

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR A PEDAGOGY OF CULTURE

Fundamentos filosóficos
para una pedagogía de la cultura

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Abstract

The general objective of this paper is to elaborate a pedagogical reading of Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, focusing on the *Phenomenology of Knowledge* where the author details that the foundations adduced by Paul Natorp, in *Introduction to Psychology* constitute a critical view of psychology as the foundation of intellectual operations. In general, there are three results: first, this recovery of the Natorpian vision allows Cassirer to maintain that all cultural activity (language, mythology, art, science, etc.) has as its foundation the psychological activities of the subject, which implies that all symbolic formation is both an intellectual product of the individual and a cultural activity. Second, that part of the development of a critical psychology, in accordance with Natorp's general plan, is the need for a theory of formation that explains how the cultural environment shapes the intellectual activities of the subject, a general thesis assumed by Cassirer for developing his theory of the symbol. Finally, the cultural formative agents considered by Natorp for the formation of the individual (state, art and religion, mainly) constitute the theoretical bases of culture on which the student will later develop his theory of language, myth/religion, art and science as cultural formations.

Keywords

Natorp, Cassirer, philosophy, pedagogy, culture, formation.

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Resumen

El objetivo general del presente trabajo es elaborar una lectura pedagógica de *Filosofía de las formas simbólicas*, de Ernst Cassirer, centrando la atención en el volumen *Fenomenología del conocimiento*, donde el autor detalla que los fundamentos aducidos por Paul Natorp, en *Introducción a la psicología* constituyen una visión crítica de la psicología como fundamento de las operaciones intelectuales. En general, son tres los resultados a mostrar: primero, que esta recuperación de la visión natorpiana permite a Cassirer sostener que toda actividad cultural (el lenguaje, la mitología, el arte, la ciencia, etc.) tiene como fundamento las actividades psicológicas del sujeto, lo que implica que toda formación simbólica es, tanto un producto intelectual del individuo como una actividad cultural; segundo, que para el desarrollo de una psicología crítica, de acuerdo con al plan general de Natorp, es necesaria una teoría de la formación que explique cómo el entorno cultural conforma las actividades intelectuales del sujeto, tesis general asumida por Cassirer para el desarrollo de su teoría del símbolo; finalmente, que los agentes formativos culturales considerados por Natorp para la formación del individuo (Estado, arte y religión, principalmente) constituyen las bases teóricas de la cultura, en las que posteriormente el alumno desarrollará su teoría del lenguaje, mito/religión, arte y ciencia como formaciones culturales.

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Palabras clave

Natorp, Cassirer, filosofía, pedagogía, cultura, formación.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to elaborate a pedagogical reading of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (PSF)* (Cassirer, 1998a and c), mainly of the volume dedicated to the phenomenology of knowledge (Cassirer, 1998c).¹ Among the philosophical antecedents to which the author resorts to elaborate this project, the use of the general philosophy of Paul Natorp (2015) stands out, of which the author openly comments:

Natorp [argues] that not only in the knowledge of the nature of the individual is referred to the universality of the law, and is taken and valued only as a “case” of that law, but that the same mode of determination also applies to any ethical or aesthetic consideration (Cassirer 1998c, p. 73).

Although Cassirer summarizes the general philosophical proposal developed by his teacher, it does not include the “pedagogical perspective” widely developed by Natorp (1905). However, the formative reminiscences can be appreciated in his work to such an extent that the philosopher of Wrocław considered that a theory of knowledge should undertake a “phenomenological” route in the sense proposed by Hegel (Cassirer, 1998c, pp. 8-9).² The omission of the student when considering the pedagogical theory of his teacher deserves greater attention for a better understanding of the theory of the symbol.

According to the new philosophical assessments of the impact of Cassirer's work, psychological theory occupies a fundamental place in the project proposed by him, to such an extent that it would be possible to understand his theory of the symbol by deleting from this vision a description of the neurological and biological processes that sustain the human being's ability to construct symbols (Andersch, 2015). However, in the same way, it is possible to sustain the importance of a theory of formation that explains how the cultural formations adduced by the author in his *magnum opus* are preserved, transmitted and structured to become educational processes for the new members of the communities.

A possible explanation of why a theory of formation cannot be found in Cassirer implies the philo-sophical development offered by the symbol "history", presenting it as the system by which it is possible to understand the human being "no longer as a being with nature, but as a being with history" (Cassirer, 2012, p. 253). This theory conceives the becoming of the human being as a process of change and continuous conformation whose origin and explanation depend on a general form of the historical becoming. But even with this, and according to Natorp, any theory of formation must refer to a pedagogy of culture to explain how different cultural forms (state, art, religion) contribute to the shaping of an idea of the human being.

The general thesis that will be argued is that the gradual theoretical foundation of each of the tasks proposed by Cassirer requires a pedagogical justification to explain how the symbols described by the author are developed and shaped in the cultural aspect, and for this it would be necessary to undertake a re-reading of the training project of his teacher Paul Natorp. It is evident that the "critique of culture" (Cassirer, 1998a, pp. 18-21) did not contemplate the pedagogical development as one of its fundamental moments, but it does, instead, recognize in the "movement" (*Bewegung*) that every symbolic form travels towards its progress the path through which each symbolic form is manifested and reaches its ideal representation (*Abbildung*); however, it is precisely in this phenomenological transit that it implies an authentic formative process (*Bildung*) that allows both symbols (myth, language, art, etc.) and the human being to form an authentic world of culture. This is what the author says towards the end of his life when he notes: "In [every symbolic form, the human being] discovers and tests a new power, that of building a world of his own, an ideal world. Philosophy [and pedagogy] cannot give up the search for a fundamental unity in this ideal world" (Cassirer, 2012, p. 334).

The second section describes the logical and epistemological foundations proposed by Natorp and used by Cassirer, although they were not presented under this structure. The third section will explain the pedagogical foundations that can be included in the development of a theory of symbolic formations.

Logical and epistemological foundations of pedagogy

One of the most important results offered by the philosopher of Wrocław in the third volume of his *magnum opus* corresponds to the confirmation that:

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It is not only true factors and formal motives (of knowledge) that prevail in shaping the scientific image of the world, but also those that already exist in shaping the “natural image of the world” (*natürlichen Weltbildes*), the image (*Weltbildes*) of perception and intuition (Cassirer, 1998c, p. 7).

With this, the author expanded his knowledge reference by accepting that science, although it was the most important model to consider, could have found epistemic references in primitive and intermediate modalities such as myth, art or language.

In different sections of the treatises *The Language* (1998a, pp. 159-259) and *The Mythical Thought* (1998b, pp. 197-285), it is shown how the organization of the first communities and the aboriginal communities known until before 1920, mainly in Africa and Oceania, acquired their language and worldview from behavior patterns and linguistic models fully developed within the community. The description of these ethnological findings presented by the Neokantian was intended to show, precisely, that both linguistic thought and its epistemological-mythical foundations, despite not being located within a scientific model, responded to the demands of the environment under semantic patterns —for the case of language— as cult-ritualistic —for the case of myth—.

In *Phenomenology of knowledge* the author noted that the new model of “concept”—i.e. the process by which these communities manifested their “knowledge”—should be considered as a valid epistemological process, even if in these configurations and explanations of the world it was not possible to find a model identical to that proposed by the natural sciences. With this proposal, the author did not propose to destroy the classical model of science, but to study the general act of knowing what occurred in communities whose organization did not follow the statutes

of academic institutions. As a general argument, for the author, it was possible to find thought structures that could justify valid modes of action for the community and that, in addition, could explain the phenomena of nature:

The justification and critical foundation of knowledge consists on recognizing itself as mediator, as a spiritual “organon” that has a certain place in the total structure of the spiritual universe and that performs a certain function (Cassirer, 1998c, p. 17).

In this sense, the philosophy of symbolic forms, as a research methodology, sought to understand and define the role that each symbol fulfilled individually, without losing sight of its belonging to the system of culture. As seen, the search consisted in delineating between the role of an individual form and the general function that it had to fulfill within a system.

For his part, Paul Natorp (1905), prior to the development of his student’s ideas, proposed a new foundation of pedagogy to justify that any process of formation achieved by the individual depended, necessarily, on a cultural interaction and could never be presented as an activity isolated from the subject. Although Cassirer (1998, pp. 61-75) takes advantage of and studies the logical and psychological treatises of Natorp (1974; 2015), we find no mention of the pedagogical treatises in any of the three volumes of the *PSF*, however, as seen in the title of this *magnum opus*, every symbol depends on a “formative” process.

Cassirer refers to the general psychology of Natorp (1905), in whose presentation he understands this science as the study of individual consciousness and the way in which it is linked to the community and the environment. But in that same treatise, he presents pedagogy with the study of growth and formation within the community and the social environment of the human being, so, in Natorp’s words, it would be about complementary knowledge. Particularly in his studies on human formation, this author differentiates between the natural model of development and the cultural model with which to form the human being: “The term education [*Erziehen*] is based on the analogy of raising [*Aufziehens*] plants or animals. It means achieving proper growth through proper treatment or care. He points out the difference and the interrelation between nature and culture [*Natur und Kultur*]” (Natorp, 1905, p. 1). The central thesis is that, while human development may encounter “natural” development, deviation from a “cultural” model makes it difficult to appropriate established community resources to determine an ideal mode of action. This aspect will be fundamental to the theory of symbolic forms.

However, although we do not have more details about the displacement or omission of the pedagogical by Cassirer, we do find an analogical exercise in *The Myth of the State* (Cassirer, 1968). In this treatise, its author questions the emergence of the ideas that allowed the development of Nazism and fascism, as well as emphasizing that philosophy serves as a guardian of a relevant social development of each symbol, in this case that of myth and politics. The central idea states that the deviation of a form from its cultural unit leads to its degradation despite the fact that it operates technically effectively; the general sense proposed, therefore, is to promote that each form develops operationally according to a general criterion. In this sense, the *PSF* aims to define the work that each symbol has to fulfill, to determine the relevance of any particular action based on these proposed principles. This is what Cassirer (1998a) calls the “internal form” of each symbol: “This form [means] the law that conditions its structuring” (p. 21)

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The relevance of this critical function is to determine and evaluate the internal shape of the symbols as part of their pedagogical character. Natorp (1905) had performed a philosophical exercise similar to that of Cassirer, but applied to the general process of human formation: “The word formation [*Bildung*], which is perhaps even more appropriate to describe the whole pedagogical task, points more clearly to form, i.e. to the inner law of the formation [*Gesetzlichkeit der Gestaltung*] of the human being in the human being” (p. 2). The interest of this author is to define that the formative process is constituted both by a general criterion of relation or idea (*Idee*) and its daily experience or nature (*Natur*), because only in the cultural action is it possible to determine logically that a process is a pedagogical act.

For Natorp (1905), the logical criterion that defines pedagogy implies the acceptance of an internal law or general form to which the pedagogical aspires act, which allows to guide and evaluate the educational process (*Erziehung*) to determine if the development of the human being is an ideal formation (*Bildung*). For his part, Cassirer (1998c) recognizes for each symbolic form an ideal mode from which it is possible to evaluate the function that each symbol fulfills within the cultural framework. The author himself proposes this task: “The *Philosophy of symbolic forms* is nothing more than the attempt to assign to each of them the determined index of refraction that specifically and peculiarly corresponds to them” (p. 12). Therefore, the critical research that it undertakes seeks more than to delimit what a cultural symbol is, since it also proposes to determine

whether that symbolic form (*Symbolischen Formen*) corresponds to an ideal form (*Bildung*).

In this way, a pedagogical modality is observed in the *Phenomenology of knowledge*. This process postulates that in the permanent act of constructing (*Aufbau*) each symbolic formation considers the internal form of the corresponding symbol, but not with isolated or heterogeneous criteria, but from a general function (*Grundfunktion*):

There is a unitary coherence that goes from the mere expressive value of perception and from the representative character of representation [...]. The type of coherence can only be specified and known following its construction [*Aufbau*], and it is discovered how all its phases, though heterogeneous and contradictory, are dominated and directed by the same basic function [*Grundfunktion*] (Cassirer, 1998, p. 57).

Three key outcomes can be highlighted with this quote. First, it can be argued that Cassirer's goal is to show that all human activity, however diverse it may seem, responds to a common spiritual function whose manifestation is the unity of culture. With this, the Neokantian does not pretend to manifest an equality between the modalities, for example, myth and science, but between both underlies a same general process that allows describing its process of spiritual construction. The second result allows us to affirm that Cassirer, the holder of the third volume of *PSF* as "phenomenology of knowledge" (*Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*), seeks to confirm the existence of a basic function in every process of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) as the most important finding to highlight of the general theory of symbol formation (*Symbolischen Formen*). Finally, the third result shows that if all symbolic formation depends on a basic logical function, then this process of formation cannot be only a purely critical cognitive activity (*Erkennenkritik*), but must also involve a psychological and pedagogical dimension that explains the process of cognition (*Erkennen*) and training (*Formen*).

The same principle is found in Natorp (1905) when defining pedagogy as the science that aims at human training. Like his student, we find the need to integrate the multiple training tasks related to growth and human development as a common foundation that allows cohesive educational act around an ideal purpose.

The task [*Aufgabe*] of formation is the harmonious development of man's soul in all its essential directions; but this harmony demands both a relative independence of the connected components and their common relationship with a final center: the idea [*Idee*] (Natorp, 1905, p. 4).

Although Cassirer's effort was aimed at investigating the "internal form" of symbols and in Natorp the "ideal form" of education, three general common criteria in both studies are observed:

- The delimitation of an internal form.
- The delimitation of a deductive logic scheme.
- The conformation of a criterion to determine the operational relevance of both the symbols and the training process.

Accordingly, each author sets a basis for measuring the viability of individual actions, as well as their overall process of formation (*Bildung*), all from a general idea or foundation (*Idee*). In the gradual achievement of each of the objectives, each author justifies the need to recognize an ideal model from which to determine an ideal model of their own, both training and knowledge. This basis, as we will see below, is decisive to define two questions: the first of a metaphysical nature, what is pedagogy, in the case of Natorp, and what is science, in the case of Cassirer; the second of a methodological nature, how to teach through knowledge?

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Methodological foundations of pedagogy

For Natorp (1905), the source of pedagogy lies in two major fields, the first in three objective philosophical disciplines, namely: "Logic, Ethics and Aesthetics" (p. 5). According to the author, the aim of philosophy is to show the path through which educational activity can be transformed into a formative activity, which can achieve human ideals, all this through an investigation of "pure objective knowledge" (*rein objektive Erkenntnis*). The second field corresponds to the systematic investigation of subjectivity through psychology, which contributes to:

The foundation of pedagogy will also refer to the individualization of educational activity. It is true that the individual is connected with the general in a continuous sequence of stages [...] Only psychology is able to give indications on how to proceed, not in the general course of education, but in the given individual case (Natorp, 1905, p. 7).

Thus, the author proposes an integral investigation of the educational process, since he considers that only the unity of philosophical objectivity and psychological orientation in particular cases, from general criteria, establishes a safe path of formation.³ Natorp (1905, p. 8) wonders if this division of the foundations justifies the pedagogical activity, since

every educational action implies the act of forming the individual subject; before this he recognizes that in education (*Erziehung*), by involving a natural and subjective process, therefore psychological, the ideal would be to develop a physiological investigation to determine the biological evolution of each student and with controlled psychological experiments to define the specific activities of each stage and how they favor each student. The same author acknowledges that this way of studying would imply a type of specialized and unrealistic intervention, since it is a pedagogical process that neglects the general reality of the student. It reiterates the importance of a balance between the philosophical-objective foundations to establish general driving regulations that allow the universal training of students, therefore, rather than determining specific cases for the individual, it is necessary to elaborate general actions that allow solving particular situations within the general training process.

The importance of unity in the foundations has as its final redoubt in the selection of the contents. The question, until now, was to determine the general methodological framework from which to frame the pedagogical principles, which are fixed at the philosophical and psychological poles. Thus, the new central question is to define the thematic contents: “Consideration of the content necessarily precedes the scientific structure of pedagogy. [...] the structure and unity of the content of the formation (*Bildungsinhalts*) must be studied in relation to the structure and unity of the content of the culture (*Kulturinhalts*)” (Natorp, 1905, p. 9). This question is crucial for understanding the general logical criteria to be considered to unify all content and to determine the type of specific knowledge to be promoted.

In this sense, Natorp (1905) accepts that the work of didactics is fundamental for fulfilling this task (the harmony of knowledge and the type of orientation that must be given to each of them in particular). However, he insists on the unification of the educational contents taking into account two aspects: theoretically the contents must be delimited by a philosophy of culture and practically following a logic proper to each knowledge (*i.e.* mathematics, chemistry, history, arts, etc.). The purpose of this is to recognize that each field obeys a model of construction of own knowledge, but that collectively manifests the totality of culture. This unit of criteria is called “human training system (*Bildung System*)” (p. 11), technically known as didactics.

As seen in Natorp (1905), there are three central results to understand pedagogy:

- The *foundations*, namely: philosophy (study of objective principles) and psychology (study of subjective principles).
- The *selection* of content (all cultural manifestations).
- A method of *organizing* the contents (through a thematic or didactic logic).

For his part, Cassirer accepts the general thesis of his teacher by incorporating the harmonious development of culture as the purpose of philosophical activity:

The philosophy of symbolic forms starts from the assumption that, if there is any definition of the nature or essence of the human being, it must be understood as a *functional* and not substantial definition [...]. The outstanding and distinctive characteristic of the human being (is) his *work* [...]. A philosophy of the human being would therefore be a philosophy that would provide us with the vision of the fundamental structure of each of these human activities and that, at the same time, would allow us to understand them as an organic whole (Cassirer, 2012, p. 108).

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As seen, Cassirer's postulates, at first glance, deviate from the previously stated conception of pedagogy. However, in the recognition of the *PSF* as a research methodology that is not only interested in identifying the foundations of the human being, but also in studying culture as the normative system where human development will be promoted, it gives a new meaning to the philosophy that is much closer to what Natorp proposed (1905). In order to show the pedagogical value of the Cassirerian proposal, it is reviewed in the light of the triple structure defined above: theoretical and practical foundations, selection, and thematic organization of training contents.

Regarding the *foundations* we find in *PSF* the distinction between the constitution of "objective knowledge" and the "subjective conditions" that make it possible (Cassirer, 1998c, pp. 61-127). With his teacher, the Wrocław philosopher agrees that the constitution of a general system of knowledge depends on the differentiation between knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) and perception (*Wahrnehmung*). In his research, it is clarified that although in *Mythic Thought* it had been established that the mythical perception of the world (*i.e.* ancient accounts the narratives of the aboriginal tribes, and even, the first cognitive manifestations of the infants during their growth process) is a valid mode of thought, none of them is based on the pure act of apprehending, but on the functional coordination of what is perceived subjectively with a predefined worldview (Cassirer,

1998b, pp. 105-194). Its pedagogical relevance is found in the description and delimitation of the process.

It is not possible to dwell on the abundant details and examples that Cassirer offers to argue how individual consciousness, from the incorporation of universal categories, gradually differentiates between the world of isolated impression in which the subject lives and the system of socially accepted conceptions. This adoption of the belief system is described by the Neokantian as a continual confrontation of individual consciousness with the community worldview (Cassirer, 1998b, pp. 220–270). An important function given to certain members of the community, such as the priest, the politician or the teacher, is precisely the protection and orientation of the appropriation process of those schemes of thought by the new generations. In this sense, it can be seen how the duality “subjectivity” and “objectivity” continue to be maintained as the dialectical poles of the process of knowledge construction, but instead of conceiving as rigid schemes that are learned only by being perceived, the author states that the learning of such a system responds to a dialectic that confronts the consciousness of the subject with the natural world and the ideas constituted by the community:

In the early stages of evolution [...] the *feeling of self* is still directly fused with a certain mythical-religious *communal feeling*. The self feels and knows itself to the extent that it is apprehended as a member of a community, to the extent that it is grouped together with others in the unity of a family, a tribe or a social organism (Cassirer, 1998b, p. 220).

The same principle of training is found in language acquisition. According to the author, the gradual distinction between corporality and the personal space world acquires a universal dimension to the extent that the individual adopts the linguistic schemes offered by the community. The general process of speech development depends on the subject’s ability to recognize a general system of meaning constituted by a social referent that guides and forms it (Cassirer, 1998a, pp. 159-259). The most illustrative example offered by the author is the analysis of the testimony of Hellen Keller (1954, pp. 36-37) who narrates how she was able to incorporate a sign language system developed by a certain community, whose main function allowed her to communicate her individual experiences. The best-known case is when she relates the discovery of how the first words learned in sign language “water” and “doll” became the first material objects in the world to be transformed into spiritual objects that possessed a linguistic coding, but at the same time offered a similar look

to the rest of the world's objects; with this experience a new path of recognition began.⁴

From these results, Cassirer (1998b, pp. 268-270) will argue that it is precisely for this formative character that the existence of a modality of knowledge in prelogical or non-scientific forms must be postulated. The importance of this finding is fundamental for Pedagogy because it implies that “pure knowledge” is not only constituted in the shaping of the object, but in all phases of the process. This novelty proposed by the student is better understood when remembering that for Natorp (1905, pp. 11-13) “pure knowledge” is the result of a systematic epistemological construction that depended, precisely, on a logical and epistemological analysis to incorporate a perceived phenomenon within a general system of meaning. According to this, the task of pedagogy was determined by the fulfillment of the training ideals duly defined at the beginning of the process, and only to the extent that these were achieved when it would have been possible to describe a content as learning and as knowledge.

Sebastian Luft (2011, pp. 241-244) has highlighted this aspect of Natorp's philosophy—and of Marburg's neo-Kantianism in general—stating that, for them, the constitution of the object implies a constructive process in which the objectification process involves a reference model with which to validate the “objectivity” of what is perceived, a role that corresponds to science. According to Luft (2011, pp. 254-259), however, Cassirer's Neo-Kantian project contemplated science as its culminating moment, but only as a final phase of the general process, establishing the need to resort to a symbolic form (which may be myth, language, art, etc.). This clarification by Luft is important because it details the importance of the general process in the process of symbolic formations, rather than placing a specific moment as the founding moment, as proposed by Natorp (2015).

Already the Neokantian, in the general presentation of his project, stressed the importance of looking at the process that fulfills each form in culture, instead of looking at a specific manifestation as the general sense from which it was necessary to understand the totality:

Criticism of reason thus becomes criticism of culture. It seeks to understand and show how all content of culture, insofar as it is more than mere isolated content, insofar as it is founded on a universal formal principle, presupposes an act originating from the spirit (Cassirer, 1998a, p. 20).

Hence, the *PSF* cannot be understood solely as a justification of the coherent unity of the symbols that gather around an idea that compiles



them, but also as a description of the general process of how the human spirit creates resources to know its cultural environment.

Thus, it is determined that the criterion of “selection of contents” is the same one that Natorp (1905) had proposed when establishing that it was a pedagogical duty to target the totality of cultural manifestations. In *Philosophical Anthropology*, Cassirer (2012) clearly states that it is only in the functional unity of all symbols that it will be possible to study the human being, since the fragmentation of knowledge or the selection of one form over another implied the segmentation of the contents that could guarantee a broad and deep vision of the human being: “It seems to be recognized in general that self-knowledge constitutes the supreme purpose of philosophical inquiry [...]. Self-knowledge [is] the requirement of realization that connects us to the outside world to enjoy our true freedom” (Cassirer, 2012, p. 15).

For the philosopher of Wrocław, the study of symbols is the way and way for the human being to develop all his faculties. But it does not rest on the psychological act of knowing (in cognition) the basis of this task, but it includes a formative value in the dialectical process of knowing, in the act of confronting the community, with its forms, with its conceptions, the most important moment of all this critical development. Thus, when designing the totality of the modalities of culture as the selection of the contents, the author establishes a selection that implies, at the same time, a form of study, because only in the authentic encounter with culture is how the human being realizes himself: “Human culture, taken as a whole, can be described as the process of the progressive self-liberation of the human being” (Cassirer, 2012, p. 333). This is so because it implies a genuine openness and search for the individuality that we are, but above all, for the general sense proposed and learned communally.

Finally, regarding the “organization of contents”, Cassirer offers a hierarchy route divided into three parts. With Natorp (1905), he accepts that this phase of formation depends on a deduction of the general principles defined and delimited by a philosophy of culture, but instead of assuming an action guided solely by a scientific model, in the *PSF* we find that the general process unfolds in three general functions: expressive, representative and significant. With the distinction of these moments, as mentioned, the main pedagogical novelty that is introduced is to recognize that in each phase of training we already find a valid way of knowledge and, therefore, of learning. By recognizing new logical modes of knowledge in myth, language and science, the general thesis of understanding each moment as a moment of differentiated learning is introduced.

Thus, the organization of the contents now depends, both on the educational purpose, and on the general structure of each section, of each subject or theme that is being taught. Each sphere of the process acquires its own and independent value, since it is the manifestation within a general function of the spirit: the cultural form “does not mean only the sum or subsequent compendium of the particular phenomena [and contents] of this field, but the law that conditions its structuring” (Cassirer, 1998a, p. 21). Only in the recognition of the harmonic unity of each symbol as a general content that must be taught from its internal logic, but also, from the general function that unifies the different symbolic forms is how it will be possible to elaborate a pedagogical project whose purpose is the harmonic unity of all cultural manifestations.

With all this we can define what Natorp (1905) and Cassirer (1998c) understand by pedagogical methodology. Three are the basic questions to take into account: the *philosophical and psychological foundations* with which we set the educational ideals towards which we want to guide training, the *selection of content* that will allow full compliance with these ideals and a *method of organization* of the particular content. The basis of the latter finds important differences between both authors. For Natorp (1905), science is the general reference model that defines the way of proceeding, so it is understandable that it is a developmental physiology or an experimental psychology that determines the appropriate training procedures. By contrast, for Cassirer (1998c), each symbolic form fulfills a particular function and thus operates according to its own methodology, without dissociating itself from a common cultural function. The pedagogical proposal that derives from this is a critical evaluation of the different symbols to determine the degree of relationship that each maintains with the general system developed by the community.

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Cultural foundations of pedagogy

In the foundation that Natorp (1905) offers of the pedagogical task, it establishes three major reference blocks: the *training* of the subject, the *cultural means* of training and the field or *conditions* of the training process. Each is then reviewed separately.

Regarding the *formation* of the subject, the author proposes attention to two faculties: the intellect and the will. The first establishes as an objective resource reference to “science” (*Wissenschaft*) as the system to be taken into account in the shaping and delimitation of training content. The

purpose of this resource is to differentiate between the world of simple impressions of the scientifically configured world of sense. The purpose is to ensure that the teaching program is supported in objective ways:

The same basic law also regulates the general development of theoretical knowledge [necessarily extends] to the development of humanity [...]. And so, from this fundamental law, from the natural division of each individual act of the communication of knowledge [...] it is also, in general, the organization of the content of education, i.e. the methodology of teaching as a whole and in each different part (Natorp, 1905, p. 14).

As seen, a plan of formative contents is achieved for the structuring of the teaching plan, with which a criterion of didactic formation is established; the formation of the intellect not only implies the compilation of knowledge, but also contributes to the hierarchization, structuring and thematic organization of the scientific results for the articulation of a teaching and learning plan. For Natorp (1905), in this way, two important objectives are met: to guarantee the objectivity of knowledge by relying on scientific advances, and the assurance of a critical teaching model, since the content is ordered to the scientific logic of the subject.

Thus, it is necessary to set the criteria for the formation of the will to establish the formation program of the intellect. The specific problem for this faculty is the theoretical framework from which to make decisions, therefore, for the author, the configuration of the contents from the results of science would allow the delimitation of a training plan towards which to drive decisions: “The law of development, i.e. also of the formation of understanding [*der Bildung des Verstandes*], is transferred at the same time to development, i.e. to the formation of the will [*der Bildung des Willens*] (Natorp, 1905, p. 18). With this, the general program is linked and correlated: intellect and will are formed unitarily from the delimitation of contents defined by the progress and advancement of science.

Regarding the *cultural means* of training, Natorp (1905) proposes the formation of a multiplicity of resources that accompany the training process. The first of them corresponds to “art and aesthetic training” (*Die Kunst und die ästhetische Bildung*); regarding the first, it is a philosophically organized program to define the creative act that the student must reach. While the free creation of the spirit must be encouraged, this must be allowed to the extent that artistic content – defined by the techniques and objectives of the art– is achieved (Natorp, 1905, pp. 18-20).

The second cultural medium refers to “religious formation” (*Die religiöse Bildung*), whose purpose is threefold:

- Teach the foundations of the life of the individual human being (I) and the relationship that it keeps with a divine conception (the other).
- To express the importance of molding one's will to dogmatic designs and convictions.
- The formation of a spiritual consciousness.

The author recognizes and accepts the complexity of teaching like this, within the school environment, as it aims to achieve the same objective of training in freedom but avoiding all dogmatic content. The central argument of the philosopher is to state that every act of spiritual liberation comes from the conception of a supreme reality in which every human being acts according to his nature. The most important recommendation is to choose religion as a content, but without conflict with any proposal (Natorp, 1905, pp. 20-23).

As seen, cultural media complement the program of educational content from the sciences, allowing the school system a triple source of leadership:

- Intelligence and will are objectively oriented through the results of the sciences.
- Art allows the free creation of the student, but it is ordered to an artistic technique and production.
- The promotion of a religious practice favors the order of the intellect to a dogmatic program and the regulation of the will from a system of beliefs that drive the search and experience of freedom (Natorp, 1905, pp. 23-26).

Finally, regarding the field or *conditions of the training process*, the author considers: "All educational activity develops in the community" (Natorp 1905, p. 23), this implies that it is with the interaction with other individuals that these contents are learned. In this sense, the determination of the contents is not made by individual choice of the teacher but recognizes in the scientific community a consensus of results that must be transmitted. The same happens in art in terms of the formation of the free imagination, the determination of creative limits, as well as the choice of the best resources for its expression, which are delimited by the artistic community; the same for religious formation; in all cases it is the community that delimits the best interaction processes.

The role of the teacher is therefore oriented to the synthesis of the diverse and to the conduct of the students in those cultural contents



accepted in the community. The didactic process is composed of three important moments: first uses the stabilization of the contents through repetition or memory; the second step follows the same procedure as deduction or syllogistic induction, having memorized the contents, there is no more than reasoning the scientific contents following their logical pattern, finally; the third involves a synthesis and incorporation of new contents following the same previous pattern (Natorp, 1905, pp. 26-28).

This didactic description, as said, although it is driven by the teacher in his capacity as an individual, is not subject to individual free decision, but must be guided by the social life of the community. But the latter, in turn, must be ordered to a regulatory principle that allows the organized and full management of all the abilities of individuals, since it is not possible to attend to each student thinking about his uniqueness, but about what constitutes him as a community member. Therefore, for Natorp (1905), the most important quality of the pedagogical is in its structuring within a political system that allows it to regulate particular actions to be nourished by scientific, artistic and religious development, with which to lead all students equally: “This, however, presupposes a deep education that permeates all social life and whose orderly development is, therefore, the last and highest requirement of an efficient social life” (p. 29).

This restructuring of social organization from the state follows its own logical pattern of organization, which for Natorp (1905), focus on three groups of formative activities:

- The orientation and education of material behaviors is ordered by economics.
- The organization of public actions and community life responds to legal-political regulation.
- The cultivation of social reason responds to formal education.

A large part of the specific actions can be formed only within the small institutionally recognized societies, i.e. the home, the school and the public associations; each one of them must give the tools for the promotion of a coexistence between the members of each of these institutions, but also within the community life. The general objective is to promote productive life both in terms of the will and interest to do so, and to develop the skills and teaching of the tools necessary to carry out a professional activity with public benefit (Natorp, 1905, pp. 30-31). These are the foundations and pedagogical vision of the author.

In the case of Cassirer (1998c) the same treatment of these questions is observed but is placed in a different dimension: the knowledge of the singular and its relations with the universal. For this author, his teacher's proposal elucidated how it was possible to determine the logical and, it can be added pedagogical relevance when assessing a subjective activity as objectively valid. The solution proposed in the *PSF* established to recognize in each symbol a modality of own and unique understanding from which to structure a culturally valid orientation path. With this, the general task of the formative process would be, in the first instance, to define the nature of each symbol, and then to promote it according to its ideal conditions.

For Natorp (1905), defining the conditions of the formative process allowed observing that it was the work of sciences such as economics, politics or law which determined the normative situation that parents, teachers or those responsible for public institutions should promote within the home, school or in any social sphere of work. Cassirer, for his part, would develop the same task by detailing the role that symbols such as myth, language or science fulfilled within the process of shaping cultural reality. This same author, in *Phenomenology of knowledge*, argues that:

We can only grasp [the] reality in the peculiarity of [the] forms [...]. The function of thought must not be reduced to “expressing” the self [...]. thought feels capable of facing reality; it harbors the conviction and believes that it can exhaust its content. Here there must not and cannot remain any insurmountable barrier, since the thought and the object to which the first is directed are one and the same thing (Cassirer, 1998c, p. 12).

In this way, the universal is articulated as an intellectual relational product, an act in which different rules and psychological tasks are fulfilled that allow meeting the general with the particular through functional relations. The pedagogical value of this statement corresponds to the need to locate *the ideal foundations through which the “expression of the being” is possible, because otherwise, philosophy itself could not refer to any reality in a consistent way.* Much of the phenomenological descriptions of each of the *PSF* volumes intend to provide empirical evidence of the overall process of cultural knowledge formation.

In this sense, it can be said that for this author the most important pedagogical principle—since all subsequent activity derives from it—is the establishment of a “law” that determines the criterion for qualifying individual cases as culturally ideal actions and the only viable way to



achieve it is by delimiting the role and functions of each symbolic form: “This is possible by creating fixed and universally valid correlation rules between [the singular data], subjecting to certain laws the coexistence in space and the succession in time” (Cassirer, 1998c, p. 370). Accordingly, the constitution of general norms that regulate the process of knowledge construction finds in the various cultural symbols—and not exclusively in science—independent, but interconnected, forms of validation. Thus, the one and the unity will appear as dialectical interaction within the framework of a cultural system that progresses phenomenologically in each of its particular forms of knowledge.

The general sense imprinted by Cassirer (1998c) to his project began with the perception of the natural world and the infinity of its singularities until reaching the development and establishment of the physical-mathematical sciences as its highest goal. The description of this path, although it resorts to philosophical categories to constitute itself, cannot be understood otherwise than from a formative development of culture and, therefore, under a pedagogical vision (Calvo, 2023). It should be remembered that the primary requirement driving this phenomenological path is knowledge, which can only be reached to the extent that the simple impression of the world appropriates the intellectual resources of culture, and for this only the path of cultural formation remains, a path described in detail by his teacher Paul Natorp (1905).



Towards a pedagogy of culture from Natorp and Cassirer

Among the many references to which we can refer to find a common ground of both authors, it is necessary to understand that they have as a common point the Kantian vision of pedagogy. In the opening of his treatise, we already find the following statement: “The human being is the only creature to be educated. Understanding by education care [sustenance, maintenance], discipline and instruction, together with education. According to this, the human being is a small child, educating and a student” (Kant, 1983, p. 29). According to Ortiz Soriano (2023), this Kantian proposal can be fully implemented to the extent that social agents intervene for developing the skills and tools essential to achieve an appropriation of the ideals constituted by the community; in that sense, it is the role of the State to promote and guide these actions:

The role of the State in education is to cultivate and educate men, the people, and realize that if the necessary areas for integral education (discipline, culturization, civilization and moralization) are not covered, this will have a negative impact on moving away from the perfection of humanity (p. 167).

This vision, in the author's words, must be translated into the formation of a curricular proposal that allows the configuration of a formative framework that makes effective the tasks of the State in the formation of this formative vision. This Kantian proposal, as seen, not only offers a vision of the ideal foundations that must regulate education, but also establishes a specific activity in the conformation of these ideals. In contrast to this Kantian vision that covers all the edges, in the case of the so-called Neokantians, there is a more theoretical vision regarding their pedagogical proposal, but it also offers practical analyses of the educational processes as presented at the end of this section.

Taking up the work of Natorp (1905), it is important to mention that after the first edition, he offered a second expanded *Course of social pedagogy* (Natorp 1975), whose central thesis is that pedagogy, as a science of education, must guide its formative activity from an objective and a subjective sphere. The objective would be constituted by the philosophical disciplines: logic (theory of principles), aesthetics (theory of perception and good technique) and ethics (theory of moral behavior); the subjective dimension, on the other hand, would be constituted by a critical study of the psychological conditions that allow to orient the will (Natorp, 1975, pp. 106-109). With this structure, the author's purpose is to define both the theoretical framework and the methodology by which it is necessary to guide the educational process.

The ultimate purpose of these subjective and objective spheres, according to this author, is to delimit the contents of education, which are defined as follows: "We use the word 'culture' for 'formation' in an objective sense, for the formation of objective worlds [...] the content of education, presented objectively, confuses with the content of culture: it is one and the same" (Natorp, 1975, p. 110). As can be seen, for the author, the formative process is based on logic, aesthetics and ethics, guided by psychology in terms of the development of the will, but delimited by the development of cultural content. In addition to this, he adds that "cultural contents" are to be understood: "Scientific culture, morality and aesthetics" (Natorp, 1975, p. 110).

These delimitations are important, because they show that the pedagogical work is not only focused on the description of the conditions in



which the learner learns and develops new skills, but implies the understanding of the knowledge produced culturally and that must be taught to the new generations. In this sense, the concept of pedagogy, in Natorp (1975), implies a vision that favors the integration of the manifestations of human life, since it is in the totality of social actions that we can delimit the educational contents to be transmitted. In addition to this, the author adds: “All educational activity is carried out on the basis of the community. The isolated human individual is a mere abstraction, like the atom of Physics [...] therefore, every content of human education is in itself communal” (Natorp, 1975, p. 118).

Hence, the natorphan concept of pedagogy is intimately linked to cultural development and progress, in that sense, it can be argued that any historical event that favors human advancement becomes a properly educational content. In this point it is important to reiterate that the pedagogical proposal of the author is linked to his own conception of philosophy, which is conceived as a theory of being whose research methodology implies the construction of the logical foundations that allow to define and delimit the epistemological contents of the sciences (Natorp, 2015, pp. 198-199). According to this author’s conception, the content of the exact sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) constituted a true conceptual framework in which the human being could rely on to define an affirmation as “knowledge”. In that sense, then, knowing meant demonstrating the belonging of a content to a science whose methodology justified the validity of a postulate. Thus, pedagogy emerged as the “science of training [*Bildung*], i.e. the theoretical foundation for distinguishing questions concerning education [*Erziehung*] and teaching [*Unterricht*]” (Natorp, 1975, p. 105). With this delimitation, what the author proposed was the constitution of the logical principles with which to evaluate to what extent the act of growth and development of new skills in students could be considered as training or education, and to what extent it should be considered an act of adaptation.

Thus, Natorp’s general proposal (1905; 1975), in his two treatises on pedagogy aims to systematize a science (*Wissenschaften*) with which it was possible to study both the identity of education and the general framework of development in which it was to be inserted. Therefore, by stating that it was an activity whose center is culture, it established both its foundation and its purpose, because only in the interaction of the human being with his history and the community, it is possible to measure the degree and development of the education process.

As mentioned above, unlike Natorp, in Cassirer it is not possible to find a pedagogical treatise or study on the process of education. However, in his various anthropological treatises we find the theoretical elements to construct a theory of formation. The best-known work to which we can refer is *An essay on man, An Introduction to a Philosophy of Culture*, translated as *Philosophical Anthropology: an introduction to the philosophy of culture*, whose central thesis is that the human being, through history, although it has been defined as a “rational animal” (restricting its abilities to its cognitive abilities) instead, can be defined as a “symbolic animal” (Cassirer, 2012, p. 49). This new definition of the human being based on the symbol, in the words of this author, offers a broader and varied vision of options from which to understand the authentic reality in which the human being moves and develops. With this new approach it is necessary to reconsider the interpretative framework of human life, because now, it is no longer a question of studying the subject as an isolated being or an individual reality, but rather it must assume the totality of expressions and manifestations of his active life in society:

The outstanding and distinctive characteristic of the human being is not a metaphysical or physical nature, but his work. It is this work, the system of human activities, that defines and determines the circle of humanity [...]. A philosophical anthropology would therefore be a philosophy that would provide us with the vision of the fundamental structure of each of human activities and that, at the same time, would allow us to understand them as an organic whole (Cassirer, 2012, p. 108).

With this proposal, what the author proposes is a unitary conception of the essence of the human being. Instead of assuming the subject as a singular and isolated being, it assumes culture as the center and unit in which any action, however isolated it may seem, makes sense in the cultural aspect. This is significant because it is only in the accompaniment and guidance of the new members that an action can be interpreted and achieve a specific meaning. An example of this claim is proposed by the author in his essay entitled “The Shape of Concept in Mythical Thought”, in which he explains how in Australian Aboriginal tribes the conception of the world depended on two issues: first, on the tribe to which the members of the community belonged and, second, on the geographical space that that tribe occupied in the environment. What is relevant about this example is that, as reported by the Neokantian, this division occurred by virtue of an authentic cultural process, since the territorial delimitation occurred as the result of “putting a cane on the ground, in exactly this



direction. Such a staff divided the whole space into two halves, upper and lower, north and south, one of which designated as the place of the krokitch group, and the other as the gamutch group” (Cassirer, 1975, p. 31).

While the example highlights the ethnographic traits (as it describes the processes of social organization of Australian Aboriginal groups), it also highlights the general logical conditions of the educational contents of this group. Each community was responsible for transmitting to the new generations the spatial limits defined between the representatives of each group, and related to each space, the tasks, functions and customs of each group. Each tribe responded to a unique religious worldview, associated with its own totemic and ritualistic system that had to be respected and promoted among the new generations, making each group responsible for promoting its own way of life and linked to the vision of each geographical region (Cassirer, 1975, pp. 31-33).

This case, proposed by Cassirer (1975), manifests in a practical way the pedagogical vision to which Natorp (1975, p. 110) referred when he said that every educational act was, in essence, a cultural activity. There is no activity that can be maintained and considered as a representative expression of a community without enjoying a formative process that describes its teaching process and appropriation by the community. For Cassirer (1975), cases such as that of the Australian tribe mentioned above, state that in these aboriginal groups: “Everything is fixed by the myth-sociological structure of the image of the universe in such a precise way that it is not only equated to written prescriptions and laws, but in terms of immediate obligatory force it far exceeds” (p. 35). As can be seen in this previous quote, the general worldview constituted by the community, even under mythical modalities, is translated into the base and mold through which all actions of social, political, religious, artistic and pedagogical structuring are regulated, since any way of proceeding is subject to an overview of the world.

We see these same ideas expanded and deepened in the second volume of the *PSF* dedicated to *Mythic Thought*, where the author established the following: “Mythic-religious consciousness does not simply result from the factual state of the social form, but is one of the conditions of social structure, one of the most important factors of feeling and community life” (Cassirer, 1998b, p. 222). With this, it is again observed that every social structure is linked to a symbolic form that, given its cultural character, permeates every aspect of public life conditioned by the formative processes. This same principle extends to the rest of the symbolic formations, making language, history, art or science possible to develop by virtue of a structure of social interaction.

The pedagogical implication of this vision cannot be other than the conception of formation as a social process that is conditioned by the general form of the prevailing symbol. In this sense, following *Phenomenology of knowledge* (Cassirer, 1998c), it is possible to argue that the generation of all epistemological content depends on the own forms constituted by the community. This implies that to ensure the generation of new behaviors it is necessary that all new content promotes in the student a learning system consistent with the system itself that is to be promoted. For example, the learning of art must favor the development of artistic skills by promoting artistic practice itself; if it were the teaching of history, it is necessary to favor practices that favor the experience of historical events; and the same for the rest of the symbolic formations. In this sense, the formative process becomes an eminently practical action, but recognizing the importance of the cultural structures and forms in which each form develops. As the author argued in his treatise on *Philosophical Anthropology*: in symbolic forms “the human being discovers and tests a new power, that of building a world of his own, an ideal world. [Each symbol] is completed and complemented, but each opens a new horizon and shows a new aspect of the human” (Cassirer, 2012 p. 334).

A theoretical complement can be seen in both pedagogical visions. While in Paul Natorp (1905; 1975) we find the general theoretical framework in which the process of education is developed, in Cassirer (1975; 1998c; 2012) we find the anthropological conditions in which such an educational act occurs. By pointing out that the human being is a “symbolic animal” (Cassirer, 2012, p. 49) we notice a nature that requires being trained and educated, with objective and subjective resources, such as those offered by the “science of formation” (Natorp, 1975, p. 105).

Conclusions

This article proposed a pedagogical reading of Cassirer’s *PSF*, especially of his volume *Phenomenology of knowledge*. It was shown that one of the central foundations considered by the author was the critical psychology of his teacher Paul Natorp (1905). Throughout the work, however, the thematic and methodological coincidences developed in the treatise on the *General Pedagogy* of the second were shown. While no details were given as to why the philosopher of Wrocław did not include in his studies the symbol the natorphan theory of formation, it was possible to show how the critique of culture proposed fully in *Philosophical Anthropology*



contains essential foundations for the development of a Pedagogical Culture, presented and articulated by the teacher.

Particularly noted was Natorp's pedagogical conception (1905). The following was emphasized: pedagogy is science whose object is two-fold: education (as a natural process of growth) and training (as to the ideal determination of the end of education). For the foundation of its principles, two sources are distinguished: philosophy to determine the objective principles and general laws that guide the intervention and psychology to determine the subjective operating principles. For him, the educational contents must derive from the development of science and be organized within the school environment for a better structuring and hierarchization of the contents. This does not imply that other environments such as home life or community life cannot participate, on the contrary; in the first specific skills must be developed such as the appropriation of a language, rules of coexistence, and some practical skills; in public life skills must be formed linked to the respect and monitoring of legal standards. Complementary activities for the promotion of a pedagogical culture come from a continuous artistic and religious formation.

Cassirer's proposal (1998c), on the other hand, proposes a scheme similar to that of his teacher, but with special emphasis on the phenomenological development of symbolic formations. For the author, each symbol fulfills a particular function (expression, representation or significance) giving meaning to particular units. But the general sense of each symbol, however disparate or alien it may be to each other (*i. e.* myth and science, language and history, art and economics) in all of them establishes a common form of progress involving a general mode of development. Although for the Neokantian this advance of the spirit is constituted by a historical evolution, in the report and details that he offers in his *magnum opus* it is seen how the myth, language and science are articulated around a general function that determines its progression and evolution only to the extent that the members of the community interact, appropriate the general rules and incorporate them in their continuous way of acting. In this sense, it is a modality of cultural action that depends on a formative process that allows each symbol to operate according to its own peculiarity, but ordered to a cultural ideal that guides it to its full realization.

In this way, a pedagogical background can be observed in the development of symbolic forms, since like the theory of the formation of Natorp (1905), which proposed to educate ideal behaviors in the students, in the case of Cassirer (1998c) the deviation or disarticulation with respect to its general form invokes from philosophy the responsibility of

redirecting the deviation to its functional unit and, therefore, to a general form of culture, a clearly pedagogical action, as stated by Natorp (1905).

Notes

- 1 The works of both authors have been consulted in German and Spanish, but only the Spanish edition is cited in the case of Cassirer and the original edition in the case of Natorp. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated in the bibliography.
- 2 It is important to underline that when Cassirer refers to Hegel he does so, particularly, to the *Phenomenology of the spirit*, so that such clarification implies a purely philosophical and not pedagogical interest (Luft, 2011); however, it is interesting the clarification of Arsenio Ginzo (2015, pp. 13-17) on the difficulty of separating pedagogy from philosophy in Hegel, since for him such a division is not blunt. This work does not allow to deepen in these questions for what remains for a future work to expand them.
- 3 Something that is evident in the whole of this third section is that when Natorp speaks of psychology as the science of “subjectivity” he does not eliminate its scientific character, he only says that it oversees the study of the reality of the human being and his emotional, volitional and cognitive conditions in the individual. Therefore, it considers that this is about the contents of the “subject” (subjectivity), without being separated from experimental study procedures and systematic observations of behaviors. An additional important issue to consider is to recognize that in Natorp we find an independence between philosophical science (logical study of the foundations of reality) and psychological science (logical study of the foundations of the human being and his behaviors). The development and detail of the importance of the latter remains for another time.
- 4 The testimony of H. Keller (1954) is quite illustrative in this regard: “We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a mystery consciousness as of something forgotten a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time he swept away” (p. 36).

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