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AFFECTIVE RESPONSES AND PERSONAL FLOURISHING

abstract

The paper reconstructs, develops and discusses Scheler's Bildung theory to highlight its relevance for educational philosophy. First, we point out that a personality flourishes through a process of progressive individuation which is modulated by affective maturation and promoted by the encounter with an exemplarity. Then, in order to avoid some limits of Scheler's realism, we suggest rethinking these theses in the light of a new epistemological position (relational enactivism).

keywords

Bildung, affective responses, exemplarity, relational enactivism

Introduction

In this paper, we reconstruct, develop and discuss Scheler's *Bildung* theory to highlight its relevance for educational philosophy. During the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the studies of Bertolini and his group, phenomenological tradition has become an important reference for research on education (see Caronia 2011). Over the last few years, many publications, appearing not only in *Encyclopaidea* but also in other international journals, have shown that phenomenology "can inform a broad range of aspects of educational theorising and practice" (Dall'Alba 2009, 9).

However, it seems to us that some of Scheler's intuitions regarding personal development have not yet been sufficiently examined.

Scheler deals specifically with this issue in his essays *Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung* (1925) and *Vorbilder und Führer* (1933), which cannot be fully understood without reference to the ontology of the person suggested in *Ordo Amoris* (1913) and *Formalismus* (1916). An interwoven reading of these texts highlights that, according to Scheler, personal flourishing is modulated by affective maturation.

This thesis will be progressively clarified through our paper as follows:

- first, we present Scheler's notions of "ordo amoris" and "vocation" to point out what we mean when we say that every person is, in his/her essence, unique;
- second, we get back to Hildebrand's concept of "affective response" to explain how each person develops his/her individual personality through his/her distinctive individuation process;
- third, developing some of Scheler's suggestions, we examine the formative influence of a personal exemplarity (*Vorbild*) to clarify that *Bildung* is a relational, not solipsistic, process;
- fourth, extending the *Vorbildung*'s phenomenology to the area of formal education, we suggest that teachers' relational intentionality should imply not only a general existential exemplarity, but also a more specific affective exemplarity;
- finally, in order to avoid the theoretical difficulties connected to Scheler's realism (in particular, the idea of a hierarchy of objective values classes to which every individual *ordo amoris* should be conformed), we suggest rethinking all the ideas already mentioned in the light of a new epistemological position, which we define as "relational enactivism".

Against the risk of any uncritical acceptance of the dominant common

sense, Scheler's *Bildung* theory, rethought in the light of relational enactivism, emphasizes the importance of personal uniqueness and personal individuation.

1. **Bildung: a Category of Being** The reflection on *Bildung* is a humanistic and pedagogical area of study which arose in Germany at the end of the 18th century (in particular, with Schiller, Goethe and Von Humboldt), highlighting the idea that human development should be understood as a process of gradual “taking form”. This idea has continued to be sustained, although in different ways, by authors such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Schleiermacher, Herbart, Kierkegaard and Marx. During the 20th century, some of the studies of the “Frankfurt School” have triggered an international rethinking of the notion of *Bildung*, that has become the object of a critical pedagogy, according to which the individual form (*Bild*) is considered as dynamic and open, and the formative process is interpreted as constitutively problematic (see Granese 1993; Cambi and Frauenfelder 1994; Cambi and Borrelli 2011). In Scheler's opinion, *Bildung*¹ is a category of being, not a category of knowing or living: he considers as personally developed not the scholar or the researcher, but

whoever has acquired a personal structure, a set of ideal and dynamic patterns connected to each other in order to form the unity of a style (Scheler 1925, 118, our translation).

From a phenomenological perspective, asking how we become ourselves means asking how our particular “*ordo amoris*” (or *ethos*) flourishes in the light of our individual “vocation” (*Berufung, Sendung*); these concepts, explained below, are the cornerstones of Scheler's theory of personal identity, which is based on a realistic axiology and represents the starting point of Scheler's reflection on *Bildung*.

The *ordo amoris* of a person is the structural system of his/her own value preferences which defines his/her motivational style, that is to say his/her fundamental orientation towards the world. It could be defined as an “individual emotional a priori” (Cusinato 2009, 11) which acts as a filter of relevance that predetermines the boundaries of possibility of our personal experience. In Scheler's opinion, every *ordo amoris* can be considered an axiological “microcosm” (Scheler 1925, 90), which represents a personal

¹ The term “*Bildung*” is generally translated with “education”, or “training”, or “upbringing”. In order to avoid misunderstandings, we preserve the original German, following the idea that “*Bildung*” indicates a formative process that gives rise to an individual personality. This is one of the meanings which we suggest regarding the expression “personal flourishing”.

perspective on the objective “cosmic” set of values that characterizes the axiological structure of reality. This is the theory of the “axiological perspectivism”.

The other important cornerstone of Scheler’s theory of personal identity is the idea of an individual vocation. This phenomenon is understood in the etymological sense of the word as an inner *calling* to make flourish the ontological originality that each person, as unique and singular, can bring to the world. For this very reason, Scheler (Scheler 1913, 351) says that vocation represents our individual destination (*individuelle Bestimmung*).

The experience of a vocation is the experience of an individual ought-to-be, whose material content is what Scheler defines as “good-in-itself for me” (*An-sich-Guten für mich*). This expression is compatible with a realistic axiology because “for me” is an ontological, not epistemological, specification:

It is good precisely in the sense of being “independent of my knowledge”. For this includes the “good-in-itself”. Yet it is the “good-in-itself” for “me” in the sense that there is an experienced reference to me which is contained (descriptively put) in the special non-formal content of this good-in-itself, something that comes from this content and points to “me”, something that whispers, “For you” (Scheler 1916, 490).

Interpreted in a vocational way, this idea of an individual ought-to-be is the core of Scheler’s “vocational ethics”.

To avoid the paradox of a “vocational determinism”, which would leave no space for the freedom (and so the responsibility) of personal development, we have to underline that vocation should not be considered as a calling to an already predetermined *ordo amoris* that a person should only realize.

In our opinion, vocation should rather be considered as a calling to a personal uniqueness, whose profile never fully defined becomes gradually clearer throughout life through the experiences of encounters with others and with the world.

According to us, the expression “personal flourishing” has two meanings. Using Scheler’s concepts of *ordo amoris* and vocation, we suggest the following interpretations:

- it refers to a formative process that gives rise to an individual *ordo amoris*;
- it refers to the existential condition of a person who lives faithfully with his/her own vocation.

Explaining his axiological realism as a form of axiological perspectivism and his non-formal ethics as a form of vocational ethics, Scheler lays the foundation for a phenomenological theory of personal development focused on the concepts of “personal individuation” and “personal exemplarity”.

2. Affectivity And Individuation

Clearly, if an *ordo amoris* identifies a person essentially, then its development is linked to the personal individuation process.

In order to explain how someone’s *ordo amoris* acquires an individual structure, we suggest getting back to the concept of “affective response” (*affektive Antwort*) presented by Hildebrand (1973) and interpreting it in the light of the theory of acts proposed by De Monticelli (2009). In relation to the process of *Bildung*, affective responses could be described as second-level acts through which a person takes a free position on the original (or first-level) feeling expressed by the community in which he/she was born or lives. This position is an axiological “consent” or “dissent” through which a person manifests his/her own willingness or unwillingness to be further motivated by the dominant *ethos* of his/her community. As De Monticelli clarifies, second-level acts are *free* (because in the consent or dissent, the person experiences his/her own typical efficacy), but only broadly speaking, because they do not necessary manifest the voluntariness and the awareness which characterize free acts in the proper sense, such as decisions (De Monticelli 2009, 198 et seq.).

However, the positionality of affective responses is an important element of the life of one’s personality:

- through these acts, our *ordo amoris* manifests itself because in consenting and dissenting we can recognize what lies more or less at our own heart;
- through these acts, our *ordo amoris* assumes its specific structure because the values which receive our affective consent take root in our being at different levels of depth.

In Cusinato’s point of view, each person, who is entirely contained in his/her fully concrete act and, at the same time, who entirely varies *in* and *through* each act, is an “ontologically uncompleted totality” (Cusinato 2008, 294); his/her *Bildung*, which takes place through free positions, is constitutively open. A Schelerian ontology of identity admits both transformation and permanence: what is preserved is not a substance, but it is the global qualitative direction of this continuous “becoming different” (*anderswerden*) that is promoted by every act and that, in a formative perspective, could be thought of as a gradual process of becoming ourselves.

Thus, we can conclude that the identity of each person is expressed by his/

her own typical process of *Bildung*, that is to say by the personal existential flourishing style which only he/she can manifest in the never-ending path of self-development which is oriented by his/her own unique vocation.

3. Personal Exemplarity And Individual Transformation

In Scheler's opinion, the most effective driving force of an individuation process is the encounter with a "Vorbild" (Scheler 1925, 104), that is to say with a person who represents an example for a "Nachbild". In this paper, we suggest the following:

- translating the German "Vorbild" into "exemplarity" instead of "model"; according to Cusinato's proposal, model is a personal example producing an uncritical imitation, whereas exemplarity is a personal example promoting a creative transformation (Cusinato 2011,8);
- translating the German "Nachbild" into "follower": however, this term is not meant to be used according to the sectarian or religious meaning; rather, we use "follower" to indicate a person who develops his/her distinctive *ordo amoris* thanks to the formative influence of an exemplarity.

The relationship between *Vorbild* and *Nachbild* is not discussed in detail by Scheler. However, in the light of some Schelerian texts (1925; 1933), it is possible to suggest that 1) it manifests a transformative and diversifying effectiveness, 2) it arises from an affective preference and 3) it is a form of interpersonal co-participation.

First, while the influence of a *Führer* produces assimilation, the influence of a *Vorbild* promotes transformation and differentiation. In this regard, Scheler says:

Vorbilder are not objects that require imitation or blind submission, [...] but they are rather precursors that encourage us to listen to the calling of our person (Scheler 1925, 106, our translation).

The personal expressiveness of the exemplarity allows the follower to perceive the qualitative differences that are required for the recognition and realization of his/her individual vocation. In this way, the *Vorbild* activates the individuation process on the part of the *Nachbild*.

Second, the exemplarity of someone else's personality is perceived first through affective intentionality and then is confirmed by the acts of knowing and willing (Scheler 1933, 267) that will endorse, or not, what is already selected and approved by the positionality of the feeling.

Although the relationship between *Vorbild* and *Nachbild* does not imply, at least in the beginning, any form of choice, it seems that it implies a typical preference. It is not a *voluntary* preference, but an *affective* preference, and it

is motivated by the particular affinity of the heart which exists between the exemplarity and the follower.

A person becomes a *Vorbild* only if his/her axiological expressiveness receives the *affective consent* of another person.

This affective consent is the position typical of admiration, a sentiment that creates movement and that produces a change of position with respect to the symbolic order given by the dominant shared feeling of the community (Mortari 2002, 106 et seq.).

The affective persuasion that we can find in the admiration is connected to the specific similarity between the factual *ordo amoris* which the exemplarity shows and the ideal *ordo amoris* we feel called to develop.

Third, since in Scheler's idea the person is not-objectifiable, the only formative way to grasp the *ordo amoris* of a *Vorbild* is to "co-participate" in his/her effort to express himself/herself, "co-performing" his/her acts (Cusinato 2008, 284 et seq.).

However, it is important to highlight that in his/her individual *Umbildung*, the *Nachbild* will manifest his/her own singular way of co-performing the acts of the exemplarity, *in primis* those free second-level acts which, using Hildebrand, we previously defined as "affective responses". In the co-execution of the affective responses, more than in the simple execution of them, the person appears as an innovative entity able to bring into the world a new order of values. We can consider this order as new, not only with respect to the one expressed by the shared feeling from which the follower has been emancipated, but also with respect to the one expressed by the exemplarity that, with his/her transformative effectiveness, has helped the follower with his/her own emancipation process.

4. Education And *Vorbildung*

In our opinion, the investigation of the *Vorbildung* phenomenon can provide interesting contributions to the area of educational research which, interpreting education as a practice of care, also focuses its attention on the emotional aspects of personal flourishing (see Boffo 2006; Fadda 1997; Iori 2006; Mortari 2002, 2006, 2009; Rossi 2006).

The figure of the *Vorbild* presented by Scheler manifests the features of a personal exemplarity who can be found in the context of the "informal *Bildung*". In this regards, Scheler (Scheler 1933, 259 et seq.) suggests that:

- a person could be considered a *Vorbild* without knowing it and without wanting it;
- a person could consider as his/her own *Vorbild* a personality who lived in the past, or who has been handed down by tradition or portrayed in literature.

So, in a Schelerian perspective, it is clear that the formative force of the *Vorbild* can be produced exclusively by his/her being (haecceity) and does not need any act intentionally oriented towards the follower to be operative. In the context of education, which is the field of the “formal *Bildung*”, the *Vorbildung* phenomenon manifests different features; that is, a teacher should perform his/her personal exemplarity in a conscious and intentional way, not only through his/her being but also through his/her words and actions. As Bertolini and Caronia highlight in their work on the rehabilitation of troubled youth, the capability of an educator to propose him/herself as an example, through the regulation of his/her behaviours, can be an effective pedagogical strategy (Bertolini and Caronia 1993, 149). However, in order to help young people develop their own uniqueness, the educator should propose his/her personality not as *the* model to imitate, but as *an* example to discuss together (Ivi, 157). Also in schools, a teacher is aware that his/her behaviour can be an example for students, but a *good* teacher indicates as axiological references only values that have first been discussed in class and shared by students through a critical examination.

It is also important to note that, in the light of phenomenological education, students should learn to cultivate a particular cognitive posture: attention for reality. It is the attitude to approach phenomena delicately, granting them the possibility of manifesting themselves in their uniqueness (Mortari and Tarozzi 2010, 40 et seq.).

If the main task of teachers is caring for the care needed to be learned by young people about themselves (Foucault 2001, 58), an important aim of educational practice is to guide students to express and cultivate the feelings which promote and nourish the individual desire for personal development. These feelings, which we can define “formative” sentiments, are as follows (Mortari 2002, 89 et seq.):

- hope, which promotes the process of individual flourishing by giving an affective boost to the self-transcendence of the person;
- trust, which is considered to be an original openness to life which helps us to relate to our time without stumbling upon the fear of being;
- capability of accepting, which is considered as the willingness to bear our own process of flourishing, despite awareness of the fact that every existential progress will confirm the evidence of our constitutive incompleteness;
- tenderness, which is considered as the willingness to tend towards another person without asperity or arrogance, accepting his/her being different from us.

In our opinion, teacher should exemplify the formative sentiments in the everyday relationship with his/her students, having them feel hopefully and trustfully cared for, accepted in their own resources and limits, and tenderly welcomed and listened to.

In this sense, we can say that at the core of the educational and relational intentionality of a good teacher, we find not only a general existential exemplarity, but also a typical *affective exemplarity*.

Since pedagogy is a practical wisdom, not a science, it is important to point out that teacher-education should provide the development of reflective capability (see Van Manen 1991), which helps teachers keep continuous control on their way to be in relationship with their students.

5. **Rethinking
Scheler In
The Light Of
“Relational
Enactivism”**

From an educational standpoint, the main limit of Scheler’s thought is the realistic axiology, which is connected to the assertion that the different classes of objective values are organized in an absolute, eternal and immutable hierarchy, which is always at least in principle accessible to human knowledge. It seems to us that Scheler’s theory of personal development manifests an evident contrast: on one hand, the notions of *ordo amoris* and vocation emphasize the importance of individual uniqueness; on the other hand, the idea of an objective values hierarchy, which represents the correctness criterion of every individual *ordo amoris*, shifts the emphasis to the existence of a predetermined direction of conformity.

To avoid this problem, we suggest rethinking Scheler’s *Bildung* theory in the light of a different epistemological position that, using a new expression, we define as “relational enactivism”:

- according to enactive epistemology, we think that the affective system of a person structures itself in structuring the values world through a continuous reciprocation structuring;
- according to constructionist epistemology, we think that this enactive process of structuring reality is a relational, not solipsistic, action.

In detail, the main ideas expressed in preceding paragraphs can be reinterpreted in this way:

- since every access to values world is mediated by personal *ordo amoris* and, at the same time, every axiological experience, through a retroactive repercussion, influences the future expressiveness of our *ordo amoris*, we can say that an individual personality structures itself while structuring the axiological reality, according to a circular-recursive action;
- the axiological position of the affective free acts expresses the

particular way in which a person, according to his/her distinctive vocation, re-structures inside his/her own personality the dominant ethos of the community in which he/she lives;

- the particular individual way in which a person realizes his/her vocation, re-structuring the dominant ethos of his/her community, is always influenced by the categories of axiological re-structuring expressed by the affective positionality of his/her Vorbilder.

In order to maintain the formative importance of individual uniqueness, we question the idea that the correctness criterion of an individual *ordo amoris* is represented by its conformity to a predetermined hierarchy of values classes. Even if we suppose that this hierarchy actually exists, it might not be grasped by a pure intuition because every personal perspective is inevitably situated. In this sense, we share at least one aspect of Rorty's notion of "edification": the idea that every formative process can bring "something new under the sun", according to the interpretation of human life "as poetic rather than merely contemplative" (Rorty 1979, 389). However, questioning the realistic axiology sustained by Scheler does not mean embracing a relativistic and subjective position on personal development. In our opinion, not all personalities are ethically compatible, but only those manifesting a constitutively respectful structuring.

According to De Monticelli, respect is the sentiment of "what each person owes other people" (De Monticelli 2008, 219). But what is it that each person essentially owes other people? Precisely, the right to flourish according to the axiological orientation of their own uniqueness in order to develop an *ethos* compatible with ethics, that is to say an *ethos* which, in virtue of its axiological structure, is able to ensure to the other *ethe* the same right to flourish that it requires for itself (De Monticelli 2010, 153).

If respect offers ethical nourishment to the formative process of a person, then it should be included in the sphere of the formative feelings that we have mentioned above. For this very reason, we can point out that the *affective exemplarity* of teachers should also manifest a respectful orientation.

Because our axiological perspective is always situated and partial, it is important that the structuring of a personal *ordo amoris* is conceived as a process of co-structuring with other people.

Thus, we can conclude that teachers should create in classrooms communities of discourse in which students, through shared reflection, critically examine their affective experience and their axiological perspectives to develop their own uniqueness in an ethically compatible way.

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