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Prof Ferdinand Potgieter

"We don't need no thought control!"
Reflections on a possible pedagogy of
Discernment

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"We don't need no thought control!" Reflections on a possible pedagogy of discernment

by

Ferdinand J Potgieter

Edu-HRight Research Unit
Professor in Philosophy of Education
School of Education Studies
North-West University (Potchefstroom-campus),
South Africa
ferdinand.potgieter@nwu.ac.za or EDU-HRight@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

Making use of hermeneutic phenomenology and morality critique as methodological navigation points, this paper challenges the illusory prestige and power of normative orders in presenting themselves to every successive generation as the best possible likenesses of and most believable blueprint(s) for eudaimonia (the good life). By implication, it also challenges the education systems that are designed to keep these normative orders alive. It is suggested that what education needs is not morals and ethics, but a pedagogy of discernment that will teach pupils to keep their eyes open and to recognise the tragic truth that normative systems maintain themselves at the cost of wiping out the ontic truth of singularisation, mortality, as well as the ultimate non-normalisability of the human condition, namely that although we are capable of immense love and sensitivity, we are also capable of greed, hatred, brutality, rape, murder and war.

Introduction

This paper represents the preliminary outcome of my reflection on the following four related intellectual conundrums that have continued to intrigue me over the past few years:

- Who, in the final analysis, decides what ethics and morals are, how they should be understood and why all people are expected to live their lives in accordance with their phantasmatic[1] claims?
- Why do ethics and morals and the normative systems that support them enjoy so much prestige in education?
- Are ethics and morals entitled to the social status and standing that they enjoy?
- What do ethics and morals do to our existence as human beings and at what price do we submit to them?

I propose that it is not because of the absence or even a loss of ethics and morals that educational efforts worldwide are more or less all failing to restrain, control and/or overturn the ever-increasing incidence of evil in society, but precisely because of an oversupply (or "barrage") of ethics, morals and values, as Schoeman (2013: 306,307) maintains. In order to defend this argument, I firstly contextualise it by referring to what I consider to be a landmark event in the history of the United Kingdom's education system in the late 1970's. Against this backdrop I will then venture a few cursory remarks[2] about the treatment and application of ethics and morals, and the normative systems in which they are embedded. Thirdly, I briefly conceptualise the term "education", after which I highlight the phantasmatic claims and essential fallibility of humanity's treatment and application of ethics, morals and normative systems as part of my argument that if the venerable aims of education were, at the very least, credible or believable, the incidence of evil in our society should have dropped significantly. Finally, I propose a pedagogy of discernment as the *primus inter pares* (first among equals) of all other pedagogies. I suggest that this may hold the key to our

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[1] From the Latin *phantasma*, the Greek *phántasma* and Middle English *fantesme*, referring to a mental image or vision (akin to *phantázein*, meaning "to bring before the mind"); in this paper meant to refer to ethics, morals and their underpinning normative system(s) as being essentially nothing more than illusory representations or likenesses <u>of</u> and <u>as</u> the believed cure for evil and the assumed stockpile of all the necessary wherewithal with which to master the human condition.

[2] I wish to put it on record – for the following two reasons – that I only attempt to *assess critically* the inception, development, manipulation, management, presentation, functioning and treatment of ethics and morals by humanity in this paper. I don't *reject* ethics and morals. Firstly, there is a school of thought that claims that ethics and morals should be accepted as anthropological givens. Consequently, to question or critique their actuality somehow seems to fall outside the realm of what may be philosophically and scientifically permissible (cf. Van der Walt, 2014). In the final analysis, it had always been and forever will be people who decide what ethics and morals are, how they should be understood and why all people are expected to live their lives in accordance with their claims. The fact that none of us know / can recall the precise identity/-ies and other pertinent personal details of these "people" means that it is their perennial ontic and epistemic anonymity that grants ethics and morals their anthropomorphic character which, as far as I am concerned, makes it possible for us to assess their inception, development, manipulation, management, presentation, functioning and treatment critically, as argued above. Secondly: to *reject* ethics and morals and, by implication, their underpinning normative systems, would be naive. After all, it is the law-like nature of normative systems that makes life manageable, tolerable and, ultimately, liveable.

understanding of the integrative violence of humanity's treatment and application of normative systems thus leading to an understanding of why education, while claiming to be protecting and maintaining (ethical and moral) life, is not only promoting, but effectively causing evil and, consequently, destruction, decay and death instead.

"Do it again! Repeat after me…"

Released as a so-called "concept" double album on 30 November 1979, Pink Floyd's rock opera *The Wall* spoke out against a perceived anachronistic education system. Symbolised by a metaphorical wall, it explored institutionalised "thought control", educational abandonment, moral decay, ethical isolation and normative distortion. The songs approximated events in the life of the protagonist, Pink, a character based on the life of bassist and lyricist, Roger Waters, whose father was killed during the Second World War. Pink was oppressed by his overprotective mother and tormented at school by tyrannical, abusive teachers – all agents and products, at the time, of an equally strict, autocratic, oppressive and effectively dictatorial education system in the United Kingdom. All of these traumas became metaphorical "bricks in the wall" (Schaffner, 1991: 225, 226). The cyclical nature of its central theme of authoritarianism, educational abandonment, moral decay, ethical isolation and eventual normative distortion (cf. Fitch & Mahon, 2006: 71, 113) reflects the antiquated and obsolete character of the UK's education system at the time. The school-going generation of the late 1970's had finally wisened up to its efforts to control not only their learnedly (and subsequent public) conduct, but also their minds and thoughts. As a result, the social impact of this iconic rock opera was such that it was subsequently performed live with elaborate theatrical effects, and eventually also adapted into a feature film, *Pink Floyd – The Wall.* (It was also banned from being aired or staged in South Africa for a time.)

What Pink Floyd and their millions of fans essentially dared to speak out against was, on the one hand, the ubiquitous (yet largely unquestioned) process of moral reproduction; i.e. the inclination of successive generations to instruct, teach, inculcate, inspire, encourage, coerce, persuade and, at times, even compel its progeny to acknowledge and then to conform to, abide by and subsequently repeat and replicate the ethics and morals that a particular community and the larger society that they live in, may choose to live by. On the other hand (looking back to the devastating consequences of WW2), it was the fact that their generation had finally been conscientised to the point where they not only realised, but in fact deeply understood that "…those who cherish values and hold fast to moral norms are not (necessarily – FJP) reliable" (Arendt, 2003: 43).

Schürmann (2003: 3, 21, 621) implies that those who attempt to put into operation the ethics and morals that education systems, amongst others, endeavour to pass on to every consecutive generation might remain essentially naïve about the norms that such ethics and morals seek to posit. I suggest that this is exactly the kind of social commentary that Pink Floyd's *The Wall* has delivered and subsequently evoked. Van der Walt (2014(b)) argues that all human beings are, in some way or another, followers of ethics and morals because the latter "...are part and parcel of the human condition". Schürmann (2003: 3, 21, 621) argues, however, that all people eventually and fundamentally believe the phantasmatic claim made by the followers of normative systems that support the ethics and morals that they choose to live by, namely that they are able to provide human beings with the wherewithal to be masters of their own situatedness and circumstance (Schoeman, 2013: 305, 306). Nescient followers in every successive generation – precisely because of the way in which they understand and apply ethics and morals in their own lives – wilfully and uncritically seem to surrender to what they believe to be the ultimate and untouchable promise of all ethics and morals: "If you adhere to us, you are guaranteed to live a meaningful, flourishing and fulfilling life."

All is not well on the education front

Life (i.e. "natality") is, however, not only about living. It is also about the tragic truth that – in the end – mortality as "...loss of love, home, country, of health and life" (Schürmann, 2003: 19) always has the final word. The way people treat and apply ethics and morals and the normative systems they are embedded in, conveniently anaesthetises us to the fact that the day we are born, we begin to die; all of us. At the moment of our last breath we are left ontically singularised, i.e. "...alone, silent, strangers" (Schoeman, 2013: 310). This casts doubt on the apparent sincerity of the followers of ethics, morals and their underpinning normative systems to promote natality by effectively denying mortality as the inevitable and final future outcome of our lives. It also casts doubt on education as one of the main social carriers of natality's phantasmatic claims. After all, it may be argued that life begins and ends between the head and the foot of the bed and for the cyclical journey between these two signposts of existence – i.e. between natality and mortality – humankind has always depended, amongst others, on education. To quote Hannah Arendt (1993: 174): "...the essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are *born* into the world."

It is rather poignant that the essence of education (referring in a sense, to "practicing how to live") is, amongst others, about consciously disregarding the fact that although we are *born* into the world, we are all scheduled *die* out of it. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, since the early 1990s, educational research has been focusing increasingly on the phenomenon of "practice" (referring to the complex constellations of activities that define education as a profession). Informed by the inquiries into learning and identity conducted by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, researchers writing from sociocultural and situative perspectives have examined ways in which "communities of practice" could best support individual and collective learning (cf. Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003; Horn, 2005; Sawyer, 2006; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009) in order to ensure an informed, content and flourishing citizenry that unthinkingly and readily, will keep believing and submitting to the phantasmatic claims made by people about ethical and moral life.

As described in this literature, communities of practice are almost always distinguished by a shared set of purposes, repertoire, resources, and norms (Wenger, 1998). School-going learners, their parents and teachers, as well as other stakeholders and role-players forge identities as members of these communities as they (mainly collectively) endeavour to develop increasing proficiency with the practices of their respective communities. Learning and identity develop in relation to the community through increasingly adept participation in practice. Implied in the literature is, firstly, a view of the above-mentioned "practice" as a kind of disciplined, skilful, and cooperative obedience to a particular normative system, or systems, as brought about and conceptualised by people in that community (cf. Singer-Gabella, 2012: 2). Secondly, the same literature implies that it is essentially possible for any community's common domain really to be "common" and that every community can, indeed, institute a perfect "communion" on the basis of which sets of purposes, repertoires, resources, and norms can then be shared amongst everybody and to the benefit of everyone in that community.

I wish to challenge both these implications. As alluded to in the second paragraph of this paper, all is undeniably not well on the education front. The pursuit of the *agein perenne* – the perpetual and timeless process of leading each successive generation towards a meaningful, flourishing and fulfilling life – is fast losing its appeal. The current strife in, for example, Syria and the Ukraine, the recent "Arab Spring" uprisings, the conflict between the Muslim north and the Christian south of Nigeria and Mali (Potgieter, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2014: 1), as well as the countless incidents of "...slaughtering, murders, tortures, incarcerations, land expropriations, internments...", etc. (Schoeman, 2013: 308) all count as examples of education that, although advocating and almost

exclusively promoting natality (the life force) in spirit and principle, demonstrate, instead, the tragic integrative violence (Schoeman, 2013: 309) of the normative systems that it supports; particularly as these systems have been designed, treated and applied by their followers.

Efforts to counter this have resulted, over the years, in various "pedagogies": pedagogy of idea power (Papert, 2000), pedagogy of citizenship (Nussbaum, 2002), pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2007), pedagogy of place (Von Wright, 2009), pedagogy of accompaniment (Ospino, 2010), pedagogy of hope (Van Teeffelen, 2012), pedagogy of trust (DeMeulenaere, 2012), pedagogy of and in practice (Hotam & Hadar, 2013) and a pedagogy of peacebuilding (Gill & Niens, 2014), to name but nine. To understand why people, their communities and the education systems that they employ have, in particular, always been viewed as three of the main social carriers of natality's phantasmatic claims we should, perhaps, interrogate some recent attempts at (re)conceptualising education.

(Re)conceptualising education

Most contemporary conceptualisations of education are located somewhere between John White's seemingly irreconcilable polarities of "education for Smithian efficiency and education for Deweyan democracy"[3] (Howe, 2014: 77; Laverty, 2014: 109-119). Be that as it may, it should be noted that the work done by followers of both polarities – intentionally or unwittingly – promote natality as life-force, because in the final analysis, they all refer to education as being an essential, praiseworthy endeavour in which a relatively more mature person interacts with a less mature person for the purpose of guiding, forming, equipping and enabling the latter for his or her future calling or occupation, including to become a mature and responsible, whole member (with integrity of character) of the various societal relationships that s/he will belong to in future (Basave, 2006: 1; Van Crombrugge, 2006: 12, 13, 23, 41, 59, 62, 64, 86 et seq.; Van der Walt, Valenkamp & Wolhuter, 2012: 20, 21; Potgieter, Van der Walt, Wolhuter & Valenkamp, 2013: 290, 292; Cuypers, 2014: 55, 56). They all envisage a person who will be able

- to lead a meaningful life (Seo, 2014: 90),
- to discern between what is right and wrong, good and bad,
- to act on what has been so discerned, even at personal cost,
- and to take responsibility for such actions and behaviour (Noshulwana, 2011: 16).

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[3] Firstly: although these Whitean polarities can be demonstrated to relate meaningfully to the notions of natality and mortality, it falls outside the scope and purpose of this paper. Secondly: it is not my intention in this paper to pronounce upon whether the correct conceptualisation of education is Smithian or Deweyan. If anything, I am of the opinion that it is important for any philosophy of education to critique the necessity and value of such debates as that between the followers of Smith and the disciples of Dewey.

Favouring and supporting natality, recent (re)conceptualisations of education are furthermore customarily enmeshed in conflicts of value – especially the kind of value that is usually attached to the notion of the "human good" (resp. "the common good / good life") (Potgieter, 2011: 397): education should contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life of all concerned as well as of broader society (refer Strauss, 2009: 509). In this regard, John White argued in 1995 that education needs to be (re-)defined to connote preparation for the so-called "good life", claiming that "…it is essential to be as clear as we can about what it is to lead a flourishing life" (White, 1995: 3; Seo, 2014: 87-89) and that it "…must be a meaningful one" (Seo, 2014: 90). Education should induct pupils into the framework of wellbeing and parents, teachers and policy-makers should all be familiar with this notion (Seo, 2014: 88). It should be broad enough in scope to assist and accompany children to maintain their bearings in both the social world and a world beyond the social (White, 1995:15; Seo, 2014: 91). School should be a dialogic space in which rehearsal opportunities for pupils to develop their own "nesting of reasons" (Seo, 2014: 91) are continually on offer (White, 2009: 9).

Alas, the question remains: if these seemingly venerable aims of education were, at the very least, credible or believable, why is it then that we continue to witness so much evil in this world, as referred to above?

The phantasmatic claims of agents of ethics, morals and normative systems

Gray (2003: 12) and Van der Walt (2014(a): 4) allude to the observable failure of education to produce consistently and reliably, a new generation of whole, noble citizens with integrity, remarking that human beings seem to be driven by conflicting needs and illusions. They are subject to every kind of infirmity of will and judgement and thus unable to live together peacefully, explaining why they are often engaged in strife, whether on a personal, community or (inter)national level. In this regard, Peck (2006: 184) observes: "We see dogmatism, and proceeding from dogmatism, we see wars and inquisitions and persecutions. We see hypocrisy: people professing the brotherhood of man killing their fellows in the name of faith, lining their pockets at the expense of others, and practicing all manner of brutality". Despite unparalleled advances in almost every field of human endeavour, especially technology, our streets still abound with the hungry and homeless, and violence and war still continue to plague us (Olthuis, 2012: 2/7; Van der Walt, 2014(a): 38).

The above-mentioned examples have motivated many teachers, parents, pupils and education administrators to start distrusting the phantasmatic promises and claims (of the "good life") made by those who sit behind the normative systems that they have been educated to support and defend (Van der Walt & Potgieter, 2014:5). Nowhere was this perhaps better illustrated than in 1976, in South Africa, when the majority of the school-going population at the time were finally conscientised into understanding that they needed to liberate themselves from the phantasmatic power of the agents of an oppressive normative system. These uprisings marked the beginning of the end of Apartheid – leading to the first democratic elections in South Africa's history in 1994.

As a result, an increasing number of people worldwide now prefer to construct and accept their own, individual ethical and moral systems, and also to live in accordance with such systems (Koelble & Li Puma, 2011, Standish, 2004). Reasons for this include the fact that the phantasmatic prestige of "grand narratives" (resp. normative systems) seems to be such that most people subject themselves wilfully to its presumed power. People presuppose, as the conditions of the possibility of ethics and morals, that human life is finally normable and that some univocal field of normative power, in principle, covers and secures human life (cf. Pearce and MacLure, 2009; Pelcova, 2008; Vox Nova, 2010; Kourie, 2006). They nevertheless remain largely naive about the norms that ethics and morals seek to posit, because they choose to believe the phantasmatic promise and claim made by the followers of their particular normative systems, namely that they can provide human beings with the wherewithal to be masters of their own situatedness and circumstance (Schürmann, 2003: 621, 773; Schoeman, 2013: 305, 306). However, the essential fallibility of all normative systems lies in the fact that although their agents present them as the cure that will get rid of all evil, the way in which they are treated and applied by most people actually prolong the societal diseases that they are supposed to cure (Schoeman, 2013: 305). The Indian philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti (2014), puts this into perspective when he argues:

> "For centuries we have been spoon-fed by our teachers, by our authorities, by our books, our saints. We say, 'Tell me all about it - what lies beyond the hills and the mountains and the earth?' and we are satisfied with their descriptions, which means that we live on words and our life is shallow and empty. We are second-hand people. We have lived on what we have been told, either guided by our inclinations, our tendencies, or compelled to accept by circumstances and environment. We are the result of all kinds of influences and there is nothing new in us, nothing that we have discovered for ourselves; nothing original, pristine, clear."

Because we have been living undiscriminatingly for years (or "second-hand", to quote Krishnamurti) we have, essentially, been living mechanical lives – similar to a parrot that can only repeat what it

has learnt (Pienaar, 2014). It therefore comes as no surprise when Hannah Arendt claims that it is not the absence or loss of ethics, morals and values that is creating the preconditions for evil (as moralists keep telling us), but our own, erroneous treatment and application of the oversupply – the "barrage" – of values, instead (Arendt, 2006: 150).

Educational efforts to ground and articulate the norms that teach us what we are supposed to do and who we are supposed to be, may therefore be questioned (Schoeman, 2013: 307). Because of the presumed and wilfully delegated power and prestige of normative systems, their subjects believe these systems to be based on some or other highest principle; they believe the systems to hold exclusive rights to the promise of life that they offer their subjects (Schoeman, 2013: 309). Although there is certainly a case to be made that normative systems (and the morals and ethics that help to propagate them) make our lives liveable, they nevertheless also effect integrative violence.

There exists an original, undeniable discord between (a) ethics and morals and that to which they apply, (b) the human agents who get to decide how these ethics and morals should be filled with content and (c) between norms and those who are subjected to such norms. It is a discord that is perpetually being denied (Schoeman, 2013: 309) by the self-generating power and prestige of all normative systems (Schoeman, 2013: 309). As a result, the agents of morals and ethics never come to grips with the integrative power of normative systems. Even though every single ultimate normative referent that has ever been promulgated in the history of humankind can testify to this, the agents of morals and ethics simply do not see how a normative system necessarily entails a denial within its very structure (ibid.). Indeed, according to Schürmann (2003: 613) each *tranquilitas ordinis*[4] gives rise – at some stage – to conflict and discontent (ibid.) and it is precisely in this regard that all normative systems execute their integrative violence at the hand of the people who follow them. When a community denies – through the normative system of their followers – the singularity of any human subject that seeks to escape a particular normative system's own terms, they effectively force all its human subjects to fit in – sometimes even by force and coercion, if need be (ibid.). It subdues, suppresses and regulates every conceivable case or contingency (ibid.) and in doing so, it denies the ontic inescapability of mortality as the origin of contingency; as the final prospect that threatens all human enterprises with ruin, destruction, downfall and doom. So, while the morals and ethics that are derived from normative systems do their best to promise and promote life, they all eventually cause death (Schürmann, 2003: 28).

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[4] Eng. "the tranquillity of order"; the peace of all things; a well-ordered concord.

I argue that it is for these reasons that the scholarly contemplation of a pedagogy of discernment, as *primus inter pares*, should lead to rethinking the place and role of moral and ethical systems that are supposed to continue guiding education. To accomplish this, we need, first of all, to conceptualise briefly the terms "pedagogy" and "discernment".

Towards (re-)conceptualising pedagogy

For conceptual intelligibility, I prefer to use the term "pedagogy" and not "teaching". As Hotam and Hadar (2013: 389) point out, none of the efforts to explain teaching has thus far resulted in a single satisfactory, unambiguous description. Often referred to as the "science of teaching", pedagogy not only relates to teaching in its fullest theoretical and practical sense, it is also commonly regarded as encompassing the overall theoretical, historical, and practical aspects of teaching (Hotam & Hadar, 2013: 387). It typically includes the art, practice or profession of teaching, as well as the systematized learning or instruction concerning principles and methods of teaching and of student control and guidance (ibid.). It relates primarily to the teacher's doings, referring to such interests as how teachers should teach (theory) and to the various ways they can use to control and guide learners (practice) (Hotam & Hadar, 2013: 388).

My own understanding of the concept of pedagogy does not, however, refer primarily to the overall theoretical and practical methods, educational tools and tactics of teaching (the how to be a professional teacher). Instead, I am personally more interested in the eventual educational outcome as experienced by learners themselves in authentic learning environments. For this reason I refer to it as a kind of 'performative' understanding of the concept of pedagogy, that is, an understanding based on what is, in fact, happening in authentic learning environments. Following Bourdieu's (1977) philosophical lead, I am not supporting any positivistic approach with respect to what "really" happens or does not happen in authentic learning environments, even though I realise that a more positivistic approach with respect to learning space-based "reality" may argue for an "objective" independence of reality from learners' "subjective" experience of it. Instead, my aim with proposing a pedagogy of discernment in this paper is to understand what should, in fact, be taking place in authentic learning environments, rather than, for example, to encourage teachers' and their learners' performances (via targets, rewards, or sanctions) in and outside of these environments. This, by definition, differs from the academically more traditional theoretical, historical, and methodical aspects of teaching. It also differs from the existing neoliberal emphasis on performance

as a criterion for measuring good or successful teaching (Apple, 2001; Luke 2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005). As such, it already seems to suggest a particularly discerning approach to pedagogy.
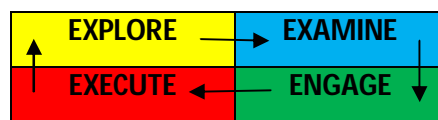
The term discernment

The term "discernment", from the Latinate *discernere*, means to perceive with the mind or by the senses; to apprehend; to divide; to separate or distinguish (by sifting) mentally; to recognise as distinct or different; to discriminate or differentiate; to act with perspicacity and acumen; to preserve sound, impartial judgement (Random House Dictionary, 2014). Discernment points to the ability of a mature, responsible, whole person (with integrity of character) to perceive, recognise, distinguish and apprehend a particular phenomenon or event by separating it from the background radiation of, amongst others, ethics and morals and the addictive nature of the normative systems which they are embedded in and to do so with perspicacity and acumen. Discernment always works in two directions. Firstly: individuals must be able to *discern* with regard to the shaping, moulding, development, application and realisation of their own ethics and morals. Secondly: they must be able to discern as far as the ethics and norms that may be forced on them by other people or by tradition (past generations) are concerned. In the end, we human beings remain the agents; it remains our responsibility not only to discern in this manner, but also to act in accordance with what and how we have discerned.

Putting it all together: a pedagogy of discernment

A pedagogy of discernment, as I see it, should be about teaching children how best to access the wisdom of their minds, spirits, intuition and emotions in order to allow them to discover what really is essential and enduring in and for their own lives. It is about teaching them how to detach themselves from their innate desire to rush decisions and to distinguish the essential and the enduring from the false, the evil and the provisional and then, how to choose the best path. It involves teaching them the importance of reflecting in silence so that they may create spaces for their deepest perceptions. By teaching them the virtues of contemplative vigilance, they may learn the art of opening themselves to clarity of understanding. When we teach them how to listen deeply for the essential questions, we teach them how to trust that the answer will unfold and reveal itself when the time is right. When they finally learn how to become alert to the messages that may come in subtle and surprising ways, they will realise the importance of holding their decisions lightly, until the essential and the enduring emerge. In order to teach children always to search for the full

information before speaking or acting, it is important that they first learn how to hone their intuition, trust their inner visions, be alert to all the signs that life may place in their paths and how to be open to revelation.

It is against this backdrop that I argue that educationists should consider the implications of a possible pedagogy of discernment as *primus inter pares* and how it might relate to the alluring nature of the *agein perenne*. With reference to the work of Schürmann (1991: 219), Curren (2013: 232) and Schoeman (2013: 313), and by adapting the thinking of Chapuis (2003: 6) somewhat, I propose that efforts to accomplish this should include considering the following four dimensions of a pedagogy of discernment: (a) intellectual quality, (b) demonstrable relevance or connectedness, (c) supportive learning environments and (d) a strong sense of impartial judgment – in each case with the emphasis on the discerner as agent. In each of these four dimensions, the following pedagogical cycle of discernment praxis, or "E^4-cycle", as I refer to it, may then be engaged as part of the entire pedagogical process, namely (a) explore, (b) examine, (c) engage and (d) execute.

Figure 1: The E^4-cycle of discernment praxis

In this manner, the tasks, duties and obligations of all role-players and stakeholders in education can receive due consideration and attention.

Finally, I wish to state that my suggestion that we consider a pedagogy of discernment should in no way be interpreted as a modernistic campaign in favour of a return to rationalism, or even to some form of neo-rationalism or absolutisation of the child's cognitive faculties. Neither should it be understood as a plea for some form of child-centrism. It is a fallacy to assume that there are different kinds of adulthood; there is only one adulthood, and I contend that it assumes an individual (and not a communal) shape in the particular way of life of every human being. A pedagogy of discernment should, therefore, seek to cut across all the aspects of education – physical, emotional, economic, intellectual, social, historical, traditional, aesthetic, ethical, religious, spiritual, etc., because it is essentially about the nurturing and accompaniment of the child's ability to contemplate all of life's many issues and to do so prudently and with informed circumspect.

Conclusion

Instead of education systems worldwide that insist on curtsying to the phantasmatic power granted to ethics and morals by their agents, I suggest that we consider a pedagogy of discernment as the basis of our efforts to reclaim the original appeal of the *agein perenne*. What we need, therefore, is a new generation of individuals who are au fait with embracing their singularity and the onticity of their mortality. We need people who will be able to expose the hubris of the normative systems that seek to enslave them. Instead of pedagogies that strive to addict people to the power of norms and values, we need a pedagogy of discernment, as *primus inter pares*, that will accompany people towards keeping their eyes wide open so that they may acknowledge everything that natality (and, hence, all normative systems) is not prepared to concede, namely singularisation[5], mortality and the definitive argument that the human condition is ultimately non-normalisable.

Stakeholders and role-players in education are increasingly distrusting of the phantasmatic promises and claims made by the agents of those normative systems that they have been educated to support and defend. We need educationists, as well as philosophers of education, to ponder the merits and demerits of a possible pedagogy of discernment as *primus inter pares* with a view to start shaping a new international educational dispensation – one that will eventually produce a generation who will no longer be the addicted followers and agents of normative systems (cf. White, 2013: 302; Cuypers, 2014: 56).

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[5] A point in space-time that marks a qualitative shift in the individuative humanness of a person: the birth-moment and the death-moment are both irreducibly, ontically and, therefore, tragically singular – devoid of any community, commonness or communality.

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