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Table of contents – Indice

Enricomaria Corbi
Editorial.
Umberto Eco, Hilary Putnam and their legacy for educational theory 7
Editoriale.
Umberto Eco, Hilary Putnam e la loro eredità per la pedagogia 11

SYMPOSIUM
Peripheral Areas. Horizons and Pedagogical Perspectives

Fabrizio Manuel Sirignano, Simonetta Ulivieri
Introduction 17
Introduzione 21

Paolo Vittoria
Il rapporto tra periferie e università: l'esperienza del Forum
coi Movimenti Sociali a Rio de Janeiro… e una proposta per Napoli 25

Giuseppe Annacontini
Ripensare i margini 'senza scarti' 43

Alessandro Tolomelli
Bologna: da centro a periferia del welfare educativo 61

Carolina Silva Sousa
La educación para la Resiliencia en el alumnado
de la periferia de la Europa del Sur 83

Anita Gramigna
Ai confini del mondo.
Formazione, spiritualità e incanto nella tribù Yaqui 101

Cristina Allemann-Ghionda
Emigrazione e integrazione scolastica in Germania:
tendenze e nuovi compiti 117

Giuseppe Burgio
Alla periferia dei gagé.
La formazione di genere tra i rom e le romnià 129

Maria Dimasi, Panagiotis G. Krimpas
Minority Languages in Greece:
Linguistic Peripheries and Immigrant Languages
between Politics and School Education Legislation 149

Juan J. Leiva Olivencia
La odisea de los refugiados sirios en Europa.
Una mirada desde la pedagogía intercultural 171

ESSAYS – SAGGI

Amelia Broccoli
Ethics and Complexity of Educational Action 191

Valerio Ferro Allodola
L'esperienza del tirocinio formativo universitario:
le rappresentazioni di un gruppo di studenti 207

Maria Grazia Lombardi
L'educativo ambientale tra pedagogia verde,
pedagogia ecologica ed ecologia relazionale 221

Maria Rosaria Strollo
Lo sviluppo delle competenze per la cittadinanza attiva.
Dalla teoria alla prassi 235

BOOK REVIEWS – RECENSIONI

Valentina Paola Cesarano
M. Striano, & R. Capobianco (a cura di), *Bilancio di competenze all'università*, Napoli: Federiciana Editrice Universitaria, 2016 257

Mariarosaria De Simone
F. Cambi, *La cura di sé come processo formativo. Tra adultità e scuola*,
Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010 (edizione digitale, 2014) 263

Ethics and Complexity of Educational Action

Amelia Broccoli*

Abstract

The article starts from the analysis of the relationship between education and ethics, taking into account the role played in this context by communication. Every educational relationship is based on a preliminary ethical and anthropological option and it is essential to work on the nexus between ethics and education, without resorting to moralistic exhortations or prescriptive logic. For this perspective, it is useful to consider the etymological roots of the lemma ethics, which, in the ancient Greek world, encompasses a semantic spectrum of concepts that include habit, usual environment, custom. Its meaning is therefore often significantly different the modern one, and may imply a different system of norms and values. If we accept that ethos designates the common home of humanity, we must accept that education and training cannot crystallize into a set of rules and precepts independent of the autonomous becoming of subjectivity. Educational practices are always part of deliberative moral contexts requiring commitment, responsibility and sharing of rules, and are subject to the dialectic between freedom and necessity. Education should be the autonomous and creative construction of people seeking their place within the general context of humanitas. The task/challenge of education and educational theory, then, is to propose theoretical approaches and concrete practices that contribute to the growth of the individual as a 'constructer of ethical and political reality' and to educational and communication strategies that promote the interrupted dialogue between education, ethics and politics in contemporary society.

Keywords: *complexity, ethics, communication, education, relationship.*

Riassunto

L'articolo muove dall'analisi del rapporto che intercorre tra educazione ed etica, prendendo in considerazione il ruolo assunto in tale contesto dalla comunicazione educativa. Pur considerando che ogni rappor-

* University of Cassino and Lazio meridionale (Italy).

to educativo si fonda su un'opzione etico-antropologica preliminare, si ritiene indispensabile lavorare sul nesso etica-educazione, evitando di far ricorso ad esortazioni moralistiche o alla logica di un prescrittivo dover essere. A tale scopo, sembra essere utile il ricorso all'analisi delle radici etimologiche del lemma etica, che, nel mondo antico, indica lo spettro semantico di concetti quali abitudine, luogo di vita abituale, consuetudine. Si tratta di qualcosa di ben diverso dal sistema di norme e valori con cui si intende l'etica in senso moderno. Se ethos indica il luogo abituale e la casa comune dell'umano, l'educazione e la formazione non possono cristallizzarsi in un insieme di norme e precetti esterni all'autonomo divenire della soggettività. Al contrario, le pratiche educative, sempre situate in contesti deliberativi di tipo morale che richiedono impegno, responsabilità e condivisione di regole, si collocano all'interno del gioco dialettico tra libertà e necessità. Ma la formazione appare come la costruzione autonoma e creativa di un soggetto che cerca la sua forma all'interno del contesto dell'humanitas generale. Il compito/sfida dell'educazione e della pedagogia, allora, si rivela quello di proporre modelli teorici e prassi concrete che contribuiscano alla crescita dell'individuo come 'costruttore di realtà etica e politica'. E alla possibilità di attivare strategie educative e comunicative che possano promuovere il dialogo interrotto tra educazione, etica e politica all'interno della società contemporanea.

Parole-chiave: *complessità, etica, comunicazione, educazione, relazione.*

1. Ethics and Education in the 'Age of Void'

Vladimir Jankélévitch writes that

> the moral 'point of view' is the most humane way of considering existence. In every human problem there is a moral evaluation [...]. As a result, everything is ethics, including psychology and sociology (Jankélévitch, 2006: 53-54, *trans. mine*).

Can Jankélévitch's acute observation apply also to educational science? Are education, teaching and educational theory in some way ethical too?

Before offering an answer it is necessary, following in Socrates's footsteps, to agree upon what is meant by 'ethics'. The present proliferation of various forms of ethics (bioethics, business ethics, work ethics, sports' ethics, etc.), suggests a widespread need for rules and order, almost a desire to exorcise the entropic chaos that often seems to govern relationships between human beings. These variants of ethics rise and fall, following the fashions or the spirit of the times, and highlight the endless contradictions of this postmodern era, characterized, according to some, by the complete absence of distinctive and universal values. But if ideologies and grand

narratives have collapsed, if the subject is vacillating or plain dead, what ethics can we sensibly discuss, given that ethics are the direct off shoot of the thinking and deciding subject?

During the twentieth century, rationalistic transcendental ethics were definitely debunked,

> […] giving rise to what is called the 'twilight of duty,' 'the age of the void': that is, the end of the subject, and also of the great narratives—modern ideologies—that claimed to precisely project it in a rational and universal dimension (Galli, 1997: VIII).

The subject is caught in the contradiction of feeling powerful and powerless, confident and insecure, master and a subject in her or his own realm. The apparent evaporation of ontological, metaphysical and religious certainties of the past, makes the subject perceive the difficulty of identifying new horizons of meaning that would provide a context to the search for purpose and value.

While not agreeing with the apocalyptic analysis of those who lament the total collapse of traditional values, overlooking the *different* values that continue to emerge in the usual dialectic between past, present and future, there is no denying that the crisis of contemporary ethics has given way to epochal diseases like nihilism, narcissism, individualism, relativism. It is possible that these diseases always existed and that we only perceive them more, now that the crisis is spreading and our certainties are collapsing.

The 'age of void,' as defined by Gilles Lipovetsky (Lipovetsky, 1983), is the age of postmodern individuals, individuals who see in the lack of rules and restrictions the triumph of their freedom to determine their destiny. It is no longer, says the French sociologist, a question of rebelling against the oppression of a regulatory structure imposed by society and find new areas of self-legitimation, to transform the existing moral order and pursue a broader existential and political design. What is rejected is the norm itself, in order to allow for the existence of an individual without rules, living in a state of absolute freedom, free from all constraints. There is very little "openness to the improbable" (see Sloterdijk, 2016) in this definition of freedom and a lot self-absolving promotion of an individualism refractory to any to all forms of discipline and compulsion.

In this context it is not easy to identify a need for ethics, for an ultimate reference systems, universal principles, shared values.

> What is it—says J. Russ—that allows us today to say that a law is just? We do not know. Contemporary ethics is created in an absolute void, in the place where the habitual, ontological, metaphysical, religious basis of pure or applied ethics has been effaced (Russ, 1994: 7).

Where to restart, then? Some believe that this task falls on education. A salvific mission to reintroduce values and norms and avoid the moral

catastrophe of humankind. Others, more pessimist, believe that education is obsolete, that it does not have the power to intervene effectively in an historical, social and political context that recognizes only the authority of science and technology. Others, perhaps more cautiously, do not surrender to the inevitable, even knowing that it *might* be inevitable.

Certainly, these are not easy times for education. And those interested in education cannot ignore the echo of Kant's questions: "All interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical) is united in the following three questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What should I do? 3. What may I hope?" (Kant, 1998 [1781]: 677). Questions that echo urgently in the large domains of educational sciences. Moreover, education is not a separate territory isolated from the rest of the world, but a *world of life* that must be grasped in its entirety. Education is a complex totality, which is declined according to the infinite modes of existence.

No matter how many attempts can education make to reinforce its *scientific* basis and to corroborate its epistemological *status*, taking upon itself the burden of developing a complex technical and operational approach, its founding nucleus is always, invariably, linked to a delicate ethical and anthropological preliminary option: what can education reasonably know about, do about and hope for the future of humanity?

This essay will focus on the relationship between education and ethics, staying clear of unnecessary moralizing attitudes, which may be effective in a confessional approach, but are counterproductive in a critical pedagogical one. The closer you get to the core of educational discourse, the more it seems difficult to avoid a question that underlies any educational relationship: what is the relationship between *teaching*, *educational theory* and *ethics*? And how does that relationship develop, when it becomes necessary to elaborate reflections and, above all, concrete educational proposals that also qualify as forms of moral education? Educational practices, in fact, by their very nature, are linked to action and moral values and there can be no form of education that is not also an instrument for the creation and transmission of values. This aspect crucially distinguishes it from educational theory, which, if it aspires to a strictly 'scientific' status, must necessarily be a value-free reflection on educational practices, limiting itself to the equally fundamental role of elaborating proposals, world views and a priori syntheses.

But questions on the nature of the relationship between education and ethics and between education and morality endure, even today, when education is accused by many of obsolescence in the face of the skills required by society. Accusations and criticisms, however, coexist with sudden appeals to the palingenetic power of education for the (moral) regeneration of humanity. In short, people demand of education everything and its opposite, as if they were not aware of its potential and its structural antinomies, its limitations and possibilities, or at least pretending to ignore that education (and school) are part of a much larger system, combining education, ethics and politics.

Nor can we overlook, on the other hand, the very close relationship that education has with communication, a link that must necessarily be taken into consideration if we wish to explore the necessary path towards a new ontological and ethical foundation of educational discourse. The challenge, in other words, revolves around the ability to recover a role of an educational theory that contributes to the growth of the individual as a 'builder of ethical and political reality.' And the challenge is also to enact educational and communication strategies that promote the interrupted (or never fully realized) dialogue between education, ethics and politics in contemporary society.

However, to state that education must exist within an ethical and moral framework and to hope that this framework be taken into account in all educational relationships that can be defined as such, is very different from explaining *if* and *how* this can be done in the various educational contexts. Also because, while the conviction that values are the result of learning does not mean that they should be prescribed according to the dictates of a rigid axiological ontologism, it also does not mean that one should aspire to a total ethical relativism in which any stable reference to common sense is lost.

How then are we to deal with education as the formation of conscious and responsible subjects, committed to living ethically in a community of changing norms and values, without slipping in the marshes of an unsuccessful prescriptivism that would only confirm the naturalistic fallacy of deriving prescriptions from descriptions?

It may be useful, perhaps, to start from the bottom, from the genesis of words and from their original etymology, in order to grasp the significance that these words have taken as in the course of their evolution. Just as it would be necessary to start from the concepts of ethics and moral in order to understand the meaning they have in relation to *education* and *teaching*.

If "Language is the house of being," as Heidegger (1998 [1947]: 239) said, it is very possible that this is where we must start in order to tie together words and things. And, above all, to see if, in times of crisis, we can still hope to sensibly identify a shared moral code and ethics. A crisis, moreover, is not a state without any positive aspects. The word comes from the Greek *krino*, and has a semantic spectrum that includes *choose, separate, divide*. Therefore, if it is true that the subject who is aware of the contemporary condition experiences a crisis, it is also true that this existential and ontological condition may be the occasion for new choices and new opportunities. This might explain the growing interest in practical philosophy, which, already with Aristotle, embraced ethics and politics, and is now experiencing a revival of interest tied to the issues of *care, virtue, responsibility, justice*. This combines with the search for new principles and new foundations that could help re-establish ethics. Principles and foundations that are

> not a set of morals, an ensemble of rules characterizing a culture, but a 'metamorals,' a doctrine that positions itself beyond morals, a reasonable theory on the good and the bad, on values moral judgments (Russ, 1994: 5).

Consider for example the resumption of themes and motifs of Aristotelianism by authors like Alsdair MacIntyre and Martha C. Nussbaum, who try to see what happens *beyond virtue* and how *social justice and human dignity* are shaped when establishing a new ethical horizon; or consider the concepts of *equality* and *care* in the studies of philosophers like Lawrence Kolhberg and Carol Gilligan, both also interested in the interconnections between ethics and education; or again to the issue of liability as formulated by Hans Jonas and Paul Ricoeur, which characterizes the transition from the 'you must' to the 'you can' in the socio-political coordinates of a human community.

We shall, then, start with the ethics of the ancients, an unavoidable reference for anyone wishing to study this topic and understand its relevance in contemporary literature. It is not just for historical-philological reasons that it useful to compare the present use of the term with the original one. As we shall see, in contrast with the common view of ethics as a set of normative precepts to propose and impose through exhortation, the ancient world is full of surprises.

2. The Origins of *Ethos*

The fact that ethics was not born as a system of rules is obvious. In ancient Greece, in fact, where *moral issues* are not yet *ethics*, the notions of *virtue, law, fate, happiness* helped define the existential horizon of reference of individuals who still did not identify with a universally shared value system and did not perceive coercion or the law as something external to them. Ethics did not exist as a discipline in its own right and was not independent from philosophy or general wisdom. Moral concepts developed in a pre-predicative context, on the ground of religious, political and social experience. The moral system, moreover, was not very strict on account of the lack of public control systems, beyond ordinary social dynamics.

Moreover, ancient Greek ethics was not even a form of deontological ethics, but an *eudaimonistic* ethics, since the pursuit of happiness was the ultimate goal of moral action, or, in modern terms, its 'motivation.' The Homeric hero defends his honor and that of his household (*oikos*), often through the use of force, the only virtue acknowledged as having moral value. The first manifestation of virtue, then, is inside the *oikos*, where the sovereign exercises his legitimate power, defending his integrity and his community. "On them—explains Vegetti—depends the collective consensus, the 'respect,' which is basically the only real foundation of a sovereignty so lacking in institutional legitimacy" (Vegetti, 2010: 15-16). There are no universal moral rules, or values associated with the idea of collaboration or sharing. And in line with the above, also the concepts of individual choice and moral responsibility are still not fully developed.

However, the first meaning of ethics that the ancient world has produced is that of a behavior suited to the life of the community. The terms *oikos* and *ethos* appear significantly close, from a conceptual point of view, and

one cannot help noting the semantic gap between *oikos* and its contemporary meaning. "The concept of *ethos*—clarifies Rohls—derives from the Greek terms *ethos* (habit) and *ēthos* (usual place of life, custom, use, character" (Rohls, 1995 [1991]: 7). Thus there is no reference to the idea of 'value'; no reference to an abstract 'should be,' no ethics of prescribing, as argued by philosophers as different as Hegel and Heidegger.

What qualifies as an *ethos*, in fact, is what is usual and customary for the members of a community, what allows them to identify with the 'de facto situation', the condition of common life. The semantic connection with the concept of *oikos* is now more evident: the house is what serves as the habitual residence, the home that protects one from the outside and strengthens the bonds between those who dwell inside. And the home is still, today as in ancient times, that which serves as an identity device, allowing us to constantly confirm our internal space and, at the same time, our self (Pasquinelli, 2004).

The reference to the lexical origin of the word *ethos* may be also useful for a reconfiguration of the delicate relationship between ethics and educational-formative practice, suggesting an interesting change of perspective. Indeed, our own everyday experience appears to confirm that the ethical system can be regarded as a condition of proximity to a fully human condition and not as a set of evaluation requirements. The reference to orders, exhortations and recommendations certainly has very little to do with the structuring of an autonomous and responsible 'ethical subject,' whether in formal and informal educational practices.

The same holds for the moralism underlying part of public communication, bent on 'awakening consciences' through a constant state of indignation, which has very little impact on the concrete reality of individuals. Especially now that the continuous alarm for to the crisis of values, the disintegration of traditional institutions, the collapse of traditional certainties and truths, are all amplified out of proportion, and accompanied by a chorus of ritual invocations for the restoration of prescriptive ethics. Nothing could be more useless for a form of education, which, while incorporating the future-oriented dimension of utopia and the idea of the human 'perfectioning' of subjects, has factual reality and not prescriptions as its starting point.

Certainly, we are not arguing that educational practices should be free of normative references. These references are necessary, on the contrary, in the constant dialectic between the exercise of freedom and the boundaries of need. Education, conceived as the capacity to construct one's self and give meaning to one's ability to choose, is constantly situated in deliberative contexts that require commitment, responsibility, a shared set of norms.

But education is also an autonomous and creative form of human becoming and being which finds its 'form' in the concreteness of an historically determined environment. That is why, ultimately,

> a form, *forma hominis* included, corresponds better to the negative ruling of *ethos* that its positive ruling from the current level of common sense that 'ethics' means 'corresponding to value judgments' (Granese, 2008: 82).

What I am trying to underline is that education has not a deterministic cause and effect relation with ethics. It is not by imposing more or less stable axiological schemes that we can endow educational practices with moral principles and values. Rather, it is by taking care of and nourishing the domain of our 'common home' where human becoming takes place. "In this sense ethics is the ideal, but also universal human material, and pedagogy, as a theoretical and practical discipline of collective individual development, this has to deal with and this can (or even should) find its identity" (Ibid.: 83; see also Baldacci, 2007).

There is no denying that this is no easy task in these times of general epistemological disorientation, which reflects also on education and pedagogy. It would be necessary, perhaps, to adopt a perspective different from that of ordinary common sense, rediscovering a dimension long fallen into oblivion buried under heavy layers of fruitless deontology. This does not mean founding a new ethical-legal status but weaving together the strands that make human behavior meaningful and provide us with a sense of feeling 'at home.'

3. Ethics and Educational Care

Heidegger's enlightening reflections on the connection between ethics and 'living beings' locate in the disorientation of modern human beings the stimulus for the search for a new ethics. When

> yet without elevating the human being to the center of being, a longing necessarily awakens for a peremptory directive and for rules that how the human being, experienced from ek-sistence toward being, ought to live in a fitting manner (Heidegger, 1998[1976]: 268).

Here we see very clearly the condition of existential confusion resulting from the loss of the center. The loss, both material and symbolic, of one's center of balance delocalizes identity and produces the sense of *a-topia* and disorientation that characterizes the modern human being in the age of technique. That is why, following Heidegger's view of ethics and ontology as intertwined, taking care of the "sojourn (*Aufenthalt*), place of living" allows humans to reconcile themselves with their essence. Consequently, according to an effective and graphic definition of ethics,

> if the name 'ethics' […] should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being, then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics (Ibid.: 271).

This means, ultimately, that ethics can be seen as a return to the human in its broadest sense, as explicitly suggested in Heidegger's *Letter on "humanism"* quotedabove.

It is not difficult to see, at this point, that it is the concept of 'human' that constitutes the semantic core of this argument. Human refers to *humanitas* in a broad sense, it refers to the individual, person, subject, and designates that being who is finds in the ongoing dynamic of freedom and need his or hers self-determined existential and creative *status*. But it also brings to mind the idea of human development, becoming and transformation. Here we return, once again, to the specific field of education. Here the becoming of a human beings, their development in a free, though necessary, form takes place starting from factual situations that must be taken into account. The usual place, residence, common household indicates the space in which the time of human development unfolds according to habit and custom.

It is not, however, a development divorced from normative references. What constitutes the difference is that these are not *external* to its becoming. Herein lies the core of the matter, which must necessarily concern those involved in education. From this perspective, education cannot correspond to the subject's gradual approach to a prescribed condition. Instead it must respect the subject's nature and original substance, accompanying his or her future with commitment and care.

Education and didactic practice, in other words, are called upon to offer continuous commitment and hard work, to help subjects make choices and take responsibility by acting with awareness and discernment. Which means that educational practices must deal regularly with situations endowed with oral content and seamlessly interact with shared values systems.

If one considers education from the perspective of the 'educational care' of human beings, other ethical implications become evident. The goal of education is

> to put the other in a position to provide for themselves for their own needs [enabling the subject] to do cognitive actions such as identifying needs and establishing priority criteria, both of concrete actions to meet the needs and achieve objectives (Mortari, 2006: 31).

As one can see, in this case too we are in the presence of conscious deliberation, of goals and objectives, of material and moral criteria that are not imposed from the outside, but emerge from a concrete context in life. Again, nothing could be further from the Kantian imperative.

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethic*, was the one that evidenced the close connection between ethics and education. As noted by Hegel and Gadamer, the appeal to 'morality' rather than the pursuit of Plato's Good, makes it possible to establish practical knowledge as an independent domain. Some critics speak more specifically of a "common sense morality" (Robin, 1971[1935]), emphasizing the novelty of a philosophical practice closer to everyday social interaction. Be as it may, Aristotelian ethics qualifies immediately as a practice whose goal is to make us aware of the public *ethos*, of that vast patrimony of truth found in the opinions (*endoxa*) of the best citizens.

How does the transmission of norms and ethical and political values occur then? Certainly, not solely through the use of reason, as in Socratic ethical intellectualism. In other words, it is not enough to know (and teach) the good to accomplish it. In the democratic *polis*, two rather significant elements emerge: the *ethos* remains tied to the political community, involving also the economy and politics; and the good life can be led only within the *polis* (Rohls, 1995 [1991]).

Yet education has a significant role, says Aristotle:

> Virtue, then, is of two kinds: that of the intellect and that of character. Intellectual virtue owe sits origin and development mainly to teaching, for which reason its attainment requires experience and time; virtue of character (ēthos) is a result of habituation (ethos) (Aristotle, 2004: II, 1103a 14-16).

Two elements stand out: first of all, Aristotle's clarification on the semantic gap between *ethos* and *ēthos*, which aims to distinguish and to connect at the same time the sense of *habit* with that of *character, home and habitual place*. As one can see, in Aristotle's interpretation as well, the concept of ethics seems devoid of any normative value connotation. It is still only the reference to a shared tradition that serves as a moral norm for the community, a happy mixture of life and moral daily regulative practices.

Secondly, Aristotle distinguishes between 'ethical virtues,' those of the desiring part of the human soul, of the character, of *ethos*, and 'dianoetic virtues,' expression of the rational part of subjectivity, acquired through education. In other words, we are born solely with a predisposition for virtue. Then we need the (*ethos*) habit of a virtuous life, which is achieved through everyday social education. It is, therefore, a question of allowing the individual to become aware in a rational form of the "public ethos from which it was formed spontaneously, and that he will return this ethos freed from the confusions and contradictions that lurk there, led to systematic clarity" (Vegetti, 2010: 165-166).

Therefore, true virtue is achieved at the moment when, as a result of an autonomous and deliberate choice, the subject consciously acts virtuously inside the ancient polis. The ethical naturalism of Aristotle, at this point, is perfectly completed, with all the inevitable consequences that this approach entails, as McIntyre, for example, has noted: "The educated moral agent must of course know what he is doing when he judges or acts virtuously. Thus he does what is virtuous *because* it is virtuous" (MacIntyre, 2007[1981]: 157). The direct passage from the description to the norm, therefore, to the close connection between fact and value, between observation of reality and the setting of goals, and helps to radicate the idea of an ethos inscribed in the historical and political coordinates of the ancient city. Hegel saw in this coincidence of particularity and universality, the 'beautiful ethical totality' of the Greek *polis*: "The ethical realm—says in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—is in this way in its enduring existence an

immaculate world, a world unsullied by any internal dissension" (Hegel, 1977[1807]: 278).

For Hegel, Greek democracy was the material place where subjective intention manifested itself as a moment within the objective spirit. In this coincidence of the will of the citizens with the will of the *polis* (which is of course an idealization, which ignores among other things the fact that Greek democracy contemplated the existence of slavery and inequality) Hegel sees the substantial immediacy of ethics in terms of common habit and custom, which lasted until it was corrupted by the of principle of interiority introduced with Christianity. But at this point, the subject acquired the capability of becoming 'infinitely free,' affirming the principle of the single and unique personality.

As for Aristotle, on the other hand, Hegel appreciates his idea of civic virtue as substantial self-completion, taking place in a perfect form of community, represented for him by the ancient Greek city. Naturally, something quite different from the modern idea of ethics.

4. Responsibility and Communicative Action

Even now the becoming of the human being takes place in well-defined historical contexts. And we have attempted here to show that thinking of ethics as a 'common home' can still be a significant help in establishing a meaningful horizon of shared values.

The importance of education, in this semantic reinterpretation of concepts, is significant, although one cannot attribute to it a salvific role. While education is not, or not solely, the mechanical product of a historical, social and economic context, it does not have the magic power to transform the world around it, persuading consciences and indoctrinating minds. Education is a real but weak force, a force that can control or emancipate, support authority and institutions or undermine customs and conventions.

Yet, it is at the heart of the ethical landscape of human development, also and especially to the extent it presents itself in terms of authentic communicative relationship between subjects.

Paul Ricoeur's reflections on the chance of establishing fair institutions that operate for the common good involve also the question of educational communication and its role in the present socio-political scenario (Ricoeur, 1992; 2005). What task/role/challenges do education and educational theory have to deal with in redefining the relationship between the individual and complex society? Ricoeur seems to argue that, in the dialectic between ethics and politics, there is room for a new educational approach, one that will promote the construction of values like the *good life* and *fair institutions*.

Richard Rorty's position, on the other hand, is very different. It outlines the profile of the post-philosophical intellectual, affirming the primacy of democracy over philosophy and relativizing the concept of truth, which is

seen as a refutable and negotiable belief (Rorty, 1989; 1979). Rorty emphasizes the concept of democratic reason, which accepts the play of opinions and the prevailing of one thesis over another as a price to pay for the protection of democratic freedom. Obviously, we see in this an echo of the recent debate on postmodernism, realism and new realism, especially in relation to the concept of truth (Putnam, 2012; Searle,1995; Corbi, 2010).

Opposite between the two authors seems also their view of the role of communication: a tool for the development of ethical value, for Ricoeur, a simple narrative and *conversation between equals* for Rorty. In either case, however, communication plays a decisive role.

But what kind of communication are we talking about in the case of educational relationships? Communication among human beings after all does not coincide simply with the exchange of semantic content. The information and knowledge transmitted in a speech act is only part of the overall communication. One must take into account, in particular, the relational aspect present in every dialogue, that is, the set of motivations, goals, hopes and desires that drive human beings to enter into a communicative relationship with one another.

In is not a question of viewing the two aspects of language, the logical-symbolic (semantic) one and the affective-motivational-rhetorical (relational) one, as antagonists in the discursive action, but to acknowledge the equal standing of both means of expression, which are both necessary for knowledge and its communication. The dialectic and the rhetoric of communication, in other words, are complementary and necessary aspects of every communicative act. After all, it is no longer possible to maintain that rhetoric is only the counterfeiting of truth, or a manipulative and oppressive practice.

In today's democratic society, the art of rhetoric is increasingly turning into a *theory of argument*, that is a way of distinguishing between *good* and *bad* arguments (D'Agostini, 2010). And this obviously translates in the need to find good reasons, both logical and moral, to support dialectical-rhetorical procedures and to educate people to *communicate correctly.*

As we know, this is not an entirely new proposal. Already in the Greek democracy of the V-IV century, the dialectical rhetorical argument was seen as a form of philosophizing functional to truth understood as *common good*. Philosophy was in fact "the specific application of argumentative techniques [towards] the pursuit of truth, the search of *being,* the search for public and individual *happiness* (the good)" (Ibid.: 215).

We believe the future of education can be located in this context. Some thinkers have argued that the more education and rhetorical-communicative competence becomes common, the more it will be possible to communicate in an authentic, responsible and democratic fashion (Cattani, 2001; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004).

There is no denying that this belief runs the risk of turning into a form of normative- pedagogical Enlightenment. Any strict regulation of speech and any attempt to confine communication within the rigid boundaries of

prescriptive norms is the result of illusory and abstract thinking, which fails to take into account the elusiveness of subjectivity. Especially when it does not address the more complex (and perhaps uncomfortable) question of the place of public communication within a mature ethical horizon of value.

However, in times of revival of practical philosophy of and tolerant conversation, which Rorty sees as a last chance for the survival of the old philosophy, it seems inevitable to consider educational communication and rhetoric as the best way to work on truly shared values such as equality, solidarity, democracy.

After all, rhetoric is closely connected with the problematic domain of ethics and politics, since it is "the place of multiplicity, plurality, compared differences and dialogue, the place of multiple questioning, which poses problems rather than giving solutions, and invites to take decisions" (Raimondi, 2002: 22). The reference to the multiplicity and complexity of the social world emphasizes the correspondence between the interiority of the subject and his or her public dimension. Rhetoric, in this case, works both in favor of the reunification of different parts of subjectivity, extending the expressive and evocative potential of the word, and in favor of the reconciliation through peaceful dialogue of social contradictions and conflict. It functions as a reasoning instrument that mediates, establishes a dialog, persuades, in order to reach a consensus on values that are never taken for granted.

This presupposes, of course, that we are willing to consider communication in anti-Platonic terms as a complex theory of argumentation, in which conflicts and divergences are triggered, but in which everyone can maintain his or her individuality.

And it also means shifting our focus from the axiological domain of the absolute to that of reality, and dealing with the everyday, the ordinary, the concrete. From a philosophical point of view, it means abandoning the aspiration to a perfectly accurate logical-formal language, the one that Wittgenstein was thinking of when he said that "everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly" (Wittgenstein, 2001[1922]: p. 30) to accommodate the imperfect and precarious dimension of ordinary language (Wittgenstein, 1984[1953]).

However, a reference value system remains indispensable. It is necessary to rebuild on an ethical foundation of values the modes of communication between people, redefining the rules of discourse in order to re-establish human interaction on the basis of rational and shared norms (Habermas, 1986[1981]; 1992[1983]). For language is the domain in which different opinions come into contact and in which divergences and conflicts arise. We therefore need to work on dialogue, also intercultural (Portera, 2013) and consensus to build a new ethical and moral practices. "In the absence of an interhuman dialogical encounter—says Pati—values to would become meaningless […]. [They] must always be proposed through an interactive exchange between the You and the I" (Pati, 2008: 100-101).

Communication must be considered as more than a simple exchange of information, as a rich and complex web of linguistic *relations* between people. Either speech is able to sustain this rich and multilayered semantic burden, or it will risk losing its main function.

Education is rightfully part of this significant circle. In democracy it is our right and our duty to learn how to distinguish good reasons from bad ones. To do this we can rely on an educational and ethical code that is *internal* to rhetorical procedure itself. The richness of the educational discourse can only be grasped through a *dialectic* of *communicative complexity* through the consolidation and the reunification of its many forms of expression. And rhetoric has the extremely useful function of serving as a bridge between intellectual knowledge, the inner experience of feelings and the space of emotions.

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