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## **Pedagogy and Personalism: Fundamental References of Education between Emergencies and Search for Meaning**

### **Pedagogia i personalizm. Fundamentalne odniesienia edukacji między emergencją a poszukiwaniem sensu**

**Abstract:** Due to the problematic issues of the times into which it is projected, pedagogical reflection is at risk of losing its particularity as a theory called to preserve the perennial fundamentals of the person and education. Exerting the theoretical references of pedagogical anthropology inspired by personalism and its recovery in a hermeneutic perspective, the article outlines the specificity of pedagogy and its intrinsic relationship with the concept of the person. From the investigation emerges a ‘pedagogy of the person’ committed, especially in the contemporary context, to outlining the main ‘thematic nuclei’ to guide education: person, educability, interpretation and search for truth.

**Keywords:** pedagogy; personalism; hermeneutics; educability; search for truth.

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**Abstrakt:** Ze względu na problematyczność czasów, których dotyczy, refleksja pedagogiczna narażona jest na utratę swojej specyfiki jako teorii poświęconej zachowaniu wielowiekowych podstaw osoby i edukacji. Niniejszy artykuł służy zarysowaniu specyfiki pedagogii i jej inherentnego związku z ideą osoby, wykorzystując w tym celu teoretyczne odniesienia antropologicznej pedagogii zainspirowanej personalizmem i jego zwrotem ku perspektywie hermeneutycznej. Z rozmyślań tych wyłania się „pedagogia osoby” poświęcona, zwłaszcza w kontekście współczesnym, wyróżnieniu głównych „rdzeni tematycznych”, którymi kierować ma się edukacja: osobą, zdolnością do kształcenia się, interpretacją i poszukiwaniem prawdy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pedagogia; personalizizm; hermeneutyka; zdolność do kształcenia się; poszukiwanie prawdy.

## 1. Introduction

Education is projected into a time of multiple problems at the risk of losing the fundamentals of pedagogical reflection, which are subject to continuous semantic manipulation to adapt to the moment's needs. To understand these concepts, we must return to find them in practical education and be aware of the reflective implications of the concept of the person. Furthermore, we should consider that reflection on education today adopts concepts and meanings that are viewed more as bulwarks to deal with difficulties and problems than as perspectives to guide people's lives and their possibilities of educating themselves.

The many educational emergencies (Paté-Cornell et al., 2016; National Service for the Cultural Project of the IBC, 2010; Committee for the Cultural Project of the IBC, 2009; Vico, 2009) make us compromise identifying education with the dynamics of responding to needs, forgetting other modes of reflection that are proper to the human person: starting from the dimension of desire (Bosch, 2020; Sullo, 2007; Ciancio, 2003) to the search for truth.

Returning to education by focusing on some foundational themes appears necessary to recognise pedagogy as a science, a theory, an art and a dialogue with the foundations that allow us to affirm the continuous circularity between theory and practice of educating (Xodo, 2003). The reference to the foundations of the pedagogical discourse seems even more necessary because educating requires an act of awareness, recognising that we cannot fully understand the person in front of us: experiences and events often remain inex-

pressible, and although questions and feelings, which are nourished from the depths of our being, remain in everyone, we need to relate to a component of mystery and the unspeakable. As the poet Rilke stated, we must exercise ‘fidelity to the question’ (Rilke, 1980/1929, p. 30) to be able, accordingly, to take on our lives individually, to take it upon ourselves, and to accept with trust what happens to us.

While we are involved in education, we are continually urged to nurture the question of meaning (Frankl, 2006; Nanni, 1986), particularly because we are faced with the continuous changes of a society of techno-science (Benanti, 2016), which threatens to dull the identity of people, to make us all indifferent (Fabris, 2004), because we are influenced by nihilism that heavily affects especially the new generations (Galimberti, 2008). Consequently, we need not to lose the meaning of the ‘words of education’, such as person, beauty, good, freedom and truth (Musaio, 2013), which make us experience the encounter with the essential dimensions and the search for meaning.

## **2. Pedagogy, education and anthropological appeal**

Starting from education as an emergency implies comprehending the many situations of difficulty and existential discomfort (Benasayag & Schmit, 2004/2003) experienced by many persons, both young people and adults. The educational emergency is wide-ranging because it concerns the human condition in its complexity for the loss of the very idea of being human and of education. Among the most common experiences of those involved with education, there is the feeling of being perpetually poised between the search for solutions and the desire to look at broader perspectives, to implement projects and cultivate hope, to bring back the problems to a perspective around the human being (Pollo, 2013; Nanni, 2002). Nevertheless, the debate around educating becomes mired rather on the need to ensure quality education for all, on the necessity to develop the skills required to orient oneself in life, rather than considering the importance of continuing self-formation throughout life (Guardini, 1992, p. 102). The theme of skills, which has become central, especially in personal education activities (Mari, 2018), necessitates outstripping the focus on techniques and methodologies to communicate, relate, design, work in teams and act creatively. Self-education requires an act of deeper awareness which recognises that, while it is important to ‘equip’ the person in all possible ways, we will never predict their paths and understand identity (Malo, 2013). The dimensions pertaining to the sphere of the human re-

main inexpressible in an objective way: some examples are reflections on the emergence of human life and the meaning of birth (Arendt, 2004/1958), the experience of the encounter with the other that takes place in an educational relationship (Scholé, 2008) and the meaning of identity in concerning the Other (Morin, 2002/2001), the search for meaning. Going beyond the response to needs, knowledge and skills, education is outlined as the search for the *deep motivations and desires* of the person (Musaió, 2020), dimensions that require an approach to the person in his/her originality and uniqueness, capable of bringing a new meaning to the existence of oneself, to the others world (Guardini, 2002).

Education is not just the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies but an experience of self-education by the person who ‘emerges’ from within. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between how education is experienced in different contexts, the demands made by the knowledge-based society in terms of skills and competencies to be acquired increasingly, and the deep motivations that instead arise from within each person.

As emphasised by pedagogists of personalist inspiration, since the second half of the twentieth century (Scholé, 1955; Flores d’Arcais, 1992; Scholé, 2005), pedagogical reflection approaches personal dynamics with the intention to respond to the demands of integral formation throughout life. The needs contemplated are those related to learning and its relationship with education, to the needs of the complex society of knowledge and globalisation, which affect both the level of educational practice and the sense of planning and the need to act in a way that is not disconnected between theory and practice.

In contemporary times, pedagogy has aimed to meet these needs by consolidating its nature as an ‘autonomous science of education’ about the search into educational practices and the search for meaning (Dalle Fratte, 2004). The scientific nature of pedagogy should not make us forget that it is a science of a ‘human fact’, which implies an anthropological approach: answering the question of ‘what is education?’ is equivalent to asking ‘what is man?’ and ‘what are his purposes?’. Concerning this matter, pedagogy is outlined as a ‘philosophy of education’ (Reboul, 1997) which, in contrast to the fragmentation of the sciences, finds its identity in a task of synthesis that heeds the distinctive aspects of the human being, to the reasons why he or she is educable and how this education can occur. Pedagogy cannot be reduced to a methodological reflection on criteria, methods and actions, or exclusively procedural and data collection approaches. The continuous transformations induce pedagogy to modify its investigations, but without losing sight of the educational centrality of the person, the interaction between teaching and

learning, the attention to the personalisation of education (Agazzi, 1950), together with an activity of critical examination and interpretation of the continuous educational needs that must not overlook the anthropological and ontological assumptions of education. This is the direction in which the ‘anthropological appeal’ arises, aimed at focusing on human nature, the concept of man’s purpose and the intrinsic meaning of education as deriving from man’s ultimate and supreme purpose. The anthropological problem, which is at the centre of the Christian vision that assumes man within the mystery of God, makes it possible to rediscover, through the man-God, Christ, the coordinates for posing the question of the human being before himself and before the world (Scholé, 1990, p. 44). Attention to the verb ‘to rediscover’ means to recover within ourselves what intrinsically belongs to us. The anthropological question is, therefore, more central than ever because of the implications it has for the human being’s inner search for himself and the innumerable problems he has to face, without running the risk of losing focus on his own ‘centre’, forgetting that interiority is configured as a path towards the mystery kept within ourselves, to be walked not to close in on ourselves, but to open up to others and the Other (Guardini, 1997, pp. 57–58). Hence, pedagogy is outlined as a reflection called to determine the basic assumptions of the educational process (Vico, 2002), considering the nature of the pupil and the educator as *educable people*, to seek the conditions so that they can implement their total potentiality and project themselves towards a horizon of possibilities (Musaio, 2016). In this direction, the concept of *educability* defines both the set of potentialities that belong to us as persons and a perspective on the human being to avoid the risk of reducing education to a mere experience detached from the founding notions, which instead we need to know and interpret even today. Among all the fundamental educational references, the concept of the person occupies a central place.

### **3. Personalism and ‘return to the person’**

In the twentieth century, the reference to the person focuses on different dimensions: from the investigation of the existential ‘structure’ of the person (Stein, 2000/1932–33), to the attention to interpretation (Gadamer, 1983/1960; Pareyson, 1971), to the call to Otherness and the other (Ricoeur, 2015/1990) and the reasons of one’s interiority (Zambrano, 2000/1958, p. 146).

Decades later, after the spread of the first reflections of personalist inspiration, the theme of the person continues to arouse interest in study and

research (Possenti, 2013; Pavan, 2006). It is spoken of in different forms and ways and is frequently referred to in different areas of investigation. Contemporary culture tends to recognise quite widely the dignity and value of the person as one of the most relevant foundations of individual existence and its various expressions: consider the attention paid to the ethical dimensions connected with respect for nascent life, to education, the formation of identity, the life project, the search for meaning and the relationship with death, as major themes of the human condition (Pessina, 2010).

The issue also emerges in pedagogy, extending its influence from theoretical reflection to educational practice problems. However, in educational practice the concept of the person is encountering a high polyvalence, an interchangeable use of the term, risking losing sight of that strong value of the humanistic and Christian tradition, which refers to the anthropological perspective of the philosophy of the person and personalism, around which the contemporary context has launched several paths of theoretical examination aimed, on the one hand, to reconstruct the meaning and history of the term 'person' (Berti, 1995; Melchiorre, 1996), and, on the other, to delineate a return of interest in the person, in order to attest a constant effort of interpretation of the integral nature and ontological openness of the person (Pareyson, 1971) and to underline the implications regarding educability and education.

Regardless, we must remember that the philosophy of the person and personalism has drawn on multiple perspectives: from the metaphysics of being, to the metaphysics of the person of spiritualist inspiration, to the influence of phenomenology, to the various existential and hermeneutic currents. Personalism cannot be summarised in a single current because of its multiple matrixes, particularly present throughout the twentieth century. This is why we can speak of a 'line of theoretical tendency' opposed to negative thinking (Galeazzi, 2001), correlated with praxis, which manifests itself in highlighting the human person, their value and dignity, so as to oppose nihilistic or deconstructionist drifts. Approaching the basic instances of personalism and the lesson it still conveys today, we can recognise its delineation as a philosophy of education that has represented an important term of comparison regarding divergent and even conflicting philosophies (Cambi, 2000, pp. 49–50). Personalism has given to the contemporary pedagogy an essential principle, the concept of person, relaunched in its ontological primacy and in its complex structure, also faced with a hermeneutic approach, in order to grasp the key role that this concept assumes within the educational processes and to activate the potentialities of the subject-person, called to 'become' more and more a person (Bertolini, 2001), without losing the character of intrascendibility.

It is notable how, even in contemporary expressions, personalism has continued to reflect both the reference to Boethius' definition, which emphasises the person as substance, and Richard of St Victor's definition, with a consequent personalist perspective that is more attentive to relationality and the concept of existence, to *ex-sistere*, understood as the dimension of being outside oneself, in the relationship's direction to the other and the Other (Melchiorre, 1996, pp. 149–162). The intertwining of the *substantial and relational* dimensions of the person has led to the recognition that the definition of self refers to and comes from the other and that the concepts of *person* and *interpersonal relationship* are configured as an original constitution of the person and of ethics itself, hence outlining the opening of the individual towards the relational dimension. This last aspect has been investigated in particular by the phenomenological expressions of personalism, underlining the dynamic and relational character of the person, as being present to themselves while pouring out in the act of being present to others, in communication, in the relationship and in the construction of a community (Mounier, 1982; Campanini, 2015, pp. 27–32). The accent is thus placed on the relationship as an intrinsic dimension that opens the person to the other-than-self, given the expansive and communicative nature which, from an educational aspect, intercepts the attention firstly to personal development in the different phases of life, then to the communication of the self to others, to the overcoming and transcendence of the self, to increasingly become 'being with' a movement of sharing towards others and towards Being.

The framework of contemporary reflection advocates for the need to find and 'rediscover' the theme of the person as an interest and a 'dimension transversal to various orientations' (Galeazzi, 1998, p. 32). Consequently, if in the past, personalism was mainly characterised in an ontological and metaphysical sense, in the contemporary age, various instances oriented to a personalist 'sensitivity' are emerging in the philosophical field and in the different scientific sectors such as the human and social sciences.

In searching the philosophical and pedagogical panorama of the twentieth century (Chiosso, 2012) for those contributions that have given voice to the significance of the human being as a person, we find many perspectives that contain useful indications for pedagogy so as not to lose its 'nexus' with the concept of the person. Alongside perspectives of an ontological nature, which emphasise the concept of the person in relation to being and the search for truth (Pareyson, 1971, p. 65), reflection is projected towards research into thematic nuclei useful for guiding the recognition, development and formation of the person, considering a concept that is not already presumed but

placed in relation to the ‘interpretation’ developed by pedagogical theory and educational practice. Hence, the personalist perspective, far from representing the person as a mere theoretical abstraction, is combined more concretely with the ‘reading’ of the needs of education and formation, with the originality of each person and the research around the self. Pedagogical reflection moves towards adherence to a personalism that is more open to hermeneutics and capable of achieving a concrete approach to the person as a search for a set of goals for which to educate (Vico, 1995).

The recovery of a philosophy of the person urges pedagogy to question itself on the concept of the person as a foundation to be interpreted simultaneously as a concrete reality, from within the intertwining of theory and praxis, a relationship never definitively resolved that requires considering how the solution of educational problems takes place from within praxis, but always against the background of reflection. In essence, we are called to consider that, as Laberthonnière argues:

The idea one has of education and the educator’s task clearly depend on the idea one has of man and his destiny. Depending on the fact that one admits that man is this or that, that he must be this or that, one cannot act indifferently in one way or another, if one wants to be coherent with oneself, when it comes to working to form men (Laberthonnière, 1961/1935, p. 3).

As Luigi Pareyson states, in relation to an ontological personalism, a philosophy of the human being can only be a ‘philosophy of the person’ (Pareyson, 1954, p. 22). Moreover, in a scenario marked by nihilism and the ‘death of God’, the philosophies of the person form an attempt to respond to the various crises, which they try to cross by continuing to appeal to the idea of the person, re-proposed in ever-renewed terms, to respond to the different challenges of education (Mari & Musaio, 2018). In the idea of the person we can see the call to a ‘humanistic alternative’ to contemporary nihilism. The attempt to implement a ‘return’ to the person (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 113) aims to refocus on the person by reconsidering and appealing to the person to counter the risk of a dispersal of this concept in a reflection centred on the themes of personality, character and individuality, rather than on that set of qualities and potentialities that even a theoretical discourse must know how to manage to be able to guide people’s lives. In this direction, the discourse opens up to educability and education.



#### 4. Pedagogy, person and educability

As a human science, pedagogy is driven to search for the deeper meanings of life and of the human person. Given this aim, pedagogy seeks to broaden its investigation to reflect the multiplicity of forms of expression and experience of the human being, their perceptions, activities, research and aspirations, through which they can realise their deepest nature. As H. U. von Balthasar states, the person is always a symphony of dimensions and is never divided, like a 'chord' in which the sounds of the different instruments that compose it play together:

Different instruments play together. ... The contrast between the instruments must be as sharp as possible so that each retains its unmistakable timbre. The composer must write the part so that the timbre of each instrument reaches its maximum effect. ... In the true symphony, however, all the instruments merge into the overall chord. ... To express all the richness of the sounds that the composer feels within himself, the orchestra must be pluralistic (von Balthasar, 1979/1972, p. 13).

The metaphor of the 'orchestra' recalls the concept of the person as harmony, obligated to tune up the different instruments of which it is composed. An attention to the different dimensions of the person, tuned up beyond plurality into a common wholeness, enables them to compose a single melody, which can mirror the person's uniqueness and unity. The world, and every aspect that composes it, and every person, is the reflection of an organic unity of composition that is the work of God, and even if it cannot 'fully embrace its plurality, because unity is never lodged in it, yesterday no less than today' (ibidem, p. 15), each person perfectly understands that they all complement each other in a symphony.

Following von Balthasar's remarks on the relationship between *plurality* and *unity*, we find references to the contemporary human condition often the result of fragmentations of the person's unitary structure. In contrast, the person should instead learn to trace the whole in the individual part, to compose the symphony of themselves and know how to act in unison with others, overcoming perspectives of separation and detachment, which do not recognise that humanity is symphonic, as the manifestation of a plurality starting from the unity of the person (Scholé, 2006).

These emphases help us understand how the object of the study of pedagogy overcomes the separation between ‘object’ and ‘subject’ because it does not limit itself to studying the pupil as an object of study, in isolation, but tries to embrace every single person in their evidence: as Giuseppe Vico indicates, education to the ‘manifestation and unveiling of the metaphysical evidence of being and of the person’ (Vico, 2002, p. 10). Consequently, assuming the person as a fundamental guiding idea implies considering that from the aspect of the theory of education, the particular object is defined as a ‘person’ in that they are ‘educable’ and to be understood and encountered from within the different educational situations and relationships (ibidem, p. 99), trying to avoid unilateral positions, to affirm the nexus between *existentiality* and *essentiality of the person*, between *rootedness* and *transcendence* (Vico, 2000, p. 22). With its interest in the person and educability, pedagogy examines the reasons for overcoming a sterile identification of the person with the terms of object and subject, to recover the proper relationship with being and with truth. This is what personalism tries to do in an ontological sense while directing attention to the person’s interpretative nature as a relationship towards being and towards truth. These dimensions are essential for dealing with nihilism and existential emptiness and the consequences of an education drained of references to the veritative dimension, or oriented only to methodological and purely technical methods, without a recall to an ethical and ontological horizon. In educational perspectives devoid of ontological and value references, the person

loses the quality of temporal experiences, of the relationship between value and time. The end of this duel between person and nonsense can only be favourable to the person. Pedagogically, it is important to develop guiding ideas, operational proposals and hermeneutic horizons to reduce the damage, to decondition the person, to strive against the attempts to encapsulate man culturally and materially (Vico, 2002, p. 32).

The exploration of the relationship between the *person, educable potentialities* and *the search for truth* allows pedagogy to draw further refinement in the interpretation of the person and the tools of knowledge and understanding of the other. The knowledge of the other as a person establishes and characterises our relationship with the pupil, whom we must be able to interpret, to ‘read’ in the complexity of his or her aspects and dimensions. The pedagogist, like every educator, knows that he or she cannot disregard a body of knowledge of the pupil as a unique and unrepeatable person, as

a human reality that is receptive to our gaze and asks to be known, interpreted and revealed. Nevertheless, the hermeneutic activity that the educator is called to undertake cannot do without considering the potentialities of each subject, the fact that each one lives in a situation, reflecting a specific reality in which one is born and lives, is formed, projects oneself towards the achievement of goals. The intertwining of the real, the ideal and the possible is reflected in each person's *educability*, while manifesting their personal potentiality, employing it in the experienced reality and directing it towards the not yet, in order to give complete fulfilment to themselves within the path towards humanisation that previous generations have already written.

Educability refers to the consideration that the subject of education is the human being and that education, in its essence, derives from an 'intrinsic disposition of the person', combined with the interweaving of the person's spirit and the world of the human species. It is precisely because the person can exploit the experience of the species and insert themselves into the human and cultural experience of their predecessors that they can get closer to be themselves increasingly and historicise themselves. This is why there is educability and, therefore, education. As evidence of this reflection on educability, we find the references of Italian pedagogists of Christian inspiration in the second half of the twentieth century. Among these, Aldo Agazzi argues about the relationship between educability and education:

Education is not immediately deduced from the human subject's analysis but only by considering the *relationship* between the single human subject with its constitutive characteristics and the human species, namely humanity. And if we ask ourselves what the intimate and profound reason for this human exclusivity of the educational event is, it turns out, by investigating the spiritual and mental processes of the human being, that education in the authentic sense exists in the human world only, because only man is endowed with that particular form of development and learning that allows him to understand and make others' experiences his own, an endowment and attitude that coincides with the uniquely human characteristic that is educability (Agazzi, 1972, pp. 36–37).

Consequently, the concept of educability clarifies that the journey towards *perfectibility* is both a personal and a community task. Growth is a process that involves both the person themselves and the previous generations, both the pupil and the educator. Indeed, the more the latter can be said to be such, the more they live and exercise the educational task by helping the pupil live their own life and find meaning in it. Thus, the educational rela-

tionship becomes the space where there is an exchange between different uniquenesses accompanied by an educational word that is the revelation of what each person is called to be. The educator also has the task of cultivating, revealing and imagining the you that the other can become, even if there is resistance, passivity, conformity and uncritical adherence to stereotypical models.

The problematic questions in education urge us to ask ourselves a question that concerns the specificity of the features that we record occasionally, and the deep margins of each person and their interiority. At this point, education means to know how to look inside, even into the 'chasms of our interiority' (Borgna, 2005, p. 29), to help move towards overcoming difficulties, failures and setbacks and opening up to change. Thus, education is a discourse on inner and outer life, on the inclination to listen and analyse our emotional responses and seek change. Change is undoubtedly an experience that disconcerts us, urges us to seek new adaptations and to adopt new 'features' or 'forms' of ourselves.

In relation to the difference in our life stories, choices and situations, we are the protagonists, especially of the paths we recognise in ourselves: the paths of suffering, of difference, of care, of desire, of creativity. Self-knowledge allows us to recognise that education is an experience with 'inner resonances': it is, firstly, an inner unfolding in which we allow ourselves be involved, to be enacted by going beyond estrangement because each one experiences 'an interiority that is concealed by an exteriority, but at the same time is expressed in it and therefore can also be perceived by another being' (Guardini, 2008/1972, p. 133). Educating ourselves and others means recovering a broad experience that opens us to a personal resonance of the world and others in us. Only by allowing ourselves to be involved with the other is it possible to discover the uniqueness and mystery that the other brings with them, as a cause of wonder.

## **5. The person as interpretation, freedom and search for truth**

Central to the discourse on education there is a continuous attempt to interpret the person with the view to helping them shape themselves and seek an authentic expression of the self. Hence, it is reductive to consider that pedagogical science's reflective and practical commitment can only be directed towards responding to the needs, difficulties and anxieties of the

self-realisation of the subjects. It is unwise to think that education can be reduced to the level of the demand–response dynamics because this perspective equates education with an instrumental and methodological logic for obtaining results and risks dropping the attention to the anthropological component, which, as stated earlier, constitutes one of the intrinsic dimensions of pedagogical discourse. If we try to depart from a purely instrumental view, we can understand how education is the scope of the possible, of prefiguring and *anticipating*:

Education, in its permanent unfolding and development, is expectation, silent expectation of something that the anticipating consciousness of man knows how to perceive in that purpose for which he lives and chooses, and which, in an ontic and ontological sense, already exists beforehand as intentionality and need for something both in the being and in individual existence (Vico, 2002, p. 47).

Hence the importance of bringing pedagogy back to reflect on what is already inscribed in everyone's potentiality. Education is not reduced to a functional operation for predetermined objectives but is *relationship* and *search for meaning* within which the *individual's freedom* takes shape. It is the sphere in which the other is recognised; it is the place of *encounter*, *attention* and *care towards others*, which implies transcending an external, detached observation of a purely psychological nature. Looking at the other person means developing an in-depth reflection, going beyond categorisations and stereotypes, to identify each person's potentiality and help them move towards their own humanisation. The educability of each person, while manifesting their potentiality, implements it concretely in the experienced reality and orients it progressively towards the other-than-self, towards what is not yet, to achieve complete fulfilment. The educator has the task, from within the relationship, to foster each person's individuality, to understand from within, to know how to put himself or herself in the other's place, and imagine the you they may become.

To further deepen the pedagogical interpretation of the person as educable, it is necessary to recall the discourse of personal freedom. As an intrinsic dimension of the person, freedom is subject to many constraints in a society dominated by the crisis of reason and by the forgetfulness of the spiritual dimension, the exaltation of occasions and opportunities, rather than the search for ethical and ontological perspectives (Botturi, 2003). Regarding the educable person, the concept of freedom implies recognising the person's ability

to choose between distinct possibilities and the possibility of choosing the good as a capacity that qualifies the person's *proprium* (Mari, 2013). From a personalist perspective, the emphasis on freedom does not rest merely on the formulation of theoretical principles but is a problem with concrete implications about the difficulties and commitment required by the exercise of free activity. Thus, we can argue that education to freedom is configured as an enhancement of the person's singularity that identifies the person and the peculiarity of their way of being in the world.

Interpreting the *nexus between person and freedom* implies the promotion of certain essential components:

1) *The personal 'singularity'* refers to the 'form' that each person has and is engaged in outlining in order to assert a self-profile as the outcome of choices which express the uniqueness of the person (Pareyson, 1971, pp. 179–180).

In its most authentic meaning, freedom is not the sphere of arbitrary actions with no purpose. True freedom is the manifestation and deepening of singularity and personality. Consequently, the freedom of the person as manifestation and shaping of personal being is not the result of a natural spontaneity but a 'spiritual need', the inner deepening of their own unique perspective. Thus, each person's uniqueness is not defined as something definite, but as something that involves an act of initiative and transposition onto a plane of value (ibidem, p. 180).

2) *The shaping of the person as a 'task'* transpires from within the educational formative processes that contribute to implementing the person as a dialectic between potentialities and limits, between concrete personal plasticity and planning, between a sense of dedication to oneself and others and respect for obligations and between freedom and necessity (ibidem, p. 198).

The outlining of the person from within a 'polar' structure (Guardini, 1997, p. 29) shows that education occurs from within pairs of opposite terms, between reference to the mouldable nature on the one hand and the need for programming on the other. The person emerges by one's pliable nature, because one can potentially do what one wants, but always within programming dictated by moral obligation. This, in concrete life, implies seeking the coincidence of the self with the task and the ideal, in such ways that 'duty becomes a task to which one must constantly devote oneself and aspire, and the ideal, becoming the task of a whole life, becomes norm and law, in a reciprocal integration' (Pareyson, 1971, p. 199).

At the end of the process of personal development that outlines the inner coherence of the person and what they actually are, the person assumes that specific and unmistakable profile of the self, which is revealed at all times as

the expression of a coincidence between the concrete and ideal dimensions, between ideal and duty, seeking the consistency of their own life within that multiplicity of interpretations or masks that they can choose and decide to espouse: 'In every moment of one's existence, the person is what one has succeeded in making of oneself, and every moment sums up and condenses the whole history of the person, carrying within oneself the overall evaluation' (ibidem, p. 180).

3) *The delineation of personal freedom as a search for truth* shows how the person expresses a constitutive 'tension' that leads one not to be satisfied with being reduced to operational methods, to do for the sake of doing, to achieve results. On the contrary, the person can go deeper, distinguish between operating, inventing, doing, forming and searching for the truth, and freely accept this by consenting to it or rejecting it.

The person is an original ontological 'openness' formed in the relationship with the being, understood as listening to the truth, to which they give themselves through a conscious act of freedom (ibidem, p. 229). Because of the capacity to interpret, the person becomes receptive to the relationships between being-freedom and being-truth, which comprise the fundamental cornerstones of education. The purpose of education is, indeed, the promotion in each human being of that process of gradual transition from educability, to education, to formation (Vico, 2002, p. 177) which calls one to live and recognise oneself from within an experience that is certainly physical, psychological, emotional, relational, social and ethical, but which expresses in a broader sense an experience that refers to the exploration of truth and meaning of existence.

## 6. Conclusions

By investigating the nexus between personalism as a philosophical perspective and the concept of the person, pedagogy draws some of the main reasons for continuing to increase trust in the person, educating potentiality and possibilities. Moreover, these dimensions are nourished by the person's continuous tension to ask questions about themselves and the reasons for their existence, thus also expressing an openness to the truth.

The search for truth underpins human commitment, task and effort, and conveys meaning to the results achieved through the exercise of human freedom as a dimension that supports and guides personal initiative.

From a pedagogical perspective, interpreting the person in their relationship with truth leads one to heed that, because of the original ontological dimension, the person is reaching out and opening towards the truth (Pareyson, 1971, p. 106). And it is precisely because of this hermeneutic nature, this capacity for interpretation, that the person conducts and develops an exploratory investigation that enables them to draw ever closer to themselves and the relationship both with others and with the Other in a metaphysical sense.

The revisiting of personalism that has increasingly refined the hermeneutic exercise by the person in contemporary times facilitates not to stop at interpretation as a technique, method or simple operational strategy. Interpreting the person certainly means implementing a set of processes with a view to observe, to listen to and to understand their personal history and identity. Interpreting is not only a set of processes of gnoseological nature but rather of an anthropological and ontological one.

A pedagogy that still continues to have dialogue with the foundations of personalism encounters interesting perspectives of deepening the concept of the person in a hermeneutic key, utilising paradigms to consider the person not only as the result of reflective processes but also of inner and truthful research. In this direction, the pedagogy of the person benefits from the close relationship with the ‘philosophy of education’, which has not only speculative but also revelatory purposes regarding a personal relationship of searching for the truth in us and outside us. Indeed, there is always a need for truth in the person, but there is also a capacity to search for and interpret it, which we need to know how to develop, support, encourage and promote. In the various situations of experience, the person ‘feels’ a desire for spirituality that encourages the search to give a meaning to these experiences and a sense to the existence.

The reflection carried out so far invites us, in short, to adopt and revisit personalism and its nexus with the person in order to encounter perspectives such as hermeneutics, which encourage the meeting between reflection on education and paradigms more focused on the anthropological and ontological implications of the human being.

To continue to mirror the sensitivity and interest towards the issue concerning the person and to recall this value pedagogically means to assume it both as an ethical, social, political and religious instance, and as a founding aspiration and requirement (Mounier, 2004, pp. 43–56) to provide vision that does not lessen the pupil either to a simple individual among others or to a subject-object for neutral scientific consideration, but which can enhance him in his personal nature of singularity.



To continue to question personalism so that it is re-proposed means to recognise, as Armando Rigobello states, that the fundamental problem remains the same: to make the singularity of the person, their inner richness and creativity the dominant motif of an ontological perspective and an ethical, political and spiritual proposal (Rigobello, 1995, pp. 583–597). Accordingly, it is possible to react to interpretations conducted only based on the canons of scientific research and to approach areas of a phenomenological-hermeneutic nature that reveal the reductionism to which human nature's investigation conducted on the basis of scientific criteria alone creates. A pedagogy that adopts hermeneutic thinking suggests significant insights into educational theorising and practices that maintain fidelity to the person's ontological value while considering the many difficulties and contemporary complexities.

In the attempt to overcome the limits of objectifying the perspectives and methods of approaching the person and their potentiality, the necessary transition is towards the exercise of a 'hermeneutic rationality', capable of expressing and giving voice both to the demands of the person's fulfilment and to the metaphysical and transcendent search in response to the condition of finitude.

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