

ROMANO GUARDINI'S HUMANISTIC PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

After presenting Romano Guardini's pedagogical thinking in its main features, this paper reconstructs the situation of the debate about education in Germany during the Weimar period (1918-1933). Then Guardini's pedagogical main work, *Die Grundlegung des Bildungslehre* (1928), is analyzed in its structure and development. In the end, it is proposed an analysis of topicality of Guardini's thought about education in reference to current context.

Key words: Guardini, Philosophy of education, German pedagogy, Christian pedagogy, Humanism

« If the living God is there, then He is there also for education»

Grundlegung der Bildungslehre (1928)

The work of Romano Guardini (1885-1968) does not yet form part of the history of pedagogy as it should¹. His pedagogical texts can be counted on the fingers of one hand, yet the education of young

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¹ An Italian version of this text has been published in the *Proceedings* of the international conference held in Trento in October 2018: «Humanitas», 74, (2-3/2019), pp. 225-236. The English bibliography on Guardini's philosophy is very poor: cf. Kuhlen R., *Romano Guardini, The Teacher of Teachers*, in Robert L. Tuzik (ed.), *How Firm a Foundation: Leaders of the Liturgical Movement*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990, 36-49; Krieg Robert A., *Romano Guardini's Reception in North America*, in *Kirche sein. Nachkonziliare Theologie im Dienst der Kirchenreform* (H. J. Pottmeyer ed.), W. Geerlings / M. Seckler (Hg.), Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1994, 93-110; Krieg Robert A. (ed.), *Romano Guardini. Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, Chicago 1995; Krieg, Robert A., *Romano Guardini. A Precursor of Vatican II*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame 1997; Krieg, Robert A., *Romano Guardini's Theology of the Human Person*, in: *Theological Studies* 59 (1998), 457-474; Furnal J., *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016; Gorevan P., *Romano Guardini and the Liturgy*, in *New Blackfriars* 79 (1998), 197-203; Rego J., *Liturgy as Symbolic Action in Romano Guardini*, in *Questions Liturgiques*, 94 (2013), 76-90; Millare R., *The Primacy of Logos over Ethos: The Influence of Romano Guardini on Post-Conciliar Theology*, in *«Heythrop Journal»* 57/6 (2016), 974-983. For critical texts in German, cf. B. Gerner, *Guardinis Bildungslehre: Beiträge zur Wirkungsforschung*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1985; G. Henner, *Die Pädagogik im Denken Romano Guardinis*,

people was his mission. Many of his works are pedagogical in terms of purpose and rationale, albeit not in terms of subject matter²: *Le età della Vita (Stages of Life)* or *Le Lettere di autoformazione* may rightfully be included in academic programs on the history of pedagogy; *Senso della malinconia* (1928) should be included in the subjects of Social Pedagogy in every university. *Liturgische Bildung* (1923), which paved the way for liturgical renewal, is a powerful peroration of the fundamental import of religious space and time and of gestures; the *Lettere dal lago di Como* contains a prophetic statement « on the inception of a new form and image of man » that opposed whichever form of education claiming recognition based on the accumulation of content knowledge alone³. As a Catholic author, however, it is surprising to note that his extensive writings fail to include texts on the relationship between the State and the Church on the subject of education or freedom of education, and on the educational duties of the family, all of which were sensitive issues for the Magisterium (the encyclical *Divinis illius Magistri* was published in 1929). This can perhaps be explained in the light of the German confessional milieu and of Guardini's distinct position vis-à-vis the German academia, teaching specifically 'Catholic' subjects in non-denominational universities, as in the case of the professorship of *Religionsphilosophie und katholische Weltanschauung* which he held at the University of Berlin from 1923 to 1939, until he was dismissed from teaching by the Nazis.

Paderborn 1990 (Univ. Diss.); S. Werner, *Was heißt christliche Bildung?* in Id., *Im Horizont der Geschichte. Religionspädagogische Studien zur Geschichte der religiösen Bildung und Erziehung*, Lit, Münster, 2001, pp. 181-204; Th. Schreijäck, *Bildung als Inexistenz. Elemente einer theologisch-anthropologischen Propädeutik zu einer religionspädagogischen Bildungstheorie im Denken Romano Guardinis*, Herder, Freiburg u.a., 1989 (Salzburg, Univ., Diss., 1988); I. Schmidt-Silla, *Romano Guardini. Aspekte der Reformpädagogik und Jugendbewegung und ihre Aktualität in der Erziehung heute*, Xlibri Verlag, Fuchstal 2010; Ch. Gampenrieder, *Der Bildungsbegriff bei Romano Guardini. Eine Untersuchung*, VDM, Saarbrücken 2011; M. Enders, *Die philosophischen Bildungs-Lehren von Romano Guardini (1885-1968) und Gustav Siewerth (1903 - 1963) und ihre Relevanz für den Zukunft der menschlichen Bildung in Europa*, in M. Schulz (Hrsg.), *Menschenbild und humanisierende Bildung: zur philosophischen Pädagogik Gustav Siewerths*, Verlag Gustav Siewerth-Gesellschaft, Konstanz 2016, pp. 91-128.

² In the framework of Guardini's *Opera omnia*, currently published in Italian by Morcelliana (Brescia), we do not yet have the volume *Scritti pedagogici*, envisaged as n. VII of the series. Actually in Italian the only collection of pedagogical writings is R. Guardini, *Persona e libertà. Saggi di fondazione della teoria pedagogica*, Carlo Fedeli ed., La Scuola, Brescia 1978. On pedagogical thinking, cf. C. Fedeli *Pienezza e compimento. Alle radici della riflessione pedagogica di R. Guardini*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2003; Id., *L'educazione come esperienza. Il contributo di John Dewey e Romano Guardini alla pedagogia del Novecento*, Aracne, Roma 2008; Id., «L'uomo è tornato a essere un enigma per l'epoca presente»: *l'umanesimo pedagogico di Romano Guardini*, in «Pedagogia e Vita», 2/2017; A. Ferrari, *Romano Guardini: il suo contributo alla educazione dell'uomo contemporaneo*, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore graduate thesis, 1988; Aa.Vv., *Romano Guardini e la pedagogia. L'educazione come compito e valore* (G. Fabris, G. A. Faccioli eds.), Il Poligrafo, Padova 2015. On Guardini's thought, cf. S. Zucal (ed.), *La Weltanschauung cristiana di Romano Guardini*, Istituto Trentino di Cultura, pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di Scienze religiose in Trento, v.13, Trento 1988; M. Borghesi, *Antinomia della vita e conoscenza affettiva*, Milano, Jaka Book 2018. On Guardini's Biography, cf. H. Kuhn, *Romano Guardini. L'uomo e l'opera*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1963 but most of all H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz, *Romano Guardini 1885-1968. Leben und Werk*, Matthias Grunenevald Verlag, Mainz 1985, it.tr. *Romano Guardini. La vita e l'opera*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1988.

³ «We feel the profound insufficiency of culture in everything that surrounds us and in ourselves. From the period of the Enlightenment onwards, we talk too much about culture ... Authentic culture has no roots in knowledge, but in being. The word itself says it: *gebildet* is the one who has taken his form from an inner principle that is structure and law for him; for which being and doing, thinking and acting, the person and the environment descend from an inner form that determines them ... There is no worse 'non-culture' of modern Enlightenment culture...», *Lettere dal lago di Como*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1959, pp. 99-100.

For Guardini, the true value of Christian education resided in intention more than in educational practice. In essence, it can be said that Guardini's pedagogical intention was to raise modern man from the moral and cultural confusion into which he had fallen in order to resume the journey towards his authenticity, and in so doing inspire young people to experience the joy and greatness of living the Church. In that perspective we grasp the full extent of his high consideration, albeit not without nostalgia, of more solid and religiously passionate Christian epochs compared to his own. Whereas 20th century scientific pedagogy had as its aim that of reconciling the child and the man with their nature, or that of healing their anxieties – in fact it was conceived as a social discipline or as a therapy -, Guardini practices the pedagogy of disquiet to dig into the depths of human experience, so as to give it a 'form'. Guardini resists the temptation to trivialise and naturalise the process of inner growth that he always positions within a specific conception of dialectics as an opposing methodology and not as a system (Babolin, 1978). Education is for him a non-rational necessity, or rather, it is an experience of growth whose stages cannot be separated from a compressed conception of life, which extends far beyond a mere understanding of the world and involves the risk of conscious choice.

In Guardini's work pedagogy is not a science: the only applied science that the philosopher contemplates is ethics, the intermediate dimension of the human life - between the individual and the spiritual ones - that encompasses material existence and constitutes a breeding ground for discernment, that is, for practical judgment. The *ethos* is the womb that gives birth to individual consciousness, but it is also the realm of concrete existence: the « fundamental law of human existence», he writes, « occurs insofar as man reaches out above his natural grasp, towards its essence. Man genuinely reaches out to his true self only in this way » (Guardini, 1978, pp 46-47). It should be noted that the first major contribution on the theme of *Bildung*⁴, by Max Scheler – whose work deeply influenced Guardini - appeared in 1925. At the end of his life, Scheler addressed the problem of reconciliation and the relationship between conflicting forces, between opposing poles, which was also the inspirational theme of Guardini's most celebrated work, *Gegensatz*⁵. It is no coincidence that the development of Scheler's theory anticipates

⁴ M. Scheler, *Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung*, Cohen, Bonn 1925. This first intervention was to be followed by three more contributions in just three years: Id., *Mensch und Geschichte*, in «Die Neue Rundschau» 2(1926), pp. 449-476; Id., *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs*, in H. Lichtenberger (Hrsg.), *Ausgleich als Aufgabe und Schicksal*, Rothschild, Berlin-Grunewald 1929, pp. 31-63; Id., *Philosophische Weltanschauung*, in «Münchener neuesten Nachrichten» 81 (1928), pp. 1-3.

⁵ It should be noted that Scheler's reflection on *Bildung* corresponds to his latter stages of thought - pantheistic-panenteistic - the antithesis between *Geist* and *Drang*, the attributes of the foundation, that meet/clash in man and whose outcome - that is never predictable - puts into play the realization of the foundation itself. *Bildung* is at the service of this “anthropological” - ultimately “metaphysical” - dynamic. Guardini repeatedly recalls Scheler's last (“pantheistic”) phase, showing that he knows its essential contents, but there is no reference to his ideas on education in that phase: c.f.

the underlying structure of Guardini's *Grundlegung der Bildungslehre. Versuch einer bestimmung des Pädagogisch- Eigentlichen*, his only explicitly pedagogical text published three years later⁶.

It should be noted that Guardini's thought marked a departure from the German pedagogy of the first half of the 20th century that saw the development of new forms of philosophical rationale. Notably, 20th century pedagogy, marked by the increasing withdrawal of philosophy, was now defined by the growing penetration of psychology and sociology, paving the way for the transition from the philosophy of education to science education. At the time, the most popular pedagogical handbooks and texts circulating in Germany were substantially 'traditional' and 'indigenous', linked to a typically German approach to classifying concepts by virtue of their broad nature. At the time of the First World War, the most innovative text in Germany was *Lexikon der Pädagogik* by E. M. Roloff (1913-1917), whom Guardini knew and frequented⁷, but earlier works by F. Paulsen, *Das deutsche Bildungswesen in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Teubner, Leipzig 1906 and, above all, by W. Rein: *Pädagogik in systematischer Darstellung*, Beyer, Langensalza, 1902-1911, 3 Bd.; *Encyklopädische Handbuch der Pädagogik*, Beyer, Langensalza, 1a 1895-1899, 7 Bd; *Pädagogik im Grundriß*, Göschen, Stuttgart 1890 (de Gruyter, Berlin & Leipzig 1927⁶)⁸, were equally used.

In Guardini's extensive oeuvre we find references to various pedagogical principles, but not for this does the author feel compelled to systematize his philosophy of education. Even the references to famous pedagogues are scarce, generic, and sometimes inaccurate: addressing the theme of children's religious formation⁹ in *Von Heiligen Zeichen* (Guardini, 1922), he refers to Montessori as the 'renowned Catholic educator'. In *Ethik* he quotes Montessori from a broader perspective as to why children must

⁶ Werkbund, Würzburg 1965⁷, in R. Guardini, *Persona e libertà...*, cit., pp. 49-92.

⁷ Cf. *Lettere a Josef Weiger (Opera Omnia XXVII)*: Lettera n. 50 (10 e 24-01.1915); n. 53 (28.03.1915); n. 57 (27.06.1915); n. 66 (27.08.1916); n. 84 (24.10.1921 e 20.01.1921); n. 146 (17.11.1931). In *Stationen und Rückblicke / Berichte über mein Leben*, Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag - Mainz 1995, p. 39, Guardini recalls his time at the University of Berlin and says he has had friendly relations only with very few professors, including Spranger.

⁸ On the History of Pedagogy in Germany, cf. T. Ballauff – K. Schaller, *Pädagogik. Eine Geschichte der Bildung und Erziehung*, Alber, Freiburg – München. Bd I: *Von der Antike bis zum Humanismus*, 1969; Bd II: *Vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, 1970; Bd III: *19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 1973; H. Blankertz, *Geschichte der Pädagogik*, Büchse der Pandora, Wetzlar 1982 (2011¹⁰); C. Berg (Hrsg.), *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte*, Beck, München, Bd. 1-6: 1987-2005; cf. Bd 4 (1991): *1870 - 1918. Von der Reichsgründung bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs* e Bd 5 (1989): *1918 - 1945. Die Weimarer Republik und die nationalsozialistische Diktatur*; G. Böhme – H.-E. Tenorth, *Einführung in die Historische Pädagogik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1990; D. Benner – J. Oelkers (Hrsg.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2004; W. Böhm (Hrsg.), *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*. Begründet von Wilhelm Hehlmann, Schöning, Paderborn 2018 (ed. or. Kröner, Stuttgart 1982; W. Hehlmann [Hrsg.], *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*, Kröner, Stuttgart 1931; 1971¹¹); D. Lenzen (Hrsg.), *Pädagogische Grundbegriffe*. Band 2: *Jugend bis Zeugnis*, Rowohlt, Reinbek 1989 (2007⁸), *Pädagogik, historische* (di Bernhard Schwenk), p. 1161 ss.

⁹ In a note (dating back to the last edition of the 1965 book), p. 14, Guardini informs that a recent edition of Montessori's texts had come out: M. Montessori, *Religionspädagogischen Schriften*, Freiburg 1964.

be allowed to be children in order to develop their creativity freely¹⁰. There is no mention of Dewey and nor of Piaget. In some passages of various works, Guardini makes reference to the conceptualization developed by H. Nohl – whom he defines the “master of recent pedagogy” – whereby the educator must protect the pupil from both the adult world and the instincts of the child himself¹¹. The most prominent source of Guardini is believed to have been the work of F.W. Foerster (1869-1966) whom he regards as an « exceptional pedagogue » (Foerster, 1980). He claims to have read a 1908 article by Foerster, although he proves to be cognizant of many of his works¹² and affirms that from this author he has learned the most, indeed from him alone (with the exception of Bernhard Strehler - while never referring to his texts but only to the experience of the boarding school in Neisse)¹³.

Pedagogical debate in Germany during the Weimar period (1918-1933) was rather complex and discontinuous¹⁴. Two prevailing tendencies in the philosophy of education can be observed¹⁵. The first concerns the theory of pedagogy as a « moral science » (*geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*), which in the 1920's gradually spread across academic circles¹⁶. Although it established itself to the detriment of the prevailing trend of the previous thirty years – positivist/empiricist pedagogy - Herbartian pedagogy still had an influence in the late 19th and early 20th century, marked by a greater focus on intellectual development and advocating a formalized, systematic approach to the human phenomenon. Moving away from these two lines of thought, *geisteswissenschaftliche* pedagogy was characterized by

¹⁰Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, Mainz 1993, Bd 2, p. 623. The same in *Gläubiges Dasein / Die Annahme seiner selbst*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag – Mainz, 1993 p. 136.

¹¹ Cf. *Ethik*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag – Mainz 1993, Bd 2, p. 699, p. 955; *Sorge um Menschen*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag – Mainz 1988, Bd 1, p. 170; *Gläubiges Dasein / Die Annahme seiner selbst*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag – Mainz, 1993 p. 136.

¹² *Grundfragen der Charakterbildung*, in «Hochland» April 1908, pp. 1-25. Guardini also explicitly mentions: *Jugendlehre*, Berlin 1904 (in *Lettere a Josef Weiger*, Opera Omnia XXVI/1: Lettera n. 4 del luglio 1910); *Lebensführung*, Berlin (neue Ausg.) 1912: in *Lettere a Josef Weiger* (Opera Omnia XXVI/1: Lettera n. 20 del 12/4/26.02 e 9.03.1913) and in *Lettere a Josef Weiger* (Opera Omnia XXVI/1: Lettera n. 43 del 15.02.1914; *Lebenskunde*, Berlin 1904 and *Lebensführung*, Berlin 1909 (in *Das Ende der Neuzeit/Die Macht*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag - Mainz 1986, p. 183). An important consideration about Foerster is also in *Der Gegensatz*, p. 124, n. 32 (it. tr. *Scritti di metodologia filosofica*, Opera Omnia, I, p. 178): Guardini writes that there are tasks for pedagogy that have not yet been clarified, or not even seen. Foerster's merit is to have them processed on a concrete level.

¹³ Cf., *Stationen und Rückblicke / Berichte über mein Leben*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag - Mainz 1995, p. 227 (note on 9.03.1954).

¹⁴ Among the recent accounts of German pedagogical thought, the work of Weimer, thoroughly revised and updated by Jacobi in the 1990s, deserves a mention for its focus on the theoretical assumptions of the debate in the field of education: H. Weimer, *Geschichte der Pädagogik*, völlig neu bearb. Aufl. von Juliane Jacobi, de Gruyter, Berlin – New York, 1992.

¹⁵ In this regard, the testimony of a direct protagonist of those debates is significant: H. Nohl, *Pädagogik aus dreißig Jahren*, Schulte-Bulmke, Frankfurt a. M 1949.

¹⁶ It was precisely in this decade that it prevailed over the rival historical current of empirical pedagogy, more directly dependent on Wundtian psychology and in general on 19th century positivist tradition: these two currents fought for supremacy in the German pedagogical discourse of the last decade of the 19th century and in the first two decades of the 20th century. From 1945, that is, after the National Socialist ‘period’, *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* returned to prevail in German-speaking environments until the 1960s, when it succumbed to emerging trends linked to the development of social sciences and the Frankfurt school, but above all to the re-evaluation of empirical analytical methods in the field of education.

the stress on ‘human life’, to be primarily conceived by means of ‘understanding’, *verstehen*, as opposed to *erklären*, ‘explaining’, representing the typical mode of natural sciences. In essence, despite a variety of repetitions purporting to be original, the historicist reflection and hermeneutical theory of W. Dilthey¹⁷ was the fundamental inspiration of this pedagogical approach. In this conception, the focus is on the complex, and radically historical process, whereby the lived experience – that could never be objectified as a natural phenomenon – is self-understood through the constant interplay between the historical dimension of the student, the educator, and the historical experience of the surrounding environment. It was a matter of overcoming the limitations of Enlightenment concepts whereby the practical dimension of existence remains subjected to an ordering principle of an intellectual nature. Guardini’s recurrent polemic against *Aufklärung* points in this direction.

A distinctive aspect of *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, that should not be underestimated, was the idea of the autonomisation of pedagogy and the clarification of its status as an academic discipline, seeking an equidistant role between the pedagogical concepts that drew their content from normative-legal foundations and those of a religious denominational matrix. Alongside this first theoretical line there was a second, neo-Kantian, approach which enjoyed considerable reputation in the academic world of the 1920s. Marked by a normative and deductivist dimension, this theory of education understood pedagogical activity as the accomplishment or, in extreme cases, as the mere application of the premise of moral law enshrined in human conscience. It garnered appreciation from the social-democratic political arena, notably from its revisionist factions.¹⁸ A more marginal and less significant role compared to these two prevailing approaches was played by Bernfeld’s marxist pedagogical reflection (Bernfeld, 1925), which draws extensively on Freudian psychoanalysis, and by the theories of O. Rühle and his wife A. Gerstel, more inclined to identify an approach that harmonised Marxism and Alderian psychology¹⁹. But we also find the first theories – that took shape in the theories of education of National Socialism after 1933 – marked by a distinctly anti-individualist approach, focusing on the role of the community and the people in the formation of the individual²⁰. The latter were meant to counterbalance the liberal-protestant educational program propounded by E. Troeltsch in

¹⁷ The main exponents of the *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* are Eduard Spranger, Theodor Litt e Herman Nohl, Wilhelm Flitner. Cf. J. Blickenstorfer, *Studien zur Erkenntnisproblem in der geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, Zürich 1986; Id., *Pädagogik in der Krise. Hermeneutische Studie mit Schwerpunkt Nohl, Spranger, Litt zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik*, Klinkhardt, Bad Heilbrunn 1998.

¹⁸ An example of hybridization between social democracy and neokantian pedagogy is Leonhard Nelson, *Vorlesungen über die Grundlage der Ethik. Bd.2: System der philosophischen Ethik und Pädagogik*, G. Hermann – M. Specht (Hrsg.), Öffentliches Leben, Göttingen 1932.

¹⁹ Cf. O. Rühle, *Erziehung zum Sozialismus, Gesellschaft und Erziehung*, Berlin 1920; Id., *Das kommunistische Schulprogramm, die Aktion*, Berlin-Wilmersdorf 1920; Id., *Das proletarische Kind*, Langen, München 1922; Id., *Die Seele des proletarischen Kindes*, Verlag am andern Ufer, Dresden 1925.

²⁰ Cf. P. Petersen, *Allgemeine Erziehungswissenschaft*, Bd.1, de Gruyter, Berlin-Leipzig 1924; Id., *Die neuuropäische Erziehungsbewegung*, Böhlau, Weimar 1926; E. Kriek, *Philosophie der Erziehung*, Diederichs, Jena 1922; Id., *Grundlegende Erziehung*, Stenger, Erfurt 1930. From 1933 Ernst Kriek ed Alfred Bäumler will become the official ideologues of the Nazis educational program.

1918²¹. In this respect, a sharp distance separates Guardini's conception of the intellectual encounter and the relationship between teacher and pupil, from that of most German philosophers praising Germanic grandeur, especially of M. Heidegger, his teacher. The National Socialist (Nazis) model of the organic relationship between the State, the “container”, and race, ‘the content’ (these are Hitler's definitions) overturned the idea of a spiritual community, developed in the 19th century, into the more problematic one of a ‘community of the people’, which is the oxymoronic expression on which Heidegger, for example, grounded his theory against ‘academic freedom’, which, the philosopher wrote in 1933, « will be expelled from the German university; for this freedom was not genuine because it was only negative. It primarily meant lack of concern, arbitrariness of intentions and inclinations, lack of restraint in what was done and left undone » (Pizzolini & Bandini, 1981, pp. 109-110). For Heidegger, German students and teachers were to adhere to three ‘bonds of service’: Labour Service, Military Service, and Knowledge Service. The « spiritual mission of the German people » was to « open its history to all the overwhelming world-shaping powers of human existence and continually fight for its spiritual world anew ». When Guardini, at the end of the 1950s and 1960s, wrote about universities (Farina, 1999), he had before his eyes « twelve years of destruction » by the Nazis. His reasoning was in fact based on the rekindling of a passion for truth, the betrayal of which had spawned Germany's catastrophe. The assertion that truth is given only for ‘love of life’ or, worse, « with regard to the people or the State » was to be rejected, since truth is there for itself. A university student has many reasons for going to university, yet the most important of them all is the quest for the « ethical-philosophical foundation of the specific sciences » (Farina, 1999: pp. 43-44).

Guardini's only specifically theoretical work on pedagogy is *Grundlegung der Bildungslehre* (Guardini, 1928). The text is structured in nine short chapters, whose content may be summarised as follows. In § I, *The Spiritual Development of the Modern Age*, examines the dissolution of the medieval vision of the world and of man, the emergence of disciplinary autonomies and the re-emergence of a longing for completeness, the ‘pedagogical tension’ extended towards a new form of ‘specificity’, the problem of critical discussion with the religious sphere and the need to reintegrate pedagogy « into the system of completeness, consistent with the essence of things ». For Guardini, *The source of pedagogical activity* (§ II) resides in « the deepest dimensions of human existence », it responds to the « process of becoming » marked by a dynamic interaction between two polar opposites: between possibility and reality and between objectivity outside oneself and its assimilation inside oneself, confronted with the « peculiar structure of human existence » that leads man « to the freedom of belonging to oneself »: the

²¹ Cf. speech 28.09.18 in E. Troeltsch, *Deutsche Bildung*, in Id. *Schriften zur Politik und Kulturphilosophie (1918-1923)*, G. Hübinger (Hrsg.), Kritische Gesamtausgabe Bd. 15, de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 2002, pp. 161-205; it. tr. A. De Leo, *Deutsche Bildung*, (M. Gennari ed.), Il melangolo, Genova 2017².

experience of the power to choose coupled by the immutability of that which is necessary triggers the effort of being ‘person’, that is, ‘embodied-spirit’ thereby grasping the limits of ascribing a « purely pedagogical teleology » to pedagogy, for « if the living God is there, then He is there also for education ». In § III, *The problem of the pedagogical specificities and inadequate definitions*, the philosopher addresses the problem of the ‘pedagogical category’, namely, the ‘unit of measurement’ underlying the conception of pedagogy. Guardini indulges in a historical overview of the three models of formation prevalent in western civilization: the theoretical one based on knowledge, the ethical one based on will and duty and finally the biological and aesthetic one, arguing that taken separately they are all unsatisfactory, thereby recovering the intrinsic ontological meaning of the term *Bild*, translated into Italian – perhaps not accurately enough – as ‘*forma vivente*’ (living form), whose definition, on « the different planes of being » (inorganic, organic, spiritual-creative) is explored in § IV, *Living form and formation*, culminating in the following definition: «The living form reposes on the polarity between the total exteriority of what is material and manipulable on the one hand, and an interiority that grows deeper from the other; originating in the interior, biopsychic sphere, and extending to the utterly personal and secret sphere of the relationship with the Father, unknown to all except to Him alone and ‘to this heart of mine »». In § V, *Movement and encounter*, the philosopher draws a comparison between the ‘form’ as a means ‘for’ and ‘form’ as an ‘expression of’, as an instrument and as fullness, showing that the only authentic option for the human person is to accept ‘questioning himself’. In § VI, *The relationship between formation and self-verification*, Guardini introduces the dialectic between the encounter of reality and self-critical assessment, the aim of which is not to crystallize the living form thereby enabling it to avoid two major temptations: to absolutize and replicate itself in a defined image of man or to lose itself in every encounter and in every action thereby foregoing the personal and historical continuity between being and action. These are the two temptations to reproduce a perfect human form or the « actualist or existentialist attitude that decentralizes and disintegrates existence ». Paragraph § VII *Objectivity and service*, examines the hypothetical accusation of proposing a « subjectivist or egocentric » pedagogy. Guardini does not deny the pedagogical value of selecting the items ‘relevant’ to the construction of self, but he rejects the idea that educating to objectivity means choosing *among* the most useful things. In fact he propounds the idea that education means « regaining the right relations with all things ». He sets out the notion of a ‘pedagogy of objects’ drawn from two distinct movements, acceptance and service: accepting the object (material as well as symbolical, juridical, aesthetical...) means enshrining it into our world, making ‘room’ for objects in our world, appreciating ‘the existence of things’; placing oneself at their service means wanting things to be and that everything in history and in the world be accomplished at its best. The formative ‘power’ of things is critical to the shaping of the virtues of character that give substance to that which lasts. However, the limit inherent in being faithful to things, to norms, to discipline, lies in man’s potential loss of self-identity and freedom of conscience and judgment. On that account, § VIII, *The Last Definitive Dialectic*,

deals with the question of the interaction between encounter and success, between the living form and the purpose of formation, between fact and intentionality, between the 'immanent moment' and the 'transcendent moment' of pedagogical practice. Guardini writes that « the distinctive feature of pedagogy consists yet again in the perspective point of convergence of this architecture of lines and planes. Grasping it constitutes the ultimate, profoundest pedagogical intuition ». *The option* is the heading given by Guardini to the conclusion of his argumentation (§ IX): each educator decides where to place the 'barycentre' of the pedagogical question, whether in the concept of the living form, in that of becoming, or in that of service. However, the fact remains that « it is my precise duty to know what I should do with myself ».

Moreover, in *Grundlegung* we find a certain semantic opacity, for example as regards the interplay between 'dialectics' and 'polarity'. It remains, however, a substantial and exemplary text illustrating Guardini's intention to make incompleteness, conflict and disorder of life and ideas, the foundation, almost an *introibo*, of a profound conversion of philosophy to life. His entire Christian philosophy can thus be read as an unyielding battle against the reduction of « existential experience» to a mere «existential position». Guardini wishes to restore blood and flesh to existence. Only in this way can it serve as an example for the faith. In fact both are "inconceivable", both are radically liveable. In an essay of 2008, French theologian G. Woimbée (Woimbée, 2008) aptly highlighted a statement by von Balthasar to the effect that Guardini « felt responsible for the *expression* of Christianity» (Balthasar, 1971, p.14). The 'expression' argument is closely connected with the question of 'accomplishment' and symbolism. Guardini postulates a very broad anthropological space where the circle of light and that of darkness are intersecting, producing an all-embracing theory of life - may I be excused for the audacity of the metaphor - which thereby encompasses all possible realms of existence, none of which can exist without being part of the whole, and neither can claim to prevail, to be better or worse, on the basis of a purely factual assessment. It requires faith. But this raises a crucial question to moral pedagogy and to political-ethical education as a whole, namely, to know whether the forces of the mundane world are sufficient to make the right choice.

In conclusion, it can be said that, despite the absence of a clear pedagogical canon, Guardini's work takes on a highly topical meaning today. Reading it is a valid antidote to the present religious and political polarizations. He has argued against the reduction of complexity into opposition. Human life is never binary. Consciousness is always multipolar; it experiences the complexity of relational processes - including today's biochemical processes - as an immense opportunity. Historical memory is by definition prospective and non-linear: it changes according to perspective, it is transformed according to the questions and the tasks we give ourselves. Western culture, including Christian culture, has always practiced the art of pluralism and the resolution of conflicts on different planes, so as to

create a plurality of codified and regulated systems and thereby enhance more competences. Polarization lends itself to simplification, but in reality it severs bonds and must be distinguished from the exercise of polarity, that is, from the ability to confront the other even in a firm manner while respecting the rules and mutually recognising the value of the respective points of view. Polarities are part of daily life as well as of sexual, creative and spiritual life; they accustom us to the exercise of rules and help us remain true to ourselves while attracting or rejecting ourselves. The polarization between good and evil, on the other hand, is the result of a radical trivialization of life; it is a dreamlike discontinuation of complexity and a way to evade responsibility.

Guardini distances himself from all the totalizing notions of pedagogy. In adherence to his vision of Christianity, he rejects the idea that in human development values can be deduced from facts. *Die Begegnung* (Guardini, 1955) – existential encounter – is the common experience underlying his philosophy of existence - not in the sense of a comforting embrace or a contract, but rather as a challenge to spiritual idleness. It must be said, however, that although participatory encounter is also the mode of relationship that Guardini always sought inside and outside the academic world, he nevertheless prioritises self-education, constituting the classic itinerary of a long Christian spiritual tradition. In order to attain complete fulfilment, « the point where in a certain sense the being-spirit is fully accomplished », the human person must be shaped on a model of truth that is never the product of a mere learning process. It should be said that freedom and choice are at the heart of the educational model that Guardini was confronted with, in line with the great season of 20th century philosophies of freedom. He dismisses all forms of philistine pedagogical concern, denying a productive meaning to precepts, and he restores the deepest sense of serving the truth – not the pupil – to the educator's authority. His conception thus echoes – without mirroring it - the theory of education of another leading European intellectual, L. Laberthonnière. The French Oratorian, author of the successful *Théorie de l'éducation* (1901), elaborates on authority as a service to the independence of the child. Guardini considers authority the antidote to all forms of Power - on which he reflects for a long time - but in so doing he has a very hieratic view of authority, which is not at the service of society in a mechanical way, nor of those seeking dominion, for the Christian-self extends beyond the bond between « the old man and the child, the follower and his leader, the pupil and the professor » (Fedeli, 1978:pp.206). According to Guardini's powerful understanding of Pauline definitions, the Christian self is the *in-existence* of Christ in man and of man with Christ.

Guardini circumvents the issue of cultural crises – resulting from the impact of the immense tragedies of the First World War - and does not indulge in a lamentation of the crisis in Western society by resorting on the one hand to a strongly Christological conception of faith - Christ is the most important event in history - and on the other hand by opening up to the Church the prospect of 'becoming' - not

being - the community form that transcends the typical sociological and institutional dimensions produced by the cultural ambition of self-legitimization adopted by Power in the modern era. Thus, Guardini's *Bildung* takes on a 'heroic and liberating' trait that was absent in the works of other German philosophers. His desire to re-awaken the German youth to a fulfilled form of responsibility is functional to the inner choice he made as a young man to « interpret the Christian reality with scientific responsibility and at a high spiritual level » (Guardini, 1984; Henrich, 1986: pp.43).

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