

Dewey’s Contribution to Giovanni Maria Bertin’s Ethical and Social Education

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to present an analysis of Dewey’s contribution to Giovanni Maria Bertin’s Ethical and Social Education¹. In it, the author intends to demonstrate that, on the basis of several of Bertin’s works, a possible comparison can be made between the socio-pedagogical (and cultural) values in the active, democratic and militant education described by John Dewey in his logical and pragmatic approach and the socio-pedagogical (and cultural) values in the ethical and social education theory developed by Giovanni Maria Bertin himself, known as “Pedagogical Problematicism”. The premise is that both John Dewey and Giovanni Maria Bertin put their trust in substantive democracy, rather than in democracy as a purely representative and formal exercise. They both believed that a democratic way of life can be developed from infancy through “learning by doing” and practice (praxes), as well as through exposure to democracy in one’s daily life. Democracy, Education and Ethics, as they understood them, is respect for the other and one’s personal commitment, which must permeate through every role that all people play in different situations, contexts and in the different spheres of their public and private lives.

Il saggio analizza il portato del contributo teorico deweyano all’educazione etico-sociale di Giovanni Maria Bertin, il quale discute intorno alla filosofia dell’educazione di John Dewey in alcune delle sue opere più significative. Proprio a partire dalle riflessioni svolte in quelle pagine è possibile avanzare un confronto critico, tra i principi socio-pedagogici (e culturali) espressi nell’educazione attiva, democratica e militante di Dewey (sviluppati

¹ Some aspects of Bertin’s ethical education, here reworked, expanded and deepened, were anticipated in the contribute presented at the International John Dewey Memorial Conference (Session: Democracy, Listening, and the Other) organized by the John Dewey Society (JDS) and the North Eastern Philosophy of Education Society (NEPES) held on October 8th-9th, 2021 at the University of Vermont (Burlington, USA).

nel suo originale approccio logico e pragmatico) e quelli socio-pedagogici (e culturali) inerenti l'educazione etico-sociale elaborata da Bertin, nel quadro epistemologico del “Problematicismo Pedagogico” da lui stesso ideato, nella seconda metà del Novecento. Il pretesto epistemologico consiste nel ridiscutere il costrutto stesso di educazione democratica. Entrambi gli autori considerano la democrazia sostanziale come la migliore forma di governo possibile, inoltre sostengono che uno stile di vita democratico può essere appreso, attraverso l'esperienza, *l'imparare facendo* e, soprattutto, esperendo pratiche democratiche in differenti contesti esistenziali e socio-relazionali. Di qui, l'intreccio virtuoso tra educazione, democrazia ed etica viene concepito come vissuto e postura esistenziale improntata al *rispetto* dell'altro e all'*impegno* etico-sociale, che deve potersi concretare nella pluralità dei ruoli giocati da ciascuna persona sia nella sfera pubblica che in quella privata.

Keywords: democratic education; militant education; ethical and social education; John Dewey's pragmatism; Giovanni Maria Bertin's Pedagogical Problematicism

Parole chiave: educazione democratica; pedagogia militante; educazione etico-sociale; pragmatismo deweyano; Problematicismo Pedagogico di Giovanni Maria Bertin

1. The Political Philosophies of John Dewey and Giovanni Maria Bertin

Although the two philosophers moved in very diverse historical and cultural contexts, they had a common bond, in that they both developed a different and original approach to knowledge (broader than Pedagogics in scope), thereby introducing a new way of conceiving several categories in the philosophy of education, which could and can help to interpret (then and now) the complexities of human life, with all its antinomies and dilemmas. Authoritative interpreters of these two authors observe that both developed original philosophies of education, or more specifically, political philosophies that, still today, are influential examples of militant pedagogics driving transformation in education and teaching, and more broadly in the social and cultural sphere (Borghi, 1951; Filograsso & Nisi, 1989; Bellatalla, 1999; 2016; Westbrook, 1991; Hickman & Spadafora, 2009; Cambi & Striano, 2010; Shook & Kurtz, 2011; Contini, 2009; Fabbri, 2012; Gallerani, 2012a; Baldacci, 2013). In both cases, the great scholars outlined the framework of a radical critical philosophy (Dewey’s Pragmatism and Bertin’s Pedagogical Problematicism), where *reason* (for Bertin) and *logic* (for Dewey), albeit in different modulations, act as a ‘critical and regulatory’ device (Bertin, 1975) for investigating the theory and praxis of the complex link between experience, knowledge and education (in all their many and varied relationships and interpretations) as well as the problematic nature of human existence (Dewey, 1899/1915; 1913; 1938b; Bertin, 1976; 1977).

The analytical study of the complex and dynamic relationships underlying all human behaviour is a constant and distinctive feature in both approaches. Furthermore, both authors agree that an ‘intentionally educational’ process is permanent (life-long and life-wide), continuous (in all stages of human life) and involves the constant search for *sense* and *meaning*. A fundamental aspect of this process is to be in a relationship with others and with one’s natural and social environment (in the meaning of Bronfenbrenner’s *ecology of human development*), as the process itself develops *means* and *ends* that tend to encourage both ethical and aesthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934; Bertin, 1981). Over the years, these constructs have stimulated both studies in many fields of knowledge and a wide international cultural debate (see, for example, Visalberghi, 1951; Borghi, 1955; McDermott, 1981; Gattullo et al., 1985; Granese, 1992; Putnam, 1992; Filograsso & Tagliavini, 2004; Kennedy, 2012). It is, therefore, impossible not to take Dewey’s and Bertin’s philosophies as references for educating in (and to) the complexity of human existence (even at a time of crisis like the present) through the option of an *authentic* and responsible way of life (Bertin & Contini, 1986; Gallerani, 2011; Contini & Fabbri, 2014), fully committing to the various forms it can take in the search for self-fulfilment, or better, for self and social empowerment. In other words, a way of life that can direct a person’s and society’s actions towards forms of democracy and progress that are fairer and more equal (Gallerani & Birbes, 2009).

Bertin endorsed Dewey’s “method of intelligence”, his cornerstone logical and pragmatic theory applied to moral life, which, as Dewey wanted to show, can induce the emergence of ethical and aesthetic instances in any ethical and moral experience, on the basis of *reason* guided by logic (Dewey, 1938a; Striano, 2015). According to pragmatism, intelligence can be used to liberate and liberalise action, because «a pragmatic intelligence is a creative intelligence, not a routine mechanic» (Dewey, 1916, p. 129) and its purpose is to pursue the common, collective *good* (a very important term and concept in the Deweyan perspective). This approach (and method)

is framed within a historical and cultural system where, on one hand, *democracy* is seen by Dewey (and by Bertin) as the highest form of authority, ensuring individual and collective liberties, and social justice (Dewey, 1916; Bertin, 1951). On the other hand, the purpose of education is not an education in pure thought but an education in social living, that is, schools must be in step with the needs of society and collaborate towards progress (Spadafora, 2006; 2010; 2015; Pezzano, 2007; 2013). The American philosopher famously wrote that if «we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow» (Dewey, 1916, p. 167), underlining how crucial it is to perceive the philosophical importance of education (Bakhurst, 2020, p. 258). In a similar vein, he suggested that philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education (Dewey, 1916, p. 336). As a consequence, gaining experience from a moral law cannot be detached either from the *means* and *ends* needed for the set of morals to come into existence, or from acknowledging the role played by the ensuing *consequences* (arising from every action). Put differently, a *significant* experience demands or requires conscious action, knowledge of the consequences and *awareness* that the two are closely interwoven.

Dewey’s thought, expressed as the capacity for abstraction, judgment and generalisation of behaviour, is therefore tension opening to the present and above all to the future, because it strives for a higher purpose (going beyond personal utility), achieved through constant, permanent commitment. This passage underlines the analogy with Bertin’s designed and constructive *reasoning* (applied with sentiment and imagination) – a vital and existential project – involving designed tension built on *commitment*, choice, *dissent* and, also, the *unfeasible* (Bertin, 1977; 1981): because it is projected towards the *utopian* or, more aptly, what will be possible tomorrow (Bertin, 1987). Both philosophers conceived *reason* (or intelligence) as something that can be translated into ethical (or *human* in Dewey’s perspective) and *transformative* commitment, embracing change. More specifically, it should be able to have a positive effect on the facts, history and culture of a society or an era.

Furthermore, this commitment must adhere to the principles of ‘active education’, which is progressive and democratic in substance and not just a formal education (Dewey, 1916; Bertin, 1962; 1964; Oliverio et al., 2016).

Dewey and Bertin agreed, nevertheless, that existence consists in the commitment to self-fulfilment, that is to say, to translate one’s life into a shared “aesthetic experience”. Indeed, they considered experience as an art (and art as an experience, cf. Dewey, *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature*) and in its various forms, expressions and declinations (Gallerani, 2017), it is thus *necessary* for each person’s global, ethical and aesthetic education (Dewey, 1934; 1938b; Bertin, 1995).

On the basis of these assumptions, Dewey and Bertin emphasised the value of acting ethically (Dewey & Tufts, 1932), referring in particular to *educators* (and more in general to people in caring professions), who reach out to a *subject* of investigation (people and experience in human relations), full of complexities that cannot be disentangled or ever totally fathomed. They both agreed that complexity and problematical issues innate in real experiences could be investigated and interpreted through *reason* and ethical and social education, as well as through *reflection*. In greater detail, we can see that the problem of experience, in Bertin’s Problematicism, is faced and elaborated by *designed reasoning* guided by *possibility* (Bertin, 1975). In Dewey’s approach,

problematic issues within complex or disturbing experiences will themselves stimulate thoughts about action, namely *reflection* or *thoughtful thinking* (Dewey, 1933; Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

2. The role played by reason (and logic) in the learning process

In his principal work, *Educazione alla Ragione (Education for Reason*, published in 1968 and republished in 1972 and 1975 with comments and explanations, here referred to as Bertin, 1975), where he contends that reason should be at the basis of all action, Giovanni Maria Bertin outlines the perspective of a philosophy of education, where the *problematicity* of human experience is presented in all its radicalism and many forms, purposes and social and cultural value, embedded both in its historical moment and, at the same time, in its moment of ethical choice and commitment, whilst also closely linked to the need for a unifying rational thought (or *transaction*, in Dewey’s language). In this work especially, Bertin embraces the experimental facet of Dewey’s two concepts of *experience* and *transaction* (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). Nevertheless, although Bertin fully shares Dewey’s principle of an education *of and for critical thinking* primarily based on reconstructing one’s experience through an exploratory process to imbue it with further *meaning* (as the premise for developing reflective thought), he also expresses doubts in the position taken by Dewey on *pedagogics*. Bertin makes the precise criticism that Dewey’s approach does not seem to consider or take appropriately into account:

«[...] either the general principle covering the problematic issues in education (with ‘social progress’ being a fundamental line of direction in such a notion [...] albeit not exclusively or uniquely) or the phenomenology of the many forms of possibility it implies, in that Dewey’s’ pedagogics appear to be clearly-defined and conclusive, and thus limited, in their tending towards a choice that responds to the needs of a historically specific society» (Bertin, 1975, p. 49, Author’s translation).

Thus, Bertin claims that Dewey stiffens on ‘social progress’, even though this is only a historically characterized criterion (Baldacci, 2020, p. 292). Thus, whilst built on activism, Dewey’s philosophy for education seems little inclined towards *dissent* and less *committed* than a kind of critical-problematicist Pedagogics that is both militant and resistant, always on the front line in the tireless fight «against whatever is not intelligent: against what is prejudiced, deceptive, rhetorical, mystifying» (Bertin, 1975, p. 128), namely, a Pedagogics that sets out to oppose everything that tends to homologate or debase individuals, commodify culture and barbarise society (Bertin, 1962; Contini, 2009; Gallerani, 2014).

In Bertin’s arguments, a decisive role is played by the meaning given, on one hand, to *judgement* (the outcome of transcendental reasoning) and, on the other, to *doubt*, in that they are in some way two complementary and fundamental aspects. By proposing the two concepts as both a method of investigation and an antidote to *non-commitment* and *nihilism*, Bertin demonstrates that thinking and reflection can develop into a methodological pathway, whereby a particular aspect in one’s experience can solve the problematic issues one faces in a given moment within a specific direction of thought (in Bertin’s words). More specifically, he claims that the problematic issues are the *subject matter* (the datum to be judged, the question to be addressed or avoided), its *form*

(consisting of ongoing cultural, social, individual and historical hypotheses) and its *synthesis*, which is the justification for the hypothesis (Bertin, 1975, pp. 29-30).

The short extract above highlights the *rigour* and, at the same time, the Problematicism at the core of Bertin’s thought, revealing that he is at some level in tune with the rigour expressed by Dewey. This is the same rigour put forward by Kant (and Hegel), invigorated in Bertin by a style open to inter-disciplinary comparison and debate, which Bertin in turn had learnt from his *teacher* Antonio Banfi (Baldacci, 2011; Gallerani, 2012b). In parallel, the rigour of Dewey’s investigative method was influenced by the American educator George Sylvester Morris’s Hegelianism, and subsequently by the teachings of Charles Sanders Pierce and William James (Hickman, 1996; Stara, 2009).

Dewey’s experimental investigative method, while suffused with a subtle American cultural radicalism, was honed by intense research, and reached its undeniable apex in works such as *How We Think* (1933), *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *Experience and Education* (1938) and *Theory of Valuation* the following year, as well as in *Knowing and the Known* (1946, written with Arthur F. Bentley), to mention just a few of Dewey’s most original studies (belonging to his Middle Works and Later Works). We obviously cannot forget Dewey’s most translated book, his great *Democracy and Education* (1916), which lists the foundational concepts of his philosophy of education.

Over his long teaching career, the American philosopher developed his *instrumentalism* (logical pragmatism), demonstrating that it is possible to overcome the classical and sterile distinction between theory and practice, between human sciences (including philosophy) and what are known as hard sciences (Dewey, 1897; 1933; Hickman, 2001). In his perspective, *logic* is a *theory of investigation* which is particularly effective for the purposes of knowledge and the progress of *knowledge*, under the assumption that the latter, to be such (and to be meaningful) must *transform* factual reality, or at least produce social-cultural progress. Thus, in the process of gaining knowledge, the *subject* who perceives (by giving form to reality in his or her globality as a person, meaning the reality of one’s experiences) and the *object* (the specific, instrumental object) become interlocutors, opposite and active poles in a complex relationship (one that involves *problematicity*, Bertin would have said) which originates from an experience (a fact or event) or, more precisely, a *transaction*.

Bertin’s reservations about Dewey’s Philosophy of Education fade and then vanish completely when Dewey directs his focus towards *ethics*, which he connects with aesthetic education and ethical-moral education (Dewey, 1932). Bertin certainly understood the originality and value of the logical-pragmatic “intelligence method” applied by Dewey to moral life. The latter indeed demonstrates, in the works cited above, how experimental intelligence can, on one hand, contribute to supporting ethical and aesthetic instances in life (and experience) and, on the other, strengthen one’s own ethical and moral principles, precisely on the basis of *reason* guided by logic. Ultimately, these principles coincide with pursuing the common good, in both individual (of the single person) and social experiences, within the framework of a historical and cultural system where, for Dewey, *democracy* is a form of increasing authority acknowledged as the best guarantor of individual and collective freedoms (against the *creative impulses* and *desires* of individuals), as well as of social justice. According to Dewey, this is also in consideration of the fact that gaining experience from a moral law cannot be detached

from the *means* and *ends* needed for them to come into existence, or from acknowledging their *consequences* (connected to single actions). In other words, a *significant* experience demands conscious action, knowledge of the resulting consequences (or those that are strictly connected to the action) and *full awareness* that action and consequences are always closely interwoven.

In this perspective, the cornerstone of *democracy* is, in pedagogical philosophy and in Dewey's political optimistic view, the *possibility* (and the potential) that each person is able to *develop* within schools and other institutions of education and so within society. Dewey started from the premise that this development was not purely an ethical matter, but mainly a *cultural* issue. For him, a society's culture can shape the way a person's potential will develop, and can also shape their *freedoms* (and the manner in which these freedoms are expressed), a concept he had first outlined in *The Ethics of Democracy* (1888) and *Democracy and Education* (1916), and then explored further over the following years in *Experience and Education* (1938) and *Freedom and Culture* (1939). From these works, it is clear that the core of Dewey's philosophy is understanding *how* education can, in turn, bring about the progress of democracy. The starting point is that democracy should become a true “way of life” established and developed through education into the living experience of those being educated. Education is based on theories and practice that can induce real political change and, for this reason, can transform and steer individual and social reality towards democracy. At the very end of *Democracy and Education*, in the last section of the final chapter, *The Social and the Moral*, Dewey suggests that a person's development is inevitably entwined with emphatic development ethically, socially and morally, because «as a matter of fact, morals are as broad as acts which concern our relationship with others. And potentially this includes all our acts» (Dewey, 1916, p. 267). This sphere is linked to education, in that education directs people towards decisions based on the common commitment to the political achievement of democracy and social progress. Ultimately, Dewey's *reasoning*, understood as the capacity for abstraction, judgment and generalisation of behaviour, presents itself as tension opening to the present and the future, in that it constantly strives for a higher purpose (going beyond personal utility), achieved through constant, permanent commitment.

This idea of reason, which has a clear similarity with the *designed* tension based on commitment, choice and dissent (and on Nietzsche's concept of the *untimely/unorthodox*) developed by Bertin and some of his pupils (Contini, 2009; Gallerani, 2012a) is directed towards transcendental reasoning (immanent and not transcendent, because it has no pretension of “gathering, let alone defining the Absolute”), in the quest for the utopia of ‘what is possible tomorrow’.

In conclusion, for both authors, individual ethical and social commitment, or what Dewey would refer to as *human* commitment, is an act of transformation at the root of social progress (and democracy) (Dewey, 1915) and for ‘existential design’ (Bertin, 1951), and is capable of affecting factual and historical-cultural reality in a given society or even in a given era. This commitment must adhere to the principles of *active education*, an education that is substantially and not just formally progressive and democratic, as already noted (Dewey & Tufts, 1908/1932, p. 48, and pp. 273-284; Dewey, 1916; Bertin, 1953).

3. Role and potential of ethical and social education

In his *Disordine esistenziale e istanza della ragione* (1981), which covers social and *existential disorder*, Giovanni Maria Bertin analyses and discusses the *ambivalence* and *hypertrophy* of aggressiveness, lingering however on examples of the most efficacious *therapies* to reduce and transform it (Bertin, 1981, pp. 287-317). For this reason, after having set out and asserted his theory, Bertin concludes his discussion on this delicate topic with several interesting pedagogical ideas and considerations. Among these final thoughts (Bertin, 1981, pp. 318-325), we will focus our attention on his view of *competition*, which for him was the outcome of, and a deleterious way to incentivise, aggressiveness. He notes that the most valid antidote is the ethical injunction to “fulfil yourself by fulfilling the other”, given its intrinsic *anti-aggressive* function. However, this ethical injunction must not be upheld or corroborated through *adversarial debate* within one’s relationships with others who are fulfilling themselves by experiencing *life in common*, which starts from “the need for constructing collectively” in any form of living, from work to politics, and in relationships established within one’s family, neighbourhood and even in one’s free time (*Ibidem*, p. 322). He points out that ethical and social education can incentivise new lifestyles, new postures and new praxes, including

«the practice of empathy [...] of mutual cordiality, derived from the solidarity implicit in activities that are or can become of common interest [...] against the practice of indifference, diffidence, reciprocal irritation provoked by a life lived under the banner of alienation, the one from the all, and the all from the one, an incubator of more or less latent aggressiveness, ready to erupt into acts of violence at the slightest opportunity» (*Ibidem*, p. 323, Author’s translation).

In an educational process that involves relationships, young people, adults (and other resources), emotions and empathy play a crucial role for good reciprocal comprehension (Contini, 2009). Bertin also argued that these objectives can only be pursued by acting, at the outset, to remove the primary causes, which are mainly economic and social-political, in particular inequality, injustice, poverty and underdevelopment (Contini & Genovese, 1997).

He concludes his careful overview by formulating the usual *problematicist* method into an original theory, which is strikingly far-seeing in that it tends to redirect the attention of educators and politicians to the crucial role played by a broad, coherent and global programme of *permanent education*, where social-ethical education holds a cornerstone position (Gallerani, 2018; 2020). This programme is worth investing nationally, because, according to Bertin, it is the only way for education and cultural policies in Italy to be efficient and achieve their predetermined and expected outcomes, rather than trusting in the “ineffective effort” (as he repeats) of small groups and philanthropic minorities, however *illuminated* (Baldacci, 2012; 2013; Bertagna, 2018; Tramma, 2019; Fiorucci, 2020).

These topics were close to Bertin’s heart, and he had already anticipated them in *Educazione alla Ragione* (*Education for Reason*), where he had put forward his hypothesis and theories on the problematicist *model* and *structure* of pedagogic research, clearly intending to state that the core of the existential structure of the “rational” model (that of “education for reasoning”) is “ethical and social education”. This *model* offers a valid

methodological principle to pedagogic research, whereby it is possible to understand both *complexity* and *problematic issues* in the educational experience (which always has historical, social and cultural ramifications) in the different forms they present and fulfil, and always directed towards and in function of potential individual and social emancipation.

In this hypothesis, we can see that Bertin explicitly adheres to Dewey’s thought, where the latter’s theses were formulated and expanded on in *Schools and Society* (1899/1915) and in the first pages of *The Sources of a Science of Education* (1929), where the American philosopher upholds a *model* that can act as a regulatory device between theory, practice and educational experience, so that the theoretical models taken as reference would function as instruments capable of steering educational practice, according to a precise project plan and purpose (as Bertin did in his *Education for Reason*). According to Dewey, an educational project is by its very nature based on hypothesis, objectives and methodologies that lead to outcomes or results which, inevitably, can only represent partial objective results, and so ones that are never absolute but always in progress. Additionally, the intrinsic complexity of the variables intervening in any educational experience (in the *here and now* historically, socially and culturally) must always be considered, as must the intrinsic variability and intricacy of any intentionally educational act and action (one with an ‘intention to educate’).

On the basis of these assumptions, also for John Dewey an ethical and social education is essential – as emerges in *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897): John Dewey’s *manifesto* concerning education and in others of his essays on education – because it trains people in the art of debating within interpersonal and social relationships and to cultivate a correct distance from facts and their consequences. According to Dewey, for an efficacious action to activate a path of reflective action, it must be at a distance from the immediate action, as he explained in *The Sources of a Science of Education* (Dewey, 1929, pp. 9-13). He also believed it fundamental for an educator to be fully aware that the purposes of an educational action are an integral part of the process in which they operate, meaning that they must be *flexible*, so as to adapt to the various situations (Dewey, 1916, p. 129).

Ends can thus be perceived as organisational factors that direct the action, and are conceived by Dewey as *procedural means* (or *intentional ends*) necessary to plan, organise and provide sense and meaning to activity and behaviour. Intentional acting (in Dewey’s meaning) enters thought at this level, and must guide each process that is intentionally meant to educate or train. The heuristic strength of the end lies not only and not so much in it being the end purpose of an action, but in being the *driver* that literally gives intention and redirection to the action itself. Given that, in the complexity of educational experiences, acting intentionally to educate describes a field of *mediation* (between real conditions, means, ends, possibilities and objective limits), where the purposes can never be fixed rigidly beforehand. Thence, the *end* (in Dewey’s perspective of democratic education) must not be understood as an objective to reach, but as tension and direction towards *change* (to people, situations, the quality of an experience). In other words, this means that there is an active process where the purpose is to transform an existing situation; the end is thus achieved in the *while*, in the course of the action itself.

Based on these theories and arguments, Dewey and Bertin both emphasise the value of acting ethically, referring in particular to educators (and, more in general, to people in *caring* professions), who interact with a *subject* of

investigation (*people* and their reciprocal *relationships*), whose complexity is linked to what is indivisible, according to the etymological meaning of the Latin term *individuum*¹, referring to a person in his or her entirety, and thus unrepeatable, irreducible and inalienable. And it does not finish here. On this point, Bertin’s ethical exhortation (the ethical principle) “*fulfil yourself by fulfilling the other*” once again underlines the fact that an individual can never achieve self-fulfilment except within a constructive relationship that involves as much others and one’s own social and cultural environment as it does nature. Following this thought process in *Etica e Pedagogia dell’impegno* (1953), Bertin first analyses the problematicity of the educational experience and then concludes by stating that an ethical and social education can cultivate the *responsibility* and resolution to overcome one’s ego-centricity in those being schooled. Equally, it encourages in them the *resolution* to act responsibly and concretely, to bring about transformation in the present, yet protracted and projected into the future.

Therefore, the two philosophers pursued parallel, but not coinciding, paths. Indeed, looking at the possibility of addressing and overcoming the set of *problematic issues* emerging from experience, Bertin initially resorted to the *application of reasoning* and ethical and social education, while Dewey found it essential to turn to logic and the analysis of means and ends. It follows that the *problematics of experience* described by Bertin (bound to the dialectics of a me-centred world, at the basis of the idea of experience itself and the source of radical problematic issues) can be addressed (and overcome) by *reason* and the *direction of planned design* (‘existential design’), which, in turn, is directed towards the *possible* (and the *commitment* that each person is prepared to put into play). For Dewey, on the other hand, the *problematic issues* present in the most complex, unusual or disturbing situations will themselves stimulate and activate thought on action, or *reflective thought* (reflective thinking and self-reflection) (Dewey, 1933, p. 78).

Through a deeper analysis, we can see that Bertin’s intuition on ethical and social lifelong education is the precursor of an idea of development founded on individual and social empowerment at the basis of the most complex, innovative and effective approaches to education, among which we will only mention the *Capability Approach* developed by the economist Amartya Sen and the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1999; 2009; Nussbaum, 2000). In addressing topics such as *basic justice*, *ethical acting* (for fair and ethical development) or *substantial liberty* in situations where there is great imbalance in the power between social parties, the authors claim that traditional *utilitarian* visions (Nussbaum, 2010) are outdated (as are the universal theses that interpret development purely in terms of profit and economic growth).

Ultimately, we could say that Problematicism in an ethical and social education proposes a tangible type of ethics in acting, thinking and living, based on constant and intentional trans-action (in Dewey’s meaning) and engagement with the environment and society.

These and others of Bertin’s thoughts expand our analysis on educational *logoi*, stimulating further considerations about whether to include ethical willingness and whether or not everyone is ready to listen to others on this matter, because: «*Understanding* is not enclosing someone else’s experience within our own, it is instead opening ourselves to understanding the problems of others. This principle [...] teaches us that, even in understanding, the ethical need for willingness must be paramount» (Bertin, 1962, p. 74, Author’s translation).

ⁱ The Latin noun *individuus* is composed of the prefix *in* (meaning *un/not*), associated with *dividuus* (meaning *divisible*, or separable), giving the overall meaning of indivisible, in the sense of “not divisible”. The resulting notion relates to a complex system where the parts are all inseparable. It thus denotes a complete being with its own existence, in that it is a man/woman or person (see <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/individuus> and <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/individual>).

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