

Il rapporto formativo tra l'esistenza umana e la libertà. The formative relationship between human existence and freedom.

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ABSTRACT ITALIANO

L'articolo intende affrontare il rapporto tra libertà e *Bildung* a partire da un punto di vista fenomenologico. In tale contesto interpretativo, la temporalità riveste un ruolo essenziale nella pragmatizzazione di una forma spirituale di significato, in cui la vera libertà dell'essere umano assume la sua forma. La *Bildung* rivela quindi il suo rapporto costitutivo con la libertà come opera di autoformazione. È già a partire dall'esperienza greca dell'esistenza, che l'uomo afferma la sua libertà nella continua lotta tra la potenza della natura e la potenza dello spirito. Tuttavia, è in epoca moderna, che vede l'educazione non più guidata da ideali prefissati e costantemente sottoposta alla possibilità del fallimento, a essere immaginabile una rinnovata relazione educativa basata sul consiglio [*Beratung*]. Il reciproco consigliarsi si muove nella dimensione della possibilità che sola darebbe il giusto spazio ad una significativa autocomprensione educativa della libertà umana.

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

This paper intends to address the relationship between freedom and *Bildung* starting from a phenomenological point of view. In this interpretative context, temporality plays an essential role in the pragmatization of a spiritual form of meaning, in which the true freedom of the human being is formed. *Bildung* thus reveals its constitutive relationship with freedom as a work of self-formation and it is originally from the Greek experience of existence that man asserts his freedom in the continuous struggle between the power of nature and the power of the spirit. However, concerning the modern age, in which education is no longer guided by pre-established ideals and is constantly subject to the possibility of failure, a renewed educational relationship based on counselling [*Beratung*] is conceivable. Mutual counselling moves sole dimension of possibility that would give the right space for a meaningful educational self-understanding of human freedom.

Introduction

During the years of his teaching at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Freiburg, Eugen Fink developed his own personal reflection on education. The lectures given by Fink in 1953 and published in the 1970s under the title *Grundfragen der systematische pädagogik*, presumably have a dual purpose, on the one hand that of collecting and giving a unified form to his thought, and on the other hand that of reflecting on a concrete educational situation.

Fink's interest in education cannot be considered as something marginal, but rather as one of the *Grundphänomene* of human existence that plays a central role in the whole structure of his thought.

Education is a complex phenomenon not to be revealed in a definitive manner, but to be brought out with a careful reflection, because in education there are always traces of life and of the world. Maybe just because of this unusual and conceptually philosophical approach, his pedagogical vision turns out as little known and not particularly understood (cf. Graf, 2006, pp. 71-84).

The starting point, therefore, is always a cosmological thought and, on the basis of this approach, education shows its link precisely with the need for man to orient himself among things and to continually seek meaning. No path is more rugged and subject to failure, and this is due to the essential insecurity that accompanies all human research in this field. In Finkian hermeneutics, the human-*Dasein* does not have direct access to being, because the condition of such access is always represented by fundamental phenomena, such as love, education, work, language, death and so on. This is why man continually educates others and educates himself to be in the openness of the world and therefore in relation to what emerges from the play of light and shadow and what appears in its identification. If Fink's idea of education is structured starting from the world, it is easy to understand how it cannot be explained according to the model of a mere transmission of rules and fixed ethical principles, because man is not seen as a shapeless matter to be shaped according to a well-defined model.

In Italy, for example, the notion of phenomenological pedagogy is inspired by Husserlian themes and, as recalled by V. Iori (cf. Iori, 2016, pp. 18-29), it appears with the work of P. Bertolini which breaks into the pedagogical panorama with an absolute novelty character because it configures an eidetic science of education, placing the problem of pedagogical epistemology in a phenomenological perspective, according to which there is no need to seek a greater scientificity in a positivistic sense, but rather indicate the direction towards a scientificity that is suitable for the human, in response to the philosophical impoverishment and to the degradation of pedagogy determined by the prevalence of techniques over the human dimension.

On the basis of the phenomenological reduction, still emphasizes V. Iori, Bertolini conceives education in an anti-dogmatic way, as an act that carries within itself an inexhaustible problematic intentionality. In other words, the pedagogical science qualifies itself first of all for the need of a horizon of meaning, to which the phenomenological method has opened new roads and new possibilities.

The phenomenological reading of the educative processes is not limited to a logical-rational comprehension, explaining the facts by a causalistic way from the outside (*Erklären*), but it opens up to the giving of oneself, to the possible, to that kind of understanding (*Verstehen*) that confers meaning, an understanding derived from lived experience.

From the idea of a systematic pedagogy, emerges, between the lines, a criticism of a science of psychologistic education and, at the same time, of the various pedagogical theories that dominated the educational scene of that era. On the economic side, the signs of a scientific organization of work were already visible, which are also reflected in education, which, conceived as a means of preparation for professional life, assumes

categories resulting from a conversion in a pedagogical key of an economic and technical conceptuality.

The crisis of the modern world cannot be considered, in fact, a crisis of efficiency: the specialization of the different disciplines that make up the education sciences and the corresponding educational models are, on the contrary, increasingly defined and determined in their fundamental principles. Fink translates, even if with some precision, the Greek *paideia* with the German *Bildung* and, moving in a totally different field compared to the educational orientation of his time, refers to an alternative model of education, whose purpose is not a mere education, but an education to life in the Greek sense. The happening of *Bildung*, understood as the dialectical process of giving shape and shaping, is formation in the original sense, in which the product of formation is never separated from the process itself. The two moments, formation and being formed, coexist in a continuous reference of one to the other and in the cosmological context this process occurs by means of a continuous interpretation by man of the symbolic universe that emerges with the world.

As underlined by V. Cesarone, in order to grasp critically the essential link that in Fink's thought regulates the relationship between philosophy and pedagogy, it seems appropriate to start precisely from his interpretation of *Bildung*, a concept that, like all German *-ung* substantives, contains in itself both the movement of the action and the result achieved at the conclusion of the action itself, in the specific case the educative proceeding and the result of the education (cf. Cesarone, Crivellari, 2019, p. 8). Thus, a distinctive feature of Finkian's understanding of education emerges taking the form of action and at the same time of human work, assuming the meaning of a process through which a man can autonomously give himself a spiritual figure, that is «a form of existence formed and founded on the relationship of a man to himself» (Fink, 1989, p. 134), unlike divinity and animals that, as "finite" figures in their eternal or instinctive determination, have no possibility or need to do so.

"Only man educates" (cf. Fink, 2019, p. 75), is a sentence that resounds several times in the pages of a text that is fundamental for understanding philosopher Eugen Fink's model of human education. This expression inevitably relates "the human" to two other realms, the animal world and the divine sphere, which traditionally represent the upper and lower limits of human action. This dual relationship of man with the animal and with the god, which has provided a term of analysis of the human situation for much of Western thought, does not, however, according to Fink, have the capacity to explain a phenomenon that is configured as exclusively human: the education. The animal and the god are in their being, even if in different ways, essentially perfect, while imperfection is that distinguishes man, because our form is always *in fieri* and we are lacking in it from the beginning. The animal cannot educate because it is already perfect by nature, because it has no room for freedom in its fixed structure (cf. Cesarone, Crivellari, 2019, p. 77 ss.)

Man's emancipation from a condition of comparison to the perfect nature of the animal and the infinite power of the divine has as his most important expression the discovery of freedom and as its consequence a changed relationship to the world. The inner space became free from all worldly affairs, and this is why the conceptual-speculative thinking

can concentrate on the essential: bringing the spirit in the human being back to consciousness.

The one who has been formed, even if it is an *ongoing* process, establishes a spiritual work by holding fast to an ideal that guides him. This aspect is the preeminent sign of his intrinsically communitarian existence. Man is indeed an individual, a free personality, but as such he belongs to the great community of the world guided by an ideal, which he shares with all those who are part of his same formation, and who therefore move in the same cultural openness.

Free self-determination and the possibility of failure

Human life and the formative process are determined in freedom, in the possibility of choosing in different situations, as an act that is realised and determined as a leaning towards one choice and not the other. Choice involves man's entire existence, so that when we act in view of something we do so with a motivation. According to Fink, the Western tradition, not without reason, has seen happiness as the goal of existence since its Greek beginnings.

But what the freedom of the human being consists of has been and still is a matter of debate. In Fink's interpretation, the decision involves the meaning of life, i.e. he chooses a determined meaning for his existence. The horizon of possibility of our freedom, to use an expression that recurs frequently in Finkian texts, must be prepared so that our freedom can be realised. This changes the belief that the meaning of our existence, the possible directions of our decision, are products of our own freedom. Meaning, which directs our free acts, is not a product but a presupposition: on the contrary, we move through the world assigning meaning to things and existence because we tend, first of all, towards a dimension of meaning that is never individual but always collective. It is in the space-time dimension of the human community in which we are that things obtain their meaning. It would be reductive, therefore, to conceive of human freedom as a mere capacity for choice, as a decision between different proposals. It predisposes us to creativity and to the free planning of existence.

Formation as spiritual self-formation and pragmatism of a spiritual form of meaning is the true freedom of the human being, but not a form of life that is beyond our power. For, in the human will alone, this idea can be realised in finite stages which, like all human activities, remain ultimately questionable. Freedom is never a secure possession but lives only in the constant struggle for it. The independence of a spiritual attitude towards the world and the free self-determination of our spiritual existence could hopefully be a "new" ideal towards which one could direct one's education. Although education is something that becomes possible thanks to the human faculty of choosing, within it not everything, however, can be limited to the realm of will, in fact, education is not a simple acquisition of knowledge and data, since it concentrates forces beyond the individual control. First of all because every educational act originates from an exercise of freedom that must continually confront itself with historical and objective reality. For this reason, the educational process is always to be seen in relation to the becoming of a man and in his taking shape from time to time in its connection with the historical and objective reality,

characterizing in every epoch the fundamental experience of the relationship between existence and reality, the opening of the first to the latter, called by Fink the rise of a world (1) (Fink, 1989, p. 134).

Mass man, busy with the realisation of his presumed interpretation of life, no longer meets his target, he moves in the public opinion of the commonplace that belongs indiscriminately to everyone and to no one. The loss of freedom in anonymity has as its correlate the loss of contact with reality. If education were truly understood as an act of freedom, despite modern man's tendency to 'secure' his own life and his attempt to see himself always from a world-historical perspective, then the self-formation of human existence could be removed from the non-binding arbitrariness of the mere subjective will and the public manner of life.

The *Kultur*, unable to stop an increasingly invasive *Zivilisation*, would leave the field to a new concept of formation whose content of truth is not eternal as idealism would like it to be, but would take shape within the historical-social structure of man and as such would be destined to perish, opening the doors to what Theodor Adorno calls *Halbbildung* (2). Emancipation from the norms handed down could only at first appear as a conquest of freedom, but then, according to the philosopher of the Frankfurt School, it would reveal itself as a loss of roots. The destruction of *Bildung* would not therefore lead to a radically new idea of education, but rather what survives as *Halbbildung*, as semi-culture, would give meaning to the modern idea of education. The inability to presuppose an ideal horizon for one's spiritual actions would allow this semi-culture to become the automatic way of approaching the world, an approach that would not allow one to grasp one's own limitation, one's own relativity, which would represent the only possible ways to a new idea of formation (Adorno, 1959/1972). However, even if human education may never live up to the ideal, risking at every moment to decay into a kind of *Halbbildung*, it does not seem so absurd to take the truth of the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky's authorship, according to which man, even if he cannot bear freedom, should not renounce it.

The formative relationship with freedom

At this point, one might ask whether our openness to the world is not determined precisely by the primordial experience of our opposition to nature and how this is compatible with our formative relationship to freedom. Nature, insofar as we oppose it, would no longer be included in our freedom and yet we remain dependent on it in our needs and demands. It reveals itself as the limit of our freedom, as the one in relation to whom and against whom freedom must always preserve itself. Freedom already shows itself to the Greeks as overcoming nature, but in such a way that this upheaval dominates the whole world of existence. Greek man, however, seems to belong to both realms, the natural realm and the realm of freedom, and seems to persist in the time of his existence like no other human being. He is no longer sheltered by nature but is still open to nature in an exceptional way; he has become aware of his sacrificial freedom and stands at the dawn of the day of history.

In Greek myth, there is never an overcoming of the natural forces of the earth itself, but a constant contestation of them. Greek existence is in immense tension between the power

of nature and the power of the spirit that arises in it. Apollo, the god of the lyre, is the principle of the will to form and shape, of spiritual dominion over a nature that is reluctant to form, of the dominion of chaos. Thus the Apollonian serenity, clarity and spiritual luminosity of Greek existence can only be in relation to what remains in the shadows. The Greek experience of existence is consolidated in the awareness of human exposure to the supremacy of being and the threat of formless nature, which man in his freedom faces in order to survive. Man is understood as a child of nature but at the same time as a revealer of its truth, as a narrator of its mystery, as the one who transforms chaos into image and form. This conflict between form and chaos, however, never ends in victory. It remains in the animating tension of Greek existence as being constantly in danger.

Also today, formation is more than an educated form of life. It shows itself in its essentiality as the emergence of man in the encounter with the world and the pragmatization of a fixed form of life. The field of education is wide and shows many forms and figures. Biological and physiological elements intertwine with emotional and affective components in which the different varieties and manifestations of human coexistence form conscious and unconscious educational processes. What is most striking, of course, are the intentional educational efforts of parents, professional educators, schools. However, it is not only parents and teachers who educate. Consequently, an exchange occurs, whereby those who are educated in turn, education may also occur through inspiration, admiration, or even disgust. Everything that enters the boundaries of our experience exerts an effect. Everyone sets an example and “teaches”, even if unintentionally, by his behavior, his relationships, his actions and his omissions (cf. Fink, 1978/2019, pp. 125-136). The whole of human existence is included in the element of “teaching”, not only in the continuous exchange in which human beings teach each other, but also in all spheres of existence which exposes man to understanding. The school system, as an institution, can be seen as one aspect of the infinite variety of forms of that global process which pervades our existence as a living formation of meaning. Although this school education, like any intentional human work, is far from the “immediacy” of nature, it is the place where our idea of education becomes concrete in an ordinary existence.

die Beratung

Childhood, which is often referred to when we start from a traditional interpretation of “*lernen*”, is not a subordinate mode to the other phases of life in terms of intimacy and meaning, but a complete way of inhabiting existence. Certainly, the child needs guidance, but the adult also needs sight. They learn different things from one another.

It is this human condition of uncertainty that gives rise to what Fink refers to as advice [*die Beratung*], the “central phenomenon of human education” (Fink, 1970, p. 206). In the field of education in our time, the council is the place where the self-constitution of human freedoms originates, where the understanding of the common meaning of life is established, where adherence to a purpose is born among people. It emerges from a

common lack of direction in an age in which the ideals that should guide education no longer have their guiding force.

Fink's interpretation of education, therefore, starts from a different assumption than that of tradition. Some see education as an instrument for the transmission of objective knowledge. We should consider education as something more "original", which cannot be learned, such as studying mathematics, which can only be experienced. (cf. Fink, 2019, p. 62 ss.). All education is found and begins in the sphere of customs, and when observed from the latter it clearly shows its intimate link with ethics. However, customs, which are a prerequisite in any human practice and consequently in any educational act, are not a fixed set of rules and principles, not anymore. Customs tend to change historically, taking shape and giving form to the way in which a "people" orients itself in the world. The continuous research by people of their own orientation does not dispense the individual from deciding what to "do" and what to "leave" (cf. Fink, 2019, p. 125 ss.) but obligates him in this regard and this applies especially to the field of education. Education must be understood according to its historical objectification, its peculiar form and its link with the norms observed by humanity in a specific age.

If this is true, the impossibility of basing education on a stable principle that has driving force, is the result of the profound insecurity that characterizes the contemporary era, because what we are continually involved in during our lives on this earth, is precisely the continuous search for meaning and the danger of making errors in this same search. Concerning what emerges from the discourse on a systematic pedagogy, the formation rather than a transmission of knowledge from the educator to the student, is configured as a common advice, offering something to others through words, actions or even through example. It is clear, therefore, that in this way the educational relationships of domination and authority conceived in the traditional sense, are lacking, at least in a certain sense, and the "political" and not merely theoretical value of Finkian cosmology, is shown from this assumption.

The teachings handed down by tradition no longer have unshakeable validity and the reliability of the religion of moral philosophical systems has disappeared, the spiritual reality of modern man has disappeared, there is no longer any claim to know the meaning of human life in an unshakeable way. Educational processes used to take place within a predefined framework, education had its origin in an idea. Today, there are many possibilities to advise on the ways and means of education but not on the ends, the principles. Our age is marked by the attempt to teach a life that we ourselves no longer know with certainty, in which the community relationship of educator-pupils is structured on the basis of a questioning of life, both are in the situation of non-knowledge, meeting in the common effort to achieve mutual understanding.

This does not mean that the educational situation is in total anarchy. In the space of the community, authority emerges, elevating someone above teaching and learning, even though there is no one in himself competent to guide others on a path that is uncharted for all. Advice is marked by a transitive character that binds those involved in it in a relationship of mutual dependence. As we have had the opportunity to specify, education has the task of bringing young, unformed people to a form, and this in spite of the fact that

our age is marked by a lack of fixed value norms towards which the various educational aims can be directed.

The educational relationship based on counselling has to do with the dimension of the future and with educational acts that fall within the sphere of possibility and the significant self-understanding of human freedom. Freedom is the condition for the possibility of counselling, and it is through the free act that man builds his world; the pre-consideration and opening to the future of possibilities that do not exist as natural or ideal facts but only as the projective will of human freedom that can be realised through decision. The coexistence of human freedom is only possible as a human education from a human being who interprets himself and the things around him, self-interpretation is first of all an interpretation of the world, a culture of humanity that fights for the conquest of a common popular spirit.

Authors' Notes

The contribution resulting from the reflections of the two authors is divided as follows: the paragraphs "Introduction", "Free self-determination and the possibility of failure" are attributed to Claudio Crivellari; the paragraphs "The formative relationship with freedom" and "die Beratung" are attributed to Roberta Santucci.

Notes

- (1) As pointed up by G.R. Cervo, in Fink there is a structural semantic ambiguity between world and Being, which are located alternately in the subject position or predicate. In general, however, when he uses the "worldness" as a predicate of the Being, he is describing Heidegger's position, the one that sees the world as "Lichtung", as the unveiled state of the Being.
- (2) Cfr. G. Sola, *Teoria della Halbbildung*, Il nuovo Melangolo, Genova 2010.

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