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Pedagogical Hope between Presence and Promise

Pedagogiczna nadzieja między obecnością i obietnicą

Abstract: What specific imprint does Christianity give to the philosophical elaboration of personalism? Initially, we introduce a reflective reread on Christian personalist thought in ongoing pedagogical discourse, in particular through the paradigmatic concept of hope. Returning to the traditional concept of ‘person’ and to its philosophical-ontological legacy, this essay discusses the dynamic of the teacher-student educational relationship. In this context, this paper attempts to show that the educator manifests his being a *person of hope* through his *educative presence* and respect for the *promise*.

Keywords: personalism; pedagogical hope; educational presence; promise; intergenerational dialogue.

Abstrakt: Co można uznać za oryginalny wkład chrześcijaństwa w rozwój personalizmu na gruncie filozofii? Na wstępie niniejszego artykułu zaprezentowano,

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przede wszystkim poprzez odniesienie do paradygmatycznej idei nadziei, refleksyjne odczytanie chrześcijańskiej myśli personalistycznej w kontekście bieżącego dyskursu pedagogicznego. Wracając do tradycyjnej koncepcji osoby, jak i filozoficzno-ontologicznej spuścizny tegoż pojęcia, niniejszy esej poświęcony jest omówieniu dynamiki relacji wychowawczej zachodzącej między nauczycielem i wychowankiem. W tym właśnie ujęciu podjęta zostaje próba wykazania, że wychowawca przedstawia się jako *osoba nadziei* poprzez swoją *wychowawczą obecność* i szacunek dla *obietnicy*.

Słowa kluczowe: personalizm; nadzieja pedagogiczna; obecność wychowawcza; obietnica; dialog międzypokoleniowy.

1. Introduction

Reading personalism in ongoing pedagogical discourse asks us to open up to a horizon of perspectives but also to a fertile ground of tradition: the legacy of the concept of ‘person’ and its historical connoted revival in twentieth-century personalism still represent extensive heuristic margins and critical impulses. The role of tradition acquires an essential character for personalistic pedagogy because it recalls a process of reflection that is dense and articulated in long phases of analysis, which leads to the search for a point of approach to a concept that has its origins in theological and metaphysical thought, but which represents interesting suggestions in its very etymology. Tradition, as a delivery of authentic and founding values to next generations, is characterised by the personalism of some nuances: firstly, the knot that tied its spiritual soul to a specific period in the 1930s must be untied; thus, *engagement* must be released from being recognised solely in revolutionary political commitment. In fact, the return to tradition refers to personalism as a commitment but also prophecy; it calls for a return to an anthropology on an ontological and ethical basis and not just a historical one.

In 1939 Emmanuel Mounier published a short volume entitled *Personalism and Christianity*, in which the reflection develops on the theological level, while the community personalism, with a social and political background (Mounier, 1975/1936) through which his work is usually described, is from the following years. Ada Lamacchia, translator of the Italian version of the work, wrote in the introduction: ‘The basic question that underlies the whole essay is: what specific imprint does Christianity give to the philosoph-

ical elaboration of personalism so that the latter gains a space of meaning and a speculative horizon that cannot be traced in issues that ignore it?' (1977, p. 13). The answer to this question, which is hope, appears in one of the key themes through which Mounier reinterprets Christian personalism, recalling the letter to the Romans on this theme: 'Who without reason for hope, in faith went on hoping, so that he became the father of a number of nations' (Romans 4:18).

Hope, both theological and human, represents the heart of Christian personalism and also nourishes its pedagogical thought. The hopeful faith that we find in the spiritual writings and subsequently in the 'letters on pain' (2001) brings Mounier's thinking closer to authors such as Jacques Maritain, for whom 'the foundation of hope is a very first condition of equilibrium for our judgments on human life, not only on our own deficient life before God, but on the life of humanity and the final meaning of history' (1982, p. 67), and Charles Péguy, of whom we remember the image of hope as a child virtue that walks holding the hand of the older sisters Charity and Faith, recalling how it is she, although small, who keeps the other virtues united through her seeing and 'loves what has not yet been' (1929).

Furthermore, we can include Gabriel Marcel (1980) among those who have deepened the dimension of hope, recognising a common reference to the future in *espoir* and *esperance*, although 'with the intention of the future, hope is trust and at the same time patience' (Melchiorre, 2000, p. 52), while hoping exposes you to the risk of illusion. Placing our reflection on hope in a pedagogical context, therefore, requires promoting the transcendence that belongs to the person and which refers to educability as an implementation of the potential of being, namely it requires us to refer to the idea of human perfectibility.

In this context of analysis, in 1954, the first Scholé Convention, the Italian Center for Pedagogical Studies among Christian university professors, referring to the French personalist current, sees *Christian pedagogy* as a theme for reflection and while building the foundations of Italian personalism it found in the reflection of Luigi Stefanini precisely an attention to educability; it is deepening in teacher–pupil relationship, which 'is image to the God–man relationship' (Stefanini, 1955, pp. 48–49). Pedagogy with a Christianly inspired personalistic matrix can be recognised in the attempt to nourish the link between philosophical and theological anthropology.

Already Maritain, in *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation* (1959), encouraged referring to the question about man as the inevitable preamble of every theory of education; thus, recognising man as a person meant affirming

his ontological spiritual dimension. From this basis, on the historical-material level, the person is called to mature his (intellectual, relational, affective, ethical) potential through education, because ‘to correspond to this integral humanism, there should be an integral education’ (Maritain, 1943, p. 88). Hence, among the contributions offered by the scholars who participated in the conference, Marco Agosti proposed ‘the elaboration of an integral pedagogy according to Christian Personalism’, which has a conception of the human being based on ‘substantiality, individuality, rationality, super-naturality’, which are ‘the four cardinal points of orientation for the study of the person’ (1955, pp. 237–247).

This pedagogy has its roots in the manifestation of the exemplary idea that God has placed in every human being. Hope, therefore, is substantiated in the recognition of ‘this infinite desire that inhabits the person’ (Malebranche, 1963, p. 52).

Furthermore, alongside attention to the essence, with the desire to recall the role of pedagogy as a practical science, Aldo Agazzi highlighted that education ‘can and should be founded, animated, directed, finalised according to principles and reasons of absolute – perhaps even being conceived *for* the absolute and *for* the universal’, however ‘it is not operated in beings, situations, problems *about* absolute and *of* absolute’ (1955, p. 254). Indeed, education occurs in the ‘empirical reality’ that is individually, historically and existentially determined. The reflections on the concept of person, albeit in the individual specificities of research, have all recalled an inalienable and inviolable dignity of man, who is the subject of freedom, relationship and transcendence.

2. The educator: a person of hope

In the early eighties, Paul Ricoeur, with the well-known essay *Meurt le personnalisme, revient la personne* (1983), identifies the crisis of notions as subject, me and conscience, and raises the need for a renewed hermeneutic responsibility able to deal with the changed anthropological paradigms. The personalism of Christian inspiration (Macchietti, 1998), from an actualising and critical standpoint, still reveals in the yearning for the Universal the ontologically human need of overstepping the contingent and complex cultural horizon. It shows the difficulty of the historical hold, if it is eradicated from its expressly Christian thought, but it does not lose its ontological value (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 92). New junctions thus open up to pedagogical research,

with a relaunch of the person in terms of *horizontality* (socio-political life) and descent into *interiority*, but also as an opening to *verticality* as *transcendence* and tension underlying the Christian-oriented educational proposal (Mari, 2001, p. 29).

To this end, Giuseppe Vico, questioning himself about the qualities of the Christian educator, defines him as a witness of truth, a living and embodied virtue that has the *habit* of consistently pursuing a set goal. The educator knows and wants to grasp the spirit of education even in the most intimate and hidden corners of his own and others' personality. The educator is an *anticipatory consciousness* (the title of the second part of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Bloch, 1959/2019); he presents himself as a work of synthesis between memory and future, as a prediction of a possibility of liberation, both in the dual relationship with vulnerable and fragile man, and in his social and cultural role. Reviewing the thinking of Ernst Bloch, Vico portrays the educator as a *cultivator of hope*, an essential element of humanity and a concrete expression of being, which testifies to the need for the person to live in the light of a goal. Even in situations of wounded or betrayed humanity, the educator represents 'an event of life which founds in its fulfilment the premise and the expectation of further fullness of humanity and transcendence' (1995, p. 70). Designing, then, will mean looking forward, believing that every person has potential resources but may not be able to see those, or may fail to fully realise them. The call of educability is in fact essential, and represents the transcendent force of change, growth and development. The educator is involved in a path and in a project that is a concrete and historical expression of the potential the human possesses, experiencing the paradox that the same person surprises himself in his being novelty and an opportunity for change. The educator therefore supports a transformation and accompanies the search for meaning in the existential journey, because only what penetrates the depths of the human soul has the power to form.

Hence, education is called to question the relationship between unity and the multiple existences of being, aware that the identity of the subject, as a 'synthetic unity of consciousness' in Kant's intuition (2007, pp. 137–138), is expressed in perspective form. We draw on Virgilio Melchiorre's reflection on the person as a perspective that is always open to the world in order to advance in pedagogical observations: the person 'is an intelligent tension that in the manifold of being ceaselessly seeks out and overshadows a full sense of being: in the finite limit of its perspective gradually crosses the original power of an absolute principle which the Western tradition meant, from the beginning, under the name of *Lógos*' (2007, p. 195). This perspective brings

us back to the gesture of tying (*léghein*), that is, the gesture of the peasant who discerned the good ears of the field.

The person, therefore, has within himself a conscience that orders and directs, which comes from the Principle, which chooses and governs the multiplicity of the world. From this aspect, we draw a profound reference to the intangibility and originality of the person. Pedagogy thus does not act purely by virtue of the creation of man as a social object, as a scientific tool, nor as a purely biological material.

The inviolability of the person lies, according to the intuition of Giuseppe Flores D'Arcais, precisely in his being 'unique'. Indeed, if 'the individual is a unit, one among many, one of many (shareholders, citizens, etc.), the person is unique' (1994, p. 125). Hence, the educational task will be to protect and promote that uniqueness.

In this regard, Giuseppe Catalfamo, an Italian exponent of a critical personalism, making a synthesis between educability and education, outlines in the educator the role of *pedagogical faith* nourished by hope: 'There are those who focus on education and believe in it and if they believe, they have a faith, a pedagogical faith, precisely'. This faith is not absolutely effortless, because it refers to another faith that is its condition: faith in the humanity of every person and, accordingly, faith in their perfectibility, in their redeemability, in their educability. A faith that has no certainty, but is nourished by hope: 'the educator must hope and have faith in education *malgré tout*. And faith in this particular man *malgré lui!*' (Catalfamo, 1986, pp. 98–99).

From this interior attitude of *cura sui* arises for the educator the possibility to become 'a person in view of being as hope' (ibidem), because the educators become as witnesses of hope in concrete historical and existential conditions. The educability of the person is, consequently, a task of synthesis between human aspirations and what Paul Ricoeur identifies in the *space of experience*. In it, 'whether it is a matter of personal experience or of experience handed down by earlier generations or by existing institutions, it is always a matter of overcoming something foreign, of something acquired becoming a *habitus*' (1991, p. 218). Accompanying the path to personal knowledge hence requires referring to a second concept: the *horizon of expectations*.

The formation of a project of the future is influenced by many factors and a certain *horizon of expectations* on the part of the living generations: 'No expectations without experience; no experience without expectation' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 270). In doing so, we create a perpetual generational transmission of meaning and construct a new understanding of historical time. In fact,

expectations carry within them pedagogical hope, yet it can be vulnerable in the fear that what is hoped for will not come to pass. The horizon, then, goes beyond the concept of space, because it is an unfolding and perspective opening that recalls an *ulteriority*. Therefore, the present manifests its being novelty to the extent that we believe it introduces new times.

Waiting is looking towards something else; in the dual relationship it recalls a path delimited by a past of memories and roots, and a future that is intention and desirability. The educator who awaits is the one who attends to the person's educability and watches over its flowering, without forcing and intrusiveness. Indeed, waiting cultivates freedom, animated by trust in the person before him, but also in the humanity that inhabits him. Waiting is a gift and a relational form marked by gratuitousness, since it is a response to the promise that each person represents.

For the Christian, in particular, waiting is preparation for the encounter with the God of the Promise; it refers to the search for the meaning of existence and the relationship with the Truth. Waiting is a vigil, a watching over.

How does the educator live the time of waiting? Jacques Maritain highlights how much the education of the child must consist primarily in accompanying and encouraging the personal dispositions that allow him to develop the life of the spirit; hence, attention must turn to the intimate depth of the personality.

In summary, education 'consists first of all in worrying about the inside, and the internalisation of the educational influence' (Maritain, 1943, p. 64). Considering the child and infancy as a paradigm of education, we could note how much, especially in times of crisis, such as the one we are experiencing currently due to the pandemic, the finitude of the human leads to questions of meaning about living and asks to investigate the educational relationship in its being intertwined between trust and hope. Consequently, it's necessary to rethink the pedagogical accompaniment of the human story *in fieri* as an anthropological question never resolved and solvable that for returning to the essence of the human requires descents in depth for new *re-emergence*.

Hope is thus linked to trust in the terms proposed by Gabriel Marcel of 'trusting in a being that can be called *Thou*', or rather in relaunching the educator an anticipatory awareness of an existential experience that can be contained in the image: 'I hope in you for us'. 'What defines man' – claims Marcel – 'are his *exigencies*' (Marcel, 1973, p. 34). Accordingly, *expérance absolue* is reached when one acts on the interior by recalling a transcendence and overcoming the solitary self and individual purposes to arrive at a knowledge that is born from grace, rather than being the result of an achievement.

Transcendence is not merely ‘going beyond’ because it represents the tension of the *verticality*, with the traditional distinction between the immanent and the transcendent, it is a form of *trans-ascendence*. For this interpretation, we don’t have hope, we *are* hope. Furthermore, hope opens to the person’s constitutive relationality: ‘For hope, which is just the opposite of resignation, something more is required. There can be no hope that does not constitute itself *through* a we and *for* a we. I would be tempted to say that all hope is at the bottom *choral*’ (1973, p. 143).

Reflecting on the value of hope in relation to human freedom, Martin Buber also comes to affirm that ‘the good teacher educates by his speech and by his silence, ... through his mere existence, only he must be a really existing man and he must be really present to his pupils; he educates through contact. Contact is the primary word of education’ (1967, p. 102). This is the dialogical principle in education and freedom represents the confirmation of the original power, but not its realisation. This is possible only through dialogue, that is, a relationship that arouses the person (Benedetto XVI, 2009, p. 53).

The place of human educability is precisely the deep intimacy that conceals the need to hope, being the subject of relationships and bonds. This intimate environment remains in the *spirit of childhood*: ‘Without that tender downy bud, which the first comer can nip off with his nail, all my creation would be nothing but dead wood’ (Péguy, 2017/1956, p. 73).

This interest in the *presence of the other person* reveals myself, and it is the basis on which the community is built (Mounier, 1975/1936, pp. 88–89). Furthermore, this is the link with a second pedagogically oriented concept: promise.

3. The promise: building the relationship between educability and educational presence

Promising is *putting in the presence of*, submitting to someone’s gaze to anticipate, asking for a personal commitment so that what is foreseen can be realised; keeping the promise is a form of obligation that for Ricoeur resides in *ipseity* because it leads to mutual recognition. Ricoeur’s desire ‘to live well with and for others in just institutions’ (1992, p. 239), is a deontological desire, because ‘not keeping one’s promise is betraying both the other’s expectation and the institution that mediates the trust of speaking subjects’ (1992, p. 268). The promise, in fact, stems from the pedagogical trust recalled by Catalfamo: the educator is the one who, through his presence, marks a par-

ticipation in the human journey in research and certifies a trust, although he has no guarantee of the result. Recalling the value of the ‘deponent action’ (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 148 ff.) as a form of attestation and testimony highlights how much it is not a stepping aside but a remarking of trust through one’s presence; that is, it argues in favor of the relationship: ‘By the mere fact that I say “I promise,” I am committed, and I am under an obligation’ (Ricoeur, 2002, pp. 52–56).

The educator is metaphorically a ‘present word’ because he fills the relationship with his humanity and he is *with* and *for* the other: the subject undertakes to keep the promise because remaining faithful to one’s promise means keeping oneself in the identity of the one who said and the one who will do tomorrow. This self-maintenance announces self-esteem (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 56). Keeping a promise, *in primis*, is an expression of respect for oneself; therefore, it is a response to someone who believes in me and then designates a shared trust in the mutual relationship.

Anticipating these reflections from an educational point of view, as early as 1966, Giuseppe Catalfamo had highlighted how much pedagogy has its ‘foundation’ in the person, ‘because from the person it moves, to the person it tends, it is nourished by personal invocation. It requires the self-realisation of the person in the direction of values: the implementation of our humanity, which is our fidelity to ourselves!’ (1966, pp. 127–128).

The person is a promise thanks to what he has received through creation; hence, education is called to cultivate the potential of man and to allow the full realisation of the person. The educator, that is a *man of promise*, testifies to care and concern above all for his own formation, thus opening himself to concern for the integral human subject. The presence of the educator is a key element of personalist anthropology because it expresses the dynamisms of donation and acceptance that are typical of human and educational dialogue. The educator must fundamentally tend to witness that faith in the human inhabited by the possible and by constitutive relationality: the educator is ‘*truly present*’ because he is aware of his being in a relationship and of his attesting a commitment to the human. Buber states in this regard: ‘In order to be and to remain *truly present* to the child (the adult) must have gathered the child’s presence into his own store as one of the bearers of his communion with the world, one of the focuses of his responsibilities for the world’ (1956, p. 41).

The *presence* is also an expression of a concern and care that needs to overcome the assistance and purely technical approach of the training practice, to espouse the freedom of personal encounter. The educational relationship is precisely this advance of trust in the person of the pupil and in the re-

lationship, capable of soliciting the freedom of a never-ending formation and in which, primarily, the educator is a witness that relaunches the construction of the human. The educational proposal is a living and embodied presence, never the imposition of a model and a deforming structure.

It is the process that Nédoncelle describes as an advance of ‘one conscience over the other, the first being the mother of the second’. But then the influence becomes less imperative, while not ceasing to enrich, ‘we go towards the being of the benefactor, we discuss his gifts so that we live and make them live’ (1959, p. 203). The dignity of the person coexists in the educator and in the pupil, defining an asymmetry of proposal and never of subordination. The educational relationship, through the presence of the educator, in fact, ‘is only called to recreate the gift it receives’ (Nédoncelle, 1959, p. 230).

Returning to Mounier, ‘in its inner experience the person is a presence directed towards the world and other persons, mingled among them in universal space’ (2010/1952, p. 20), so we perceive nowadays, as in the times of the French philosopher, a tendency and attention to explore the depths of the human, leaving in the background ‘to what one might call the heavenly abysses into which its creative exaltation and mystical life ascend’ (2010/1952, p. 35). Poor care for the spiritual life reduces the educator to the functionality of a profession, which instead asks to return in human depth and openings to the vertical horizon.

The person of the educator is called to a constant work of *cura sui*, both on the level of cultural formation, clarifying his anthropological vision and his pedagogical theory (his educational purposes and the objectives of the action), and on his personal training, or attention to the spiritual appeal. For the Christian educator, the necessary reference to transcendence is the living root.

In the discomfort that many young people experience nowadays, the active presence of the educator as a witness of a gift to be answered in terms of renewed donation manifests a particular definition of authority (Mari, 2017, p. 117; Crotti, 2017, pp. 85–106; Arvanitis, 2018). In the personalist proposal, authority arises from the bond and is realised in an encounter with a person who arouses (*augere*) in the present the call to the possible and to the future. The presence and the authority of the educator allude to the substantiality, authenticity and donation element of the educational relationship which is based on the availability to inhabit the historical and human spaces of living, even before manifesting itself in actions intentionally programmed for learning transmission.

4. Adult educational presence and generational hope

The loss of an open gaze to hope in the young generation has a cause in the instability of economic and social conditions, just as an element of crisis lies in the reduced opportunity of social and civil participation.

However, we must not neglect the relationship between the lack of trusting presence of the adult generation and the difficult construction of a horizon of hope (Benasayag & Schmit, 2003): as we find in Marcel's thought, the *espérance absolue* is reached when we overcome everyday experience and act on interiority by recalling a transcendence; in this way it becomes a bridge that opens to the relationship with the other to reunite in a 'us', overcoming the solitary self and individual aims to reach a knowledge that is born from grace, rather than being the fruit of a conquest (Marcel, 1980, pp. 14–15).

An aspect can be found in Erik Erikson's psychological studies, who defines hope as 'in the attainability of fervent wishes, in spite of the dark urges and rages which mark the beginning of existence. Hope is the ontogenetic basis of faith and is nourished by the adult faith which pervades patterns of care' (Erikson, 1964, p. 118). In his staging theory, trust has a central role and, starting from the fundamental trust of the early stages of life, returns to an ability to promote and sustain this relationship in adulthood, making oneself generative, that is, capable of taking care of what has been generated. Hope is substantiated by the relationship with adults who allow the child not only to be born, but bring him into the world, because they insert him in a time that goes beyond the present and takes place from generation to generation (Lizzola, 2015, pp. 74–75).

The first step of proximity, as a source of trust and openness to hope, is therefore in the archetype of the promise, because it is not enough for man to survive, to live fully he must feel part of an individual and collective history that makes sense. What allows us to grasp the meaning of the narrative is essentially the hope deposited in history and in time, which represents its promise and allows it to be told, because without hope there are only untold stories (Vico, 2007, p. 36). Hence, hope is an essential movement of the soul, which refers to the dimension of incompleteness of the human being and the boundary is not a point of disjunction (*limes*) but a search for a common and uniting sense (*limen*). The tension towards the future takes the form of a creative capacity; it must not, however, tend towards an achievement, but must remain

faith, fidelity, trust in the void which is the space of the absolute, called by several names: Justice, New Law, Love. In fact, its roots lie in the original dimension of trust, which is the capacity of life, in the moment in which it goes beyond itself and transforms itself, to open up and abandon oneself to something else, to accept what lies beyond (Boella, 2019, p. 64).

Delivering an idea of an open future in the educational process requires building relationships that are bridges between different people and between generations: ‘Transmitting hope as a legacy means precisely this: offering the younger generations roots to consist and wings to leap forward’ (Goisis, 2020). The handing over of the world to the younger generations is expressed in the relationship of trust that nourishes hope: both (trust and hope) have emotional origin but are ontologically rooted and open themselves to make the impossible possible. Indeed, those are categories on which also a historical and political vision can be built for overcoming the fear of the different as an obstacle and build human proximity. The present is an observation point, but in the dimension of the passage, in the *eccentricity* of the human that always extends himself beyond the defined.

The personalistic revival of ontologically oriented pedagogical hope is an element that could weave new pedagogical plots, rereading the educational relationship between generations in terms of trust in the value of the person and of promise of an educational presence that is faithful to the original relational principle.

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