



article

from liberation to the practice of care

the educational philosophy of ann margaret sharp

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abstract

This article aims to critically analyse the educational philosophy of Ann Margaret Sharp (1942-2010), co-founder with Matthew Lipman of the philosophical-educational proposal known as 'Philosophy for Children'. Sharp's philosophical vision, which has not yet been sufficiently studied and analysed, relies on an innovative combination of educational practice, intellectual liberation, and relational care. The first part of the article clarifies in what sense, before conceiving Philosophy for Children with Lipman, Sharp drew on Nietzschean insights that she developed creatively to achieve the liberation of children and teachers. This transformation is related to the re-evaluation for formative and existential purposes of concepts and practices such as sublimation and suffering, which traditional education disregards or rejects. The second part of the article focuses on Sharp's contribution to the development of Philosophy for Children from the 1970s. In this respect, Sharp integrated her Nietzschean reflections, which were still based on the centrality of the individual (both student and teacher), with a more communal and relational



perspective, which contributed in a unique way to the development of the theoretical-practical core of Philosophy for Children, that is, the dialogical dynamic known as the 'Community of philosophical inquiry'. Secondly, we endeavoured to detail Sharp's view of relational care and the so-called 'caring thinking', which has become one of the cornerstones of this philosophical practice, as well as the related teacher-training activities. Finally, it was shown how, from a general point of view, the intersection with care contributes to the further conceptual and practical clarification of the educational innovation of Philosophy for Children.

keywords: ann margaret sharp; philosophy for children; liberation; friedrich nietzsche; care.

de la liberación a la práctica del cuidado

la filosofía educativa de ann margaret sharp

resumen

Este artículo pretende analizar críticamente la filosofía educativa de Ann Margaret Sharp (1942-2010), cofundadora con Matthew Lipman de la propuesta filosófico-educativa conocida como «Filosofía para niños». La visión filosófica de Sharp, que aún no ha sido suficientemente estudiada y analizada, depende de una combinación innovadora de práctica educativa, liberación intelectual y cuidado relacional. La primera parte del artículo aclara en qué sentido, antes de concebir Filosofía para Niños con Lipman, Sharp se basó en ideas nietzscheanas que desarrolló creativamente para lograr la liberación de niños y profesores. Esta transformación está relacionada con la revalorización con fines formativos y existenciales de conceptos y prácticas como la sublimación y el sufrimiento, que la educación tradicional desprecia

o rechaza. La segunda parte se centra en la contribución de Sharp al desarrollo de la Filosofía para Niños a partir de los años setenta. A este respecto, se observó en primer lugar que Sharp integró sus reflexiones nietzscheanas, que seguían basándose en la centralidad del individuo (tanto alumno como profesor), con una visión más comunitaria y relacional, que contribuyó de manera singular al desarrollo del núcleo teórico-práctico de la Filosofía para Niños, es decir, la dinámica dialógica conocida como «Comunidad de indagación filosófica». En segundo lugar, se detalló la visión de Sharp sobre el cuidado relacional y el denominado «pensamiento cuidador», que se ha convertido en una de las piedras angulares de esta práctica filosófica, así como las actividades formativas relacionadas. Por último, se mostró cómo, desde un punto de vista general, la intersección con el cuidado contribuye a una mayor clarificación conceptual y práctica de la innovación educativa de la Filosofía para Niños.

palabras clave: ann margaret sharp; filosofía para niños; liberación; friedrich nietzsche; cuidado.

da libertação à prática do cuidado a filosofia educacional de ann margaret sharp

resumo

Este artigo pretende analisar de maneira crítica a filosofia educacional de Ann Margaret Sharp (1942-2010), cofundadora com Matthew Lipman da proposta filosófico-educacional conhecida como "Filosofia para Crianças" (Philosophy for Children). A visão filosófica de Sharp, que ainda não foi suficientemente estudada e analisada, depende de uma junção inovadora entre prática educacional, libertação intelectual e cuidado relacional. A primeira parte do artigo esclarece em que sentido, antes de

conceber a Filosofia para Crianças com Lipman, Sharp se aproveitou de insights nietzschianos que ela desenvolveu de forma criativa para alcançar a libertação de crianças e professores. Essa transformação relaciona-se com a reavaliação para fins formativos e existenciais de conceitos e práticas como a sublimação e o sofrimento, que a educação tradicional desconsidera ou rejeita. A segunda parte enfoca a contribuição de Sharp para o desenvolvimento da Filosofia para Crianças a partir da década de 1970. Nesse respeito, observou-se primeiramente que Sharp integrou suas reflexões nietzschianas, as quais ainda estavam pautadas na centralidade do indivíduo (tanto discente como docente), com um olhar mais comunitário e relacional, que contribuiu de maneira única para o desenvolvimento do cerne teórico-prático da Filosofia para Crianças, ou seja, a dinâmica dialógica conhecida como “Comunidade de investigação filosófica”. Em segundo lugar, detalhou-se a visão de Sharp acerca do cuidado relacional e do chamado “caring thinking”, que tornou um dos cerne dessa prática filosófica, assim como das atividades formativas relacionadas. Por fim, evidenciou-se como, do ponto de vista geral, a interseção com o cuidado contribui para o ulterior esclarecimento conceitual e prático da inovação educacional da Filosofia para Crianças.

palavras-chave: ann margaret sharp; filosofia para crianças; libertação; friedrich nietzsche; cuidado.

from liberation to the practice of care

the educational philosophy of Ann Margaret Sharp

introduction

Ann Margaret Sharp – co-founder with Matthew Lipman of the famous philosophical-educational proposal known as “Philosophy for Children” (P4C), which today is spread all over the world – developed her own convictions about the relevance of philosophy and philosophical inquiry for education following a parallel and independent path to that followed by Lipman himself. From their meeting in 1973, Lipman and Sharp developed P4C’s educational programme together. In 1974 they founded the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), which is still the international reference point for the development of P4C. Each of the founders made an irreplaceable contribution to the success of the project: Lipman in terms of organisation and management, Sharp in terms of teaching, team building, and spreading the educational proposal around the world.

From the outset of their collaboration, Lipman and Sharp’s main activity was the joint development of an educational curriculum focussed on philosophy, covering primary and secondary school levels. Their first endeavour was the revised publication of the philosophical novel for children *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (Lipman, 1974), which Lipman had conceived in 1969. In addition to the novel, Lipman and Sharp developed the corresponding teacher’s manual (Lipman; Sharp, 1974)¹. They then wrote additional curriculum materials². Ann Sharp also wrote novels, including *The Doll Hospital* (Sharp, 1998)³, *Geraldo* (Sharp, 1999), *Nakeesha and Jesse* (Sharp, 2002) and *Hannah* (Sharp, 2005a), along with the respective teaching manuals.

Lipman and Sharp devoted special attention to putting their philosophical-educational vision into practice. They tirelessly engaged in

¹ The novel was translated into Portuguese under the title *A descoberta de Ari dos Telles* (Lipman, 1990). Other novels have also been translated into Portuguese: *Luísa* (Lipman, 1995a), *Pimpa* (Lipman, 1995b), *Issao e Guga* (Lipman, 1997).

² The full list of novels and manuals is available at this link: <https://www.montclair.edu/iapc/wp-content/uploads/sites/200/2019/03/iapccatalogue.pdf>.

³ Translated into Portuguese under the title *O hospital das bonecas* (Sharp, 2008).

training teacher-facilitators as a means of contributing concretely to the creation of a “Community of philosophical inquiry” (Lipman; Sharp, 1978a). They began to disseminate the programme in New Jersey school districts and in some North American universities (Lipman, 2008). Finally, they began an intense training programme for teachers.

In addition, both were equally committed to theoretical reflection on their educational experience. The result was an extensive series of scientific publications, which gave rise to intense reflection on the role of philosophy in the education of children and young people. In 1979 they launched “Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children”, whose editions were published continuously until 2014. Equally important were the reflections developed in various volumes (Lipman; Sharp, 1978b; Lipman; Sharp; Oscanyan, 1980; Sharp; Reed, 1992, 1996; Splitter; Sharp, 1995).

For various reasons, which have only recently begun to be investigated (Gregory; Laverty, 2018; Franzini Tibaldeo, 2023), Sharp’s scientific contribution has not received due recognition, which has partially obscured her specific and innovative role in the development of P4C.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to shed light on the internal evolution of Ann Sharp’s thinking, as well as her contribution to the maturing of P4C’s educational philosophy. Our thesis is that two of Ann Sharp’s research interests uniquely subsidised the project, namely the centrality of the concept of liberation, which she investigated in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, and her feminist perspective, which led to the discovery of the centrality of care in the philosophical-educational process.

the children's liberation project

Ann Margaret Shoub⁴ was born in 1942 in Brooklyn, where she grew up in an Irish Catholic neighbourhood. In 1963 she obtained her bachelor’s degree in Intellectual history from the Catholic College of New Rochelle. She then moved to the Catholic University of America in Washington (DC), where he

⁴ She adopted the surname Sharp after her marriage to Vincent Sharp in 1966. Autobiographical and biographical information relating to Ann Sharp can be found in the following sources: Sharp, 2012; Sharp, 2018i; Laverty; Gregory, 2018; Franzini Tibaldeo, 2023.

obtained her master's degree in American and Latin American history in 1966. After graduating, Sharp dedicated herself to teaching: in 1965-1966, she taught World history and US history at Fayetteville State College (North Carolina) and, the following year, she was appointed Assistant professor of Intellectual history at Virginia Union University in Richmond (Virginia). Both institutions were part of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which had been created before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the aim of primarily serving the African-American community. During the years that Sharp worked at these universities, the black pride movement was at its height and there, confessed Ann as regards her first experiences in Fayetteville,

for the first time, I found myself in the minority. I was a White professor at a Black College and a rebel as far as the rest of the town was concerned. For a young white woman to teach at a black college in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1966 was something that just was not done (Sharp, 2012, p. 36).

Her enthusiasm and pedagogical skills helped her deal with the situation. Sharp sought to develop innovative teaching methodologies based on student collaboration. The aim of her "multifaceted approach" was "to reveal to her students their own value" (Gregory; Lavery, 2018, p. 6). Her fundamental educational conviction was Socratic, as she "came to believe that the first step in becoming a person is to recognize one's ignorance and prejudice, and that the first step in doing that is to be in conversation with others" (Gregory; Lavery, 2018, p. 6). In addition, this teaching experience helped her to clarify her own political positioning in relation to various forms of injustice, "including patriarchy, paternalism towards children, imperialism, war and poverty" (Gregory; Lavery, 2018, p. 6).

In 1970 Sharp began her doctorate in Educational sciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (MA). The title of her thesis was: "The teacher as liberator: an analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of education". This work was the starting point for her first publications (Sharp, 1975, 1976). In this context, Sharp matured her own pedagogical credo based on the educational centrality of philosophy, provided, of course, that philosophy was first translated and reconstructed. After completing her doctorate in 1973, Sharp was looking for a way to put this project into practice. The opportunity

arose when she got a position as Assistant professor of Education at Montclair State College, where she met Matthew Lipman. From that moment on, the two of them developed the P4C's philosophical-educational proposal together.

However, before addressing Sharp's contribution to the development of P4C, it is worth delving a little deeper into her first philosophical-educational interest in Nietzsche, who was chosen as a model of reflection and criticism for what she expected from her students, as well as from teachers. In fact, these reflections had repercussions on her forthcoming educational programme. Nietzsche's educational philosophy carries a component of transformation and substantial change for both the student, the teacher, and the world (Sharp, 1975, 1976, 2018h).

Sharp sees Nietzsche as a thinker who, in conceiving the *Übermensch* (overman), aims to create someone who takes responsibility for becoming better not only for him/herself, but also for the society around him/her. For, with the death of God, there would be no other way but to affirm one's own life through endeavour and courage:

The overman is a man who has willed himself above the animal state and the cultural conditioning of his times. His creativity is a product of his inner richness and self-knowledge. It is born of his suffering – his capacity to sublimate his life energy for the sake of creative action and to endlessly destroy what is old and accomplished for the sake of becoming qualitatively more (Sharp, 1975, p. 98).

Thus, we realise that Sharp's vision of the *Übermensch* is the possibility of someone who becomes him/herself even in the suffering of the destruction of what he knows. This is important, because the kind of philosophical and critical education that Sharp idealises must shake up the social structures in which present-day students are inserted, because their current way of thinking certainly reflects a consumerist society that lives in expectation of the future. However, in this context the promise of the future is not that of an ideal world, but of a social or existential rise through consumerism, a rise that never materializes and prevents these young people from living up to their existential potential.

Does suffering play a role in education? This is one of the key points of Nietzsche's educational reflections, as he considers suffering to be an integral

part of the possibility of having freedom. To be an educator is to bring a form of suffering to pupils, not in a sadistic way, but through the possibility of sublimation, in other words, as a way of enabling them to redirect their energies so that they can carry out creative activities and finally develop their own freedom. Thus, the students' true merit lies in their ability to transform challenges into creative opportunities, because it was up to the student "who has learned to control and sublimate his impulses, thus harnessing them for the creation of beautiful ideas and actions" (Sharp, 1975, p. 99).

This sublimation, therefore, is a process of redirecting the pupil's capacities. However, Sharp understands that in Nietzsche this freedom can only exist through suffering, which the student has to experience in order to achieve it. The author believes that this emphasis on suffering is denied by traditional pedagogies that are overly concerned with technical and bureaucratic aspects of the educational process, without realising that learning must involve a mixture of suffering:

The suffering involved in the relentless pursuit of self-mastery is often mitigated or ignored as if talk of such things is not in good taste. Emphasis is put on everything (the curriculum, the teaching technique, the set-up of classroom), except the struggle involved in all self-discipline, in all delaying of gratification for the sake of something more (Sharp, 1975, p. 99).

Sharp sees in Nietzsche a forerunner of criticism of contemporary pedagogical views underestimating or negating the role of suffering in the educational process. It is responsibility of education to stress that it is not possible for everything to be pleasurable, and that the freedom of self-determination matures through the suffering of being able to wait and learning to postpone gratification and to sublimate certain moments and pleasures towards a greater goal.

In fact, the desire to make oneself greater is precisely the point that connects the author's vision to Nietzsche, as she wants her students to become critical and realise something beyond the expectations that society has for them, something that Sharp will call the "WILLING TO BE MORE" (Sharp, 1975, p. 100; capital letters in the original). For Sharp, it is this "will to be more" that makes children abandon a momentary pleasure for something that only in the long term, and perhaps only personally, gives them the strength to overcome

themselves, being a form of sublimation opposed to the concept of denial or self-injury. This entails developing a total love for oneself, recognising that there are higher goals than immediate pleasure, which could precisely limit one's ability to become more than he/she is. According to Sharp, this is why the "student commits himself to the endless pain of giving up all that will thwart his growth and creativity" (Sharp, 1975, p. 100).

Suffering, then, is part of building the path to freedom. Without suffering there is no freedom, and the greatest suffering would be precisely not having the possibility of exercising the best of oneself. Thus, freedom is a self-affirmation that involves the "desire to be more", but it is also a self-limitation, because in order to fulfil this desire to be more, it is sometimes necessary to limit certain pleasures. At this point, we might think that Sharp is denying the student's own life for a supposed growth that may never happen, something that would clearly be a mistake for Nietzsche. But, in fact, this would also be a mistake according to Sharp, because these instincts, these pleasures, far from what first appears, do not affirm life, but reject it, and not in the metaphysical sense, but in factual existence:

It is the task of the educator to create conditions which demonstrate to the student that giving rein to one's instincts is not evil but against life. "Our instincts contradict, disturb and destroy each other" (Nietzsche, 1911, p. 99). Passions unless sublimated can impede man's growth, and yet all growth in rationality and creativity is marked by passion itself of the most intense kind (Sharp, 1975, p. 101).

This sublimation, then, is more reminiscent of life, because it demands of students not the complete denial of a pleasure, but on the contrary, the vivid affirmation of a passion to become better, which makes them deprive themselves for a few moments in order to revel in the conquest of being who they really are, with all the potential that their reality and social class may have taken away. This means that, ultimately, "freedom is the antithesis of giving rein to one's feelings; rather it is 'creative self-limitation'" (Sharp, 1975, p. 101, quoting from Nietzsche, 1997, p. 137).

In this way, Nietzsche does not consider that there is a correct form of education based on a vision of the students' freedom, as they would still be stuck with confused aspects of themselves. To better elucidate this point,

Nietzsche considers that to be free is to be authentic and this involves a recognition of one's self-creativity that does not exist in someone who is immersed in social values that have been pushed on them as truth, but without there being a full capacity for judgement. In fact, this would be, in a way, the role of the educational institutions that Nietzsche saw in his time, which in addition to depriving students of a critical view of reality, are driven by utilitarian values to train people for financial needs (Zuben; Medeiros, 2013, p. 76; Biesta, 2009).

How is it possible, then, to believe that children and young people would have the capacity to choose sublimation in order to make something better of themselves, when the whole system is concerned solely with the usefulness of education as a possibility of achieving something, such as a job or buying goods, which are much easier and more immediate pleasures than understanding the need to excel and achieve self-determination?

This point precisely reinforces the view that Sharp finds in both Nietzsche and Marcuse, since the former supported the idea that the German schools of his time had denied the role of sublimation as "a subversive tactic of the State to keep the reins on individual autonomy" (Sharp, 1975, p. 103)⁵. The latter perceived in this structure a tendency towards enacting a repressive desublimation, which worked by giving the illusion of freedom through the chains of banal instinctive pleasures, as a way of guaranteeing the inertia of mass society (Sharp, 1975, p. 104).

These criticisms lead Sharp to develop an educational perspective that does not focus solely on a teaching method or a structural revolution, but also on engaging in teacher training pivoted on the development in teachers of a more critical attitude to the process of thinking, of relating to suffering, so that they can rationally use their strength to "be more" and achieve liberation.

For Sharp, educators are people who have gone through this educational metamorphosis, creating and adapting themselves just like their pupils (Sharp, 1976, p. 389). Thus, educators have already gone through the process of sublimation itself and possesses self-discipline and culture, as well as values

⁵ See also Sharp, 2018h.

that they have created for themselves, because they themselves must be beings who are “constantly striving for freedom and self-perfection” (Sharp, 1975, p. 104), which shows that the Nietzschean view of educators is that they must be precisely people who face life with the metamorphic ideal of the *Übermensch* (Tedesco; Oliveira; Lacerda, 2024).

It is important to note that from the outset Nietzsche’s educator has to face the challenge of what it means to teach in an institutional context that does not reflect this new being that he/she is. In fact, this educational goal cannot be achieved by simply using a dispassionate didactic technique, but requires mobilising a more comprehensive and refined approach. It is at this point that Sharp identifies in Nietzsche an educator of love (Sharp, 1976, p. 390-399), because the posture of this educator seduces the student into imitating him/her, even though he/she is aware that this operation is not without a certain amount of manipulation:

Although he is aware that he is manipulating the environment for the production of free men, the educator is also aware that education required more than this. Somehow, he must be capable of seducing the student to a life of creativity and freedom. It is only through his creative and overflowing love that he is able to seduce another into the suffering which all self-discipline involves for the sake of freedom (Sharp, 1975, p. 104-105).

In what sense does the student have to be “seduced”? Sharp believes that when educators maintain a genuinely ethical attitude, students realise that they are in front of someone who lives in their existence what they teach and this shows them the true respect that these teachers have for teaching, because they do not just repeat empty words, but exercise their own existence as a witness to what they themselves want for the world:

The very commitment that one is seeking from one’s students must be made manifest in the everyday behaviour of the teacher. The zest for knowing, the serious attachment to the procedures of inquiry, a revulsion for anything sham, the capacity to endure the endless search and the disciplined mode of everyday living that is a prerequisite to any serious intellectual venture – all must be shown. To talk about these traits directly is moralizing and usually counterproductive. Children know in a very short time whether or not a teacher possesses these virtues. It is as if they have an extra sense for smelling out anyone or anything counterfeit or phony (Sharp, 1984, p. 4).

What is evident to Sharp is that Nietzsche’s emphasis on freedom and sublimation is a goal that functions as a guiding ideal in a society that even has

educators who are passive about their own lives, which directly reflects on their commitment to teaching.

According to Sharp and Nietzsche, sublimation happens in educators because they are willing to experience this process of overcoming the human for the *Übermensch*, and develop into lovers so great of the transformation they have undergone that they ardently wish to imprint it on those they educate, which requires a strong discipline to always look for innovative educational forms, and not just the repetition of a concept or content that often does not concern the student (Sharp, 1975, p. 105).

These educators also do not feel satisfied as long as they cannot apply the desire for sublimation in their students and this, we emphasise once again, is not due to a mere method or cynical pleasure, but is part of the very constitution of these educators' way of being that does not accept that their students cannot become what they really are:

Through his everyday contact with his students, the educator aims at awakening the *pain* which comes when one realizes that one is not oneself yet and thus must search for new knowledge and experiences in order to satisfy the drive for liberation. The educator is endlessly waiting for the student to awaken to the drive of freedom (Sharp, 1975, p. 105).

Nietzsche realises that an educator of this kind is not good for a State that is looking to expand education, but not at the expense of what it considers ideal, and that is why it resorts to the lowest aspects of the students' pleasures, so that they have the sensation of learning, but are only stuck in the inertia of their existence, because free and creative people have an infinite capacity to generate new ideas, new alternatives to what exists.

The role of educators for Sharp is therefore the role of people who are creating a new world, because they themselves have undergone the metamorphosis of their spirit, according to the Nietzschean Zarathustra (Sharp, 1976, p. 399-420; Tedesco; Oliveira; Lacerda, 2024). This educator, who was once a camel, then a lion, and is now a child, wants to take his pupils into the desert through sublimation and, like a loving child, wants to see this pupil transformed not into yet another plastered model, but into a child building his/her own world and bringing the innocence of new games (Sharp, 1976, p. 387-388).

Sharp, therefore, sees that “Nietzsche can serve as an important balance for educational theorists in their pursuit of meaningful educational theory” (Sharp, 1975, p. 106) and that the conception of sublimation and suffering is that which can bring not a false freedom, but which must be understood in its dual role, as it is “somehow refreshing while at the same time sobering” (Sharp, 1975, p. 106).

Nietzsche understands that this duality is necessary, because otherwise there would be no possibility for the person to be finally able to enjoy the being who they are, because for Nietzsche “once one dedicates oneself to becoming free, one, of necessity, affirms the inevitable suffering involved in the process itself. All conquest, all pain, all joy and all creation involves a struggle with nature and an overcoming of that nature” (Sharp, 1975, p. 106).

In this way, sublimation and suffering have this clear purpose of allowing students a gigantic happiness that they cannot understand without having gone through it. It is like the very idea of the three metamorphoses of being, because the camel suffers, the lion fights, but the child laughs, builds, forgets, and this forgetting is precisely because he/she now has such pleasure in being what he/she is, that no longer recognises the camel in the desert or the lion fighting the dragon, but only recognises him/herself as a being who always has the “will to be more”. This is why Sharp says that modern “educational theorists would do well not to mitigate the pain involved in liberation and the essential *tension* that must exist in the student-teacher relationship for growth to take place” (Sharp, 1975, p. 106).

Therefore, according to Sharp, liberation and the search for knowledge aim to develop complete and successful people. Through education that aims to improve the individual, there will consequently be a fairer and more equal world. In this way, the combination of a Nietzschean perspective with the forthcoming P4C will result in a programme that will place greater emphasis on the education of young people and will be based on the growth process of freedom as the “cultivation of the power over oneself” and as “the process of ACTIVELY REDIRECTING the basic energy of human life” (Sharp, 1975, p. 99).

This transformative redirection must involve not only the student, but also the teacher, whose role should not be limited to focussing on educational content. More than this, teaching requires the ability to adopt approaches capable of promoting the intellectual and relational liberation of students. The “good educator”, says Sharp on the basis of Nietzsche, “is an artist who is involved in the most delicate art there is, the art of teaching” (Sharp, 1975, p. 102).

This idea became clear in the 1970s with the development of the P4C, which was based on training teachers by equipping them with inquiry skills and philosophical facilitation abilities. According to Lipman and Sharp, the facilitator’s role should be twofold: “(1) to model and to call for good dialogue moves (cognitive and social), and (2) to help the participants keep track of how the dialogue progresses through the stages of the framework” (Gregory, 2008, p. 23-24). Rather than simply lecturing students, the teacher/facilitator was expected to adopt a philosophical-pedagogical stance capable of orchestrating liberating dialogue in the classroom and promoting moves such as identifying assumptions ignored by the group, identifying important alternative viewpoints not raised by the group, and encouraging participants to move from one stage of inquiry to the next (Lipman; Sharp; Oscanyan, 1980, p. 102-128; Lipman, 2003). Therefore, the teacher/facilitator’s training was designed to make them “philosophically sensitive”, i.e. able to “*hear* the philosophical dimension” of what the students were saying and detect what was missing (Sharp, 2018a, p. 89), with the intention of guiding them towards liberation and intellectual autonomy.

However, before going any further, it is necessary to highlight an aspect of Sharp’s investigation into Nietzsche’s thinking that will have repercussions on the forthcoming P4C programme. In presenting the educational relevance of the three Nietzschean metamorphoses, Sharp emphasises the differences between them in relation to the student’s liberation process. The latter evolves from an attitude of reverence and obedience, corresponding to the first stage of the camel, in which the educator has to discipline and stimulate the student to overcome fear and laziness (Sharp, 1976, p. 399-408), and culminates in the third

stage of the child, in which the student “is totally affirmative, totally yea-saying and thus is capable of creativity” (Sharp, 1976, p. 413). However, along with the student, what is significantly transformed is also the educational relationship itself, because from “model and leader” (Sharp, 1976, p. 400) the educator becomes “friend” (Sharp, 1976, p. 418). This means that the vertical educational relationship becomes progressively more horizontal and the initial asymmetrical one becomes more symmetrical and reciprocal. It is worth noting that in Sharp’s following educational reflections this process towards horizontality and reciprocity will somehow expand beyond the simple relationship between two individuals (the educator and the student) and involve a plurality of inquirers (the facilitator and the participants in a communal philosophical dialogue)⁶. In this respect, it was through his involvement with Nietzsche that Sharp matured his conviction that liberation is “the goal of a process of subjectivation in which one becomes who one is through and in dialogue with others” (Oliverio, 2018, p. 69).

liberation and care

Lipman and Sharp’s decision to get involved in education was based on their concerns that children might be receiving an inadequate education, which was due, on the one hand, to the inequalities within the US school system and, on the other, to the ineffectiveness of the individualistic, reductionist, unidirectional, dispensing, and content-transmitting nature of traditional education, and the erroneous image of the human mind as “an empty passive vessel that must be stuffed with information or content in order to be ‘educated’” (Lipman; Sharp; Oscanyan, 1980, p. 83). Instead, their question was how children could become more “reasonable” thanks to a more interactive education and how this could lead to the democratic renewal of both schools and society (Lipman, 2008, p. 107). Thus, Lipman began to imagine how philosophy could contribute to promoting this liberation and flourishing of

⁶ In offering suggestions for educators and teachers who want to do philosophy with their students, Sharp rightly points out the possible differences between novice and experienced classes, both in terms of didactic objectives, the students’ abilities and attitudes, and the options for facilitation on the part of the educator/teacher (Sharp, 2018a, p. 90-91).

children, while at the same time helping them to deal with the ambiguities related to the increasingly powerful advertising of consumerism (Lipman, 2012, p. 26). Sharp was equally concerned about the “political, economic, sexual and moral messages that infiltrate so much of our space and time through the technologies of mass communication” (Sharp; Gregory, 2018, p. 147). She was also sensitive to the following gender issue:

The commercial success of the fashion and cosmetics industries testifies to the effectiveness of commercial media in encouraging women to think that the good life is one of sensation, consumerism, and devotion to projecting a certain image for the public (masculine) gaze (Sharp; Gregory, 2018, p. 147).

Thus, she fully agreed with Lipman’s idea of providing children with the means to deal with this threat and confront its force in order to achieve “cognitive and moral growth” (Sharp; Gregory, 2018, p. 147) and thus liberate themselves.

Lipman and Sharp’s main idea was that, through cooperative dialogue with classmates and the set of tools that Western philosophy had developed over time, it was possible to stimulate children’s desire for knowledge and improve their ability to think for themselves rather than being manipulated, which would ultimately result in a pluralistic and democratic society. In other words, as analysed in Section 2, since the educational relationship between teacher/educator is capable of generating a movement that becomes reciprocal and horizontal, this relationship would not only free both individuals, but could also be pluralised and extended to the whole class, thanks to the generative and liberating potential of the “Community of philosophical inquiry” (COI) itself (Lipman; Sharp, 1978a), which involved a plurality of students investigating together with the teacher/facilitator and which was a peculiar environment capable of promoting co-operation rather than competition between individuals⁷. Lipman and Sharp were convinced that this was how the individualistic and narrow-minded paradigm that characterises consumerist society could be overcome (Sharp, 2018b, p. 237).

⁷ It is worth highlighting the autobiographical account according to which Ann Sharp first learnt what “community of inquiry” meant when, in the late 1960s, she and her husband Vincent became educators for a group of high-IQ teenagers with various degrees of mental problems. Ann engaged in innovative “indirect teaching” activities based on dialogical interactions and community discussions (Sharp, 2018i, p. 18-23).

Therefore, the conception of a proposal for “philosophising together” became the cornerstone of their educational efforts. Sharp put the finishing touch to this reflection by taking up and renewing in a relational and communitarian sense her interest in liberation and highlighting the importance of “care”, as the affective-evaluative element that accompanies both the flourishing of a self-centred individual into a free person capable of building meaningful relationships, and of a competitive society into a community of inquiry characterised by an open and constructive spirit:

Such a community presupposes care: care for the procedures of inquiry, care for one another as persons, care for the tradition that one has inherited, care for the creations of one another. Thus there is an affective component to the development of a classroom community of inquiry that cannot be underestimated. The children must move from a stance of cooperativeness in which they obey the rules of inquiry because they want to gain merit to a stance in which they consider the inquiry a collaborative process. When they truly collaborate, it’s a matter of *we*, not just personal success [...]. They truly care for each other as persons, and this care enables them to converse in ways they never have before (Sharp, 2018c, p. 45).

As a result of their participation in the process of building reflective and relational care through philosophical communal inquiry, children change by developing new skills. In other words, they implement the very meaning of “education”, which was understood by Sharp as “a process of growth in the ability to reconstruct one’s own experience, so that one can live a fuller, happier, qualitatively richer life” (Sharp, 2018c, p. 45). Involvement in community research offers participants an opportunity for liberation and self-transformation. As a result, those who participate in a philosophical classroom session and investigate together with others are characterised by

an ever-developing moral-political awareness that tempers subjectivism and conservatism on the one hand and a loose tolerance for anything at all on the other. Such a process of good discernment involves a commitment to particulars. [...] [T]he journey toward the good is not only experienced in cognitive and verbal modes of inquiry; it is also experienced in our most intimate relationships with the world, wherein our perceptions of the smallest things [...] are capable of becoming ever deeper and of developing a caring attitude in us (Sharp, 2018d, p. 52).

Lipman and Sharp specified the role of care in the COI in a unique way. They developed a “multidimensional thinking approach” (Lipman, 2003, p. 197), based on a triad of “modes of thinking” (“critical”, “creative”, and “caring”), which corresponded respectively to the gnoseological, aesthetic, and

ethical axes of thinking (Lipman, 1995c, p. 62). In particular, clarifying the meaning of the innovative phrase “caring thinking” and its relationship to the moral sphere required notable efforts of reflection⁸. In this respect, Sharp’s hypothesis was that “caring thinking”, as essentially related to the “practice of caring”, played a fundamental role in the development of personality and interpersonal relationships (Sharp, 2018e, p. 209-210).

In an article first published in 1991 under the title “The Community of Inquiry: Education for Democracy”, Sharp stated the following:

A certain care is manifest in the group, not only for logical procedures, but also for the growth of each member of the community. This care presupposes a disposition to be open, a capacity for changing one’s views, and a willingness to be transformed by the other – to be affected by the other. This care is essential for dialogue [...]. Care, then, makes possible a conception of the world as a play in which one can shape outcomes and create beauty where none has existed before (Sharp, 2018f, p. 242).

According to Sharp, “care” was the relational pivot that enabled communal thinking, philosophical inquiry, and the transformative liberation of the self. Moreover, it revealed itself through the social and proactive behaviours of the co-investigators, who enjoyed mutually generative and trusting relationships. She complemented these reflections with a re-evaluation of Peirce’s cosmologic notion of “agapism” or “evolutionary love” (Sharp, 1993, p. 57). Sharp was in search of “a more comprehensive understanding of human experience” (Sharp, 1993, p. 56) and was convinced that Peirce’s philosophy could provide this insight. As a result, the dynamic, evolutionary, appreciative, creative, and agapistic nature of the “higher development of human reason”, according to Peirce (Sharp, 1993, p. 57), led her to a trinity of forms of inquiry enacted in the practice of philosophy, which was very similar to Lipman’s (1995d): “Philosophy for children focuses on the doing of ethical, aesthetic and logical inquiry” (Sharp, 1993, p. 59). It is worth noting that, for both Sharp and Lipman, care was characterised as being intrinsically related to values and not just regarded as a feeling, related to politeness or simple ‘kindness’.

⁸ It is interesting to note that already in her early Nietzschean works, Sharp mentions the educational relevance of critical thinking and creativity (Sharp, 1976, p. 401 and 413). In fact, unlike the novelty of “caring thinking”, critical and creative thinking have been widely investigated for several decades.

The thread of care running through Sharp's reflections was further clarified by her dialogue over the years with feminism, which represented the explicit point of reference for the aforementioned works (Sharp, 1993, 1994). For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to highlight some basic aspects of Sharp's view of feminism. She was well aware of the plurality of positions among feminist thinkers, some of whom were more inclined towards essentialism, highlighting the irreducible differences between men and women, while others focused more on the critique of patriarchal culture and argued in favour of the transformation of men and women (Sharp, 1994, p. 24-25). Sharp was closer to this second approach, which emphasised that a gender perspective and a broader approach could promote cultural change through constructive criticism of existing power structures (Sharp; Gregory, 2018; Garza, 2018). However, even more relevant to the current educational analysis is the fact that Sharp's feminist sensitivity allowed her to add innovative nuances to Lipman's vision of "caring thinking" and to appreciate it in a slightly different way.

For example, in the essay "The Other Dimension of Caring Thinking" (Sharp, 2018e), Sharp highlighted three characteristics of caring: (1) the "ontic" feature, which involves the person as a whole; (2) "intentionality", which involves our relationships with other people; and (3) "communality", as the relational environment in which people can commit to the practice. Although there are no feminist thinkers among the sources for this article, it is clear that the three basic characteristics of care highlighted by Sharp are based on her previous work, in which the use of a feminist approach helped her to bring to the fore the bodily, perception-related, and relational dimension of care. This was not at odds with the aspects of caring thinking highlighted by Lipman, since both thinkers agree that caring contributes in a unique way to the affective embodiment of thinking and to its "intensity and commitment to act" (Sharp, 2007, p. 251).

However, it is also true that Sharp's view of caring thinking also differs from Lipman's: while for Lipman all aspects of thinking, including caring thinking, were of equal importance, for Sharp, relational awareness, which was

specifically related to caring thinking, was given anthropological pre-eminence and entailed with a more comprehensive nature compared to critical and creative thinking. It is in the light of interpersonal relationships that human existence and thinking acquire meaning and are therefore able to guide judgement, choices, and behaviour. Sharp developed this relational primacy of both care and caring thinking from her dialogue with feminism and especially with the so-called “ethics of care” (see, for example, Sharp, 1994 and 2018g, p. 118). As a result, her understanding of P4C is centred on the experience of relationship: “Committed to the narrative as a form for becoming aware of the philosophical dimension of experience, it [P4C] stresses *relationships* not only among ideas and disciplines, but among people” (Sharp, 1994, p. 27). This was due to the fact that the other dimensions of thinking (the critical and creative) were enveloped in caring thinking (Chesters, 2012, p. 128-153; Morehouse, 2018)⁹.

conclusions

In this article we enquire into the educational philosophy of Ann Margaret Sharp, whose thinking and contribution to the development of “Philosophy for Children” (P4C) are not yet sufficiently known. From her interest in the educational thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sharp focused on the transformative role of education for both pupils and teachers. This transformation relates to the re-evaluation for formative and existential purposes of concepts and practices such as sublimation and suffering, which traditional education disregards or rejects. On the contrary, the dynamic and creative renewal of education proposed by Nietzsche and Sharp is based on human transformation and flourishing thanks to the tension and effort of

⁹ Some commentators (Kohan, 2019, p. 209-235; Chetty; Suissa, 2017; Morehouse, 2018, p. 206; Wurtz, 2024) point out that the philosophical-educational practice proposed by Lipman and Sharp, although innovative, does not really succeed in tackling and deconstructing systematic socio-cultural distortions, including racism, in a sufficiently effective way. This is an extremely important issue, especially in the Brazilian context, but one that we cannot go into in depth here. We are, however, convinced of the critical and deconstructive role that community-based caring thinking can still play, especially if it is fuelled by a humble, vigilant, attentive, and sensitive approach to diversity and relational nuances on the part of teachers/facilitators. Ann Sharp developed this outlook in dialogue with feminist scholars and applied it to teacher education (Sharp, 2018a).

actively redirecting existence. This is where the liberation of each individual lies, i.e. in the conquest of who each person really is.

However, in conceiving of P4C's educational programme together with Matthew Lipman, Sharp developed her previous Nietzschean reflections, which were still based on the centrality of the individual (both student and teacher), into a more communal and relational outlook, in the broadest sense. In this regard, her longstanding interest in liberation developed to the point of characterising not just individuals, but a plurality of students who investigate together with their teacher/facilitator. This new way of experiencing philosophy is what Sharp and Lipman called the "Community of philosophical inquiry" (COI), as an experience capable of promoting liberation through co-operation rather than competition between individuals. Over the decades, both Lipman and Sharp engaged in the theoretical and practical clarification of the components of this experience and identified a triad of ways of thinking (critical, creative, and caring), which corresponded respectively to the gnoseological, aesthetic, and ethical axes of human thinking. However, the reflection on caring thinking proved to be particularly interesting in both theoretical and practical terms. And it was precisely in her interpretation of caring thinking that Sharp revealed both her philosophical creativity and the specificity of her contribution to the development of P4C. Her sensitivity to gender issues, among which the centrality of interpersonal relationships stood out, meant that P4C and the COI were moulded and built in the guiding light of caring and relational thinking.

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