. Thereafter, this objectivity takes the form of *representation*, of the *idea* as the modification of a self-present substance, conscious and certain of itself at the moment of its relationship to itself. Within its most general form, the mastery of presence acquires a sort of infinite assurance. The power of repetition that the *eidos* and *ousia* made available seems to acquire an absolute independence. Ideality and substantiality relate to themselves, in the element of the *res cogitans*, by a movement of pure auto-affection. Consciousness is the experience of pure auto-affection. (Derrida 1997: 97-98)

The shift between Plato and Descartes, and the trajectory it follows into Rousseau and Hegel, is the shift toward the internalizing of the *eidos*. The 'absolute independence' this internalization allows for is that which Derrida challenges. The criticisms employed by these philosophers (implicitly or explicitly) against writing provide Derrida with the means to deconstruct this logic of 'absolute independence'. For him, their effacement of writing leaves no room for the trace as part of a structure of supplementarity in what Derrida calls writing in general or 'arche-writing'. The difference between supplementarity as additive or constitutive is the difference between the independence of the idea from structure and supplementarity as structure (Derrida 1997: 167).

The concept cannot be in and of itself but is rather always already within this structure of supplementarity and subject to the logic of the trace. Derrida reads the concept as text and insists that text cannot be separated from context. He places this thinking of non-presence, of the trace and the (con)text, in contrast to that of Hegel's which he finds eschatological because Hegel 'determined ontology as absolute logic; he assembled all the delimitations of philosophy as presence; he assigned to presence the eschatology of parousia, of the self-proximity of infinite subjectivity. And for the same reason he had to debase or subordinate writing.' (Derrida 1997: 24). This 'infinite assurance' of infinite subjectivity is also the presentation of a 'horizon of absolute knowledge', which 'is the effacement of writing in the logos, the retrieval of the trace in parousia, the reappropriation of difference, the accomplishment of what I have elsewhere called the *metaphysics of the proper* [*le propre*—self-possession, propriety, property, cleanliness].' (Derrida 1997: 26). This operation is also present in the *Phaedrus* and *Émile*, where writing is presented as a

a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness. It is exactly what Plato said in the *Phaedrus*, comparing writing to speech

as *hypomnesis* to *mnémè*, the auxilliary aide-mémoire to the living memory. Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. Without writing, the latter would remain in itself. Writing is the dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos. Its violence befalls the soul as unconsciousness. Deconstructing this tradition will therefore not consist of reversing it, of making writing innocent. Rather of showing why the violence of writing does not *befall* an innocent language. There is an originary violence of writing because language is first, in a sense I shall gradually reveal, writing. (Derrida 1997: 36-37)¹

To rethink a pedagogy under the age of a certain thematic of deconstruction would not then simply be to recover and destigmatise writing (or language) as educational means but to rethink the whole of education as being subject to the conditions of writing in general.

For Derrida, unlike Rousseau, there is no natural course of education, nor is it possible to mitigate the process of supplementation, or to create hierarchies of more or less natural supplementation. Education then, in whatever form, cannot avoid supplementation. Equally, an education designed on the basis of being natural or more in tune with the nature of childhood is, by this logic, more deceitfully artificial than an education which acknowledges the necessity of supplementation. While Derrida's engagement with Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* is primarily designed to illustrate the non-priority of speech over writing, and exhibit the characteristics of 'general writing' in speech, the implications of this reading for educational theory and practice are significant. For example, contemporary arguments against the use of technology in education or childhood would not be able to be criticised from the perspective of being less natural than any other use of language (Author, 2016). Equally, the moralistic undertones of the prioritisation of 'nature' in education can also be analogised with other moralisations in education, especially those which defend particular understandings or processes of what constitutes 'education'. This does not drain education of all meaning, rather it proliferates and multiplies its meanings, while questioning and delegitimizing those which rely on unjustifiable and/or unjust presuppositions.

The Age of Rousseau: The Problem of the Natural

Derrida's theorization of writing in *Of Grammatology* is developed alongside a reading of Rousseau, whose pedagogical thought exemplifies many of the features common to pre-Derridean conceptions of writing. In a footnote to *Of Grammatology* Derrida notes Rousseau's analogizing of writing with the 'mask', both of which are denounced:

It is well-known that Rousseau ruthlessly denounced the mask, from the *Letter to M. d'Alembert* to the *Nouvelle Heloise*. One of the tasks of pedagogy consists precisely in neutralizing the effects of masks upon children. For let us not forget, "all children are

afraid of masks" (*Emile*, p. 43) [p. 30]. The condemnation of writing is also, as if self-evidently, an ambiguous condemnation of the mask. (Derrida 1997: 353 – footnote 31)²

The mask that is writing finds its way into the contradictions of Rousseau's pedagogy. Thus, we may be able to see the functioning of masks, or writing (or the non-neutrality, or non-naturality) of the teaching space. Derrida draws attention to the main contradiction of Rousseau's naturalist pedagogy in the supplementarity which it at once demands and rejects as inferior to nature:

Like Nature's love, "there is no substitute for a mother's love," says *Emile*. It is in no way *supplemented*, that is to say it does not have to be supplemented, it suffices and is self-sufficient; but that also means that it is irreplaceable; what one would substitute for it would not equal it, would be only a mediocre makeshift. Finally it means that Nature does not supplement *itself* at all; Nature's supplement does not proceed from Nature, it is not only inferior to but other than Nature.

Yet all education, the keystone of Rousseauist thought, will be described or presented as a system of substitution [*suppléance*] destined to reconstitute Nature's edifice in the most natural way possible. (Derrida 1997: 145)

This education becomes a process of supplementing the natural, wherein, 'All the organization of, and all the time spent in, education will be regulated by this necessary evil: "supply [*suppléer*] . . . [what] . . . is lacking" and to replace Nature. It must be done as little and as late as possible (Derrida 1997: 146-147). Rousseau's notion of the necessary evil of supplementation is based on false formal dichotomy between the natural and the supplement. But the definition of any text, including that which would be read as nature within metaphysics, always implies a logic of supplementarity. And while Rousseau realizes the necessity (however evil) of supplementarity, he does not locate, as Derrida does, its operation in the thinking of nature itself.

Childhood, in particular, reveals where the natural and its supplement necessarily overlap and invalidate each other's opposition: 'Childhood is the first manifestation of the deficiency which, in Nature, calls for substitution [*suppléance*]. Pedagogy illuminates perhaps more crudely the paradoxes of the supplement. How is a natural weakness possible? How can Nature ask for forces that it does not furnish?' (Derrida 1997: 146). Childhood could therefore be understood as 'naturally' requiring supplementation. However, if specific supplements (i.e. writing and/as reading) are to be held as late as possible in education (when it is clear that childhood requires supplementarity) then who decides what is the good/natural and unnatural/bad supplement? What is the most 'natural' supplement when it has already been proven by Rousseau as well as Derrida that nature is part of the order of supplementarity? If nothing can be thought as being natural without supplement then there is nothing which can be absolutely present or without trace. Pedagogy would then have to operate as if one were

always teaching or learning a foreign language. For Derrida (if not for Rousseau) all language is foreign:

The difficulty of the pedagogy of language and of the teaching of foreign languages is, *Émile* will say, that one cannot separate the signifier from the signified, and, changing words, one changes ideas in such a way that the teaching of a language transmits at the same time an entire national culture over which the pedagogue has no control, which resists him like the already-there preceding the formation, the institution preceding instruction. (Derrida 1997: 170)

It is this institution which could be considered always as the teaching and learning of and through a foreign language, with all its self-effacing traces and supplementarity. All of the naturalisms, nationalisms, and other prejudices of so much formal education are enculturation's into a foreign culture or nature, even (and perhaps especially) if this culture or nature is supposed to be our own. While mass education cannot avoid all elements of this problematic, it can avoid obscuring or denying it as a condition.

The Age of Hegel: The Problem of Presupposition

In the same way that nature, for Rousseau, does not have to be justified as the basis for educational practice, content derived from state-sponsored Hegelian metaphysics is also intended to be received as presupposed truth in the lower tiers of the education system. By this logic, the idea, including the idea of nature for Rousseau, can be presupposed, and therefore taught and learned with certainty outside of a justifying context. Again, philosophy justifying itself and its associated prescriptive educational practices without revealing its own history and supplementarity, let alone allowing it to be put in to question. Instead of learning and teaching why 'we' (as educators or an educating society) have come to think as we do, we learn and teach instead what to think.

In 'The Age of Hegel', a text originally published in French in 1977 and compiled in the first volume of *Right to Philosophy*, Derrida initially examines correspondence between Hegel and Victor Cousin. While, for Cousin: 'the teaching of *metaphysics* causes the objection of age to be raised' because philosophy teaches 'natural certitudes (for example the existence of God, the freedom or immortality of the soul), in principle, it is never too early to begin.' (Derrida 2002: 119-120), Hegel wanted to exclude 'metaphysics proper' from the gymnasium. In Cousin's argument for this kind of metaphysical education, Derrida emphasizes the *natural*, writing that, 'it is always by insisting upon the "natural," by naturalizing the content or forms of instruction, that one inculcates precisely what one wishes to exempt from criticism.' (Derrida 2002: 121). Cousin's suggestion is for the inculcation of the 'content' of philosophy as a determinable and absolute product.

By contrast, the circular form of Hegel's speculative philosophy implies what Derrida calls an 'already-not-yet', whereby the minor is sublated into the major as the process of *bildung* takes place:

At the age of fifty-two, he speaks of his twelfth year. He was already a philosopher. But just as everyone is, right? That is, not yet a philosopher since, in view of the corpus of the complete works of his maturity, this *already* will have been a *not yet*.

If we don't think through the conceptual, dialectical, speculative, structure of this *already-not-yet*, we will not have understood anything (in its essentials, as he would say) about *age* (for example, that of Hegel). Or about any age whatsoever, but especially and par excellence that *of* philosophy or *for* philosophy. (Derrida 2002: 117-118)

The twelve year old Hegel was thereby ready for the practice of philosophy rather than simply the content of philosophy but, as Derrida goes on to show, this was a fact he suppressed in his prescriptions for state education. Outside of these prescriptions, though, Hegel presupposes the logic and the already-not-yet of sublation as a 'moment in the logic': 'Under the cover of the *already-not-yet*, autobiographical confiding enlists the anecdote in a demonstration, treating the issue of (the) age as a figure in the phenomenology of spirit, as a moment in the logic.' (Derrida 2002: 118) The moment is part of the greater philosophical movement of the logic even as, '[t]he *not-yet* of the *already*, as we shall see, forbids precisely that which it would seem to promote, namely, the teaching of philosophy at the Gymnasium.' (Derrida 2002: 132). This final point is the major concern of Derrida's text, wherein he reads Hegel's letter, 'To the Royal Ministry of Spiritual, Academic, and Medical Affairs', written April 16, 1822. The letter is reproduced in full as an appendix (Derrida 2002: 150-157). The key point of this letter, for Derrida, is Hegel's assent to and implicit support of the removal of philosophy from the Gymnasium, Hegel writing that, 'I need not add that the exposition of philosophy is still to be excluded from instruction in the Gymnasium and to be reserved for the University, since the high edict of the Royal Ministry has itself already proposed this exclusion.' (Hegel cited in Derrida 2002: 153).

For various pragmatic reasons (including Hegel's pension arrangements), that Derrida explores at length, the project of philosophy becomes wrenched from childhood and placed at a particular educational stage in the building of the reason of the state:

Interpreting the age of Hegel involves keeping in mind this boundless textuality, in an effort to determine the specific configuration that interests us here: the moment at which systematic philosophy – in the process of becoming philosophy of the State, of Reason as the State – begins to entail, more or less obviously, but essentially, indispensably, a pedagogical systematics governed by the necessity of entrusting the teaching of philosophy to state structures and civil servants. (Derrida 2002: 137)

The curriculum suggested by Hegel is the content of philosophy in relation to the state; state philosophy, state education. This is why Hegel's report on education is seen by Derrida as anything but a minor writing, arguing that, if his 'hypothesis is admissible, then any treatment of this "Report" as a minor writing, any evasion or subordination of this *type* of text is, among other misunderstandings, tantamount to a failure to move beyond a prestatist problematic of education and of philosophical education.' (Derrida 2002: 138). Education at the hands of the state, or at the hands of Hegelian philosophy (or even Hegelian education in the hands of the state), which would amount to the same thing, is, for Derrida, a very contemporary problem. We are ourselves in the '*age of Hegel*' as the 'general structure that opened it and that Hegel tried to keep open is where we find ourselves today, and it does not cease to modify and insinuate itself.' (Derrida 2002: 143)

In Hegel's proposals to the Ministry he comes much closer to Cousin, where content before thought takes priority, to assure a smooth flow into the determined philosophical system:

Hegel – Hegel's philosophy – responds to the request, which we can here distinguish from the question: in order to avoid babble, he advises loading the mind with content, with a good content as is necessarily determined by the system...For Hegel, memory was both a beginning and an end; he remembers (being eleven) and remembers that he began by remembering that which he first learned by heart. But at the same time, this homology of the system (the dialectical concept of *Gedächtnis*) and of the autobiographical experience that gave Hegel the inducement and the freedom to think, this homology is to be enriched again by its pedagogical version: by beginning with teaching the content of knowledge, before even thinking it, we are assured of a highly determined prephilosophical inculcation that paves the way for good philosophy [*la bonne philosophie*]. (Derrida 2002: 141)

The topics to be taught are those 'essential to the preparation for speculative philosophy' (Derrida 2002: 141). Which is why Derrida suggests that, '[i]n short, no *philosophy* except Hegel's can take on or justify such pedagogy – its structure, its progression, and its rhythm – and remain rigorously consistent.' (Derrida 2002: 143)

At Hegel's suggestion that his educational model is a better '*preparation* for the "proper essence of philosophy"' (Derrida 2002: 146), Derrida draws on the relation of this essentiality to the logic of presupposition:

This *presupposition* functions as do all presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*) in Hegelian discourse; furthermore, it situates the point of contact between a state of political action (philosophy reserved for the University) and the logic of Hegelian discourse, here exempted from the need to explain itself. (Derrida 2002: 146)

This logic of presupposition is revealed as mirroring that of the underlying structure of contemporary education in France:

In our analysis of this justification of the exclusion of the history of philosophy from the curriculum of the Gymnasium, we should not forget that today, in our own lycées, resorting to the history of philosophy as such still meets with official disapproval, especially if it takes the form of an exposé or narrative. The “good reasons” invoked to justify this attitude make sense only within the Hegelian concept of presupposition. It is not a matter here simply of disputing these reasons, but rather, first of all, of recognizing precisely their presupposition, the presupposed logic of presupposition. (Derrida 2002: 146)

Derrida suggests that, ‘it is well accepted today that young “listeners” should receive instruction in the “human sciences” often related, even annexed, to philosophy, but not in philosophy “proper.” (Derrida 2002: 120) This exclusion is prefigured by Hegel’s exclusion of ‘metaphysics as such’ from the Gymnasium:

This exclusion postpones (until the University proper) access to thought – in its speculative form – of something whose *content* is already present, Hegel insists, in secondary education. If metaphysics as such, in its speculative form, is excluded, we can, on the contrary, teach on the secondary level, that which refers to will, freedom, law, and duty, everything that would be “all the more called for in that this teaching would be related to the religious teaching carried out at every level, for at least eight to twelve years.” In other words, philosophy proper is excluded, but its content continues to be taught, albeit in an *improperly* philosophical form, in a nonphilosophical manner. Its content is inculcated through the teaching of other disciplines, notably prescriptive and normative teachings such as morals, political morals (the “just concepts of the nature of duty which bind the man and the citizen,” for example), or religion. (Derrida 2002: 147)

These ages then are not simply critiqued in terms of dismissing writing and a certain kind of philosophical experience and prioritising a false presence but also in terms of a hierarchization which seats absolute knowledge and Hegel on the throne:

There is a Hegelian hierarchization, but it is circular, and the minor is always carried, *sublated* beyond the opposition, beyond the limit of inside and outside in(to) the major. And inversely. The potency of this age without age derives from this great empirico-philosophical cycle. Hegel does not conceive of the school as the consequence or the image of the system, or even as its *pars totalis*: the system itself is an immense school, the thoroughgoing auto-encyclopaedia of absolute spirit in absolute knowledge. And it is a school we never leave, hence a mandatory instruction,

mandated by itself, since the necessity can no longer come from without. (Derrida 2002: 148)

This interiorization of education – and not teaching as the teaching of a foreign language – is, for Hegel here, inescapable and therefore all-consuming and all consumed. This is why ‘...the State did help its philosopher, the apologist for its rationality.’ (Derrida 2002: 128). It is indicative of the age of certitude – i.e. subjectivity (Derrida 2002: 123) and the right age for philosophy – philosophy in the age of the state (Derrida 2002: 124-125).

This relationship between philosophy and education, that Derrida explores in Hegel, mirrors, in many ways, the dominant constrained relationship between knowledge and content in mass education systems. Where examinations (and the teaching that is forced to subject itself to their ends) pose questions about content, rather than putting the content in to question or engaging with its history and supplementarity.

School and Philosophy

On October 20th and 21st, 1984, a conference, ‘École et philosophie’, was held at the University of Paris X, Nanterre. Jacques Derrida did not attend the conference, instead sending a letter that was published as the preface to the book of the conference proceedings, *La grève des philosophes: École et philosophie* (Paris: Osiris, 1986). This text was then subsequently published in the ‘Mochlos: Eyes of the University’ section of *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée), which was divided in to two books and published in English translation in 2004, as *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. The letter itself is translated under the title, ‘The Antinomies of the Philosophical Discipline: Letter Preface’. In the introduction of the letter’s text, Derrida is emphatic on the attributes of its epistolary form, ‘prefer[ring] to entrust what I have to say to the genre of the letter’, not least because it allows him ‘to manifest there, with less embarrassment, something like a “mood”’ (Derrida 2004a: 165). For Derrida, at least under the influence of this mood, ‘a letter, even a philosophical letter, dates the “as if” of the mood, of a fabled mood: once upon a time, one day, I had the feeling that...’ (Derrida 2004a: 165). In the letter, Derrida presents seven antinomies which provide a matrix for ‘utterances producible today on the subject of “School and Philosophy.”’ (Derrida 2004a: 173). These antinomies are presented as ‘seven contradictory *commandments*’ (Derrida 2004a: 169). While these commandments are specifically related to the relationship between philosophy and education (not just school, in any common sense), they also provide a matrix for reflection on educational questions generally, as well as the philosophical aspects of education, more broadly conceived.

A significant component of the framing context for Derrida’s commandments is his discussion of the socio-economic exigencies imposed on education and research generally, which, in particular, positions philosophy as at once ‘untouchable’ and ‘useless’. To theorise this context more broadly, philosophy might also be reflected on as a marker for all of that in

education considered 'untouchable' but perhaps more importantly 'useless' in a context of 'end-orientation'. This brings to the fore a familiar argument made in the context of institutional education, where various aspects of institutionally conserved educational experience are diminished due to a focus on outcomes. One might even say that, amongst other things, the more broadly philosophical components of education are conceived of as being neglected. Rather than focus his aim on criticising end-orientation in education, Derrida instead draws attention to contradictions in philosophical thought and practice that he suggests should not be overcome or resolved. Importantly, these contradictions are not outlined in order to undermine the discipline of philosophy but instead to map its divergent characteristics. His 'commanding' mode of address implies an obligation (or at least an observation of the various obligations) to the maintenance of these seven contradictions in all their aspects.

Not contradictions in the sense that they might negate one another, Derrida's contradictory commandments, as the title of his 'letter' suggests, are antinomies. They present distinct and logically discreet directives for equally binding responsibilities. While these antinomies are not, therefore, mutually exclusive positions or paths, the logic that supports one of the positions might be distracting, unhelpful or even detrimental towards arguing for the other position. In outlining the first commandment, which navigates the problem of reconciling 'two orders of finality', Derrida writes:

On the one hand, we must protest the submission of the philosophical (its questions, programmes, discipline, etc.) to any external purpose: the useful, the profitable, the productive, the efficient, "high performance" [performant], but also whatever belongs in general to the techno-scientific, the techno-economic, the end-orientation [finalisation] of research, even ethical, civic, or political education. But, on the other hand, we should on no account give up the critical, and therefore evaluative and hierarchizing, mission of philosophy, philosophy as the final instance of judgment, as constitution or intuition of final meaning, last reason, thinking of ultimate ends. (Derrida 2004a: 169)

Here Derrida distinguishes between the imposition of ends on philosophy (and, by extension, education), and the need for philosophy to concern itself with ends. The central concept of 'ends' varies dramatically depending on context, imposition, and the ability to effectively put it in to questions. Philosophy as the locus of reflection on 'ends' does not mutually exclude the resistance to the imposition of ends, even if the defensive and speculative work of philosophy and education might sometimes have to be separated from one another.

The second commandment, which poses the problem of reconciling the necessity for a 'localizable identity' for philosophy, alongside its 'ubiquity that exceeds all bounds.' (Derrida 2004a: 170). Where, the 'enclosure of philosophy' within 'a class or a curriculum, a type of object or logic, a fixed content or form' should be challenged, when imposed externally, but the 'specific unity of the discipline' should be reflected on and clarified. Philosophy should at

once find its place in other disciplines and educational practice more broadly, while also being able to be determined as a discrete subject. Here the distinction might be drawn between philosophy as discipline and philosophy as practice, neither less important than the other, but both necessity different contextual legitimations.

The third commandment deals with both the necessity and impossibility of teaching philosophy, where, 'On the one hand, we feel we have the right to demand that philosophical research and questioning never be dissociated from teaching.' While, on the other hand, accepting and defending that philosophy as a discipline 'can always be overrun, sometimes provoked, by the unteachable.' (Derrida 2004a: 170). Forms of philosophical education that exceed teachability, provoked, perhaps, from experiences far removed or present in the undercurrents of formal education. Or else teaching that which cannot be taught in any evaluable sense.

The fourth commandment approaches the contradiction of both respecting and transgressing what Derrida calls 'the institutional limit', where it is considered 'normal to demand institutions adequate to the impossible and necessary, useless and indispensable discipline', 'normal to demand new institutions', and 'essential' to do so. While, on the other hand,

we postulate that the philosophical norm is not limited to its institutional appearances. Philosophy exceeds its institutions; it even has to analyse the history and the effects of its own institutions. It finally has to remain free at every moment, obeying only truth, the force of the question or of thinking. It is legitimate for it to break every institutional tie. The extra-institutional has to have its institutions without, however, belonging to them. (Derrida 2004a: 170-171)

This expansive and inclusive description of philosophical practice and experience, and the extra-institutional education it both requires and provides, illustrates the breadth of Derrida's understandings of philosophy and (philosophical) education. Both outside, and sometimes 'against' the institutions that would claim it, while at the same time, being related to them without being defined or limited by them.

The autonomy necessary to and heteronomy affecting on the philosophic community is the subject of the fifth commandment. Where, on the one hand, teachers 'must be trained: there must be students, teaching positions; there will never be enough; and all of this is controlled from outside the philosophic community' but this must also 'not infringe on the necessary autonomy, indeed the essentially democratic structure of the philosophic community.' For Derrida, 'There must be a teacher for this discipline that cannot be disciplined, for this teaching that cannot be taught, for this knowledge that is also nonknowledge and more than knowledge, for this institution of the an-institutional.' (Derrida 2004a: 171). The teaching of philosophy is, here, perhaps, also the teaching of the practice and experience of philosophy, which cannot be taught in any ordinary sense, relying instead on its very unteachability as its primary educational provocation. Undisciplined teaching and

learning does, though, not negate the specifically trained and highly disciplined education that philosophy can also provide. Both offer means to philosophy and education.

The fixing or opening of the duration of philosophical education is the subject of the sixth commandment, where on the one hand 'the transmission of knowledge, the extreme wealth contained there normally require time, a certain rhythmic duration, indeed as much time as possible, more than a flash, a month, a year, more than the time of a course, always more time. Nothing can justify the extraordinary artifice that would consist in fixing this duration at nine months.' (Derrida 2004a: 171) While, 'on the other hand, the unity, even the architecture of the discipline requires a certain organized gathering up of this duration. One has to avoid spreading things out in a disordered way, one has to avoid dissolution and make room for the experience of the "at a single blow," of the "all at once" (Derrida 2004a: 172). Reconciling then, 'this duration and this quasi-instantaneous contraction, this nonlimitation and this limit.' (Derrida 2004a: 172). Both open-ended and strictly limited forms of philosophical education are advocated for, again revealing the vast possibilities for philosophical education but also revealing how very specific types of education might be differently and significantly informed by Derrida's thought.

The seventh and final commandment ask how one is 'to reconcile the taking-place and the no-place of the teacher [maître]? What incredible topology do we require in order to reconcile the heterodidactic and autodidactic?' (Derrida 2004a: 172). On the one hand, the teacher is perfectly justified in teaching and initiating students in to a discipline, while, at the same time, 'The teacher is only a mediator who must efface himself. The intercessor has to neutralize himself in the face of the freedom of philosophizing. This freedom trains itself, however grateful may be its relation to the necessity of the teacher, the necessity for the magisterial act to take place.' (Derrida 2004a: 172). The teacher, both as trainer, and as self-effacing facilitator of relatively autodidactic philosophical learning. It is not one or the other, for Derrida, rather that both approaches, and all those in between, might be informed by and developed in relation to his thought, as well as, of course, the thought of many others.

Broadly speaking, what distinguishes the emphases of the two (never completely distinct) 'poles' of these seven antinomies from one another is that one tends to be institutionally focused (closer to Hegel) while the other is non-institutional (closer to Rousseau). However, unlike both Rousseau and Hegel, Derrida does not fix either of these orientations to presuppositions (about nature or knowledge), any kind of prescribed practice, or as exempt from historical and contextual analysis and critique. One is for the institutionally inherited discipline of philosophy, the other is for the experience of philosophical thought, education, or practice that exceeds the institution. Derrida seems, at least in the mood in which he finds himself producing this letter, committed or cognizant of the validity of commitment to both or either.

Despite Derrida's reputation as a maverick philosopher who eschewed disciplinary strictures, his career was not only conducted in institutions; he directed and also set up his own. Correspondingly, the primary focus of the majority of his philosophical contribution was the work of canonical philosophers (Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Husserl, amongst

others). As such, while it may seem as if Derrida's thought, especially in its style and presentation, might lend itself more to the non-institutional component of his antinomies, his professional contribution to the former, especially to the institutional practice of teaching philosophy in the French system, was where his efforts were more consistently dispersed. Equally, all of the texts collected in both volumes of the *Right to Philosophy* are principally directed at the institutional history, thought, and practice of philosophical education. It is, in fact, only in this 'letter preface' that his interest in the conception and practice of non-institutional philosophical education finds an explicit place.

Derrida's deconstruction of the 'institution' of philosophy was, like all of his 'deconstructions', not a destruction of its subjects. As Samir Haddad puts it, 'deconstruction is one way of responding to legacies, a way that responds to the necessity of inheritance by choosing to heighten the aporetic tension in the concepts of the past through a competitive movement of raising the stakes.' (2013: 37). This aspect of deconstruction is especially apparent in Derrida's work on philosophical education. Also, though, as Derrida explains in his essay, 'Signature event context', 'Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order within which the conceptual order is articulated.' (Derrida 1982: 329). And I would suggest that Derrida comes closest to overturning and displacing the conceptual order of philosophical education, and education more broadly, in his letter preface. Raising the stakes – to take a phrase from Haddad – in the broader context of educational thought and practice, can further heighten the tension of these contradictions.

Even though aspects of educational thought and practice that are not specifically philosophical are already apparent in Derrida's seven commandments, they can be refined and refocused to provide a complementary matrix for reflection. Even though such a matrix could be constituted of seven or more commandments, I have distilled them here to three: 1) On the one hand, there must be work done to defend insitutional education that is not a means to externally imposed ends (e.g socio-economic contribution, employment), while, on the other hand, there must also be clear understanding and legitimation of education that finds its 'end' in 'practice' 2) On the one hand there must be forms of education which respect 'the institutional limit', necessarily affected by state structures, institutions, and histories, which are discrete activities, fundamentally connected to teaching, and ordinarily requiring a fixed duration. While, on the other hand it must be accepted and supported that there are forms of education which transgress 'the institutional limit' and can be organised or experienced at a distance from institutional influence, often exceeding what can be taught or even the necessity of a teacher, and which would be open and variable in terms of its duration. 3) Finally, education must be understood as significant in both its heterodidactic and autodidactic forms.

As with Derrida's contradictions, they do not present a 'good' and 'bad' side of a predicament but rather seemingly contradictory obligations that rely on different means and contexts of justification, producing very different results. What is notable in the right hand column of how I have presented both Derrida's contradictory commandments and my own,

is that much of what falls within this part of their matrices can be understood as experiences which often occur whether we are obligated to them or not. To a certain extent, but by a different logic, the same can be said of many of those on the left hand column, insofar as institutions rely as much on the inheritance of habit as conscious or deliberate obligation. That said, it is more obvious, at least in the example of Derrida's work for and in educational institutions, how an obligation to the commandments on the left hand column could be enacted. The most substantial long form engagement with these efforts is Vivienne Orchard's *Jacques Derrida and the Institution of French Philosophy* (Legenda, 2011). However, the right hand columns, both in my table of Derrida's commandments and my own, have not been explored extensively (or at all) in Derrida's thought, and are also not illustrative of concerns common to educational researchers.

Maintaining these contradictions does not mean that practice and thought on either 'side' cannot be conversant with and inform the other. However, there is a distinction between conversation across these divergent paths and the elision or elimination of their fundamentally contradictory differences. Derrida's philosophical output itself provides examples of how these poles of contradiction can be traversed without collapsing in to one another, even if they lean more towards institutionalised philosophy than its counterpoint. The philosophically educational experiences he defines in what I have presented in the right hand column, are frequently the subject of his own philosophical enquiry. In an essay eventually published in the same volume, titled 'Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis', and originally given as part of his thesis defence at the Sorbonne for the *doctorat d'état* (based on published works), Derrida somewhat sarcastically raises a concern framed by and reframing the irony of its context:

The reproductive force of authority can get along more comfortably with declarations or theses whose encoded content presents itself as revolutionary, provided that they respect the rites of legitimation, the rhetoric and the institutional symbolism that defuses and neutralizes everything that comes from outside the system. What is unacceptable is what, underlying positions or theses, upsets this deeply entrenched contract, the order of these norms, and that does so in the very *form* of the work, of teaching or of writing. (Derrida 2004a: 122)

While predominantly engaging with canonical philosophers, publishing primarily with academic (or academic adjacent) publishers, and studying and working in institutions for his entire adult life, Derrida deconstructed these texts and contexts through his engagements with them. Often exceeding what could be conceived as the institutional or disciplinary limits of education and philosophy, moving beyond and transforming their 'localizable identities', Derrida nonetheless remained broadly 'faithful' (although he plays with the idea of faithfulness in various ways) to both the discipline of philosophy and its institutions.

While Derrida, then, leans in many ways towards more institutionalised means of educational philosophy, notably in his texts where he writes explicitly about education, he

nonetheless gestures emphatically towards alternate responsibilities in the letter preface. This opens a path towards future research and practice in the area. Such work might begin by taking seriously the non-institutional aspects of Derrida's contradictory commandments to elaborate and defend the means of informal (philosophical) education that he gestures towards. This could mean pushing further on the non-institutional pole of the commandments, to enhance the means and frame of reference available. Such an approach would include examining Derrida's and others' texts for implications relating to informal (philosophical) education, as well as empirical examples, reflecting critically on how formal and informal (philosophical) education affect one another, perhaps particularly on how formal (philosophical) education elides or obscures informal (philosophical) education.

To go beyond these contradictions and the matrix they produce would be to exit contemporary discourse on education, even in its radical forms. Equally, though, there is no doubt an issue with the extension of a particular – institutionally informed – logic of education being applied to or aligned with that which exceeds its strictures. This could easily pass for a process of sublation, assimilating educational experiences to the 'growth' of subjects-to-be-educated. Such a conception of education cannot account for experiences conditioned by *différance* and, as such, might engender the necessity of developing a non-educational language for understanding experiences that are nonetheless 'educational' in a broader sense (Author, 2020). To surpass Derrida's educational contradictions, but still to do justice to his thought, might mean thinking beyond the limits of educational experience. To learn, or to be educated, in a manner that does not return to some perceivable or definable outcome, even in action, that escapes all educational rituals, even those which exceed institutions. The closest Derrida gets to this in his letter preface is the notion of a 'knowledge that is also nonknowledge and more than knowledge' (Derrida 2004a: 171). This is not simply a gesture towards what he dismisses in 'Différance' as 'the occult of a nonknowledge' (Derrida 1982: 6). Instead of gesturing towards nonknowledge, which is qualified by its relation to knowledge here, Derrida's most extreme implication for education is perhaps in the region of knowledge closest to or most affected by nonknowledge. The contradictions he outlines allow him to suspend his relation to a range of educational utterances and their concomitant practices and experiences.

Reconstructions

In an interview with *Libération*, published in 1981, and eventually collected in the same volume of *Right to Philosophy*, Derrida concludes with a claim which speaks to the underlying deconstructive disposition within which all of his commandments might be read, where, despite anything else, 'one would have to reconstruct from top to bottom all the relations (and sometimes even interrupt all relation) between the State and knowledge, technology, culture, philosophy, thinking, whether in their institutional form or not.' (Derrida 2004a: 164). The actual process, means, and ends of such a reconstruction is not something Derrida permits himself to explicate here or elsewhere, all the while inhabiting and

perpetuating relatively conservative pedagogical practices and understandings of education. However, in a recently translated interview, conducted in December 2003, he offers his own reconstruction of the specific pedagogical critiques (or, perhaps, critiques of pedagogy) that Maurice Blanchot shared with him:

I want to reconstruct the context in which Blanchot expressed his mistrust, his suspicion, with respect to pedagogical discourse. I believe it had to do with Hegel. According to Blanchot, pedagogical speech supposed the possibility of a discourse that is continuous, consequential, uninterrupted, ultimately a monologue; and this is what literary thinking and writing could not accommodate [...] he opposed a certain interrupted speech with the monological continuity of philosophical and pedagogical discourse. One of many differences between Blanchot and [Hélène] Cixous is that Blanchot never taught, never practised teaching. He had respect for professors, but he was at the same time astonished that one could speak like that, that one could give lectures, for example. Not only teach: give lectures. Same thing with my friend [Jean] Genet, who one day told me, 'But aren't you ashamed of speaking like that, of giving lectures, speeches!' He said it as a joke, but still: 'Aren't you ashamed...!' For these writers, thinkers, creators, writing was irreconcilable with pedagogical and public speech and lecturing. (Derrida 2019: 13)

Derrida implicitly distances himself from Blanchot and Genet's mistrust and embarrassment at pedagogical discourse and practice. They might represent, for him, examples of those who fall on the more radically non-institutional side of the matrix of utterances on the school and philosophy, although certainly not falling foul of the critiques of Rousseau's pedagogy that Derrida presented so much earlier in his career. In his conclusion to this description of Blanchot and Genet's dismissive perspectives on monologue-driven forms of pedagogical practice, Derrida locates the crux of their discontent with the irreconcilability of writing with 'pedagogical and public speech and lecturing'. However, this obscures, and distracts from, the more broadly political, social, and even philosophical implications of their rejection of dominant pedagogical practices. Blanchot, for example, preferred conversational (as opposed to monologic) modes of educational experience and practice, underpinned by a painstakingly developed ethics (Author, 2019). Is it only that 'writing' (even in an expansive sense) is contrary to these practices, or rather that writing is exemplary and illustrative of a much broader set of experiences and practices which are not simply reducible to institutional or traditionally informed education? And, perhaps more controversially, does Derrida find himself closer than one might expect to the very Hegel that he critiques in 'The Age of Hegel'?

The difference between Hegel and Derrida, though, is the emphasis Derrida puts on teaching the context and history of philosophy at earlier educational stages, instead of first imposing the supposed 'truths' it implies, and deferring any more serious engagement to later and more specialised study. Doubtless, any history or context must itself be subject to selection and limitation, and even questions that might be posed towards its implied truths

are not without their own fixtures and orientations. However, consciousness of this problematic, for both teachers and learners, notably those in institutional settings, can itself be embedded in the educational process. Institutional settings might even have advantages over the non-institutional vectors of education when it comes to the production of communications of means and techniques designed for these approaches. Even so, the risks of calcification, and the movement of pedagogical speech towards monologue is a constant risk that comes with the implicit legitimation and end-oriented concerns (grades, qualifications) of much institutional education. It may be possible, though, through this article's consideration of Derrida's reflections on 'writing in general', alongside his expansive conception of what might constitute philosophical education, to curtail the pursuit of what a philosophical education in general might be, and instead look to how philosophy in general might inform, moderate, extend, or provoke educational experience and practice in all its manifestations, however seemingly contradictory.

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¹ See also Derrida: 2004b, 111-112 and 168-169

² See also Derrida: 1997, 144.