

## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 18, No 1 (2021)

Historical Review / La Revue Historique

The *H*istorical Review  
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XVIII (2021)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques  
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research  
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

**“Normal Children” and “Sick Feelings” in Greek Pedagogical Discourse during the Interwar Period, 1911–1939**

*Despina Karakatsani, Pavlina Nikolopoulou*

Copyright © 2022



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Karakatsani, D., & Nikolopoulou, P. (2022). “Normal Children” and “Sick Feelings” in Greek Pedagogical Discourse during the Interwar Period, 1911–1939. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 18(1), 93–110. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/historicalReview/article/view/31406>

## “NORMAL CHILDREN” AND “SICK FEELINGS” IN GREEK PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD, 1911–1939

*Despina Karakatsani and Pavlina Nikolopoulou*

---

*Abstract:* In the early twentieth century, pedagogy, both as theory and practice, was revisited under the influence of two important reform movements. Pedagogy, a newly emerging discipline, established itself as an academic field and placed children, and their needs and experiences, at the core of its research. In Greece, the attempt to study the physical and mental development of children was closely linked with the attainment of national goals. This article looks into the attempt of interwar Greek educators to delineate and demarcate “normality” and “morbidity” with regard to the development and expression of feelings during childhood. We examine how contemporary sociopolitical conditions, as well as eugenics, influenced not only the scientific discourse on “pathological” emotions but also the ways a new signification model of “normal” and “anomalous” child emotions impacted public discourse on education and the development of the educational system in Greece.

---

### *Pedagogy: A “National Science” at the University of Athens*

In 1923, the only chair of pedagogy in Greece set up the Laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy in Athens with the aim to serve, according to Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, holder of the chair, the attempts to establish a “Greek pedagogy”. Exarchopoulos aspired to develop a pedagogical system that was adjusted to the needs of Greek children that would also serve the nation’s needs. He believed that such a system should be founded on the knowledge of the distinctive physical and mental faculties of the Greek “race” and that pedagogy, a recently established science in Greece, ought to rest on extensive pedagogical research; the latter would provide the scientific knowledge about the physical and mental condition of Greek children as well as their most significant qualities.

Our contribution looks into the attempts by Exarchopoulos and other interwar Greek educators to delineate and demarcate “normality” and “morbidity” with regard to the development and expression of emotions during childhood. We examine how contemporary sociopolitical conditions and eugenic theory influenced the pedagogical discourse on “pathological” emotions as well as the attempts to define “normal” and “abnormal” childrens’ feelings.

In the 1910s, an interclass alliance, with the urban business class in charge, which retained a stronghold among the lower middle class as well as the landless farmers, stepped up demands for urban modernisation and political change. This alliance found in Eleftherios Venizelos its political advocate.<sup>1</sup> In 1911, Venizelos proceeded to amend the constitution, introducing changes to tertiary education as well. In this regard, a new charter of the University of Athens was endorsed, signalling the gradual dominance of expertise at the institution. The turn to expertise, apart from the university's effort to follow closely international scientific developments, was linked with the state's choice to strengthen certain branches of economic life<sup>2</sup> and organise a modern administrative infrastructure along the Western model.<sup>3</sup>

The University of Athens, the country's sole university until 1926, was the only field wherein scientific discourse developed and spread during the interwar period; besides, it contributed significantly to the emergence and development of new scientific fields in the university, among them pedagogy.<sup>4</sup> Professors who held the newly established chairs competed with one another for the recognition of the new fields and the demarcation of their boundaries;<sup>5</sup> at the same time, they attempted to introduce new disciplines within the ideological context of the university.

Since its inception, the university had acquired an explicitly political and national character, and as an autonomous carrier of ideology it was linked with the spread of national ideology and the raising of national awareness.<sup>6</sup> Under its influence, scientists from different fields sought to establish, each in their own area of expertise, a "national science", which was expected to serve national goals. As a result, an alliance of fields, among them the new discipline of pedagogy, was established with the main aim to forge and protect national identity.<sup>7</sup>

It was not a coincidence that the chair of pedagogy was re-established, after breaking away from philosophy, at an historic juncture when the need to

---

<sup>1</sup> George Th. Mavrogordatos, "Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός," in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, ed. George Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadziiosif (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Kostas Gavroglou, Vangelis Karamanolakis and Chaido Barkoula, *Το Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών (1837–1937) και η ιστορία του* (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2014), 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 233–36.

<sup>5</sup> Efi Avdela, "Εισαγωγή: Η ανεξίτηλη διαφορά: λόγοι για τη φυλή στην Ελλάδα," in *Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα*, ed. Efi Avdela et al. (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2017), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Constantinos Th. Dimaras, "Ιδεολογήματα στην αφετηρία του ελληνικού Πανεπιστημίου," in *Πανεπιστήμιο: Ιδεολογία και παιδεία. Ιστορική διάσταση και προοπτικές* (Athens: Istoriko Archeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1989), 1:43–54.

<sup>7</sup> Eynthymios Papataxiarchis, "Μεταμορφώσεις του ανθρωπολογικού φυλετισμού: οργανικές μεταφορές και ανθρωπολογικός λόγος στη μεσοπολεμική Ελλάδα," in Avdela et al., *Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα*, 56.

reconstruct and strengthen the state mechanism was put forward; in this way, the state would attain its national goals, whether these were territorial claims in the Ottoman Empire or the country’s reconstruction following the Greco–Turkish War of 1922 and the demise of the Great Idea.

Pedagogy was called on to propose rational and effective educational practices, which were to be implemented in schools across the country. These practices were expected to contribute to the assimilation of the national ideology; the instruction of a citizen who would be useful to themselves and their nation; the internalisation of a common culture, which teachers, trained in the same curricula, language and morals, were responsible for instilling in children,<sup>8</sup> conveying to them a sense of citizenship, their differences notwithstanding.<sup>9</sup> The education of the national state wished to offer its future citizens a common framework of concepts and references so as to foster communication and draw a line between acceptable and nonacceptable attitudes and behaviours. It was expected that children would be instructed to distinguish which sensitivities ranked high in the scale of social acceptability; which feelings were acceptable to display; which ones were considered “normal” or “pathological”; which emotional reactions were deemed desirable and were expected to manifest themselves; and which ones were seen as morbid and thus were rejected. It was a preliminary instruction of the children’s emotional world.<sup>10</sup>

### *A Positivist Scientific Model for the Exploration of a Child’s “Nature”*

In the context of early twentieth-century Greek nationalism, Exarchopoulos aspired to set up a pedagogical system based on international pedagogical movements yet adapted to the needs of Greek children and intended to serve national goals. Such a system, he believed, was to be founded on the in-depth knowledge of the distinctive physical and mental traits of the Greek race, and the new science of pedagogy in Greece was to be founded on extensive research which would provide the scientific knowledge about the physical and mental condition of Greek children as well as their most eminent features. The establishment of the Laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy, almost ten years after the establishment of the chair, served the creation of such a “national science”.

---

<sup>8</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Ποίος τις πρέπει να είναι ο διδάσκαλος* (Athens: Avgi Apostolopoulou, 1907), 139, 150.

<sup>9</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Εισαγωγή εις την Παιδαγωγικήν* (Athens: D. and P. Dimitrakos, 1923), 215–16.

<sup>10</sup> Ute Frevert, “Le genre et l’histoire: l’exemple de la honte,” in *Histoire des Émotions: De la fin du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Alain Corbain, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello (Paris: Seuil, 2017), 98–116.

In the early twentieth century, the wish to approach pedagogical issues scientifically resulted in various research movements converging on a movement that aspired to combine various studies on children, carried out by different scientific fields, and incorporate them into a positivist scientific model, thus setting up a complete science of the child: paedology.<sup>11</sup> The request for a complete knowledge of a child's nature and life, which led to the birth of the new science, was not made by researchers that focused primarily on the child, namely by education researchers; instead, it was made by those working in the fields of medicine, criminology, physiology, biology and ethnology who had studied various aspects of children's reality, albeit through their distinctive scientific lenses.<sup>12</sup> The paedology movement, which attempted to study the biological, psychological and social dimensions of the child, finally evolved into an autonomous discipline.<sup>13</sup> It held up research methods employed in the positive sciences as the absolute model for researchers to adhere to.<sup>14</sup> They aspired to measure every aspect of the educational procedure with the use of quantitative research methods, and express the results in figures whose subjectivity could not be disputed. Quantitative research methods were idealised,<sup>15</sup> as it was thought that positivist knowledge would lead to a "subjective" and "neutral" scientific truth.<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, laboratories of psychology and pedagogy in Europe and North America laid the foundations for the development of experimental pedagogy and developed guidelines that educational research would follow for decades. Many other countries also instituted laboratories.<sup>17</sup> The experimental studies carried out in these laboratories were based on an exclusively empirical, quantitative method. Ernst Meumann (1862–1915) and Wilhelm August Lay (1862–1926) in Germany formulated extensive pedagogical theories based on this method.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Debesse and Gaston Mialaret, *Traité des sciences pédagogiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 2:368–69.

<sup>12</sup> Edouard Claparède, *Psychologie de l'enfant et pédagogie expérimentale* (Geneva: Kundig, 1916), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Depaepe, "Η πειραματική έρευνα στην εκπαίδευση," in *Εισαγωγή στις επιστήμες της εκπαίδευσης*, ed. Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly (Athens: Metaixmio, 2004), 49.

<sup>14</sup> Vassiliki Theodorou and Despina Karakatsani, *Ιατρική επίβλεψη και κοινωνική πρόνοια για το παιδί τις πρώτες δεκαετίες του 20ού αιώνα* (Athens: Dionikos, 2010), 115, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Emmanouil Lambadarios, *Παιδολογία και σχολική υγιεινή* (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1916), 6–7.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Cousinet, *Η νέα αγωγή*, trans. G.A. Vasdeki (Athens: ΕΣΕΒ, 1956), 68–69.

<sup>17</sup> Claparède, *Psychologie de l'enfant*, 46–97.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Reble, *Ιστορία της Παιδαγωγικής*, trans. Theofanis Chatzistefanidis and Sofia Chatzistefanidi (Athens: Papadimas, 1996), 538.

Nikolaos Exarchopoulos (1874–1960), the most important educator among those who held the chair of pedagogy at the University of Athens in the twentieth century, but also Dimitris Glinos (1882–1943), Exarchopoulos’ greatest opponent with regard to Greek interwar educational policy, were among the important Greek scientists influenced by Meumann’s work.<sup>19</sup> These two scholars shaped the course of interwar educational reform. Their well-documented dispute over the issue of language, the pedagogical school of thinking and political references reflect the dichotomy of Greek pedagogical and educational thinking in the early twentieth century. Despite their deep disagreement over issues of educational policy, when the formulation of a valid pedagogical theory was at stake, their views converged; indeed, the influence of the scientific movement that sought to found pedagogy on positivism,<sup>20</sup> a movement widely embraced by Greek educators during this period, was discernible in their discourse.

Our study focuses mainly on Exarchopoulos, who was appointed to the country’s first chair of pedagogy in 1912 and held it for more than 30 years, exerting great influence on pedagogical theory and practice, and on the development of pedagogical studies, in Greece. He was mostly concerned with the scientificity of the new field. He sought to establish pedagogy in academia as an autonomous science, on a par with other disciplines. His aim was to establish in Greece an objective science with regard to its research methods, and therefore reliable in terms of its research findings. Influenced by the movements of experimental pedagogy and paedology, he set up the Laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy, the Experimental School and the training course for in-service public teachers; all three institutions facilitated the chair of pedagogy in its attempt to produce scientific pedagogical knowledge and contributed towards enhancing the prestige of the new science. These institutions remained in place for many years, with some of them surviving to this day.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Dimitris Glinos, a fervent advocate of the demotic language, was one of the pioneers in the educational reforms of 1913 and 1917 in Greece which attempted to establish demotic as the language of education. Glinos was long-standing key figure in the Committee for Education (Εκπαιδευτικός Όμιλος) since 1911. In 1936, he was elected a Communist Party MP. During the German occupation, he actively participated in the establishment of the National Liberation Front (EAM). Philippos Iliou, ed. *Δημήτρης Γληνός: Άπαντα* (Athens: Themelio, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Information about his views on the production of valid pedagogical knowledge was derived from the notes he made for the courses of pedagogy he offered in the school for in-service secondary teacher training; he served as its director from 1912 to 1916. For these notes, see Glinos’ Archive. We also used published sources from Iliou, *Δημήτρης Γληνός*.

<sup>21</sup> Pavlina Nikolopoulou, “Η πορεία του επιστημονικού κλάδου της Παιδαγωγικής προς την αυτονόμηση και οι διαδικασίες εδραίωσης του στο ακαδημαϊκό πεδίο: Το παράδειγμα

In the context of the rationalistic regeneration of the world, as envisioned by the rising urban class, notwithstanding the classicist tradition of the Faculty of Philosophy, the conditions for the development of the positivist model of science, as reflected in Experimental Pedagogy, were favourable at the University of Athens. Besides, during this period, the positivist trends in the study and research of other scientific fields, already established or in the process of being established at the University of Athens, were strengthened.<sup>22</sup> During the same period, in parallel with Exarchopoulos, Theofilos Voreas, professor of philosophy, set up a new institution at the University of Athens – the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology – which was linked with new psychology subjects and tutorials introduced to the syllabus.<sup>23</sup> Ever since their undergraduate years, the two professors had followed parallel scientific careers, adopted positivism and collaborated so as to lay the foundations for the subjects of pedagogy and psychology in Greek academia.<sup>24</sup>

Exarchopoulos believed the greatest accomplishments of the pedagogical movement in the early twentieth century were the development of new scientific research methods; and the shift in the emphasis of pedagogical thinking and research. Observation and experiments were at the time the main scientific research methods, and the child was placed at the centre of research in new pedagogy. He believed that the experimental study of the mental and physical “nature” of the child, as well as the conditions under which the child worked, would produce scientific knowledge; in turn, this knowledge would lead to the solving of pedagogical problems; to this end, he deemed the contribution of paedology to be crucial.

According to Exarchopoulos, research on the child’s physical and mental development attempted to define the stages of the child’s development and the course it took at each stage; the distinctive features of each stage and their differences; the laws that governed the course of natural development; the course of the physical development of the child as a whole, and the course of the development of separate organs and physiological functions; the relationship between physical and mental development; that is, the relationship between

---

του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών” (PhD diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2014), 107–11.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgos Paschos, “Η πολιτειολογική σκέψη στην Ελλάδα κατά την περίοδο 1930–35: Α.Ι. Σβώλος, Η.Γ. Κυριακόπουλος, Δ.Σ. Βεζανής,” in Mavrogordatos and Hadziiosif, *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, 345–68.

<sup>23</sup> Gavroglou, Karamanolakis and Barkoula, *Το Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> Theofilos Voreas, “Λόγος περί του έργου του Νικολάου Εξαρχόπουλου,” *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 4 (1929): 137.



the development of the physical organs, the physiological functions and the mental capacities; and the way "mental capacities" such as sensory perception, observation, associations, imagination, memory, cognition, language, attention, emotions, will, etc., developed. The research attempted to define the onset of each function, its course of development, its intensity at each age stage as well as the time when each mental skill appeared at its most intense; the interdependence and interaction between the various mental abilities; the "normal" child type at each age stage; possible observable deviations from the "normal type", especially from the two main types; that is, "above" and "below normal" deviation.<sup>25</sup> According to the reports on the pedological research carried out on children of both sexes across the age spectrum from various social classes and diverse family backgrounds from 1923 to 1938, which Exarchopoulos submitted to the Academy of Athens in his capacity as the laboratory's director, first on the tenth and later on the fifteenth anniversary of the laboratory's operation, there were 94,394 measurements conducted on 8,706 children whose age spanned from birth to 22 years. The measurements were carried out at the Laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy as well as at selected schools of various types. One of the aims of these measurements was to draw up model tables of averages to present the "normal scale" of various physical dimensions and mental functions.<sup>26</sup>

In 1932, Exarchopoulos published a book on the mental particularities of children. In it, he argued that a new scientific discipline, *a new science*, had emerged a few years before: "the Psychology of individual differences". Compared to "the General Psychology", which investigated mental phenomena with the aim to discover the general laws that regulated human mental functions common to all people, the new discipline explored the differences and particularities in the mental life of individuals and groups as well as the factors that contributed to their development. According to his writings, this change of direction in psychological research expressed the wish to regulate social life on the basis of scientific findings. The progress of positive sciences resulted in a radical change in the conditions of both social and individual life, and raised optimistic expectations that the findings of other sciences could further contribute to the efficient regulation of social relations. The general international trend towards the study of individual

---

<sup>25</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Σωματολογία του παιδός* (Athens: D. and P. Dimitrakos, 1928), 12–14.

<sup>26</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, "Επιστημονικά έρευναι γενόμεναι εν τω εργαστηρίω πειραματικής παιδαγωγικής του πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών κατά τα πρώτα δέκα έτη από της ιδρύσεως αυτού 1923–1933," *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 9 (1934): 8–45; Exarchopoulos, *Επιστημονικά έρευναι εν τω εργαστηρίω πειραματικής Παιδαγωγικής του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών κατά τα 15 πρώτα έτη της λειτουργίας αυτού, 1923–1938* (Athens: s.n., 1938).



mental differences and the adjustment of the school workload to the individuality of each pupil, were closely linked, he noted, with the belief that knowledge of the individuality of each person, as well as of their distinctive capacities and skills, would allow them to direct themselves towards, and take up in the working and social fields, a position for which they were competent. This, in turn, would contribute to the more effective regulation of social life.<sup>27</sup>

As the Swiss psychologist and neurologist Edouard Claparède (1873–1940) noted, illness, imbalance and the abnormal function of the mental mechanism offered scientists better insight into the normal condition. Discovering the changes brought about in the individual's mental state by the *paralysis of any function*, researchers were able to gain better insights into the way this function impacted the mental state and into the importance this function held for it.<sup>28</sup>

Twenty years later, Exarchopoulos himself noted that during the interwar period the study of children's mental deviations lagged behind in countries under authoritarian regimes due to their unwillingness to deal with the welfare of children who suffered physically or mentally; they were mostly interested and invested all their energy in healthy children, *the naturally able-bodied*, who could prove useful for society in the long run.<sup>29</sup> In this context, he added that during the first years of the laboratory's operation – especially from 1924 to 1928 – research on the mental development of Greek children turned to the study of cognitive skills;<sup>30</sup> it was only later, during the last years of his academic career, that he started looking into the “emotional life”.<sup>31</sup>

His discourse to describe deviation is revealing. Any child that deviated in any of their physical or mental functions from the median, devised as a result of measurements and statistics, any child that fell at the high or low end of the scale, was not characterised as normal, but as *abnormal*, as *anomalous*.

Deviation from what was defined as the *normal mental condition* was characterised as a *mental anomaly* and could appear in all aspects of a child's mental life; in cognition, emotions, impulses and will, as well as in its moral and social tendencies. The terminology used to denote deviation is characteristic. The children were *burdened with anomalies*, displayed *child perversions*, their *mental development*

<sup>27</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά διαφοραί των παιδων και η διάγνωσις αυτών* (Athens: Dimitrakos, 1932), 2–3.

<sup>28</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά ανωμαλίες των παιδων* (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1953), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά ανωμαλίες*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, “Η έννοια της νοημοσύνης,” *Πρακτικά Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 6 (1931): 1.

<sup>31</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Επιστημονικά έρευναι*, 5.

was incomplete, and they were ill.<sup>32</sup> The child's mental condition was mediated through the specific social conceptual framework and was signified accordingly. Deviation was temporally and spatially defined and was socially determined.<sup>33</sup>

### *Pedagogy and the "Refinement of the Human Race"*

Exarchopoulos noted that during the interwar years the tendency to achieve social prosperity and accomplish societal cultural goals on the basis of scientific findings spread fast. Knowledge of the laws that governed mental life was considered to be essential to gain deep insights into, assess and direct, with the aid of scientific psychology, human action in various fields of everyday life in the right direction.<sup>34</sup>

According to him, World War I made it clear that if states were to survive, they had to use all the mental moral and financial capacities existent in each nation. Each individual had to be used in the area in which they were most competent so as to reach their full potential; at the same time, opportunities should open up for those with special competences, that is, for the excellent.<sup>35</sup> Those with mental and physical defects were presented as a threat to society and the Greek nation. Exarchopoulos believed that a race needed healthy newborns in order to remain strong and robust. The quality, rather than the number, of offspring was crucial for the preservation of racial robustness.<sup>36</sup>

In his discourse, as well as in that of other disciplines in interwar Greece, race was signified within the nation, which lay at the very heart of the ideology and culture; it was through them that the race entered scientific discourse.<sup>37</sup> Racial theories were incorporated into nationalism and were put directly or indirectly in its service, a fact that defined their acceptable content and political impact.<sup>38</sup>

Exarchopoulos problematised the biogenetic parameters of the behaviour of the individual. For example, he perceived education had the capacity to contribute towards shaping desirable hereditary predispositions and traits in students. As such, it was a powerful instrument. These predispositions could be passed down from generation to generation; as a result, individuals whose inherent characteristics could make them more susceptible to the impact of

---

<sup>32</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά ανωμαλίες*, 1–5.

<sup>33</sup> Frevert, "Le genre et l'histoire," 100.

<sup>34</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά διαφοραί*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>37</sup> Papataxiarchis, *Μεταμορφώσεις του ανθρωπολογικού φυλετισμού*, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Avdela, "Εισαγωγή. Η ανεξίτηλη διαφορά," 39.

education were to be created in the long run. In this way, he believed that education could contribute to the improvement of the human race.<sup>39</sup>

The above view represents a misconception of the theory of evolution, which supported that acquired characteristics, developed during one's own life as a result of one's experiences, could be passed down to the next generation. Since the end of the nineteenth century, this view had gained currency in other scientific fields, such as criminology, and it was considered the main reason for the display of criminal behaviour.<sup>40</sup> In Exarchopoulos' case, this misleading reading of evolutionary theory led to an optimistic perception of the power of education.

Closely related with pedagogy, the new science of eugenics also aimed to improve the human race, Exarchopoulos noted in 1932. Like pedagogy, eugenics attempted to combat the physical and mental defects of the individual. In contrast to pedagogy, eugenics took preventive action. It attempted to stop the transference of hereditary defects to the young generation. Exarchopoulos referred to the positive effect that eugenics could have on the practice of education and argued that if the purpose of education is to guide the innate predispositions of the individual in socially desirable directions, eugenics could assist in intervening directly in the "nature" of the individual and ensuring that only socially acceptable characteristics are inherited. That is, to eliminate, with the help of eugenics, the socially unacceptable innate predispositions of individuals. Thus the task of education would be made immeasurably easier as the predispositions of children would now lead by their nature to the qualities and characteristics that society as a whole wanted its members to have. Such an approach would be "the most important step towards improving the young generation and in turn the human race as a whole".<sup>41</sup>

In the wake of World War I, the effort to set up eugenics as an autonomous scientific field was gradually abandoned internationally; yet eugenics gained access to the discourse and research programmes of other disciplines.<sup>42</sup> The University of Athens, where science, state administration and sociopolitical movements interacted, was an ideal access point for eugenics and allowed it to gain legitimisation. The mobility which characterised university studies, which was directed to a great extent towards Germany during this period, contributed to the

<sup>39</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Εισαγωγή*, 260–68.

<sup>40</sup> Efi Avdela, "Φυλετισμός και Ευγονική στην συγκρότηση της ελληνικής εγκληματολογίας: η περίπτωση του Κωνσταντίνου Γαρδίκου," in Avdela et al., *Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα*, 147.

<sup>41</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά διαφορά*, 77.

<sup>42</sup> Sevasti Trubeta, "Η επίδραση της φυλετικής υγιεινής στην Ιατρική Σχολή του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών κατά το Μεσοπόλεμο," in Avdela et al., *Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα*, 102.

spread of racial hygiene ideas from the German-speaking world to Greece. Their impact, however, was closely connected with the special conditions and power balance within the University of Athens and in no case was it a direct transference of the German model.<sup>43</sup> Both before and after the war, a milder version of eugenics, with an emphasis on the social welfare and hygiene of a backward population, was implemented in Greece, where even at the best of times state infrastructure was poor.<sup>44</sup> In our opinion, the relation of pedagogy with interwar eugenics in the University of Athens should be placed in this context. At the same time, it was linked with Greek nationalism; Exarchopoulos himself, as holder of the chair, contributed to the formulation and promotion of nationalism.

The nation had to be protected from "any anomalous individuals"; science, with its scientific methods and medical terms, could help describe and diagnose the deviants stigmatised as dangerous and antisocial. According to Exarchopoulos, the state had to take action and adopt special measures to protect society from the danger these individuals represented; they were not to be left to develop according to their natural predispositions without appropriate instruction. Exarchopoulos suggested measures be taken to improve birth conditions; therefore, only those who were both physically and mentally healthy would be allowed to give birth.

To protect society from *any kind of anomalous individuals*,<sup>45</sup> it was imperative that measures be taken to hinder the birth of the latter. The hygiene of hereditary predispositions existent in genitor cells examined the reasons that led to the decline of genitor cells and looked for ways to prevent the reproduction of hereditarily defective individuals; at the same time, it would assist the reproduction of healthy predisposition carriers.<sup>46</sup>

According to Exarchopoulos, the child's various cognitive and mental capacities, its *distinctive* abilities and deviations, were to a great extent hereditary, the outcome of inherent predispositions. Mental heredity, he supported, was not limited to cognition but extended to emotions. These were determined to a great extent, though not absolutely, by biology. An individual inherited predispositions, not qualities, and therefore there was scope for environmental influence. Hence, the importance of the child's education. However, heredity determined the general outline of the individual's mental characteristics, the

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>44</sup> Giorgos Kokkinos and Markos Karasarinis, "Μεταμορφώσεις του ευγονικού λόγου στην Ελλάδα: Από τον Ιωάννη Κούμαρη και τον Δημοσθένη Ελευθεριάδη στον Νικόλαο Λούρο," in Avdela et al., *Φυλετικές θεωρίες στην Ελλάδα*, 143.

<sup>45</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά ανωμαλίες*, 278.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 279.

extremes and the extent to which the environment could overcome hereditary predispositions.<sup>47</sup>

### *Child Neuropaths and Psychopaths*

What were the types of *mental anomalies* in children? The diversity of deviation was wide, Exarchopoulos noted, and deviation appeared in many combinations and to different degrees. He stressed that the child was a developing human being; therefore, determining whether *an anomalous symptom* that appeared at a certain age was parodic and whether it signified the onset of the development of a pathological personality was far from easy.

With the exemption of the extreme cases of psychopaths or the mentally retarded interned in institutions, Exarchopoulos classified the cases of the mentally ill that were receptive to education as follows: 1) anomalies in certain mental functions, 2) defective function of either one or more senses, 3) language anomalies, 4) retardation of various degrees and types, 5) psychopathy of various degrees and types, 6) moral paranoia or moral insanity, 7) neurasthenia, 8) mobility anomalies, 9) epilepsy, 10) hysteria, 11) abandoned children corrupted due to neglect or in danger of corruption (the morally weak, the morally defective, the socially indifferent, anti-socials).<sup>48</sup>

According to him, many of these disorders were accompanied by morbid emotions. Hence, mania or epilepsy resulted in the *communication of cunning instincts* which led the individual to crime; this was why many criminals had a family background of such disorders. Individuals with *mild retardation*, which was noticeable in puberty, usually manifested emotions such as malice, revenge and weak feelings of friendship, love, gratitude, altruism, shyness and remorse. It was also common for these children to display a tendency towards immoral actions and the premature onset of the sexual drive, to engage in masturbation and to sexually assault members of the opposite sex.<sup>49</sup>

The most serious version of retardation, that is *congenital retardation*, he noted, could be identified at the beginning of an individual's life. It was a hereditary disease wherein the brain's normal development was disrupted on account of the parents suffering from neuropathy, epilepsy, dementia praecox or hebephrenia, and chronic paranoia. He stressed that *disease is always passed down from one generation to the other*.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικάί διαφοραί*, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικάί ανωμαλίας*, 7–9.

<sup>49</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικάί διαφοραί*, 64.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 72.

Children suffering from "neuropathy" or "psychopathy" formed an important group of children who *displayed anomalous emotions*. With regard to the terms employed, in no case can we be certain today about their exact content, what meaning was invested in them, and to what extent they referred to the same situations and diseases described by those terms today. For instance, the term "neurasthenia" is less used today than in the early twentieth century; also, we are not sure whether the term "psychopathy" had its contemporary meaning and by no means is it employed light-heartedly nowadays to refer to childhood problems. Certainly, language does not depict reality passively; it actively shapes what it describes. Presenting it in one way or another, it somehow constructs it, and therefore the signification of a term is not only a matter for an individual writer. Words and concepts deployed in pedagogical discourse are perceived within a specific framework of common concepts and references that presuppose it. They operate within a social conceptual framework and characterise practices which are more or less socially recognised.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, terminology employed by interwar educators reflects mainly the social and scientific limitations of their era.

The lack of a national psychiatry school during this period illustrates the extent of the difficulties faced by educators who sought to approach concepts that denoted deviation from what was defined as "normalcy"; pathological make-up and morbid behaviour. The more profound the lack of a scientific psychiatric community which would promote its own views on mental disorders or combine and adjust foreign ideas and discoveries to the Greek social reality, the more important their attempts to determine the "normal" and the "anomalous" in the development of the human mental make-up; to define the content of basic terms and concepts employed for the description of any behaviour characterised as "pathological"; and to formulate theories of the mental human functions. During the period under study, the practice of psychiatry was far from widespread. The rudimentary organisation of public psychiatry started in the 1930s and it was only in 1936, towards the end of the interwar period, that the Neurological and Psychiatric Association of Athens was established.<sup>52</sup>

In many countries in Europe and America, social hygiene movements were to emerge in the early twentieth century and expand during the interwar period. Childhood lent itself to the research of mental hygiene, psychiatry and social work, which led to the establishment of instruction clinics for children;

---

<sup>51</sup> Frevert, "Le genre et l'histoire," 99.

<sup>52</sup> Dimitris N. Ploumbidis, *Ιστορία της ψυχιατρικής στην Ελλάδα* (Athens: Exantas, 1995), 130–31.

these clinics undertook therapeutical work for various problems of personality, behaviour and relationships.<sup>53</sup>

Seemingly, these movements were not as influential in Greece in so far that neither instruction clinics nor a mental hygiene organisation were set up. Some ideas from the mental hygiene movement can be traced in the contemporary pedagogical discourse; it is also indicative that the Greek Association of Mental Hygiene, presided over by Exarchopoulos, was established in 1940. The association was short-lived – in fact, it was discontinued due to the outbreak of war – and it did not resume operations in the postwar era.<sup>54</sup>

In general, important psychological movements such as psychoanalysis became known in Greece first as pedagogical and later as psychological or psychiatric discourses. Scientists interested in the improvement of pedagogical practice publicised these discourses. Until the mid-1930s, education was the only field that dealt systematically with Freudian theory; thus, Freudian theory was perceived, at least initially, as a philosophical and pedagogical text.<sup>55</sup> Psychoanalytical theories were initially publicised through essays about their implementation in educational settings, a fact that contributed to their demedicalisation.<sup>56</sup>

A year after the establishment of the Neurological and Psychiatric Association in 1937, the Model Special School was set up in Athens under the directorship of Rosa Imvrioti (1898–1977), an eminent pioneer educator, who was socially and politically engaged and had actively participated in the wartime resistance movement. She and Exarchopoulos stood at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Her book, characteristically entitled *Anomalous and retarded children*, published in 1939, illustrated her thoughts and results from the first year of the school's operation. She mentioned the difficulties faced by the scientific community in coining commonly acceptable terms and drawing classifications which would define the “anomalous” child and its “pathological” behaviour.

As already mentioned, the classification we accepted and which is common is not based on strictly objective scientific criteria. Were someone to read the numerous long studies on this issue, they would be lost in the vagueness and subjectivity characteristic of

---

<sup>53</sup> Despo Kritsotaki, *Ψυχική υγιεινή για παιδιά και νέους* in Avdela et al., *Μορφές δημόσιας κοινωνικότητας στην Ελλάδα του εικοστού αιώνα* (Rethymo: University of Crete, 2015), 20.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>55</sup> Lena Atzina, *Η μακρά εισαγωγή της ψυχανάλυσης στην Ελλάδα* (Athens: Exantas, 2004), 21.

<sup>56</sup> Panagiota Kazolea-Tavoulari, *Η ιστορία της Ψυχολογίας στην Ελλάδα* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2002), 141–48.



such classifications. Doctors, psychologists, educators, sociologists, departing from different perspectives and different scientific interests, drew classifications which were at times simply descriptive, at times symptomatic and at times social. In fact, it is really difficult to reach a classification of the mental anomalies which would reflect the facts.<sup>57</sup>

In her attempt to describe "neuropathy" and "psychopathy", she refers to disorders of emotion and will, and describes children who had a "normal" – according to the psychometric tests used at the time – intelligence. Imvrioti does not define the concept of "disorder" but describes the behaviour of children which she considers to deviate from the "normal manifestations of that age" and which are usually connected, in her view, to the emotions and will of those children.<sup>58</sup>

The era of neuropathy (1880–1914) was actually the period when scientific psychology developed; it is characteristic that none of its pioneers were able to ignore the issues raised by the occurrence of symptoms described as "neuropathy", irrespective of the different ways they chose to address them both theoretically and therapeutically.<sup>59</sup>

Greek educators such as Exarchopoulos and Imvrioti who wished to address pedagogical issues in a scientific way dealt with child "neuropathy"; it is interesting that despite departing from different, indeed opposite, political and ideological perspectives on issues of educational policy, they did approach and perceive this child "disease" in much the same way. Neuropathy was perceived as a disease characterised by physical morbid symptoms manifested in speech, writing, mobility, the nervous system and the senses.<sup>60</sup> It was mostly a medical problem which drew the interest of educators to the extent that it was accompanied by morbid mental conditions. As a result, these children were hot-tempered, capricious, restless, indecisive and bad-mannered.<sup>61</sup>

The vagueness and confusion in the definition and understanding of "pathological" mental conditions were evident in the quest for the reasons of neuropathy. Neuropathy was mainly perceived as a biogenetic, hereditary problem; environmental and social influences on the onset and development of the "disease" were also taken into account. The attempt to define the way and

---

<sup>57</sup> Roza Imvrioti, *Ανώμαλα και καθυστερημένα παιδιά* (Athens: Elliniki Ekdotiki Etaireia, 1939), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Imvrioti, *Ανώμαλα και καθυστερημένα παιδιά*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Castel Pierre-Henri, "Le cas de la dépression," in *Histoire des émotions*, vol. 3, *De la fin du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Jean-Jacques Courtine (Paris: Seuil, 2017), 326–42.

<sup>60</sup> Imvrioti, *Ανώμαλα και καθυστερημένα παιδιά*, 34–35.

<sup>61</sup> Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, *Η νευροπάθεια κατά την παιδική ηλικία* (Athens: s.n., 1954), 13.

the extent of the interaction between heredity and the environment – an issue of great interest to pedagogy as it was connected with the wider questioning of the power and the limits of education – was evident in Exarchopoulos' and Imvrioti's discourse. Yet, their response to this issue remained mostly descriptive and case-study related, and they were far from offering a balanced approach to the problem. Their difficulties were typical of the problems encountered in other scientific fields during the interwar period. It is revealing that in their attempt to determine "neuropathy", which more often than not was taken as *evidence for degeneration caused by central damage*, they used the psychiatric term "degeneration".<sup>62</sup> Yet, this term was vague and could not strengthen their efforts to provide accurate, scientific answers to pedagogical issues. Although it was a term which by modern standards accommodated a wide array of diseases, it was employed to a great extent by interwar Greek doctors and jurists; as a result its use raises philosophical and ideological objections.<sup>63</sup>

Psychopathy was described as a mental condition in which though intelligence was normal, emotions and sexual desires lay in the threshold between the normal and the pathological. *Defective* hereditary predispositions existed in this case, leading to deviation from the normal median, yet without straying too far from it. Imvrioti adopted the view of the Swiss educator Heinrich Hanselmann (1885–1960) – considered one of the most important representatives of special and therapeutical education in the twentieth century – that the most characteristic feature of psychopaths was *imbalance, the lack of symmetry*. Man does not develop all the "sides" of his personality in a harmonious way. There is disharmony in the development of his intelligence, emotion, will and ability to act, but this disharmony does not lead the individual to behaviours that would place him outside the social body.<sup>64</sup>

According to Exarchopoulos, psychopaths were characterised by extreme feelings and serious emotional imbalance with frequent and abrupt mood swings. Anger and fear were the two dominant emotions in these children; they also had a weak will which manifested itself as *complete lack of coherence* in their decisions and actions. They were characterised by *immoral indifference*; that is, they were lacking in emotions such as decency, dutifulness and responsibility, and displayed cunning and hypocrisy, cruelty and weakness to express friendly feelings, and a strong tendency towards material pleasures and theft. However, some young psychopaths stood at the other end of the spectrum and were marked

<sup>62</sup> Imvrioti, *Ανώμαλα και καθυστερημένα παιδιά*, 38.

<sup>63</sup> Ploumbidis, *Ιστορία της ψυχιατρικής*, 187–88.

<sup>64</sup> Heinrich Hanselmann, *Einführung in die Heilpädagogik* (Leipzig: Rotapfel, 1933), 276.

out for their shyness, veracity to the extent of fanaticism, extreme scrupulousness and love for order, and religiousness. A large number of children and youngsters who resisted the impact of education and found it difficult to adapt themselves to the social dictates of education were, Exarchopoulos argued, psychopaths. Yet, not all of them, as he felt appropriate to clarify.<sup>65</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

Ever since the Enlightenment when Jean-Jacques Rousseau criticised his era and its culture, and elevated emotions to an ultimate value, thus clashing with the pragmatic thought of the era of Rationalism, emotions have been a basic conceptual category in the pedagogical agenda. The need to formulate a scientific pedagogical theory led to the emergence of the discipline of pedagogy in the nineteenth century and posed the problem of valid qualitative scientific pedagogical research. In response to this issue, the paedology movement, which adopted a positivist scientific model, was established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Under its influence, scientists attempted, with the aid of analytical methods, to study the child's “nature”, its physical but also its emotional development.

In interwar Greece, leading educators were influenced by the paedology movement, among them Nikolaos Exarchopoulos, who aspired to lay in the University of Athens the foundations of pedagogy as a “national science”, which would provide, with the aid of experimental methods, valid knowledge about the distinctive physical and mental traits of Greek children. His attempts, along with those of other Greek educators, to define the categories of “normal” and “deviant” in the development and behaviour of children, the ahistorical perspective they often adopted, which naturalised culture impulsively, biologised class privilege and moral principles or sex roles, along with the terminology they adopted, provide us with invaluable information about contemporaneous scientific social and cultural views as to what was considered normal or pathological and, therefore, as to what were the limits of tolerance and acceptance of the environment; limits that determined the chances to adapt and function smoothly in the interwar milieu.

### *University of the Peloponnese*

---

<sup>65</sup> Exarchopoulos, *Ψυχικά ανωμαλίες*, 278.

