

THOMAS MANN'S "THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN" AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIC-ETHICAL EDUCATION

"La montaña mágica" de Thomas Mann y su aporte a la formación ético-cívica

AMADA CESIBEL OCHOA PINEDA*

cochoa@ual.es, cochoa@uazuay.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7517-975X>

Universidad de Almería, Almería, España

<https://ror.org/003d3xx08>

Universidad del Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador

<https://ror.org/037xrmj59>

CAYETANO JOSÉ ARANDA TORRES**

caranda@ual.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3213-0593>

Universidad de Almería, Spain

<https://ror.org/003d3xx08>

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* PhD in Philosophy from the University of Almería (UAL, Spain). She was a professor at the University of Azuay (Ecuador) and director of the Department of Culture. She is currently an assistant professor at UAL. She has published more than twenty scientific articles and book chapters. Her research focuses on the philosophy of sexuality and art, on the latter she has published *Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Tirant lo Blanch, 2023). Responsible for Ecuador for the gender component in a project by Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad and Universitaire Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (VLIR-UOS, Belgium). She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Ibero-American University Association for Postgraduate Studies. Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=_EF8pVoAAAAJ&hl=es
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** Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Almería (UAL, Spain). He has been director of the UAL publishing house and director of the International Doctoral School. He has published more than fifty academic works, including books, book chapters, and scientific articles, and has supervised more than thirty doctoral theses. He has extensive international experience, notably including research stays at the German universities of Cologne, Heidelberg, and Berlin, as well as at the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies in Naples. Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=adPDcjMAAAAJ&hl=es>
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Abstract

This research paper reflects on the comprehensive education of our secondary school students, based on a reading of Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924). First, considering European nihilism, as formulated by Nietzsche, which has been in force for more than a century, and the philosophy of health, a theoretical framework is constructed that allows us to interpret the work from our present perspective, with its problems and challenges. The objectives focus on articulating health as a pillar of education for citizenship, promoting Platonic *apagōgē* and civic courage against war. The qualitative methodology uses nihilism as a hermeneutic framework for a "reform of consciousness", revealing the contemporary myths of youth. Two main keys to interpretation are developed: the necessary interweaving of ethics as a philosophical discipline, and the consideration of the philosophy of health as an object of reflection from the Greeks to the present day. It concludes that the thesis that the philosophy of education must be conceptually designed, within the framework of so-called citizenship education, is a fundamental chapter in health education, from the perspective of caring for oneself, others and the community, based on an appreciation of the ethics of freedom, autonomy and responsibility.

Keywords

Education, Philosophy, Health, Citizenship, Literature, Ethics.

Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación reflexiona, a partir de la lectura de *La montaña mágica* (1924), novela de Thomas Mann, sobre la formación integral de nuestros estudiantes de secundaria. En primer término, considerando al nihilismo europeo, formulado por Nietzsche, que lleva más de un siglo de vigencia, y la filosofía de la salud, se construye un marco teórico que permite interpretar la obra desde nuestro presente, sus problemas y desafíos. Los objetivos se centran en articular una salud pilar de una educación para ciudadanía, fomentando la *apagōgē* platónica y el coraje cívico contra la guerra. La metodología cualitativa emplea el nihilismo como marco hermenéutico para una "reforma de conciencia", desvelando los mitos contemporáneos de la juventud. Se desarrollan dos claves principales de lectura: la necesaria imbricación de la ética como disciplina filosófica y la consideración de la filosofía de la salud como un objeto de reflexión desde los griegos hasta la actualidad. Se concluye que la tesis de que la filosofía de la educación tiene que diseñar conceptualmente, en el marco de la llamada educación para la ciudadanía, es un capítulo primordial referido a la educación para la salud, desde el enfoque del cuidado de sí mismo, del otro y la comunidad, desde la apreciación de la ética de la libertad, autonomía y responsabilidad.

Palabras clave

Educación, filosofía, salud, ciudadanía, literatura, ética.

Introduction

The recent Spanish translation of the fictionalized story of Thomas Mann's life (Tóibín, 2022) has sparked renewed interest in the work of the German writer, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1929 and author of *The Magic Mountain* (hereinafter: MM and ZB for the Spanish and German editions), published in 1924 and which has just celebrated its 100th anniversary. On the centenary of the work, it is no less interesting to reflect on its purpose and scope, for reasons that will be explained throughout

this paper, which focuses on the novel and places it in the context of the period 1918-1939, i.e., between the First and Second World Wars.

Philosophy, as a critical, rigorous, and sober reflection on artistic events, must return to the recent past to see if we can derive any benefit from reading literary works that have become landmarks and signs of the meaning of an era and its education (Ochoa & Aranda, 2023). In this regard, the philosophical formation of two young people is addressed, whose destinies will be affected by the two wars of the 20th century, so that the author polarizes violence in young people who, in one way or another, are its protagonists. Unfortunately, the drums of war are currently sounding, and the propaganda of the contenders is aimed at winning the favor of the young population, which has always thought of pacifism and neutrality as the best weapons against war violence.

Therefore, the objective of this work is to articulate an applied and concrete hermeneutics that interprets the novel from the present, through the multiple messages it presents on the freedom-authority dialectic. In addition, the double perspective of the mountain and the plain in which the work takes place is contemplated, as well as the innocence and sacrifice of the youth of both protagonists.

The fundamental idea put forward in this article is that, both in 1924 and in 2024, there is a divergence between the lives and thoughts of young people and the course of the world. While they enjoy life—even in a tuberculosis sanatorium—they are attentive to women and the pleasures of life, including thoughtful discussions about the prevailing ideological trends in Europe and America. Meanwhile, historical dynamics follow unfathomable paths, leading to wars that, apparently, no one wants, but which are unleashed and have young people as their main protagonists and victims. This approach produces an important variable in the study of philosophy for adolescents: thinking about the invisible, about what is hidden, for example, behind the embellished world of social media, which generally presents a monochrome image that lacks the power to question the *mainstream* and the ideological devices that accompany it.

For all the above reasons, this research is based on the regulatory standards of what ethical-civic education should be (Hesse, 1992; Tóibín, 2022) in secondary education as a philosophical subject, which aims to educate citizens for peaceful coexistence and solidarity. Given the nature of the subject under study, in the analysis of MM, based on the phenomenon of European nihilism (Nietzsche, 2006) as a guideline and hermeneutic framework, the generic thesis that young people and their education are one of the decisive factors when countries in conflict prepare for



war makes sense. The thinking presented in *Perpetual Peace* (Kant 1999) has been considered as counterfactual arguments.

The philosophy of Michel Foucault (1988 and 2009) has insisted that beyond the multiplicity of themes, there is one that articulates and structures all philosophical thought: *thinking about the present time*. The level of problematicity of this forces us to study the mechanisms of power, such as those that are distributed and shared among all individuals, and the way in which systems of subjection are created that today, for example, allow us to think of war as a possible solution at the global level and as something that is carried out in a clean way, since modern technology supposedly allows us to attack the enemy where they keep their weapons and arsenals. This must be thought about and debated in philosophy classes, as it is the responsibility of today's young people, who will be adults.

The relevance of the *Bildungsroman* (coming-of-age novel) in our time is articulated through nihilism as a hermeneutic framework for a necessary «reform of consciousness.» This reform, initially conceived by Marx (1976), is not based on the imposition of dogmas. In the current situation, where young people are torn between suffocating materialism and the formation of their critical thinking, the philosophy of education takes on the task of revealing and bringing to light mysticism and mythology. Once this exercise has been carried out, self-understanding can be achieved, where the reform of consciousness becomes a critical mechanism that dismantles ideological mechanisms of subjection.

To conclude, this work is organized into three sections, which develop the multiple philosophical theses proposed in light of a world facing great and painful wars, and that philosophical education may be the most important weapon for training present and future generations to actively fight for peace. The topic addressed is currently relevant given the omnipresent violence derived from war and the armed conflicts that destroy any dignified form of survival. Faced with this grim outlook, the question arises: is education for peace possible?

The specter of nihilism

In the summer of 1887, Nietzsche (2006) wrote a fragment entitled «European Nihilism,» in which he states the following:

Nihilism appears now *not* because the displeasure of existence is greater than before, but because there is mistrust of a «meaning» of evil, and even of existence itself. *One* interpretation has succumbed, but since it



was considered *the* interpretation, it seems as if there is absolutely no meaning in existence (p. 165).

The most inhospitable and sinister guest that European culture has welcomed is characterized by a crisis of meaning in human existence (Aranda Torres, 1996; García Pedraza, 2023; Linés, 2006). If this were indebted to an ultimate goal, we would have achieved it. Not only does the moral god not appear before the world, but he is also absent from our lives. The ethical deficit suffered by citizens of democratic societies—both due to the absence of authentic citizenship education and the failure of so-called «values education,» which often suffers from a lack of definition and indeterminacy of the very concept of value—justifies today, as yesterday, redoubling the call for comprehensive ethical education and training, from the primary levels of schooling (Nietzsche, 2011; Ochoa Pineda, 2022). From this point of view, this contribution aims to link health as self-care and ethical-civic training as two of the most important contents of citizenship education.

These contents of teaching programs and didactic programming in primary, secondary, and university education should be taught as cross-curricular for all subjects, especially for the subject of philosophy, as long as it remains present in academic curricula.

It is important for educators to recognize themselves in their subjectivity and reflect on their way of being, of feeling, and of relating to others in different contexts, allowing students to also accept themselves internally and, in this self-reflection, for the cognitive to acquire individual meaning within the collective experience (Aguilar Gordón, 2009, p. 76).

To develop this objective, the following lines attempt to propose the didactic value of a modern *bildungsroman* that is now a hundred years old but which retains its relevance because it is set in a decisive period, whose spiritual situation—both in Europe and America—does not seem to have dissipated, especially with the outbreak of wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran, and other sources of tension affecting global security. The current situation harks back to bloc politics, the open and unhealed wounds of the immediate past, the Cold War, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and the seemingly fruitless efforts to ensure peaceful coexistence in the new world order, characterized by a global market and a network of physical and virtual communications that seems to have reached and colonized every corner of our planet.

Today, there is a paradox in that financial capitalism, which shapes global economic exchanges, has not pacified human life, but has led to the standardization of consciousness, the most important consequence of



which, in the light of philosophy, is the loss of awareness of the common good, the guiding principle of human freedom to live in society.

In this regard, it is interesting to pause briefly on a text by Marx, which clearly defines the interpretative perspective of the current moment, taken from a letter of September 1843, addressed to Ruge and published in *the Franco-German Annals* in 1844:

The reform of consciousness consists *solely* in allowing the world to reach into *its own consciousness*, in awakening it from its slumber about itself, in *clarifying* its own actions [...]; reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but through the analysis of mystical consciousness, confused about itself, whether religious or political (Marx & Engels, 2017, p. 346 and 1976, p. 176).

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In short, Marx sums up the magazine's tendency, as well as his theoretical thinking, in one sentence: «Self-understanding of time in its struggles and desires.» The interior of the world is the mundane consciousness of human beings. What reading of this Marxian text is possible that is understandable to students? For Kirk *et al.* (1987), the same one that philosophy has done since the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. Either the student's consciousness is coerced, with the help of representations of it, chained in a prison and gripped by a ghostly dream, or consciousness will continue to be dominated by alien and strange forces that keep it imprisoned in an eternal jail. We must unveil and bring to light the mysticism and mythography that inhabits and populates the minds of our students (). An analysis of the myths of our time, in which young people recognize themselves and identify, is not a bad start in philosophy.

The founding myth of our time, if we can speak of such a thing, is the all-encompassing force of a temporary ecstasy with absolute domination of the present and a hedonistic conception of life, which is there at our disposal for consumption and enjoyment (Herwig, 1999). The phenomenology of today's youth curiously mixes rebellion with moral cynicism, the consequence of an evil that can be described as spiritual. This is characterized by a suffocating materialism that has its exact counterpart and correlate in ignorance and intellectual poverty.

It is a neurosis that no psychological law can explain, that no psychologist dares to treat, because it refers to the *abnormal normality* of everyday life that affects us all. Or perhaps it is a form of schizophrenia that consists of acquiring more and more possessions the more uncultured one is. It is possible to highlight, as if it did not affect anyone in particular, this deep and gloomy neuroticism of our society, these diseases

of our time that harm our lives without us realizing it (Hesse & Mann, 1992). The reform of consciousness that is relevant today must begin by changing the image we have of young people, to see it in its full and profound meaning beyond viewing youth from a negative stereotype. The qualitative methodology used in this research aims to delve deeper into the mentality of today's young people, too often seen as a paragon of superficiality and disinterest in the common good.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative approach, using European nihilism (Nietzsche, 2006) as a reference point and hermeneutic framework for studying the relevance of the Bildungsroman today.

For the analysis, we have chosen the phenomenological-hermeneutic method, in which, for Gadamer, the «fusion of horizons» prevails. This fusion leads to an inevitable dialogue that, if not possible in forums created for this purpose, would be possible in the classroom and, specifically, in philosophy classes (Viveros, 2019; Ledesma Albornoz, 2021). The research was carried out taking into account that analytical disciplines are dominated by *technical and interpretative interests*. At the same time, means-end social action characterizes predictive research (Taylor, 2004).

The choice of this approach is justified, since the qualitative and interpretative view considers phenomena and experiences within an intersubjective context (Habermas, 2005 and 2010). From this perspective, the *practical interest* of hermeneutics is evident in communicative action, with full awareness of the existence of perspectives other than one's own (Walker & Lovat, 2016; Granero Molina *et al.*, 2015). Thus, in any critical approach, where many philosophical studies are based, there is a concerted *emancipatory interest* in safeguarding freedom, autonomy, and human dignity.

Finally, the chosen heuristic procedure seeks to reveal the mysticism and mythology that inhabit the youthful consciousness, analyzing contemporary concerns and myths, such as hedonism and contextual materialism.

MM as an example of bildungsroman and its reverberations in our time

Why using Thomas Mann as material for teaching philosophy and contemporary thought? What are the keys to reading this author and his book? How do they relate to the art and thought of the 19th, 20th, and



21st centuries? If we had to give an initial answer to these questions, we would have to say that our author is an intellectual in the shadow of nihilism. Throughout his work, he has acknowledged four fundamental teachers in particular: Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche, and Freud (Mann, 2013 and 2014), in addition to universal literary figures such as Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, among others.

Embedded in one of the most profound traditions of contemporary thought, his literature is a clear example of the deep intertwining of art, in this case writing, with philosophy and life, but not just any life, rather a life threatened with exhaustion, a life that not only desires nothingness, but is also nullified in itself.

This line of thought has become the spiritual master of our time, in the sense of the self-immolation of the spirit in the face of life, or the supremacy of life over reason, which produces a new philosophical object that identifies everything that human life demands in situations of hardship and need. The literary product of this negation comes from German Romanticism which, like humor and irony, has characterized the nature of art in relation to extra-artistic reality.

In my case, the experience of the self-immolation of the spirit for the benefit of life became irony, a moral stance that is that [...], self-denial, the self-betrayal of the spirit for the benefit of life, understanding «life» to mean [...] kindness, joy, strength, grace, the pleasant normality of triality, of lack of spirit (Mann, 1978, p. 43).

This is what art, or at least art in the shadow of nihilism, seeks to represent: the *ethos* (or why not *hubris*) of a personal nature, which does not aspire to the improvement or realization of socio-political ideals, but simply to become a game, a playful technique that makes us aware of who we are and what we want (Carr, 2017). Mann stands as an artistic titan against the political deformation of human thought and culture, typical of the legacy of the 18th and 19th centuries, opting for a Renaissance-style aestheticism, overlapping and latent throughout those same centuries, which appears with force in the artistic avant-garde of the 20th century (Herwig, 1999).

The difficulty with philosophical thought is probably due to the fact that we continue to see ourselves in the orbit of Enlightenment thinking as a way of thinking that is projected and culminates in the social and political as useful, rather than in the artistic as formative. Romantic-reactionary thinking? Art instead of politics? It is not about that, but about something more radical, more significant for our present. Mann openly



proposes mass democracy as a certain crisis of the spirit, as a malaise in culture, as if democracy were accompanied by a crisis of spiritual values, a numbing of human creative capacity, a degrading and degraded uniformity of its achievements.

Art is not anti-democratic; it challenges citizens in a democracy to improve themselves, to aspire to more, to reject the egalitarianism that levels us all down (Safranski, 2003). This is not a nod to authoritarianism or totalitarianism, but something more subtle, which we can see at the root of contemporary German culture. Rather than totalitarian ideals, Mann sympathizes with Goethe's Olympic ideal, understood as *pathos* of distance: «Otherwise, it annoys me greatly to be taught without [reference to] my capacity for improvement or simply [not to be taught] in order to stimulate it» (Goethe & Schiller, 2014, p. 381). This defines Mann's own *pathos* of distance or aristocratic *pathos*, always very attentive to Goethe's influence. For this reason, philosophy has in common with art—and especially with the literature of thought—dealing with and engaging in formative activities of and for excellence, for civic and civil improvement, for nonconformity with what exists, whatever that may be.

Philosophy and literature as formative activities and disciplines are not resolved in concrete or party ethics or politics, but in culture and individual formation (*bildung*) for the improvement of citizenship, which will then have an ethic or assume a certain political commitment, driven by a series of experiences or life choices (Moretti, 2015; Schutijser de Groot, 2022). The author of MM focuses on the consequences of Nietzschean thought, which extend to Ortega and Gasset, and which can be read as the search for reason in what the great systems of the 19th century left unthought, that is, in human life in its individual urgency and preemptory nature.

The author fits into the German and European tradition of the *bildungsroman*, which Goethe consolidated in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and which has continued to bear fruit ever since. This study is derived from Hans Mayer's now classic thesis (1970) that this artistic form is Germany's main contribution to modern art. Mann's hero is the mirror in which the whole of society is ironically reflected, «but not to show a hero in his steadfastness before social totality, but, on the contrary, to deny that social totality from its very foundation» (p. 23) and also to show that the young hero's destiny is to face inexorably what he has come to know as the fundamental tendencies of the spirit of his time. These tendencies have their names and can be reduced to two: one is humanitarianism, which is the way humanism has penetrated contemporary politics, proclaiming the validity of the great values of Western culture and having



democracy as its culmination; the other is a certain form of apocalyptic thinking, which puts forward a radical critique of bourgeois civilization, only to then preach the need for a new beginning for humanity, a decisive turn in human history, perhaps toward an uncertain destiny. For Yourcenar (1978), they can be associated with liberalism with humanist roots and with emerging thinking about revolution, whether in its socialist or totalitarian version.

In the present century, tired to exhaustion of raising ethics within a philosophy of values, it has proved as ineffective as in the previous one, since there is no deterrent force of sufficient weight to counteract the war-mongering passion that lurks in the heart of totalitarian regimes, regimes that consider force and war to be the lesser evil to subdue those who are wrong (Herwig, 1999; Aramayo, 2009).

Therefore, we are attempting to unify ethical-civic education with the philosophy of health. MM's tubercular cousins have learned that there are no values higher than those demanded by country, family, and tradition. We agree with Tóibín (2022) that all these values no longer dispense life, because those who have the *raison d'état* never have the right to sacrifice young people and their life plans and projects.

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MM as educational material

In the preface to the novel MM, Mann confesses that the story of its protagonist, Hans Castorp, is worth telling, but that it unconditionally requires a reference to time as the distant past, i.e., to time that is still relevant, the present past (Safranski, 2017). Every story is older than the age of the narrator, which means that being past is not a problem of time and that it is about the present time. This makes the writer lucidly aware of a character that permeates and surrounds the nature of his craft as a storyteller. Their work, in this case (ZB and MM), is set before a certain turning point (*wende*) and boundary (*grenze*) (ZB, p. 9; MM, pp. 9, 33), which were decisive and characteristic of the 20th century.

The last century revolves around a change of direction and course, represented by the Great War in Europe, a single war in two installments, which has determined the life and consciousness of humanity, the rise of totalitarian regimes in the interwar period, and democratic regimes since 1945, with exceptions such as Spain. The question is what the young people who were later involved and were victims of these atrocities were like and what they thought.

The gravity of the matter is determined by the reader, pressed by a present that does not allow them to see the profound spiritual trend of their era, a trend that will determine the historical events of the immediate future. The action of the novel is set in space-time coordinates that imply, for those who have little life experience and are not sufficiently rooted in historical existence, the development of new forces, inner transformations that make one open to new experiences.

Similarly, the space, a remote alpine location far from the madding crowd, allows one to almost completely forget what has been left behind and seems to transport the young man to «a free and original state» (ZB, p. 12; MM, p. 36). But the three weeks planned for a stay in a tuberculosis sanatorium seem too long to the young man for his urgent needs, too long to escape his daily worries and concerns. The entire novel revolves around the usurpation of time by two young people who find themselves kidnapped by life, threatened by a terrible disease, in a kind of Platonic cave from which they cannot escape because their very lives are at stake.

The seven-year period of sanatorium life is roughly equivalent to that of our high school students. Castorp is a young man who comes to consciousness with the death of his parents and the memory of his grandfather showing him a small baptismal font, which is nothing more than an old silver basin that had been used as a baptismal font since the time of his great-great-grandfather.

A few months after the death of his parents, he also loses his grandfather. His orphanhood leads him to have to wake up and get ahead with the small help of some blood uncles who care about his survival while he studies to earn a living. The novel places him, now a diligent engineering student, as befits his wealthy bourgeois family from Hamburg, visiting his cousin and friend Joachim Zimsell, who is a patient at a tuberculosis sanatorium near the Swiss town of Davos, in the heart of the Alps, during the summer holidays.

The image that both young men have of themselves projects them and makes them dream of a promising future. Hans will be a naval engineer and Joachim a career military man. Both believe that the future smiles on them and that they will fall in love with some fascinating woman. What Hans thought would be a brief stay to accompany and encourage his friend turns into a prolonged winter stay in which two crucial events in his life take place.

The first is his falling in love with a woman as mysterious and enigmatic as she is attractive, Clawdia Chauchat, a native of Dagestan. The other is an educational/formative process, the result of reading to kill



time and conversations forced by the lack of anything better to do with guests and patients at the sanatorium. Among these, Settembrini stands out, a republican humanist whose opinions make an impression on the young student, whose life is interrupted by the threat of Koch's bacillus, forcing him to put everything on hold to devote himself to curing himself of such a malignant disease—or at least its symptoms. Settembrini's antagonist is a certain Naphta, a former Jew and Jesuit, whose elitist education leads him to believe that the evil of our society has to do with the irruption of the uneducated masses onto the European and world social and political scene (Ramis, 2010).

The plot of the novel serves the author to illustrate the vital and spiritual situation of a young man who was born at the turn of the century and with whom he identifies, for better or for worse. His state of mind is essentially paradoxical, as perhaps is that of all fin-de-siècle or neo-secular consciousness, when we enter centuries such as the 19th, 20th, or 21st, where everything seems new and yet nothing is really new compared to the previous century.

The paradoxes of the student Castorp refer to the problems of adolescents in the early decades of the century, such as the inseparability of life and death, health and illness, civilization and barbarism, freedom and authoritarianism, democracy and autocracy, individualism and collectivism, to give a few examples of what our protagonist discusses in his conversations and dialogues with older people.

The first thing Hans notices is that, in the sanatorium, there is neither time nor life (ZB, p. 26; MM, p. 49), because the threat of death relativizes all temporal flow; time is emptied of content, since each passing day is time subtracted from the illness and gained for life. Given the epochal assumption that the impairment of personal life can influence the deterioration of the human physical organism, the first thing to consider is work, idolized by the previous generation.

How could Hans Castorp not respect work? It would have been unnatural. Given the circumstances, he could not help but consider it the most respectable thing in the world. [...]. His respect for work was therefore religious in nature and, as far as he was aware, indisputable. It was quite another matter that he loved it [...] for the simple reason that he was not made for work (ZB, p. 52; MM, pp. 73-74).

The text warrants a line-by-line comment, but for the purposes of this article we will only focus on the aforementioned «religion of work» as a paradox that characterized the protagonist's ancestors and, in a way,



those born and raised in the first half of the 20th century. It was the religion of our parents and grandparents, who wielded, among other things, the idea that those who do not work should not eat, although it is clear that this is not the religion of our disciples. In general, it can be said that today's high school graduates have less of a spirit of sacrifice than previous generations and less awareness of the contemporary social situation (Carr, 2017), which was essential for their ancestors. Digitalization involves little more than finger activity and few intellectual requirements. Anyone can know and have an opinion about anything, because opinion makers do not seem to have been trained in any school. Leisure, as Castorp believes, seems to be the destiny of young humanity. The coda is not without irony: «For we do not in any way intend to eulogize Hans Castorp, and we give reason to suppose that, in his life, work simply hindered his quiet enjoyment of María Mancini [a famous brand of Havana cigars]» (ZB, p. 52; MM, p. 74).

Otherwise, the characterization of this young German from the interwar period is interesting because it presents traits that are very relevant today. The student has philosophical gifts that the teacher cannot imagine, but the difficulty lies in the fact that Professor Settembrini is intolerant of opinions he does not share. Young Castorp says:

I am, as you see me, a little intolerant when it comes to matters of the spirit, and I would rather be called pedantic than stop fighting views that I consider as worthy of fighting as those you have just presented to us (ZB, p. 137; MM, p. 152).

Here we see the typical and cliché attitude of the teacher, who believes he is so sure of his knowledge that he considers it irresponsible on the part of the student to hold certain arguments, which can be refuted with better arguments, but towards which intolerance is not possible. Faced with the students' inclination to hold the most varied points of view, even passionately, what remains is understanding and assertive guidance. But what is this about, since the parallel between tuberculosis and our COVID-19 does not seem far-fetched (Ochoa & Aranda, 2021).

The disease is in no way distinguished or respectable; this way of seeing it is, in itself, unhealthy or leads to illness [...]. It dates back to times burdened by superstition, when the idea of humanity was degenerate and deprived of all dignity [...]. But reason and the Enlightenment have dispelled those shadows that weighed on the soul of humanity, although not completely, for the struggle still continues. This struggle, my friend, is called work (ZB, pp. 138-139; MM, pp. 152-153).

Because, ultimately, the debate about health and illness as means of individual fulfillment is framed in a context in which two visions or conceptions of freedom rival each other: determinism and indeterminism. The principle of freedom has been fulfilled and surpassed over five hundred years. A pedagogy that still considers itself a disciple of the Enlightenment, and which sees its means of education in criticism, in the liberation of the self and in the cultivation of the self, in the dissolution of certain forms of life that are absolute in nature, may today achieve momentary successes of a rhetorical nature; but its backward nature offers no doubt to the knowledgeable. The principle of absolute freedom, established in the Renaissance and in the free interpretation of the Scriptures, championed by Luther, culminates in dictatorial and terrorist political regimes, according to Mann's liberal diagnosis of thought.

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All truly effective educational associations have always known what was really important in pedagogy: absolute authority, an iron bond, discipline, sacrifice, renunciation of the self. [...] *The deepest pleasure of youth lies in obedience... What it needs, what it is asking for, what it will have, is... terror* (ZB, pp. 548-549; MM, p. 537).

The restoration of the principle of authority, promoted by critics of liberalism and by all conservative thinking, has as its corollary, in 20th-century Europe, all forms and regimes of authoritarianism and fascism. Unfortunately, we have not moved beyond this polarity: the principle of freedom versus an authoritarian, castrating education based on the authority of the teacher, founded on sacrifice, renunciation, and the absolute denial of free will.

The debate in the classroom is set. What is undoubtedly more problematic or controversial is Naphta's coda, intended to scandalize and provocatively mock Settembrini, when he refers to terror and says that our time needs, demands, and will have terror.

It is not only a decoy for the fear of bloodshed and absolute respect for human life, but also a premonition considered by Mann, who experienced the war of 1914 as something that stirred in the spirit and conscience of many intellectuals and ideologues. The sacrifice of human lives in the name of an ethic of conviction was the necessary means to certain ends for humanity as a whole (Weber, 2006).

Do we live in such a humanitarian age that we can dismiss as a thing of the past, the mockery of the fear of bloodshed and respect for human life? To what extent does the totalitarian and authoritarian slogan «live dangerously» encourage warmongering and the idea of sacrificing

life for higher interests? These questions are ideal for teaching/learning philosophy in our time; they remain relevant because, so far, no convincing or acceptable answer to war has been found (Ochoa Pineda, 2022; Saavedra Campos & López Pérez, 2022).

The mixture of revolution and obscurantism, typical of apocalyptic prophets of all times, is not diluted or dissolved by a solution that advocates the eradication of illiteracy and an increase in the importance of humanistic culture in secondary and university education. The slogan of the interwar period, «live life and do not give up on desire,» raises the question of its relevance in an era of young people who do not read or, at most, read screens, who boast of cyberculture, as opposed to a significant portion of young people who are eager for knowledge, lack opportunities, and are victims of aporophobia.

In short, how does the philosophy of health come into play in a subject in which the role of disease is crucial, from the understanding of philosophical activity as a stimulus, incentive, and incentive for life? Under the implicit and often forgotten assumption that thinking about goodness, beauty, and justice, «in a word, in the sovereign joy of art, that great dissolver of hatred and foolishness» (Reich-Ranicki, 2003, p. 40), health as care for oneself and others has at least two fundamental roles. The first is to propose responsibility as the property of the individual who must combine it; the second is related to the principle of autonomy, understood as the concrete realization of human freedom.

Teaching philosophy based on MM-ZB

Some applications to our present can be drawn from Castorp's adventure of thought in the tuberculosis sanatorium in the early years of the last century, which can be useful for studying current trends in philosophy. First, it is noteworthy that Mann's literature is resolved in the interplay of dialogue between characters, whom the reader identifies from the outset because they are familiar. This new dialogism raises questions that seriously affect the consciousness of young people on the eve of a decisive event in their lives, in one case World War I, in ours, an uncertain professional future and a civilizational crisis marked by multiple wars. In relation to the issue of health, Mann's ambivalent attitude is striking (2002): «Certain conquests of the soul and knowledge are not possible without illness, madness, intellectual crime, and the seriously ill are crucified and victimized, offered up as a sacrifice to humanity and its elevation» (p. 203).

The first section of this work has argued that all theoretical efforts in the study of the humanities ultimately lead to the self-understanding of the individual in the form of a critical awareness of time, in their struggles and desires. MM consists of a spiritual diagnosis of an era of hardship, characterized by the disease of the spirit, for which physical illness, and tuberculosis in particular, serves as a metaphor. According to Mann, humanity cannot be conceived of as free from disease. What syndrome characterizes the time in which we live? It is a psychological, emotional pathology whereby human beings cannot conceive of or integrate into their concrete existence the kind of life in which they are immersed.

This morbidity affects the ideas and ideals that, from classical Greece through the Renaissance, have informed classicism and romanticism, and have come down to us today as a spiritual trend, in which the humanities, the knowledge we call literature, are fused with a pedagogical zeal that strives for education (*erziehung*) and the formation of the human race (*bildung*). This nihilistic *pathos* could be described as a crisis of humanistic pedagogical ideals or simply *a crisis of humanism*.

For all these reasons, MM is an introductory work that seeks to re-educate the reader with a basic nihilistic slogan: it is better to want nothing than to want nothing, however debatable that may be. As an introductory propaedeutic, the work directs as a conductor who wants to harmonize the sound of different instruments.

As a guide that reintroduces the cultivation of humanity, the novel represents a clinical and therapeutic necessity with regard to the spiritual illness of contemporary humanity. The direction of the cure is self-direction and self-correction, conducting oneself without external help that, in the form of crutches, pushes in a certain direction foreign to consciousness and will.

This and no other is the content of education and the humanist ideal: human autonomy and moral responsibility, as opposed to heteronomy, represented by Settembrini and, above all, by Naftha, that agitator who sows hatred, justifies violence, and takes sides with terror and revenge as means to achieve an immutable, sacred, and timeless order that, in an illusory and untimely way, he wants to identify with the kingdom of God on earth. If Settembrini represents a certain enlightened tradition, with certain touches of secularism and Jacobinism, Naftha is the exalted conservative who advocates violently ending the present in order to restore the past, as a way of establishing an eternal order in the world.

Neither option is proposed by Mann as a solution, but rather as elements of judgment for Castorp's reckless mind, which is faced with the



spiritual trends of his time, but whose great responsibility is to be able to think for himself and make decisions about his life and destiny. The extreme irony of the work, its latent pessimism, can be found in the short chapter that serves as its epilogue.

In short, and to conclude, two attitudes and a coda can be contrasted. Two orientations of the spirit are possible, because they are not mutually exclusive, but difficult to observe in themselves: «The attitude based on freedom and the attitude based on piety» (Mann, 2005, p. 401). The second prevails over the first because «it pays special attention to the weakness and fragility of human beings and attaches great importance to the idea of death and decay» (p. 402). Incidentally, the author integrates into the second attitude the ancient Hispanic spirit for which «devotion is a key element» (p. 402). But the terrible coda is the horror of war. Herein lies the true value of the novel, in relation to which the above is nothing more than a prologue to the situation.

Next, we will analyze in detail the passage in which the fate of the young man, who has lived the pre-war period as a special moment, is concluded and carried out. Opposite objective time, which is measured by the clock through the space of the dial, is subjective time, which relates to the state of mind. In the novel, this is the time of illness, present in the world around us and in the shared world, but above all in the inner world of experiences.

For Mann, being or feeling ill is an experience of the subjective passing of time, a concrete intrapsychic experience that causes pain, «it is chilling [lit. sinister] and painful that the body lives on its own and without any connection to the soul» (ZB, pp. 102-103; MM, p. 120). Similarly, war is presented as a bodily experience, regardless of any care, concern, anxiety, or worry for others.

The significant epigraph that closes the work, *donnerschlag*, which translates as thunder and lightning, or storm, provided that it is not atmospheric but produced by cannons, puts an end to seven years of Castorp's life in the high mountain lodge that serves as a tuberculosis sanatorium. The effect of this on his mood is understood as that of being acclimatized to the treatment of his illness, that he «no longer knew where to go and was not even capable of conceiving a return to the world of the plains» (ZB, p. 972; MM, p. 937). Now the global perspective, which looks at things from a high and panoramic point of view, is replaced by a leveling, homogeneous perspective of the plain where two enemy armies face each other.



He shared the table with members of other nationalities, with members of humanity, even if they did not know Latin and their manners left much to be desired. The dead left Castorp indifferent, as a result of learning about illness, in the same way that he had given up both his wristwatch and calendars, since time no longer mattered. But the time of thunder came one summer in 1914, with a strange mixture of bewilderment and irritation, which shook the foundations of the earth, including the magic mountain, which put the seven-year-old sleeping beauty on guard and forced him to pay attention to what had happened in the world during his hibernation.

Where are we? What is this? Where has the dream taken us? [...]; sirens howl like dogs from hell, and their noise explodes in a din of flashes, clicks, creaks, broken glass and clashing metal, screams and moans... and, in the midst of it all, a drum beating faster and faster (ZB, pp. 980-981; MM, p. 943).

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War conflicts are very different when experienced from the trenches that make up the front line. Mann has chosen to narrate them from the perspective of the amazement, perplexity, and innocence of a youthful, insufficiently formed mentality that has given little thought to the matter.

The phenomenological description of the perplexed consciousness of the novel's protagonist helps today's reader to understand a little better the horrors of war, far from all the usual propaganda and publicity. Here we find war in all its rawness and filth, in all its barbarity and senselessness.

In contrast to the comfortable spirituality of the mountain of magicians and teachers who debate, war is the muddy European plain where the combatants meet in a more cruel way, where the opponents are stationed in trenches, where the combatants have no other slogan than to kill or die.

The plain, unlike that lovely, magical Alpine mountain, an epochal symbol of all educational institutions, represents the desolation of bombing and the blind advance of enemies, the plain where opposing and antagonistic forces fight, the plane of desolation and death by crossfire. Who is responsible? Perhaps those fiery Settembrini and Naphta who debated ideas with passion, or perhaps an evil genius called the course of the world, which disrupts and distorts everything, turning everything into fury and destructive perversity.

The option of peaceful coexistence, the civic eutopia of education and school, seems to have been unsuccessful, and the sad thing is that this young man, the product of a turbulent time, who only aspired to have

his own voice and criteria in the face of adulthood and obsolescence, has been sacrificed and, with him, the best of humanity, the eternal that never dies, the innocence of youth.

In a letter to his brother Heinrich, Mann says: «Everything boils down to metaphysics, music, and eroticism: *the self never leaves puberty*» (Reich-Ranicki, 2003, p. 84). The vicissitudes of that young, adolescent blood, who were, are, and will be the last to be recruited, students or job seekers, who know what war is because they have been unexpectedly mobilized for it, who could never have imagined that supreme courage of being thrust into battle. «Now they are here, their young blood achieves everything, their bodies, excited and sacrificed, kept in tension by deep vital reserves, do not demand lost sleep or necessary food» (ZB, p. 981; MM, p. 946).

Philosophers do not seek or intend to frighten young people with the dangers of war; they do not practice inane and short-sighted anti-warism or pacifism. The aim is to bring about mature reflection on the dichotomies of the philosophy class and the world around it, but not only there. The discussion is a confrontation of opinions and reasons, leaving beliefs aside, on the meaning of culture and the theory/practice dichotomy.

Is the exercise of philosophy not perhaps an attempt not to «separate love of oneself from love of humankind»? (Reich-Ranike, 2003, p. 47). Are not the victims who have fought in all the wars that have been and will be the best representation of humanity? Who declares war and orders millions of young people to enlist in the army, so that they fall in fields and trenches, in forests and villages burned by bombing? Young people are the ones who have fallen in all wars.

They are a single body, calculated in such a way that, despite heavy losses, they can act and win, and celebrate victory and shout a thousand cheers! [...]. More than one has distinguished himself insofar as he has fallen in this violent march (ZB, p. 982; MM, p. 946).

Faced with the absence of reflection typical of the front and the trenches, today's reader is forced to reflect because the war has not passed, or rather, because of the threat and the possibility. Is it not the tenderness and innocence of those who have fallen in wars that should lead us to reflect on the injustice and cruelty of war? For young people are the same in all times, their vicissitudes and destinies similar. There is no talk of war being an inevitable fate, that it is worth thinking about it in order to learn from the past. It is regrettable that society in general is not trained to have the civil courage and ethical audacity to oppose war.



Other images could be evoked, riding horses or swimming at the beach, strolling with one's beloved along the shore, lips on her ears... Instead, there they lie with their faces in the mud (ZB, pp. 982-983; MM, p. 947).

The writer, perhaps due to professional bias, has no choice but to evoke the simplicity and goodwill of the young combatants, who continue to think of the sweetness of love and the golden dream of their fulfilled love. Mann's narrative genius alludes to the myth of sweet youth, which modern adult society has commercially exploited as a lure to dream of it as a happy state of humanity.

Towards the end of the novel, a naive character in the story, who will most likely be among the dead on the battlefield, is found humming two verses of a love song. It is not known for certain whether he has fallen; the war is so impersonal that it disfigures even Hans's face with its blond beard. A few steps away, a shell explodes, the product of a mad science; he could be wounded, but carried away by an insane warrior's ardor, he gets up, walks, staggers, limps forward, and the love song sounds from his lips. The narrator claims that we lose sight of him, but what really happens is that Castorp from the Davos sanatorium has ended up on a battlefield in Europe.

Could one ask whether cheerful and carefree youth can end up like the protagonist of this story? That is not the case, but rather the similarities between that spoiled child of life, who was able to escape the pressing needs of business for seven years, and our schoolchildren, unconcerned with abstract ideas such as life, love, and death. Survival as species depends on the paradox that has taken shape in Castorp. In this experience, the only gain is spiritual, if only because the protagonist fell in love for the first time with an enigmatic woman with Tartar eyes.

Conclusions

The teaching of philosophy can be described, since Plato, as the «co-action» exerted on the student to carry out the *apagōgē* or shift from their immobile and static position with respect to time and its events, in order to verify the movement, change, and dynamism inherent in the temporal. This allows for the erasure and abandonment of the cavernous fixity of time, if we may use the expression, as well as the relentless destiny of human finitude and transience. In this case, we have seen that the prism or lens chosen by Mann has been, like a corrective lens, health or its absence in the form of illness. The etymology of this, *infirmitas* or *infirmus*, de-



notes a lack or absence of firmness, strength, energy, or power, Castorp's initial syndrome, who, we recall, was not a tuberculosis patient.

Specifically, faced with the dichotomy of whether to teach content or teach for life, it seems that the novel combines the attitude of young people towards the difficulties of illness and could stir up their ideas about human health. In short, there is no subject, especially in the field of philosophical reflection, that does not have substantive content and does not teach for life. What may be somewhat original is to introduce, to bring into each person, a reflection on time in extraordinary circumstances, if any are ordinary, such as those of illness, to create tension between time that seems to stand still, the present captured as an infinite succession of moments, and time in motion, the now that ceases to be in the next instant, and the present that becomes the past with the speed with which the succession of moments occurs.

Education, as analyzed in previous sections, must formulate chapters for health education within an ethical framework based on the principles of responsibility, freedom, autonomy, and solidarity. In this sense, this conception goes beyond the mere absence of physical or mental illness.

Taking into account the problem from which we started, war happens behind the backs of its protagonists, i.e., the young people who fight in it. The novel *MM* is presented as spiritual diagnosis of a time of war tragedy, where physical illness translates into spiritual illness. The great metaphor of *MM-ZB* places the reader before two young men, who are practical beings (an engineer and a soldier), who only aspire to cure their illness and recover from it, and not necessarily to be wise. Their recovery is the condition for their freedom outside the sanatorium.

The hermeneutic analysis applied to Mann's work raises the need to take philosophy as a form of personal development, in the concrete mode of civic eutopia, to be developed in the classroom. Here, there must be a confrontation between conflicting points of view (Settembrini and Naphta as examples), which must be «reconciled.» If we are to be cured, extremes must be reconciled (*MM*, pp. 519-520). It does not advocate the instrumentalization of philosophy, but rather the conversion of health—literally and metaphorically—into the fundamental content of philosophical reflection.

What is interesting for teaching is the shared reflection on time: the time of illness, experienced in the novel as a formative time, is a time without measure, monotonous, almost eternal; it passes without awareness, because the sick person is barely aware of its passing (*MM*, p. 553). Each of the protagonists devotes it to themselves, as they mature and



change their image of themselves, as if they were going through a learning process: «The time that passes here is not time» (MM, p. 556), they are personal experiences that make them forget, because they are the correlate and consequence of the attitude that initiates reflection: wonder. «The boy contemplated that spectacle with that childlike gaze that goes beyond sensory appearances and penetrates the essence of things» (ZB, p. 603; MM, p. 590). If one looks closely at the object of the young man's amazement, one finds an essential key to understanding the work.

What amazes Castorp is Naphta's father's profession, *shoshet*, Jewish ritual slaughterer, a profession he has chosen «out of a spiritual inclination and, given the fragility of his body, moved by a force related to the sparkle in his eyes» (ZB, p. 603; MM, p. 590). The context of the sentence about Castorp's amazement is not trivial, as it refers to the contrast between two antagonistic rituals of animal sacrifice in the slaughterhouse: the Christian and the Jewish. Naphta's own childlike gaze, as he watches his father slaughter the animal, penetrates and transcends the sensory to plunge into the essential, which is nothing other than the *spiritual context of sacrifice*.

Regardless of the historical context, which was not at all favorable to Semitism, but quite the opposite, the phrase concisely sums up the meaning of reflection as a paradox, whether in a tuberculosis sanatorium or a philosophy classroom. Naphta has experienced that piety-devotion is linked to cruelty, just as the smell and sight of blood gushing from sacrificed cattle is related to the idea of the sacred and the spiritual (ZB, p. 693; MM, p. 590). But the fate of Naphta's father was, paradoxically, to be crucified by a crazed Christian mob, accused of killing children of this faith.

Therefore, another of the relevant points that this hermeneutic analysis has sought to emphasize is associated with the finitude and transience of the human in relation to a didactic philosophy of health, which effectively allows for education in the face of the physical and mental illness that so overwhelms these turbulent days.

Young people of any era can learn from Castorp's example that the experiences of both cousins in the mountains temper a fundamental ethical state of mind, to which death on the battlefield is no stranger (Mann, 1993, p. 17). The sacrifice of innocence, of puberty, in war, serves as an urgent call for reflection. Can society pacify life? The conquests of the soul, the necessary development of critical thinking regarding the waves of violence and terrorism, emphasize the current need to integrate ethics as a fundamental philosophical discipline.

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Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence

The authors Amada Cesibel Ochoa-Pineda and Cayetano José Aranda-Torres of the article entitled Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and its contribution to civic-ethical education, **DECLARE** that the document was not produced with the support of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

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