

# Brotherhood as a pedagogical perspective in the present and future

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Within the framework of an approach to the philosophy of education, the article identifies the keyword *brotherhood*, understood as a category suitable for dealing with the problematic nature of our contemporaneity.

From this perspective, it has become the fulcrum of an educational program to construct a dialogue of solidarity among peoples, cultures, and living species that, today, is indispensable to managing the complexity of living in an emancipatory and evolutionary key.

*Keywords:* Philosophy of Education, Complexity, Brotherhood.

## *La fratellanza come prospettiva pedagogica nel presente e nel futuro*

Nel quadro di un approccio alla filosofia dell'educazione, il presente articolo si sofferma sulla parola chiave fratellanza, ivi intesa come categoria adatta ad affrontare la problematicità della nostra contemporaneità.

In questa prospettiva, essa è divenuta il fulcro di un programma educativo volto a costruire un dialogo solidale tra i popoli, le culture e le specie viventi che, oggi, è indispensabile per gestire la complessità del vivere in chiave emancipativa ed evolutiva.

*Parole-chiave:* Filosofia dell'educazione, Complessità, Fratellanza.

## *Pedagogy and the philosophy of education*

Like all contemporary knowledge, pedagogy is used to consider its epistemological status and the role it can play during an emergency, and the dizzying transformations of the present. Until recently, this period has been “marked” by unimaginable events:

- a global-scale pandemic, the negative outcome of a globalization process that, instead of circulating goods, cultures, knowledge, and expertise, has “globalized” a virus that has claimed a very high number of victims;
- a war that has directly involved two nations, yet it has affected governments all over the world, foreshadowing the prospect of a new world order.

These are actual “appointments with history” that require people prepared, from a cognitive and emotional point of view, to handle the perturbing problematic nature of the present: a time of *crisis* in which, now more than ever, opposing scenarios can open up. The very concept of crisis can be understood as a moment of functional passage to the construction of an unprecedented and hardly predictable situation due to a choice that can give rise to either a positive or negative event. In other words, it can go either in an evolutionary or a regressive direction.

The present historical moment is undoubtedly one of crisis (Fabbri, 2019), during which it seems almost as if democratic institutions are undergoing a setback. It appears as if a nefarious fate may be prevailing, in which individualisms and liberalisms are gaining the upper hand over the perspectives of dialogue and pluralism with which to look at the future.

While considering the risks of a regressive return to “closed” societies, *education*—and pedagogy, the science that deals primarily with it—represents that idealistic tension toward the “light” of a society that, without underestimating the insecurity and inquietude (Madrussan, 2017) inherent in change, knows how to traverse them and identify areas of evolutionary possibility. Moreover, education’s diffusive nature refers mainly to the fact that, since its emergence, humanity has evolved precisely through instruction: the latter guarantees the continuity of knowledge, experience, and values from one generation to the next, in both formal (through educational institutions) and informal (through the family, peers, and places of civic, social and cultural participation) modes.

Hence the need to better define the contours of a science—pedagogy—capable of providing focused (but never definitive) answers to educational

questions. Through a process of continuous self-reflection, particularly over the past century, pedagogy is now a science capable of handling *novel situations* in which it reaffirms its design autonomy and, at the same time, a close relationship with other educational and human social sciences. While maintaining its own specific point of view, pedagogy declares its willingness to be “affected” by another disciplinary knowledge, placing in its epistemological statute the characteristic of being a “dialogical science” for other sciences and, more generally, for the complex multiplicity of contemporary examples.

So, pedagogy is that science that reconnects the threads of plural knowledge, using the multiplicity of interpretative perspectives of other disciplines (e.g., philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology) to return them as unitary. The subject-person representing the “focus” around which all pedagogical knowledge revolves is just as unified in its complexity.

A science of educational knowledge and action, a hermeneutically critical and practical science, pedagogy highlights its *transformative value* (Loiodice, 2019). In other words, its teleological aspect is projected regarding the emancipatory change of men and women—and their life contexts—toward which pedagogical theory and praxis are directed.

Pedagogy, then, is that science committed to knowing, contemplating, and interpreting educational reality to then act constructively and vigorously. To do this, pedagogy develops theoretical models suitable for confronting educational facts and redesigning them to the ends and purposes of people’s emancipation and their cognitive, affective, and relational autonomy.

These aims move in the direction of *utopia*. With Frabboni and Pinto Minerva, we recall that the utopian dimension “opens pedagogy’s access to territories of change, allowing it to move easily between “constraints” (the set of natural, biological, historical, social, and cultural coordinates that determine and condition educational processes) and “possibilities”: the horizons of the “not yet” to which every educational program is aimed (Frabboni-Pinto Minerva, 2003, p. 18).

Pedagogy exhibits a plural epistemological status inside and outside to carry out this mission. Indeed, in addition to standing “on the borderline” with the other human-social sciences, it presents within itself a rich multiplicity of viewpoints that are not alternative to but integrative with each other (e.g., philosophy of education, social education, history of pedagogy, experimental pedagogy, and special education). Moreover, it also does so

through various research models (e.g., theoretical, empirical, historical) and a multiplicity of quantitative and qualitative survey techniques. It is a *complex multiplicity* precisely because the *object* of its theoretical reflection and its empirical research is complex: *educating people* in the plurality of personal, historical, cultural, and social characteristics.

Therefore, as Cambi (2008) wrote, if this is the *telos* of pedagogy, it requires “a controlling device” as a “science”, which knows how to interpret and consider its conceptual coordinates and the very structure of such polymorphous knowledge. This device is represented precisely by the philosophy of education “as its *specific, key* field of self-reflection, with the dual function of discourse *regulator* and *facilitator* of its problematic and argumentative constructions. The philosophy of education is the formal hallmark of pedagogical discourse and the (discursive) model of the radical problematization of its ‘problems’” (Cambi, 2008, pp. 5-6).

The philosophy of education delves first and foremost into the structure and meaning of pedagogy, recovering the intrinsic unity of the multiple interpretative perspectives with which pedagogical knowledge “views” education. More specifically, the philosophy of education carries out “*pedagogical excavations* around the history of pedagogy, the *theoretical reflection* around its epistemological status, and the *analysis of training models*” (Mariani, 2011, p. 7).

This “second-degree” (metatheoretical, metariflexive) analysis also uses philosophical codes to further explore the epistemological status of pedagogy and the crucial nodes of education within pedagogical discourse.

However, with Massimo Baldacci (2018), we share the conviction that the philosophy of education has lately stressed second-level research, on its own theoretical models, at the expense of first-level research, which is related more to a tangible educational experience and its problematic nature. It has become too abstract and, in some cases, lost its reference to the factuality of educational action.

Clearly, it is not a matter of opting for one level or the other but instead keeping them always in constant dialectical interaction. From the foundational questions about education, pedagogical knowledge is committed to providing answers that are never definitive but permanently subjected to the critical-reflexive sifting of a problematic reason. Baldacci wrote, “the philosophy of education comes into being not when we merely overcome a fervid immediacy to assume a reflexive disposition, but when

that disposition becomes critical [...] we have suggested a *critical-rational reflexive attitude* vis-à-vis educational experience as typical of the philosophy of education” (Baldacci, 2018, *passim* pp. 39-40).

Thus, the indispensability of a critical-reflexive approach—of the philosophy of education—is confirmed among all those who work directly in education: teachers, educators, pedagogists, and instructors; in contact with a variety of students: children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly; and in multiple contexts: schools, workplaces, healthcare and treatment facilities, social spaces, and communities as a whole.

The critical-reflexive tension offered by the philosophy of education can thus enable pedagogy to confront the current complexity of contemporary times with an approach that “starts” from education’s factuality to move it toward that constellation of values set as its foundation: an individual’s freedom, the universal right to education, democracy, and respect for an individual seen in their entirety and multidimensionality. Of course, central to this pedagogical discourse is also the ability to rethink an institution’s educational plan, channeling it toward people’s emancipation. For this, pedagogy must have a *deconstructive* gaze (to unmask all those mechanisms that oppress people) and then a *constructive* one, aimed at the human “bulwark” the “cultivation of humanity” (Nussbaum, 1997).

This casts doubt on education’s many facets as seen from the standpoint of global education and, therefore, of education in peace, solidarity and social justice, environmental education and sustainable development, and intercultural education and global citizenship.

Therefore, it seems crucial for us to start with Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which states:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.

This article from the Universal Declaration concludes by referring to the “spirit of brotherhood”, placing at the center of philosophical-educational thought the construct of brotherhood as a theoretical-praxis category through which to think/do education during periods of such emergencies as health, political, economic, cultural, and social emergencies such as the one that we are sharing today.

## *Brotherhood as a vital condition of existence*

Brotherhood's very definition refers to a constituent element of human beings, that of *being-with*, a relationship that "establishes" the essence and existence of people and is expressed in the form of *care* as one human being needs another from birth (and even before). In this sense, Mortari (2015) wrote, care is understood as a necessary condition for existence, encapsulating the very essence of existing. We "are" beings who, alternately, "give" and "receive" care, which represents "the primary totality of the constitution of being in existence" (Heidegger, 1925/1999, p. 379), starting from a condition of "necessity" (one cannot live without the other), and making it a constitutive personality trait.

It is precisely the awareness of this indispensable condition of mutual necessity that, through education, leads to investing in *relationality*. Consequently, *brotherhood* is cultivated as an integral approach to ensure the continuation of the species and, more generally, the planet's very life. Mortari writes, "if to live is to live-with, then it is essential to find the rhythm of sharing with others in life. By highlighting the other's fundamental neediness that characterizes the human condition, the ontology of relationality shows the inescapable need for an ethic of sharing" (2015, p. 45).

Despite being a constitutive condition of the human person, brotherhood is continually exposed to the risk of snubs and failure. At the same time, it appears the "failed promise of modernity" yet also "the imperative for a new destiny" (Ceruti, Bellusci, 2021):

- a "broken promise" because, never more than now, has there been a systematic violation of the right to life itself concerning both humans and other living species (plants and animals);
- an "imperative for a new destiny" because there is now a clear awareness that violence, intolerance, and barbarism toward all living species may result in an irreversible process of destruction for the entire planet.

The fundamentality of this construct of brotherhood brings a secular and a religious approach to the term. Not by chance do we find it in Pope Francis's documents and speeches and the analyses of a complexity theorist like Mauro Ceruti. Unsurprisingly the latter entitled one of his most recent books, written with Bellusci, *Il secolo della fraternità* (The Century of Fraternity) (2021), which continues the analysis conducted in 2020 in *Sulla stessa barca*

(On the Same Boat) regarding the importance of “changing course” towards a “brotherhood without borders.”

It is a matter of believing in the possibility of a likely re-humanization that understands how to “exploit” the added value of a diversity not divorced from unity. Today as never before, this latter represents the authentic “treasure of humanity” (Morin, Ceruti, 2013). A unity that does not deny diversity is the basis of a conception of brotherhood that unites all peoples in the same “community of destiny” that, however, requires a disposition to conceive and build it – and an appeal to a principle of planetary inter-solidarity that will prevail over the pressures wrought by rivalry, competition, and isolationism. In this scenario – among the founding principles and values of modern democracy, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* – brotherhood will direct and give meaning to the universalistic range of the other two and be able to stand up to the cosmopolitan “implied by the community of world destiny” (Ceruti, Bellusci, 2021, p. 44).

Moreover, the experience of the pandemic itself has amply demonstrated how we are all bound by a common destiny. Pope Francis wrote in his message to the September 2020 participants of the Ambrosetti Forum that, at the same time, it has highlighted the fact that “none of us alone can save ourselves. We have experienced firsthand the vulnerability of the human condition that is ours, making us a single family. We have come to see more clearly that each of our personal choices affects the lives of others, both next door and in distant parts of the world. This turn of events has forced us to recognize our mutual affiliation as siblings dwelling in a house together. Having failed to show solidarity in goodness and the sharing of resources, we have learned to experience solidarity in suffering”.

Thus, on the one hand, the pandemic has revealed the human capacity to perform actions of fraternal solidarity. At the same time, the war between Russia and Ukraine once again exposes all the planet’s inhabitants to the risk of dangerous divisions and confrontations. This confirms that human existence on this planet does not envisage a history already written, a destiny already doomed (positively or negatively). Instead, it requires a specific willingness to move toward what Maurizio Fabbri (2019) has called the *civilization of empathy*. Fabbri specified that the perspective of a civilization of empathy “does not correspond to a salvific dimension capable of eradicating evil from its historical development”. Instead, it requires a commitment to seize – even with “obstacles” and regressions – a sense of meaning that recognizes

the equal dignity of all men and women on the planet, united in the same “community of destiny” and, therefore, mutually “siblings.”

### *Educating for brotherhood*

In his numerous writings, Edgar Morin has returned to his concept of a communal planetary house, which he calls Homeland-Earth, to link the idea of brotherhood to an ecosystemic complexity, as shown by science itself, emphasizing that everything is connected and related to the whole. The world and life itself are the outcomes of interconnections and interactions. At the same time, he emphasizes that this complex reality can only be interpreted by *forming a complex thought*, capable of connecting the one with the many, the local with the global, and the individual with the collective.

This idea of complexity must somehow orient pedagogical knowledge as it is a complex science itself: a science of nexuses and influences, it was said earlier, which enhances its heuristic and constructive character suitable for combining plural and differentiated paradigms, languages, and research methodologies to reorganize them into a never quite absolute unity but one in continual formation.

A *pedagogy of educational responsibility and commitment* is responsible first and foremost for “teaching an earthly identity” (Morin, 2015) through education by showing that the evolutionary development of life itself is the result of alliances between differences that do not oppose each other (on pain of mutual destruction) but evolve together.

This is the meaning of *Fratelli tutti* (All Brothers), the title of the 2020 papal encyclical in which explicit reference is made to a concept of “open brotherhood”, which allows “recognizing, appreciating, and loving each person irrespective of physical proximity, or where in the world one was born or lives.”

Unfortunately, this appeal by the Pope is shattered by the savage barriers and rejections of entire groups of people predominantly from the poorest of the southern Mediterranean countries. Today, this migratory phenomenon appears obscured most recently by the pandemic and conflicts in countries very close to Italy. And yet it remains in all its gravity. It is a reaction to blockages relating to the parallel varieties of peoples, languages, and cultures that now populate where we live. Bauman (2014) calls it *mixophobia*, i.e., an



attempt to react to this diversity with segregationist attitudes that separate people or groups dissimilar to one's own in the same urban environment and often the same neighborhood.

Thus, it is that, paradoxically, closures, hostilities, and antagonisms increase disproportionately in this era of globalization, expanding at the planetary level to create ever more dangerous contrasts, generating individualisms and closures that end up being paid especially by the weakest, most defenseless individuals, who are forced to leave their homelands to seek new prospects for life.

Instead, this perspective must be contrasted with brotherhood, an alliance of one against the other. This awareness of a common destiny does not cancel out differences but reconnects them within the same "community of destiny" (Ceruti, 2021). Indeed, Bauman (2018) states that the problem is not learning to live "with" and "despite" differences but, quite the opposite, to establish peace precisely by appreciating and accepting these differences. Peace can and must be created "not despite our differences, but because of our differences. We are all in the business of improving the other. Together, we are making our lives richer, more interesting, more deserving, and worthier" (*ivi*, p. 90).

The pedagogical perspective, once again, can only be invested in the *power of education*, which is capable of crossing both real and virtual borders by generating new approaches and new cultures and "imagining northern and southern knowledge together to construct an *intercultural mind*," Franca Pinto Minerva wrote. In other words, "a plural, erratic, and wandering mind endowed with the idea of living and living-with the challenging nature of the real and an intelligence capable of inhabiting complexity; forms of accelerated social, cultural, economic, and political transition; and the ramification of knowledge" (Pinto Minerva, 2018, p. 93).

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