'This special issue asks: How can educators explore and enact a philosophy of education that speaks to the care, critique and collective responsibility demanded by the Covid-19 pandemic?’ My spontaneous reaction is: I have no idea! I have read many eponymous philosophical interventions that have meanwhile become viral, but I still have no clue. This is not due to a supposed shortage of ideas, interpretations and thoughtful predictions concerning the epochal and world-historical pandemic effects of Covid-19. On the contrary, now that Michel Foucault’s wish for the world ‘to multiply the channels, the bridges, the means of information, the radio and television networks, the newspapers’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 325) has come true to viral effect, there is plenty of philosophical material. There are already many suggestions: Slavoi Žižek’s communism, Peter Sloterdijk’s co-immunism and Markus Gabriel’s metaphysical pandemic.¹ A philosophical virology is currently being shaped up and is visiting philosophy of education. For, sometimes, educational philosophy, literally meta-phoric (transferring), explores education and enacts itself by hosting philosophy. It receives and accommodates thoughts about care, critique and collective responsibility that various eminent philosophers have formulated. In this sense, philosophy of education sometimes turns itself into a hosting environment. It often explores its topics and enacts its epistemological identity by ‘contracting’ philosophy: it makes philosophy smaller, more manageable, by reducing it to a handful of influential, ‘mobile’ (transferrable) trends; it catches ever new philosophies, which are installed and spread in its body like viruses; and it recruits philosophical authority in a

¹ In Gabriel’s own words, ‘after the virus pandemic, we will need a metaphysical pandemic, a unification of all people under the all-embracing sky of which we will never be able to escape. We are, and will continue to be, part of this Earth. We are, and will continue to be, mortal and fragile. So let us become citizens of this Earth, cosmopolitans in a metaphysical pandemic. Everything else will be the end of us, and no virologist will be able to save us’ (Markus Gabriel, https://www.uni-bonn.de/news/we-need-a-metaphysical-pandemic).
social-contract exchange of educational-philosophical independence for safe anchoring in one acclaimed philosophy or trend.

Thus, two distinct, though inextricably connected, international academic communities – the philosophical-educational and the philosophical – are sometimes in a mutually protective relationship of co(i)mmunity – if I may twist Sloterdijk’s (2011) term. Philosophy of education often hosts selected philosophers selectively, reverently and receptively, immunizing them to critique. Authoritative, ever new or renewed, eminent philosophical voices assist philosophers of education to secure their own immunity and academic visibility. This may be enacted (or mimicked) by claiming an ‘un-masked’ philosopher’s – Michel Foucault’s – authority to remind educators and philosophers of education how Foucault cautioned philosophy about its own immunization through eponymity. Somewhat ironically, this pandemic, a time of masks, has made such operations of eponymous, that is, unmasked, philosophies even more visible. Public interventions of unmasked philosophers become immune to critique by the weight attached to their name: ‘A name makes reading too easy’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 321), said Foucault in his ‘Masked Philosopher,’ and with this he associated a series of consequences: ‘Hence a sort of anxiety that finds expression in innumerable symptoms, some funny, some less so. […] Hence, too, the feeling among the critics that they will not be heard unless they shout louder and pull a rabbit out of the hat each week. Hence, too, a pseudopoliticization that masks, beneath the need to wage an “ideological struggle” or to root out “dangerous thoughts,” a deep-seated anxiety that one will not be heard or read’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 324).

However, my immediate, epistemically negative response (‘I have no idea!’) to the above question does not mean either to trivialize it or to render contradictory my engagement with it. In fact, I will not engage directly with the question but, rather, with its logical condition. The logical condition of this very important question is that extreme circumstances task educators (and philosophers) differently. That is, this question logically presupposes that the pandemic invites another philosophy of education, one that ‘speaks to the care, critique and collective responsibility’ that an unprecedented, exceptional situation demands. Has the pre-Covid-19 situation not demanded a philosophy of education of care, critique and collective responsibility? Has the pre-Covid-19 world had the luxury of requiring no such philosophy of education? What is new in the demands that the virus makes on philosophy (of
education, of pandemic, and of various other ofs)? In other words, the special issue question concerns two interconnected and daunting questions of philosophical-educational and epochal self-understanding (Selbstverständigung): What visit does education (and its philosophy) pay to the world? And what is the epoch\(^2\) that invites a different educational-philosophical visitation?

I begin with ‘epoch’ and ‘epoche.’\(^3\) In Greek, *epoche* denotes both ‘era’ and ‘bracketing, suspension, stop.’ Pandemic events are amongst the extreme circumstances that make this semantic ambiguity most operative because they mark a distinct and uncharacteristic period of time and they stop, change or defer our routine practices. Such events challenge and suspend many of our certainties, while inciting more intense reflection on the times we live in. *Zeitdiagnosen*, diagnoses of the times, are followed by prognoses, prescriptions and remedial measures (interestingly, all medical metaphors). If ‘the seventeenth century was a period of crises of mortality, while the eighteenth witnessed the mortality of crises’; and if modern optimism ‘was allegedly born from the death of disaster’ (Gordon, 1997, p. 67), while twentieth century postmodern disillusionment emerged inter alia from the devastating number of the dead of two world wars, where is the current drawing us now? Successive and concurrent twenty-first century crises (all along with crises that remained invisible due to being experienced by anonymized others) undermined the millennial scholarly confidence about supra-national operations/ formations being shaped up and helping the world shape up.

The new pandemic crisis involves an epochal world-understanding as exceptional temporality and bracketing of what has long passed for the proper human life. This is reflected in the ‘until’ that is so often uttered to demarcate a period of waiting whose discourse operates in ‘paradise lost’ and ‘paradise regained’ idioms: ‘Until we start living again like human beings,’ ‘getting our life back,’ ‘returning to reality,’\(^4\) etc: what counts as living like a human being, what is this bracketing of humanity to which the virus has existentially exposed us? The irony may be that, in some respects,

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\(^2\) Both derive from the Greek *epoch*.* On the variations of the meaning of epoch see [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epoch](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epoch)

\(^3\) On epoche as suspension of judgment see [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epoche](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epoche)

\(^4\) The contrast of nightmare and reality exposes the liberal crypto-utopianization of the real by revealing how much ideality liberalism invests in the notion of the real. Public statements, global viral exchanges, etc., idealize the real/reality to paradoxical, even contradictory, effect, given that, typically, liberal-anti-utopian perspectives used to contrast the ideal and the real to disparage the former.
we may or could have now started living like ‘real’ human beings, that is, as beings more aware of their individual and collective vulnerability, more determined to do something for the sake of others, beings whose confinement and limitation of choices opens them up to other choices, previously downplayed or ignored in times of imagined omnipotence. In fun-loving cultures where a valued and unquestioned imperative is ‘get a life!’ and ‘have fun!’ not having the standardized, praised kind of daily life, not having what has passed for ‘fun,’ may entail not ascetic self-denial but an exercise in alternative modes of existing and in alternative meanings of happiness. Exiled in our own home, in the solitude that suspends the time of exaggerated autonomy and economy, we may realize that happiness resists privatization. Ultimately, we could become beings at last aware that nature responds with a sigh of relief to human withdrawal and to limited action and movement.

However, reality is more complex than Antonin Artaud’s (2013, p. 15) assertion that ‘once the plague is established in a city, normal social order collapses.’ At least in our epochal pandemic much continues unabated. And much reveals continuities rather than assumed, and for decades now celebrated, ruptures. For, paradoxically, against moralist readings of it as a blessing in disguise that may set unequal humanity at last on the right track, the pandemic is no equalizer. Even if it were an equalizer, the equality of death is the most unwanted. But Covid-19 is no equalizer and we are not in the same boat. On the contrary, the pandemic has exacerbated another division of the global We, another ‘pathos of distance’: the category of the elderly and the vulnerable. Inclusion in this social category is based on health, and on what age does to health, yet intensifies the divisive effects of other criteria of stratification. Divisions of global and local We’s remain intact and are expected to worsen post-Covid-19.

The pandemic affirms the nation-state and visits countries, in some of which natural selection reigns. One’s exposure to the virus greatly depends on the existential condition (sometimes accidental) of one’s being a citizen of a social-Darwinist

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5 I disagree with Markus Gabriel’s view that “all people are equal before the virus” https://www.uni-bonn.de/news/we-need-a-metaphysical-pandemic.
6 Madonna’s video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UYU4Slh34I] filming her in her bath tub stating that the Corona virus is the great equalizer deconstructs itself in many ways, one being that, not only the global “We” is not in the same boat, but most of this “We” is certainly not, and cannot be, in such a bath tub. More importantly, various statistics have already started disproving such an apolitical wishful thinking: see, for instance, related BBC reports https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52574931.
7 On how I use this term, see Papastephanou (2019).
country whose policy of herd immunity and of the survival of the fittest detects in the virus a major opportunity for a gruesome twist of redistribution of wealth. Early in the pandemic outbreak the implicit assumption of some governments was that thousands will die but those who will obtain immunity will also have the economic-political immunity to enjoy a larger share of the money that will thus be saved. This money was accumulated inter alia by the elderly and vulnerable having throughout their lives fulfilled the role of the tax payer in the name of which all sorts of policies had been legitimized. The sacrosanct notion of the tax payer now collapses as elderly and/or vulnerable tax payers do not count and, dying in nursing homes, are even denied the last right/rite of inclusion, a place in official statistics on the number of deaths.

But the pandemic, against its connotations of universality, is thankfully Westphalian: how countries and corresponding cultures, body-politics, treat this category of the population still varies. I say ‘thankfully’ because, had it been otherwise, i.e., had we had the world state that Kant justly loathed⁸ or the supra-national political configurations that roughly two decades ago millennial academia foretold and desired, given the global distributions of power then as now, the number of the dead would have been dreadfully higher. For, in the global culture, the imaginative reach of vision, mobilized beyond some liberal utopianizations of the existent as the ‘best possible world’ but still in fear of radical rethinking, stopped at the threshold of a ‘better world.’ That is, it went up to a degree, but to what degree? The degree is grammatical, namely, it involves the positive, comparative and superlative of good, better, best, fit, fitter, fittest, and has its own politics. The distribution of the power of utopian grammar reflects a major inconsistency: whilst the world can only be imagined as, at best, becoming better, the subject worthy of survival in a culture of ‘fitness’ is the fittest.

Herd immunity was not suggested by politicians but by ‘disinterested’ (hence politically immunized) scientists. In this pandemic, the asymptomatic is most threatening. What passes for healthy, uncontaminated by politics, lowers the defenses and self-protective management of people caught off-guard. And this not only with respect to direct academic complicity in pandemic policies but also with respect to

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⁸ The vision of a world state or of supra-national, strong decision making is now known as institutional cosmopolitanism. Kant (1991) condemned it as soulless despotism and favoured more federal rather than global-state mechanisms for promoting international right and legal-cosmopolitan justice.
less implicated, even otherwise praiseworthy, interventions. Many academics of many disciplines unquestioningly respond to public hopes of returning to our pre-Covid-19 daily normalcy, as if all were fine then, proving right Albert Camus’ (2006, p. 155) aphorism that ‘the habit of despair is worse than despair itself.’ Many medical virologists virally and regularly ‘visit’ our home to tell us when we will come out of our home. In a global virtual setting of theatricality suffused with epidemic morbid glamour, many academics claim part of people’s allotted spaces (to degrees large, narrow, or even suffocating, depending on one’s socio-politico-existential placements that divide the global We). They find abode in a small corner of the cyberspace, seize a moment of televised time, eventually to inhabit our minds. Social media excel in this struggle for a niche in the public mindset. Urban silence was not met with media silence. All kinds of experts tell us how to: think about the pandemic, protect ourselves, cook, keep our bodies fit, avoid the infectious sadness that spreads all over the world and keep happy. Some philosophers-virologists confine the philosophical analysis of the new situation to the biopolitical narrative or aspire to be the proper and faithful (post-)Foucauldian interpreter of biopolitics. Some have even theorized the pandemic as a political construction of calculated panic and condemned the lockdown, explaining it away as yet another nation-state blow against (philosophically cherished) border-crossing. It takes only some reading of some viral philosophers to realize how wrong Plato got it all when he dreamt of the philosopher-educator-legislator becoming the ruler of the city.

What is the visitation of education (and of its philosophy) in such epochs? Like most other visitations it is ambiguous. Despite being epochs of borderless destruction and death, pandemic eras also host or mobilize creative forces and reshape life, economy, thought and the quotidian. Therefore, the distinct poetics of pandemics/epidemics can be, and has been, theorized as disruption and possibility. However, in my view, epidemics/pandemics share this exceptionality with education (and its philosophy) and thus contagion is not quite the new, sudden and eruptive force of an unprecedented medical event that tears the fabric of daily normalcy.

A clarifying remark first: pandemics/epidemics, contamination, contagion, plagues and cognates are currently understood as medical metaphors. That is, they seem to be extracted from their supposedly original, literal medical setting and transferred to other hosting environments such as the philosophical. Against the assumption that
epidēmia and pandēmia are medical tropes, they can be theorized as by definition political metaphors. The Greek original meaning of epidemics is more minimal, yet richer, than that of its later (after Hippocratic Epidemics’ mobility and dissemination in various places and times9) conceptual history of medicalization. Epidēmia denoted kinetics, visits, visitations; the term ‘literally means “coming to (epi) a community (dēmos)”’ (Pormann, 2008, p. 249), even returning home. The derivative term ‘epidēmiourgoi’ signified a political institution of visitation, that of the archontes (rulers) sent by Doric metropolises to pay a yearly visit to their colonies. But epidēmia also connoted stasis, having an abode, staying in home (country).10 As for ‘pandēmia’ and ‘pandēmos,’ they mean total inclusion: all people, that which belongs to everybody, the communal, the universal, the general, even the accessible to everybody (Stamatakos, 2002, p. 735). Epidemic and pandemic share the reference to dēmos, the body-politic, and concern degrees of inclusion and positioning in space. Semantically endemic in these terms is the political, not the medical. This is not about seeking an original home, a proper literal setting for pandemics and replacing the medical with the political; it is not about a reversal that leaves prior assumptions of ‘authentic’ and ‘literal’ linguistic contexts unaffected. De-medicalizing tropes of contagion does not undo their figurative character; nor does it try to deny that there exist in the world extreme circumstances (some of them medical) that shake us and (may) redirect thought and action.

What’s the purpose, then, of de-medicalizing epidemics/pandemics? It enables another insight into education. Epidemics/pandemics could also be the very metaphor, the constitutive metaphor, of education qua exchange and transmission of various ‘ofs,’ of knowledge, values, visions, etc. The medicalization of epidemics/pandemics has, as a historical political operation, diversified our idioms of mobility and stasis. But it has also had as side-effects (another medicalized metaphor) our overlooking the echoes of transference and relay effect, the infectiousness, rootedness and rootlessness, localization and universality that accompany education/learning and

9 Hippocratic Epidemics ‘fascinated generations of physicians, philosophers, and philologists’. Along with Galen’s commentary, it was ‘transmitted into Syriac and Arabic’ (Pormann, 2008, p. 248) and traveled from the ancient Greek world to the Arabic, Medieval space and time and had a long history of influencing European medical literature and clinical practice.
10 For all these variations of meanings I refer to Giannis Stamatakos’ dictionary (2002, p. 367). Epidēmios was a political term, as the example of civil war (also known as stasis, for stasis does not only mean ‘stop’, ‘pause’, but also, sedition) being in antiquity termed ‘epidēmios polemos’ shows. Epidēmios also meant popular, fashionable, liked by the people.
their philosophy when metaphorized as pandemic/epidemic. Education is epidemic/pandemic in endemically involving the political constellation: demos, home, universality, visit, transmission, metaphor, kinesis and stasis. Education has local and universal(isable) moments. It negotiates right movement and pause, the public and the private, the old and new, the one and the many. It turns the utopian grammar of degrees into aims (its own and society’s), it hosts and exchanges, it includes, excludes and allocates places. It always does this, regardless of medical emergencies.

Borrowing Artaud’s analogies of theatre and plague,11 I illustrate my metaphorizing education as epi/pandemic by masking, encrypting the theatrical and replacing it with education as follows. ‘Theatre [education], like the plague,’ ‘unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre [education], but life’ (Artaud, 2013, p. 21). Artaud’s causality of darkness incriminates life and it may be true in too general an order. Its masked essentialism obscures another causality, that of how thought has spoken to the “care, critique and collective responsibility” that any era demands.

For, thought quite often transmits itself to others by succumbing to the political infections that it seeks to cure. Plato, the Ur-mobile philosopher, tried to spread his dreamworld, educate other spatialities and install his ideal utopian city elsewhere. Having repeatedly failed, he resorted to writing down utopian details in his last work, the Laws. Medicalizing the political or politicizing the medical Plato identified acquisitiveness as a disease, mainly of the rulers (Laws III691a1-b2; X906c2), and wanted his legislator to announce ‘the acceptable limits of wealth and poverty’ so that the state could avoid ‘the greatest plague [nosēma] of all,’ that of civil war [stasis] caused by ‘extreme poverty and wealth’ (LawsV744d-e). These ideas were uttered by Plato’s main protagonist of the Laws, who Plato anonymized and presented only under the political designation ‘Athenian,’ which Cicero thought that it masked Plato himself.12 Elsewhere in the Laws, the Ur-masked philosopher/legislator is transmuted

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11 I do so while asking the reader to keep in view that de-medicalizing epidemics/pandemics/the plague allows multiple readings of the extracts from Artaud who, it should be noted, resisted medicalized idioms in his own way (on this, see Garner [2006]: ‘That “The Theater and the Plague”’ also resists the medicalized language it depends on underscores Artaud’s profoundly ambivalent attitude toward the body as organic entity and toward medicine as a science of the flesh. With the dual operation of this ambivalence, germ theory becomes for Artaud a field of repudiation, transcendence, and uneasy influence’ [p. 3]).

12 For general references to the issue of the Athenian Stranger’s anonymity and various positions of it, see https://www.iep.utm.edu/pla-laws/
into an Ur-colonialist, recommending a purifying cure. The medication (pharmakon) that the legislator (nomothetēs) should use for those who are incurable (aniatoi) and too dangerous for the city is death or exile; for less severe cases, such as those who have nothing (mē echontes), Plato recommends a milder, biopolitical, purification (katharmos) of the city: ‘those who, due to shortage (aporia) of food, show themselves ready to follow their leaders in attacking the property of the rich should be seen as a natural plague (nosēma empefykoti) of the city and should be transferred, in the friendliest possible way, to what euphemistically (di’euphēmias) can be named a colony’ (Laws V 735e4–736a2, my trans). The Ur-injustice of depriving people of their abode, uprooting, ousting them (as menacing to order), thus making them uproot or subjugate others, had a long future ahead, as colonial euphemisms multiplied virally and found occasional, implicit or explicit philosophical and educational support. The subversively positive side-effect, namely, that some of those people eventually made possible for themselves another future, more independent, more sovereign, perhaps even more aware than the metropolitan of the irremediable injustice, usually comes too late and in no way alleviates or mitigates the responsibility of the inaugural, repulsive ‘cure.’

Education and its contagion often get in each other’s way. Hence they always require care, critique and collective responsibility (but ‘of what kind?’ remains unknown), especially so in times that pass for asymptomatic. It is then that another education should become pandemic, for and of all people, that is, universal in a non-toxic way, while always alert to the toxic lurking everywhere, even in the very effort to identify the toxic and repel it. And what could its philosophy be? Virulent like Artaud’s theatre which is known to attack its spectators from all sides, educational philosophy may prepare the pandemic educational superlative by adopting an epidemic tone. Attacking realities like a virus, philosophy, educational or other, should operate with(in) limits: to what degree destruction of an organism’s (a state’s and a world’s community) order is necessary so that the body will recover and acquire immunity and from what point on the viral is lethal or recruits processes that themselves involve logics of herd (co)immunity.

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13 See, for instance, how Garner (2006, p. 10) theorizes such an attack of Artaud’s theatre on the spectator.
Education and philosophy may need operations of un-masking to attend to intellectual undercurrents (e.g., unfashionable thoughts, anonymous, silenced, ignored, forgotten or masked) and counterfactual possibilities (e.g., the occasional presence of a child playing in the streets, animals walking in cities at last empty of cars). Just as ‘the plague takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures,’ ‘theatre [education and, hopefully, its philosophy] also takes gestures and develops them to the limit.’ ‘Just like the plague,’ education and its philosophy re-forge ‘the links between what does and does not exist, between the virtual nature of the possible and the material nature of existence’ (Artaud, 2013, p. 18). For Artaud, ‘the effect of the theatre [education and its philosophy] is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world’s lies’ (Artaud, 2013, p. 21). This view may be too modern since its tone is overly optimist, too reliant on a mythic authenticity of being, sanitizing and strikingly suspect of pretentious knowledge and of moralistically depicting the lie as unhealthy. Yet, when it is not too modern, it is occasionally true.

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