

PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION: THE SCHOOL AS A MEANS OF TRAINING

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Abstract: *When I think about school, I can't help but think about life, about my life. Indeed, school has been the constant of my life.*

I have gone through all the grades of the school and in the various grades, I have also changed types of schools; moreover, today, I find myself teaching in primary school for 28 years now, and tomorrow... Maybe!

Anyway, now I'm here and I'm looking over my shoulder for a thin thread, the texture of my life. Perhaps this is not what I have to talk about, perhaps the style I am using is not suited to this treatment, perhaps I should be more impersonal, use a more objective style, but all this is not said by chance, even if by chance many of our choices are determined.

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Introduction

So, we come to the subject of this article, we come to the definition of the function that we attribute to the school. The school as a means of training. Speaking of training, it is necessary to establish who and in what way. We come to who: this question could simply be answered “the learning subject”, but by asking ourselves the problem of “how”, new problems arise that we are going to face considering the need for training as necessary for the child, as for the adult, to the construction of tools for research and understanding of the multiplicity of contexts of life, understood as freedom.

Here it is necessary to clarify what multiplicity is and therefore why it is here understood as freedom.

To clarify it is necessary to make a premise; and, that is, to speak of the school as the place within which the child makes contact with life, therefore with himself and with others. He therefore makes contact with the multiple, with the multiple places of being, he enters a workshop from which, in a perspective of continuous training, he will never leave it again. The German biologist Haeckel, at the end of the last century, wrote a thesis on the study of the evolution of man. For Haeckel, cosmic and organic evolution, including human, are governed by the “biogenetic law” according to which the development of the individual, or ontogenesis, summarizes the development of the species, or phylogeny.

Following this thesis, the English positivist H. Spencer (1820-1903), in intellectual, moral and physical education, arrives at a pedagogical perspective understood as self-development: if the succession of knowledge acquired by mankind had been transmitted by inheritance, in the same order to subsequent generations, then the education of the child must be “in a small way a repetition of civilization”.

At this point, faced with the work that was considered a sort of manifesto of positivist pedagogy, we need to ask ourselves which civilization Spencer was referring to. If the civilization that Spencer had in mind was the one that solved the problem of knowledge as scientific knowledge, that is, as it went beyond subjective impressions and reflections, then it is necessary to restore to the subject one’s position, that is, one’s role as protagonist; an “objectivity” without the subject is unthinkable. So who is the Subject of this civilization? He is the man, a man halfway between Doctor Faust and Renzo. Both of these figures live their history as men; both are looking for answers. The one, perhaps – Doctor Faust, I mean –, is the architect of his story, a story that would like to be a multiple story, just as there are many possibilities that life has within itself. Faust in his choice, in his encounter with the devil, frees himself, with a last extreme act, of his essence, of his subjectivity, of his ability to choose, of his reason, as if in this act, in fact, he wanted to contain all the infinite choices, to disperse his unique subjectivity involved in all those infinite choices, to raise one’s spirit above things and dominate them.

For the philosopher Hegel, human existence, until it rises to reason, is restlessness of the spirit. And it is Faust’s restlessness that he describes:

Faust wants to understand the foundation of things, the secret spring of the manifestations of the physical and moral world, he wants to understand the one who gave everything an order.

In vain! He moves on the stage of life, where vices and virtues are intertwined, where good comes from evil and evil from good. The spirit is increasingly confused. (.....) The spirit must leave everything to its external course and, on the other hand, a deep darkness and a gloomy silence envelop all the powers that it does not perceive and that only seem to deride it. Everything is dark for the spirit of man and it is itself an enigma. (HEGEL, pp. 70-71)

Hegel wants to solve the riddle; in fact, he solves it in the awareness that nothing in the world is enigmatic, everything is as it manifests itself. There is no evil power that deceives man, and not even an occult good or truth that must be painfully or painfully discovered beyond appearance and evil. Everything is substance, everything is to be true, everything is reason. In every moment, that world so dark in Faust is a world fully clear to itself, good and truth are constant presence. Provided, however, that we do not stop immediately, at the single choice, provided that the relationship that binds one to the whole is maintained firm and aware, the determination to the substance, the manifestation to the essence; the need for freedom. In this conception, however, Hegel does not ignore the lacerations of being, he does not ignore the eternal passing of everything. In this conception, Hegel elevates immediacy to reason, relates the given to the universal. And then, precisely the splits, the becoming, the contingency, appear as a guarantee of the freedom of the spirit – that same spirit of Faust enveloped in the “profound darkness” and the “gloomy silence” of the infinite hidden possibilities. And this guarantee is given precisely by their nature, that is, as the manifestation of reason, which always takes away its moments in itself, to regain its unity at a higher level, and thus to give its freedom a fuller effect, more aware of its own unfolding in the world, in history.

The other, that is Renzo, is a simple man, he is a man who does not have the problem of infinite choices, he is a man who, as his only choice, wants to marry Lucia: this is the only story he would like to live, he is looking for nothing else. But here is the story, indeed the infinite stories of other men who stand between his only choice – the promise – and the possibility of making it come true; and anger is not needed, the animosity with which Renzo almost rebels against the many adversities, the multiple

offerings of life in all its facets: it is life itself that dominates it, it is this multiplicity that prevails.

However, Renzo seems to live the enigma that surrounds him, the enigma of infinite events, of the continuous succession of events, with the same restlessness as Faust; Renzo like Faust, despite him, “moves on the stage of life, where vices and virtues intertwine, where good comes from evil and evil comes from good”. Indeed, Renzo does not get upset, he stays there. He awaits events, of course. And while he awaits them, more than restless, he seems to have revealed the mystery that surrounds him: there is no evil power that deceives man, and not even an occult good or truth that must be painfully or painfully discovered beyond the appearance of evil. In every moment, the world is fully clear to itself, good and truth are constant presence. This is how the world appears to Renzo: pure adherence to himself.

The Odyssey of these men, therefore, their meeting and colliding with the multiple routes that life offers them, seems to be a single journey through their own humanity – whether elevated to spirit, or as acceptance of the world –, through the their very finitude as men, as if, in the end, it is the conquest of a greater humanity that counts, a humanity that has conquered itself with the acceptance, this time, of the supreme value of facts, of events thus how they unfold and how they, men, act to determine them.

Thus the facts, the events, the unfolding of the world, in other words its manifestation, thus become the co-protagonists of History, of Faust, of Renzo – of Goethe, of Manzoni –, and of the many stories of men, of all men.

The intent was, therefore, to delve into the multiple; the intent was to define the multiple, indeed, the multiplicity. But how? Speaking of freedom. In what terms should we now address the discourse on freedom? In terms of research, of a constant and continuous search for contents, values, means. The research stems from the need to concretize our concepts, from the need to experience, to experience reality, the world as it arises, as it presents itself to us, at first in a confused way, almost as if the world and I represent an everything from which it is difficult to separate. How to overcome the split? For Hegel the overcoming of the split belongs to reason, indeed it is the essential task of reason, nor can there be reason if this task is not fulfilled. With this Hegel agrees with the tradition, but divides it as regards the way to fulfil the overcoming.

For Hegel the one and the multiple are the elements of a whole, of a circular process in which one term represents the negation of the other as multiple taken away, and not as cancelled; in the unity of the two extremes lies the category of et-et, not of either-or, as an intrinsic presence of being itself. The way lies in the recognition of the dialectical nature of reality. It is not by excluding one of the two terms of the contrast that the split is overcome, but by thinking of unity in the split, as an organic totality that develops. Therefore, the only way to overcome the split is to accept it as a reality, both logical and ontological, proper to thought and being. There must be no difference between thought and reality: thought must be a self-reflection of the world. What, then, is the point of contact between thought and reality, the point of conjunction? The limit. The concept of limit contains that of freedom, not as a universal potentiality of the will, not as an indeterminate possibility, but as a determined possibility, therefore limited. The limit therefore represents the real sphere of freedom, therefore it is not something less than the potential freedom of choices, but something more, because it makes it real, possible.

Therefore the limit to the unlimited will of man is the other, it is the will of others; therefore, being free means accepting the other as a limit, that is, as a means of realizing a certain possibility.

Freedom then is not inherent in being, in man, but it is a process, it is the development of reason that conceives itself as other than itself, and the other as a part, and the driving force of this process is the negative (moment of the dialectic) as a real force, as an immanent principle in the determinations and in this it is the potentiality of change, it is becoming as a structure of the world. It is a potential unity as a limit, that is, negation of something, determined, with its own content, The negative is itself a positive, the contradiction goes beyond itself, it removes itself as such, the self and the other identify themselves as persons, being and thought reach an absolute identity; identity of being as a subject. A subject, a person, a free person: such is the outcome of the development of the individual as a being in the world, as a unity of the many. As a child, man became great. From an indistinct whole between me and the world he split off and then rejoined it again as a being conscious of himself and of the world, as one in communication and in relationship with everything, as reason.

Giovanni Gentile said that the child was not loved enough by the adult, "because (the latter) saw him as small in front of him, and so different! Unable at first even to stand on his legs and stand up and raise his forehead as is typical of man, who looks in front of him because he has

become aware of himself, and measures himself with the world around him, and in which it touches him to affirm and live. He saw him from the beginning inept to express his thought of him and lacking in this characteristic which is the prerogative of man among all living beings, language; and deprived of that reflection so that man watches over his motions, reasoning and therefore proportionally in practice his ends to the means at his disposal, he does not want the impossible, he does not expose himself to useless risks; he controls, corrects and directs his will with greater and lesser caution and circumspection. In short, he saw him as inferior to himself because he lacks that attribute which makes him stand out as a man from the rest of all beings: the attribute of freedom. Without this attribute, although susceptible to come into possession once. Hence the need for education.” (G. GENTILE, pp. 34-35)

In the place where education takes place – the school – the child knows the world with the tools of reason. One reason, the one of him, in evolution, in growth. The tools of reason, of thought thus become the tools of communicating, of language, indeed of the multiplicity of languages that thought uses.

So how does the school educate the child to communicate with himself and with the world? By placing and addressing the child, it too, as a language, as a means of accessing all languages, as a window open to all possible windows. The knowledge of the child, in its evolution, passes through phases that the neuropsychologists of the developmental age identify in the neurological, psychological, social, motor, affective aspects; phases in which the child experiences, constructs, elaborates mental schemes, mental images to which he refers from time to time, experimenting, building, re-elaborating, thus incorporating the new experience into the others, not as a sum of experiences, but as organic inclusion with the whole.

The physical, psychic, social and affective development then become a single development in which all the aspects progress in parallel in a unique way. The child experiences himself and the world through sensory perception, manipulation, observation of what surrounds him; sensation becomes the tool of experience just as, later, when he has conquered the ability to abstraction, the image will become the tool of thought. When I speak of image I am not referring only to the visual data, but to everything that evokes an experience, an inner sensation in the child. Probably the visual image is more immediate, it immediately puts the data in contact with the thought, the sender with the receiver.

Today we live in the society of the image and the debate on the more or less positive effects that the image, mediated by television and technology has on children is very heated. What is certain is the very nature of the image as an immediate emitter of lights, colours, shapes, things: pieces of the world, of that world that the child wants to know, experience, see.

And if, of course, the image cannot be the only vehicle of experience, it is certainly a good vehicle for openness, for branching out sensations in the construction of ideas. The interaction itself with the image in digital language provides tools for what goes on to develop perceptual-motor learning, which, based on the repeated simulation of reality, is based on learning by trial and error.

Then the school, as a means of accessing all languages, must educate the child in the construction of the same languages, in the penetration of languages, of codes to ensure that he takes possession of the codes themselves and becomes capable of constructing new ones as well as new forms of communication that put him in constant contact with himself and with the multiple.

To do this, the school must start from the data, from the concreteness of the communication itself, which cannot but take place in life: from the reality of the child himself, as the bearer of his own subjectivity in the making, to the reality, varied and multiple, of which the world is composed.

In reconstructing the variety and multiplicity of the world, it is to history that the school must turn, as a methodology for investigating the self of the child and the self of humanity, as a unitary development of the journey of man in history, as the conquest of an everlasting greater awareness of one's role in history, in one's own history as men, as free of the world. A world that is at the same time infinite places, infinite times, in which the man-child is free to project himself in search of his own world, of his own Ithaca. And this is the world of imagination, where everything is possible, even choosing a possible way, not as the only way, but as one among the others and where you can experience the multiple possibilities of accessing reality, in life as being free to express, with the infinite languages of thought, his own essence of man, as the bearer of an ever richer and more complete humanity.

And if "from the Renaissance magic of Neoplatonic origin the idea of the imagination as communication with the soul of the world starts, an idea that later will be of Romanticism and Surrealism" (I. CALVINO, page 98), this idea school must return to connect the soul of the world with the soul of the child.

Conclusion

Therefore, the school is a vehicle for the construction of the means to research and understand the soul of the world, in life, in history, in itself, as a synthesis of the unfolding of civilization projected into the future.

Educating the child then means educating him to freedom, to the freedom of thought to imagine, to invent things as true or as possible.

Ernest Hemingway was saying:

The job of writers is to imagine or tell big lies and Gregorio Sansa replies: The job of the true writer consists in telling the truth.... Or in imagining it, of course (Certo... certius!).