

Lifelong Learning—From Freedom to Necessity

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Received 12 May 2016; accepted 31 July 2016; published 3 August 2016

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Abstract

Lifelong education, in its humanistic dimension as the broader right of the individual to education, which in the 1970s was seen as a question of the individual's free will, has become increasingly understood as the obligation of the individual to educate himself or herself throughout his or her life, or rather as the individual's personal responsibility for the development of his or her own education, personal development and participation in the realisation of civil rights and economic goals. Lifelong learning (education) is thus no longer a matter of the individual's free choice, but is a necessity. If one wants to survive in the labour market in a time of rapid social, economic and technological change, one must constantly adapt one's knowledge and skills to the unpredictable demands of the labour market.

Keywords

Lifelong Education, Philosophy of Education, Necessity, Free Choice

1. Introduction

Lifelong learning is something much discussed today, and yet we do not actually know exactly what it is. We do not know this, and we are in fact unable to know this, because not only is the meaning of the concept denoted by the expression “lifelong learning” unclear, but the very concept itself is not entirely coherent.¹ Nevertheless, this expression has, on a terminological level, gained precedence over the expressions with which numerous theoreticians and politicians in the 1970s attempted to most suitably name the “new” view of education which arose within the framework of various cultural and theoretical traditions, educational policies and practices. The essence of this viewpoint on education, believed by many to mean something new—a sort of a conceptual break with earlier notions—consists, put simply, in the realisation that education that ends in the period of childhood or youth (at about the time when one finishes regular schooling) can simply no longer meet the demands either

of an individual or of contemporary society. This “new” notion of education was at the time labelled by some as lifelong education, while others spoke of recurrent education, and still other others preferred to employ the term continuing education².

2. Terminological Difficulties

Do these various expressions, however, denote one and the same thing or different things? Do these specialised terms refer to the same concept? On the basis of the title of a report prepared for UNESCO by Lengrand (1970), a report that represents one of the first sources in which appears “a notion from which the present concept of lifelong learning is derived” (Eurydice, 2000: p. 7), one would conclude that the terms “continuing education” and “lifelong education” are synonyms referring to the same concept of education. The title of the report in French is *Introduction à l'éducation permanente*, and in English *An Introduction to Lifelong Education*. Given that in French educational terminology the English equivalent to their expression “*éducation permanente*” is not “lifelong education” but “continuing education” (Etévé et al., 1994: p. 347), it would seem that consequently the “continuing education” has the same meaning as the expressions “lifelong education” and “permanent education”. Moreover, considering that in the above mentioned Eurydice survey both the English and the French titles in Lengrand’s report were retroactively changed to *An Introduction to Lifelong Learning* or *Une introduction à l'éducation tout au long de la vie* (Eurydice, 2000: p. 7), that is, from *An Introduction to Lifelong Education* into *An Introduction to Lifelong Learning*, and from *Introduction à l'éducation permanente*, into *Une introduction à l'éducation tout au long de la vie*, it can be seen that these two terms are also synonymous with the previous ones. This impression also seems to be supported in UNESCO’s *Terminology of Adult Education*, which was published less than a decade later, and lists as synonyms the already mentioned terms, as well as the term “continuing education” or “continuous learning”. On the other hand, the very fact of the above mentioned retroactive changes to the title of Lengrand’s report, which are found in the survey three decades after the report was published, confirms the assertion put forward in the survey itself—namely, that today the term “lifelong learning” has gained precedence over other terms considered as synonyms (Eurydice, 2000: p. 9). It has gained precedence over terms which, according to the UNESCO Terminology from 1979, “originate in a scheme, according to which education is not a once and for all given experience, limited to the cycle of continuous education which begins in childhood, but a process which is ongoing throughout one’s life. Although life itself is a lasting learning process, every human being needs additional special opportunities for continuous, purposeful and sequentially organised learning, so as to be able to follow technical and social changes, to adapt to changes in one’s personal life (marriage, parenthood, work position, age, etc.) and thus to completely realise one’s individual developmental potential. Lifelong learning embraces the individual’s intentional and incidental learning and gath-

¹This statement derives from the survey entitled *Lifelong Learning: the Contribution of Education Systems in the Member States of the European Union* (Eurydice, 2000: p. 9). Similar statements can be found in other passages, e.g., according to the *Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe*, the term “lifelong learning” is not a technical or legal term with a precisely defined meaning (Federighi, 1998, entry “Lifelong Learning”). Jarvis (1998) also states that “since the reappearance of the notion of lifelong learning in the 1990s, it has been rapidly taken for granted” despite “the persistent question mark over the definition” (Griffin, 1998; Eurydice, 2000: p. 11). In spite of the fact that the concept of lifelong learning has not been clearly defined, lifelong learning has become an integral part of national and international policies. Thus, for instance, the Treaty of Amsterdam formally stipulated that “lifelong learning will henceforth be the guiding principle behind Community policy in the field of education and training”, and incorporated it as a supplementary notion into other areas of European policy, such as employment. Within the Community Employment Guidelines, the notion of lifelong learning is defined “as encompassing all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences” (Eurydice, 2000: p. 11). This rather generic abstract definition, which leaves unsolved the issue of the relationship among knowledge, skills and competences, can accommodate “the differing circumstances faced by each country”. However, “using it becomes a particularly delicate matter when attempts are made to put the concept into practice so as to implement concrete political solutions and to identify indicators for measuring the progress actually achieved” (Eurydice, 2000: p. 11).

²The idea of continuing education, which does not essentially differ from lifelong education, is much older. Its origin can already be found in Aristotle’s *Politics*, and it is connected with the phenomenon of spare time (*scholè*), which a free man dedicates to his love for wisdom or philosophy. Spare time is time kept apart from time designed for administering the state or the ritual worship of gods. It is thus also spare time in the sense of idleness, and the time of voluntary learning and study throughout one’s life. Thereafter, the idea of continuing education regained ground in the conception of instruction which was advocated by Condorcet at the end of the 18th century. This instruction was not conceived as instruction limited only to the period of childhood, but as instruction designed for all people irrespective of age, with the goal of continuously fighting against ignorance, prejudice and superstition (Etévé et al., 1994: p. 384). Previously, Komensky had stated that the whole of one’s life, from the cradle to the grave, is a school for everyone. In addition to Komensky, there were a number of other authors who advocated similar ideas. Therefore, it is not possible to accept the thesis that in the mid 1970s a new, ground breaking view of education emerged. Something else in fact occurred: changed social, and especially economic, circumstances, which increasingly enabled the expansion and implementation of the idea of lifelong learning.

ering of experience” (Terminology, 1991: pp. 73-74).

However, the synonymous usage of the above mentioned terms proves problematic, as it presupposes that the terms denote simply “different viewpoints of the same concept” (Terminology, 1991: p. 18). It is indeed true that all of the terms refer to a process which does not end at some point in youth but continues throughout life.³ The difference, however, lies in whether the process is conceived as education or as learning. As the terms “education” and “learning” are not synonyms denoting the same concept, but rather denote two different concepts, it is wrong to assert that “lifelong education” and “lifelong learning” are synonyms, and that they are consequently only varying viewpoints of one and the same process, denominated in a different way. Even if it were a case of truly dealing with the same process, the usage of the above mentioned synonyms would still be a poor choice, because in doing so the very notion that is specific to various viewpoints of this process would be effaced and rendered invisible. Finally, on the basis of a report by the *UNESCO International Commission on the Development of Education* from 1972, which defines “lifelong learning” and “lifelong education” as complementary concepts, we can conclude that we are not dealing with two different denotations of the same concept, but with two different denotations of two different concepts (World Education Report, 2000: p. 57), for if two concepts are complementary, then they are also necessarily different.

3. The Shift of Focus from Education to Learning

The idea of lifelong education is, as stated above, very old, but a broader (internationally recognised) interest for it did not emerge until the 1960s, when discussions about the further development of adult education ensued within UNESCO. At that time, the idea was accepted that adult education should become an integral part of every educational system, so that all men and women throughout their lives may have the opportunity to pursue education (World Education Report, 2000: p. 56). This idea was further developed by the above mentioned UNESCO International Commission, presided over by Edgar Faure, when it noted in its report from 1972 that the idea of lifelong education is the keystone of a new society which the Commission called “the learning society”. The report was further significant due to the fact that in it one can trace the shift of focus from education to learning, a shift which is characteristic of debates that took place in the following years (World Education Report, 2000: p. 56). But in what is this shift? It would appear that it lies in the recommendation of the Commission advocating that the guiding principle for educational policies should be that every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his or her life (Faure et al., 1972: p. 181). Yet, if the principle: “Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his [or her] life” were worded “Every individual must be in a position to continue education throughout his [or her] life”, what would the difference between the two principles be? It seems that in the context in which it was uttered there would be no difference.⁴ Finally, the Commission stated that “the idea of lifelong education”, and not of lifelong learning, “is the keystone of the learning society” (ibid: p. 181). As a result, the shift of focus from education to learning should probably be understood more as a shift of focus from one word to another, and not so much as a shift of focus from one concept to another. But even if a shift on the conceptual level were really intended, it should probably not be apprehended as a shift in the sense of value, as the Commission considers, as already noted, “lifelong education” and “learning throughout life” not only to be complementary concepts but that the former should be the precondition (keystone) for the realisation of the latter (World Education Report, 2000: pp. 56-57). In any case, the Commis-

³At first sight, it seems that the problem is solely in defining whether the process is actually a process of learning or education, whereas it is completely clear when the two processes start and when they end. According to strategic treatises by the OECD and the European Commission, in which objectives and means of educational policies on the global and national levels are presented, lifelong learning and education is defined as learning or education which starts when a human being is born and ends when a human being dies. Lifelong learning and education thus encompasses the entire life of an individual from the cradle to the grave (Laval, 2003: p. 95). Hence it is clear that these definitions of lifelong learning and education refer to learning and education which is not limited to a particular period of an individual’s life. Learning or education is no longer (if it ever was at all) perceived as something which is above all characteristic only of childhood and youth, but also of adulthood and old age. Nevertheless, this definition of lifelong learning and education does not encompass the whole of human life. Even leaving aside the period of so-called life after death, whose existence is a matter of faith and not of knowledge, the fact remains that these definitions of lifelong learning do not include the beginning of a human’s life. Namely, they exclude the prenatal period, which is the period from the conception to the birth of a child, despite the fact that psychological findings assert that learning already begins in this period, and not only after birth. On the other hand, such a definition of lifelong education, if taken literally, presupposes that education begins as early as after birth, which is in contrast to at least some traditional understandings of education.

⁴In my opinion, the difference between education and learning—which, accordingly to some interpretations, is in the fact that within education the focus lies more on the external institution, while within learning on the individual—is not crucial in this context, as the possibility of education throughout one’s life implies both non-formal and informal education.

sion highlighted, as had Lengrand (who understood lifelong education as the unity and totality of the educational process (Lengrand, 1975: p. 21), that “there is no permanent education, which would be as a part of the educational system, separated from the lifelong education”. Furthermore, “lifelong education is not an educational system⁵ but the principle on which the overall organisation [of its component parts] is founded” (Faure et al., 1972: pp. 181-182).

Lifelong education is thus a whole which includes education in childhood and youth as well as education that follows, whether the latter be called adult education, recurrent education or otherwise. For the purposes of our discussion, what is important is the difference between the first period of compulsory education and the following period that goes on until the end of life. John White stresses that the main difference between the two is that in the first period education is not a voluntary process for a child. As a child may not freely choose whether to be educated or not, education is inevitably imposed on him or her. If the aim of this kind of education and learning is to produce an autonomous individual, then one can expect that a child will at the end of this process be able to freely choose, because he or she will reach a level of autonomy sufficient to enable him or her freedom of choice. Yet, the condition for him or her to become free consists in going through the process of compulsory education beforehand, which is a matter of constraint and not of freedom of choice (White, 1982: p. 132). Lifelong education or education as a way of life, understood by White in this text as education that follows compulsory education, differs significantly from the latter. At that time, lifelong education used to be understood, and for White this was the only morally defensible understanding, as a matter of voluntary decision. In the new leisure society, in which there will be more and more free time, says White, people will be free to take up education if they want to. The contents of such education will depend on the individual. They may take up education simply for the sake of knowledge, which in itself is something valuable, or else in order to acquire new expertise and skills as a part of their vocational training or retraining, or for another reason. Irrespective of contents, education should be taken voluntary. Advocates of lifelong education have spoken so far about rights and opportunities, but not of obligations. And this, emphasises White, is only morally correct. If an adult does not want to continue with further education, is there a valid reason to hold that he or she has to? It is utterly probable, continues White, that the majority of people in the future leisure society will take up education, and that for them (but not necessarily for others) education will be a way of life. However, there are also other things for people to do in their spare time. The danger arising from the statement that we can no longer think about education as preparation for life but as a way of life, or at least as a lifelong process, lies in the fact that, according to White, we may blur the essential difference between compulsory education, which cannot be voluntary, and education in adulthood, which should be voluntary (White, 1982: p. 132). He believes that the latter should be voluntary, as every adult ought to be free to live the way he or she thinks is right, unless he or she is doing harm to others, or in certain circumstances to himself or herself. On the other hand, this principle of freedom may be in conflict with the principle that every individual should become an educated person. Some will perhaps become educated by the end of their compulsory education, while many will not. White stresses that in this case the principle of liberty forbids us educating the latter group with constraint further on. However, the principle of educatedness equally forbids not doing anything for them after they have reached a certain age or have finished pursuing compulsory education. If being educated represents something positive, then, says White, there is a good reason to encourage them to achieve the educatedness.⁶ This, of course, does not mean that they can be forced to pursue education further on (White, 1982: p. 132).

An adult should thus have the right to choose freely whether he or she will pursue education, or not. Likewise, he or she should have the right to education throughout life. However, it appears that neither lifelong education nor lifelong learning is recognised as one of the fundamental human rights.

4. Lifelong Education as a Human Right

According to a UNESCO report (World Education Report, 2000), until the Third World Conference on Adult Education, which was held in Tokyo in 1972, lifelong education or learning throughout life were in no way treated in the context of human rights as they are determined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At this conference was for the first time expressed on the international level the belief that the right of individuals

⁵It is impossible to reduce lifelong education to an educational system, as it does also take place (and in some forms mainly takes place) outside the system. We could say that the educational system is a necessity, but not yet a sufficient condition, for lifelong education.

⁶Ensuring stimulation for continuing education (financing, enabling education within working hours, educational leave) is consistent with the principle that everyone shall become educated. At the same time it is not in contrast to the principle that post-compulsory education shall be voluntary (White, 1982: p. 132).

to education, their right to learn and to go on learning, should be treated equally as other human rights and civil freedoms. Yet this right to learn was not conceived as a special, separate right, but as the already recognised right of every person to education (World Education Report, 2000: p. 58), which is stated in the first sentence of point 1 of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as follows: “Everyone has the right to education”. The interpretation of this was that everyone should have the right to education throughout their life. This interpretation is, due to the abstract form of the wording of the right, possible, but the meaning of the right is now somewhat broader than it was in 1948 when it was written and adopted. For considering the additional definitions that follow the main definition in the same paragraph of Article 26, it is evident that it was intended above all to be the right to regular elementary education (“Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”) Neither here, nor in the articles dealing with the right to education or to learn within other international conventions or covenants on human rights adopted since the Declaration, is the education of adults, or lifelong education or learning, mentioned. This means that the above mentioned broad interpretation, according to which the right to education should be synonymous with the right to lifelong learning, has no basis in explicit formulations of the right in international conventions and covenants on human rights binding the signatory states to facilitate the realisation of the right. Moreover, there are no provisions on correlative obligations of a state to ensure education of this kind and its financing. Nevertheless, the broad interpretation of the right, which speaks of how the right should be understood some two decades later, is important at least as a goal which should be pursued. In this respect, the right to lifelong education is synonymous with the right to lifelong learning. This is not surprising as, until 1976, lifelong education and lifelong learning were not considered as two different concepts. The difference between the right to education and the right to learn only gained a basis in 1985, with the International Conference on Adult Education in Paris, where the Declaration on the Right to Learn was adopted without actually having mentioned the right to education at all. However, the next conference in Hamburg, in 1997, again established a connection between the two, declaring in a more balanced statement that at the end of the millennium the recognition of the right to education and the right to learn was more necessary than ever (World Education Report, 2000: p. 58). Since the 1990s, the trend in educational policies in some OECD countries has been increasingly focused on lifelong education and learning. But the question as to who is the subject of the correlative duties or obligations to ensure these rights has been left unanswered. Who, for example, has the obligation to finance this kind of education or learning? By the end of the 1990s, the idea of the public financing of education beyond the period of compulsory education had given way to the model of shared responsibility, or “partnership”, between government, employers and learners themselves. This tripartite distribution of responsibility for the financing of “lifelong education” has increasingly become the norm in almost all developed countries, only with different proportions according to national circumstances. In these countries, therefore, the “right to lifelong learning” has been dealt with in close connection with the correlative duty of its financing or, in other words, in connection with the question of who should pay for lifelong learning. In regard to regular secondary and higher education, this is answered by Article 13, Paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which requires the progressive introduction of free education.⁷ However, concerning the education of adults at the secondary and tertiary levels, the position with respect to the international treaties on human rights is less straightforward. This kind of adult education, as seen before, was not anticipated in these treaties, and signatory states thus do not feel under any obligation to ensure that it is provided free of charge. If the right to lifelong learning is thus understood to include a “right” to continuing education, then in practice this would appear to mean no more than the “right” of any citizen to participate, at his or her own expense, in the market for goods and services generally, with more or less apparent financial encouragement from public funds (World Education Report, 2000: p. 60).⁸

The fact that, on the one hand, each individual has the right to education but, on the other hand, adults have to pay to enjoy this right (except in the case of compulsory, and thus gratis, education) turns out to be one of the issues connected with the realisation of this human right, which by definition should make no distinction in terms of race, sex, national or social origin, property, religion... or “any other circumstances” (*Universal Dec-*

⁷The right to introduce free secondary education is also mentioned in Article 28, paragraph 1(b) of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

⁸It is paradoxical that turning over the responsibility for the development of educational possibilities from the state to individuals and employers comes at the very moment when the need for lifelong learning is gaining more and more recognition (Raggett, Edwards, & Small, 1995: p. 1), and when lifelong learning is becoming an essential part of the rhetoric employed by individual states and international institutions.

laration of Human Rights, Article 2)—thus also in terms of the age of the learner. As this does not hold true, it is yet another proof that adults, because they are adults, do not have this right, in spite of the fact that many international conferences on adult education have proclaimed that they do. If it were otherwise, if the right were recognised in either international conventions or covenants on human rights or in national laws, then the obligation to pay for post-compulsory education would constitute a violation of this right, and consequently adults could resort to the courts in order to uphold the right. As we have seen, there is no such right in any international treatise, and thus it cannot be appealed for in the court. Hence it follows that the right to education is indeed recognised as a universal right, but its realisation is in fact limited. It is limited by the age of the subject of the right, as well as by the legal regulation of the length of free education in the state in which he or she resides. The regulation would probably be more just if the same number of years of free education were available to everyone, and if these years could be utilised at any time in one's life. In this case, those who finished the regular period of education before consuming all the available years of free education would not be disadvantaged in comparison with those who had used all of the years available to them.⁹ Even more problematic than speaking about the right to lifelong education is speaking about the right to lifelong learning. What does this “right” mean at all? Taking learning in its broadest sense, as a psychological process, then it takes place intentionally or unintentionally irrespective of whether it is recognised as a right or not.¹⁰ But if learning is understood as a conscious activity of an individual with the aim of gaining or perfecting knowledge, skills and habits, then with the right to lifelong learning one actually refers to the already mentioned right to lifelong education, which, as a positive right—a right, on the basis of which an individual demands, for example, that the state finance such education (learning)—is not acknowledged as a human right, the upholding of which should be ensured by the state. This right is actually not even acknowledged as a negative right, namely as the right or freedom of an individual to pursue education (or to learn) throughout his or her life without being hindered by the state.

5. Lifelong Learning as a Matter of Enforced Choice

Although lifelong learning is not *de iure* recognised as a human right, contemporary states trying to build their economies upon knowledge not only *de facto* avoid hindering it but in various ways also support it. The European Commission, for instance, supports lifelong learning, as it sees lifelong learning as a means for Europe to become “the economy with the most competitive and the most dynamic knowledge in the world”. According to Laval, who critically analyses lifelong learning in the context of neo-liberal policies of education, this is the main reason for support, even though the term is broader in meaning, as it “includes personal prosperity, active citizenship, social integration and not only professional integration and success at work” (Laval, 2003: p. 68).¹¹ Laval believes that the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000), which puts lifelong learning in the context of employment, clearly shows that educational policy of the European Commission is “subordinated to aims of the adaptation of the workforce to the new circumstances in the labour market” (Laval, 2003: p. 68). Only an individual who has learnt how to learn, and who is willing to learn throughout his or her life, will be able to survive in the labour market.¹² Those who are unable to adapt to rapid social changes and frequent employment changes, and incapable of assuring their own employment, will be existentially endangered.¹³ Therefore, in the future society of knowledge, and also of greater uncertainty and risk, lifelong learning is no longer a matter of free choice and voluntary decision but of social constraint and necessity. The only option remaining to a person in this state is the choice between “to be or not be”. This is not a free but an enforced choice. If one wants to survive, he or she has to make a “voluntary” decision to learn throughout his or her life. So the difference between constraint and freedom disappears, the very difference that is understood by White as the basis on which the compulsory

⁹In comparison with those who consume all the years of free education available, they are actually deprived twice. Firstly, as they do not take advantage of all the possibilities of free education they get less from the state than those who do take advantage of these possibilities, and secondly, as adults they have to pay for the same education if they do opt for it.

¹⁰Nevertheless, at first sight the announcement of the right might seem equally legitimate as the recognition of the right to freedom of thought, as thought can also be understood as a psychological process. However, the right to freedom of thought, which was, for example, so vigorously protected by the well-known advocates of freedom, Spinoza and Mill, consists in its essence in the right of a person to the freedom of thought regarding all questions (speculative or practical, scientific, moral or theological), which should not be forbidden by any authority, and not in the concession (of freedom) of thought as a psychological process, which can by no means be forbidden by any authority. What the authority should allow is thus not the psychological process of thought, but the freedom of expressing thoughts or ideas and points of view. This is why this right was already then, just as it is in contemporary international treaties on human rights, inseparably connected with the freedom of expression.

¹¹At this point, I will refer only to certain emphases in Laval's analysis, as put forward in his book “L' école n'est pas une entreprise”.

education of children differs from the voluntary post-compulsory (lifelong) education of adults. There is simply no longer a difference between compulsory education and lifelong education. Both are a matter of constraint. The duty of a child and of an adult is to learn. The only difference between them is that while a child is not responsible for his or her education,¹⁴ an adult is (morally and not legally) responsible for his or her lifelong learning. The fundamental characteristic of the concept of lifelong learning, differentiating it from lifelong education, would consist specifically in the personal responsibility of an individual for his or her learning.¹⁵ In the same context, Boshier (1998) defines “the notion of learning as personal responsibility for one’s own educational development. In order to remain employable, people, like consumers, have to be individually responsible for searching and choosing from what is available on the education and training market, in line with their requirements” (Eurydice, 2000: p. 8). The fundamental presupposition of lifelong learning is thus personal responsibility. But a person can be morally responsible for something only if it has been chosen freely, if he or she has freely decided for something. Or, in other words, an individual is responsible only for his or her autonomous acts. A subject is not responsible for non-autonomous acts. So how can an individual be responsible for learning throughout his or her life if he or she is forced to learn due to plain survival, if learning is not a matter of his or her free choice, but of necessity? On the other hand, the presupposition of personal responsibility for learning throughout one’s life is in conflict with the definition of lifelong learning as learning from the cradle to the grave, as a child who is not yet an autonomous being, cannot be responsible for his or her learning or education. Consequently, as a child is not, and can not, be responsible for his or her education, his or her parents are morally and legally responsible for his or her compulsory education. From this it follows that learning (education) in the first period of life cannot be included in lifelong learning (education). To sum up, “lifelong learning” is either not learning throughout life (from the cradle to the grave) or personal responsibility is not essential for lifelong learning. *Tertium non datur*.

The way out of this dilemma turns out to be to limit personal responsibility only to adult education (learning),¹⁶ while at the same time preserving the definition of lifelong learning as learning from the cradle to the

¹²Laval draws attention to how the idea of lifelong learning is changing the perspective on the role of school. The school should offer a young person a “package of fundamental competences” and be especially engaged in “teaching him or her how to learn”. Its most important task is not to provide knowledge, but to ensure that everyone, after having finished school, “will be able to learn throughout his or her life what will be professionally useful to him or her”. School thus has to “provide tools, which suffice for the autonomy of an individual needed for a continuous self-qualifying, for a constant “self studying”. Therefore, school has to abandon everything that is redolent of “accumulation”, of superfluous, enforced and boring skills. In this perspective, lifelong learning would prepare one less for a “degree” enabling access to employment and a professional career, and more for the acquisition of fundamental competences which can be sold, and which enable the employee to continuously adapt to economic changes and market needs. It is not too difficult to understand that an employee in the field of economics, in which, so they say, permanent employment will vanish, should be able to recycle himself or herself with the greatest possible ease and speed. The notion of “lifelong learning” thus enables synthetic articulation of the rise in the level of competences of employees, and flexible ways of gaining skills that meet the rapid technological and economic changes of modern capitalism” (Laval, 2003: pp. 67-68). Such a changed view of the role of school can also create the illusion that the contents of the instruction are not so important, as what is not learned at school can just as well be learned later on in life.

¹³Field warns that in a society based on knowledge, it will be increasingly difficult for people with a lower level of knowledge and skills, and with a lesser ability to constantly update knowledge and skills, to find a job or employment. Lifelong learning, according to Field, facilitates development, on the one hand, but creates new and large inequalities between people, on the other hand. Consequently, lifelong learning is today a mechanism of social exclusion and control (Field, 2000: pp. ix-xii).

¹⁴His or her parents are responsible, not only morally but also legally.

¹⁵The definition of lifelong learning, though not yet final, placed the responsibility of the individual at the heart of the process (Eurydice., 2000: p. 10), just as it was placed by the European Commission White Paper Teaching and Learning—Towards the Learning Society, which is considered the essential source of reference on Community policy in the area of lifelong learning (Eurydice, 2000: p. 10).

¹⁶In so doing, the term “adult” should be more precisely defined, as the traditional andragogic (pertaining to the education of an adult) definition of an adult is not sufficient in order to understand his or her responsibility. In Western culture, an adult person is understood in two different ways. The first derives from antiquity and is denoted by the term “maturity”. It is a metaphor, as Reboul shows, which “transfers” a biological fact to the area of law, morality and culture. The exact field of that metaphor is biological growth: an adult (*adultus*) is a person who has stopped growing. In this sense, Aristotle also described maturity as the period between not yet and never more, or as an equilibrium between adolescence and old age. This is at the same time an equilibrium between antagonistic virtues (bravery and moderation) or extremes within the same virtue (not too brave and not inadequately brave). Maturity understood in this way legitimised the authority of father over child, teacher over pupil or student, etc. It was understood as a virtue which had no moral value. Moral virtue does not appear as a result of maturing or maturity, but of learning and effort (Reboul, 1992: pp. 140-144). Moreover, this understanding of maturity was also apparent much later in conceiving the final exam, “matura”, as a maturity exam, but it is not of crucial importance to comprehending an adult as a responsible being. This second comprehension is connected with a term from the Enlightenment, according to which the term of an adult person derives from the juridical concept of the age of majority, with the additional ethical meaning. Legally, the age of majority is set by statute as the age at which a person is granted capacity of contact and responsibility. In the moral sense, it is a personal decision to exercise one’s responsibility, to think autonomously and make free decisions. Kant similarly defined the age of majority as the autonomy of an individual (Reboul, 1992: pp. 141-146). According to this interpretation, an adult is a person who is responsible. And only one who is autonomous is also responsible.

grave. However, this is only a provisional solution to the problem of defining lifelong learning. The problem that remains is that in adopting this position we consent to the notion that everyone, on reaching adulthood, is alone responsible for his or her own education or learning. Of course, the problem is not that an individual feels responsible for his or her education (learning), but that emphasising personal responsibility for one's own education (learning) is a consequence of transferring responsibility for the development of the very possibilities of education (learning) from the state to the individual.

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