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## THE MEANING OF EDUCATION IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

**Abstract.** Инволюция философии двадцатого века привела к рождению так называемого проблематизма, сосредоточенного на определении проблем, а не на их решении. Следует помнить, что основными представителями проблематизма были ведущие представители итальянской педагогики XX века. Наконец, от проблематизма мы перешли к слабому мышлению, неспособному обратиться к великим проблемам, которые всегда сопровождали философские спекуляции.

The involution of twentieth-century philosophy resulted in the birth of the so-called problematicism, centered on the definition of problems rather than on their resolution. It should be remembered that the main exponents of problematicism were leading exponents of twentieth-century Italian pedagogy. Finally, from problematicism we have moved on to weak thought, unable to address the great issues that have always accompanied philosophical speculation.

**Keywords:** Problematicism, weak thought, crisis of pedagogy and philosophy.

### 1. Theoretical fragility of problematicism

Within an ideal gallery of schools of thought that embody the profound crisis of Western philosophy after World War II, problematicism deserves a prominent place.

The first author to use the term problematicism was Ugo Spirito, in the book of the same name published in 1948. The philosopher from Arezzo, trained in the school of Gentilian actualism, of which he was one of the most authoritative exponents until the second half of the Thirties, suddenly detached himself by the master in 1937, when he published his best known work, entitled *Life as research*. The fruitful and intense collaboration with Giovanni Gentile allowed Spirito to establish himself within the fascist cultural landscape, where he didn't limit his action to the academic world, but took on the broadest role of ideologue of the regime. Having survived the purges prepared by the Italian Republic, he tried to apply his own philosophical hermeneutics to communist political systems, but was unable to establish himself in a context that was profoundly changed compared to the one that had made it successful.

Spirito's problematicism is based on the observation that any effort to achieve indubitable knowledge is beyond the intellectual faculties, therefore philosophy presents itself as an ever-renewed attempt to provide plausible answers to the great questions that accompany human existence. The impasse of skeptical doubt is avoided by Spirito, who doesn't deny the opportunity

and even the need to orient one's existence through more or less demanding choices, all indifferently marked by contingency. The paradoxical outcome of the problematicism of Spirito consists in the absolutization of relativism, the only indubitable certainty.

The other Italian philosopher who set his search for him in problematic terms was the Lombard Antonio Banfi. Militant in the ranks of the socialist party since his youth, Banfi openly sided against the fascist regime, adhering to the "Manifesto of anti-fascist intellectuals" launched by Benedetto Croce in 1925. A few years later, in 1941, however, he gave evidence of rare opportunism and swore allegiance to fascism in order to obtain the coveted university chair.

After the war he moved to the left again, where he was welcomed kindly by the Communist party led by Togliatti, who successfully nominated him for the Senate.

Banfi's thought, not particularly original, proposes an anti-dogmatic Kantian rationalism, which positively evaluates all the philosophies expressed in history by man, as a harbinger of partial truths. According to Banfi, in fact, insofar as it is rooted in the Kantian categories, thought can never be entirely erroneous, since it has at least residues of rationality, which partly preserve its gnoseological value.

According to the philosopher of Vimercate, critical and problematic rationalism would avoid the shallows of relativism through an incessant cognitive activity, unable to gain unshakable truths, but able to formulate plausible hypotheses, like science.

Compared to Spirito, who was formed at the school of Gentilian neo-idealism, Banfi's problematicism appears linked to phenomenology and neo-positivism, as well as to Marxism, conceived, not without considerable forcing, as neo-humanism.

Both Spirito and Banfi took an interest in pedagogy, reinterpreted in the light of the problematic philosophy and deprived of the systematic nature that had attempted to ensure it under the gentile school reform of 1923.

## **2. The relativism of weak thinking**

The uncertainty of twentieth-century philosophy reached one of its peaks with the relativism of Karl Popper and Gianni Vattimo.

Contrary to any form of dogmatism, the philosopher of Jewish origins Karl Popper developed the principle of falsification, aimed at underlining how a theory is valid only until at least one experimental datum intervenes to refute it. The relativism of the philosopher of science, who did not consider certain knowledge to be objectively impossible, but was convinced that man was unable to have full awareness of it, was strongly influenced by Albert Einstein's famous theory of relativity, to which he also addressed some epistemological observations criticisms, as well as from the philosophy of Henri Bergson.

Popper didn't limit his field of investigation to the philosophy of science alone, but was one of the main theorists of the multicultural society, defined as

an open society, that is, devoid of an ethnic and religious identity nucleus. The only limit imposed on the open society by his theorist concerned the intolerant, excluded because they are not willing to accept differences. The model proposed by the thinker, who hoped for the coexistence of conflicting ideas within it, clearly evokes the coincidence of opposites of Gnostic inspiration and is a prelude to the Baumanian idea of a liquid society, which will be discussed later.

Popper's progressive liberalism, which exerted a vast influence throughout the Western world, fueled an intense debate in Italy between those who welcomed him positively and those who, instead, bitterly contested him.

With the Piedmontese Gianni Vattimo, the weakness of contemporary philosophical thought reaches an explicit formulation, which rejects the very idea of eternal truth. In weak thought, multiple influences of nineteenth-century philosophy converge, starting with Nietzsche's nihilism and Gadamerian hermeneutics up to the heretical positions of the theologian Sergio Quinzio. Vattimo advocates the fusion of political communism with the ideals of original Christianity, according to him rediscovered in the community and anti-dogmatic dimension precisely by weak thinking. The ambiguity of Vattimo, strongly active in the academic and journalistic fields, follows in the footsteps of much of the philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and makes his own the progressive demands of democratic openness to any ideology and religion, with the sole exception of totalitarianism.

A professed homosexual, a staunch supporter of euthanasia and animal rights, the Turin philosopher has repeatedly risen to the headlines for his ruthlessness against the Jews and against the state of Israel.

### **3. The postmodern condition**

Like all deep cultural trends (in this case it would be more correct to call them anti-cultural), the concept of postmodernism has also pervaded both the artistic and philosophical spheres. In fact, the term seems to have been coined in 1977 by the Scottish architect Charles Jencks, who with it wanted to indicate a reaction to modernist functionalism and a recovery of ornament free from practical purposes.

In philosophy, postmodernity, which refers to a congeries of schools and orientations, among which structuralism stands out, has its beating heart in the work of the Frenchman Jean-François Lyotard. A keen critic of modernity understood as the construction of utopian-revolutionary philosophical systems (from the Enlightenment to idealism, up to Marxism and capitalism), Lyotard claims a return to aesthetic elaboration as an antidote to the cloak of dogmatism. In a deconstructed and deprived context of indubitable values, it will be the task of the postmodern philosopher to rediscover the truth on a small scale. The American Richard Rorty is also on the same wavelength as Lyotard, a staunch opponent of the universality of philosophical systems, replaced by a constant (and exhausting) dialogic commitment, similar to an infinite rhetorical construction, without foundation and purpose.

Postmodernism has also established itself in sociology, with the trend of liquidity, inaugurated by Zygmunt Bauman. A Communist Polish Jew, he enlisted in the Red Army to escape the Nazis, carrying out espionage in favor of the Stalinist regime even after the war was over. Having become a critic of Sovietism, but not of Marxism, he progressively moved away from the communist regime, leaving Poland to emigrate to Israel and England, where he taught for a long time at the University of Leeds. Initially, Bauman's academic activity was limited to themes dear to Marxism, with particular attention to the socio-economic dynamics within capitalist societies. Over the years, Bauman would have developed a more personal thought, preparing his own personal interpretation of postmodernity as the liquefaction (ie dissolution) of a society based on ideologies. The cessation of utopian thrusts and great historical narratives, a negative consequence of Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianisms, would have sanctioned the triumph of the consumer society, based on appearance and on the purchase of often useless goods. The continuous pursuit of pseudo-goods with homologating social value has fueled a production oriented solely to the consumption of objects destined to be replaced in ever shorter times, in a context tyrannized by novelty (especially in the technological field).

Postmodern society is, therefore, a consumer society, which excludes from within those who don't have sufficient purchasing power to withstand the frenetic pace imposed by advertising trends. To consumerist nihilism, captured in its theatrical dimension of concealing individual identity, Bauman contrasts the rediscovery of ethics, understood in an unprecedented way. According to the philosopher, the inter-individual relationship would be governed by an irrational impulse to give oneself to the other, thus submitting to his discretion. This, according to him, would constitute the basis of all social formation, which would be opposed by the codification of rules functional to consumer productivity. The confluence of Marxian utopian libertarianism, of stimuli coming from Jewish Gnosticism, of Levinasian, existentialist and structuralist themes, has determined the peculiarity of Baumanian sociology, which points to the ineluctable economic-financial globalization in the chaos of multiculturalism.

In Bauman's thought, a similar fatalism towards the fate of the Jewish people, defended with the sword drawn by the negationist threat, does not correspond to the complacency towards the moral and social dissolution of the West.

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