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Hermeneutics of the Educational Process : Bildung as Collective Intentionality

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Hermeneutics of the Educational Process: *Bildung* as Collective Intentionality

Hermeneutyka procesu edukacyjnego.
Bildung jako kolektywna intencjonalność

In the following essay I will try to put in dialogue two different traditions of thought. On the one hand, there will be the philosophy of education present in the work and thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt, as is well known, was not only the founder of the University of Berlin which was meant to serve as a model to all European universities, but he also made a decisive contribution to the theoretical development of the concept of education as *Bildung*—something which had, and continues to have, considerable significance in Western pedagogy. On the other hand, reflections on the social agency and collective intentionality as presented in some of the most recent studies of social ontology, especially in reference to the work of Michael Bratman and Raimo Tuomela, will be examined. In particular, my analysis intends to meet the objections of the research of von Humboldt on education and those of Bratman and Tuomela on acting collectively in order to answer the following questions: (1) can the educational process be studied and analyzed as a form of a collective action? (2) if so, what kind of team reasoning and what kind of planning does the educational process require to be successful? To answer the first question I pro-

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ceed to extract from von Humboldt's pages a definition of *Bildung*, trying simultaneously to highlight the theoretical framework, namely the conditions within which it is justified.

Wilhelm von Humboldt: collective action between the hermeneutics of language and the phenomenology of the educational process

In his *The Sphere and Duties of Government* W. Von Humboldt writes:

The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the grand and indispensable condition; but there is besides another essential, intimately connected to freedom, a variety of situations. Even the most free and self-reliant of men is thwarted and hindered in his development by uniformity of position [...] every human being can act with but one force at the same time: or rather, our whole nature disposes us at any given time to some single form of spontaneous activity [...] man has it in his power to avoid this one-sidedness, by striving to unite the separate faculties of his nature, often singly exercised; by bringing into spontaneous co-operation, at each period of his life, the gleams of activity about to expire, and those which the future alone will kindle into living effulgence; and endeavouring to increase and diversify the powers with which he works, by harmoniously combining them, instead of looking for a mere variety of objects for their separate exercise. That which is effected, in the case of individual, by the union of the past and the future with the present, is produced in society by the mutual co-operation of its different single members.¹

According to von Humboldt, the development of human qualities rests entirely on what human beings can understand and realize of themselves in the training process which is then proposed as a place of the first constitution of sociability. The isolated human being is a being in chains, and as such cannot proceed unless with serious limitations to their speed and movement. It is precisely for this reason that social life has always characterized every educational context, from the most basic to the highest: the so-called superior

¹ W. von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, ed. J.W. Burrow, Cambridge 2009, p. 16.

scientific institutes are nothing, free from any form of state, but the spiritual life of men, whose outer availability or inner tension pushes towards science and research. Even without them some man would reflect and would collect on his own account, another one would meet with other like him, some other man would create around him a circle of fellows.

Educational life, both in school and in scientific and academic institutions, is social life not by accident, nor for any use determined by the state or any public political, religious or cultural benefit, but under an unwritten obligation arising from the ontological status of human beings. This is not to say that among the various levels there should be no differences. Von Humboldt is very clear in stressing how the transition from high school to university constitutes not only a quantitative change but also a qualitative one, since it is assumed that the very meaning of learning in school consists in the preparation for the full and informed exercise of the spiritual faculties of the individual self. A primary school teacher, therefore, has the task of making the cosmos out of chaos which initially is the soul of the child. A high school professor has to enable the harmonious development of all of the skills of his students, while the college professor has to act as guarantor of one or more trends already proven as dominant within the spirit of the now mature young person that is before him. In all these cases von Humboldt's words highlight a trait that could be called idealistic, namely the implicit emphasis on the absolute priority of the educational act, where nothing can be assumed, and which proves the contrary is always strong enough to bring down the same distinction between learner and teacher.

The similarities between the two approaches, however, end here since, unlike the idealists, von Humboldt does not believe that the priority of the educational act is based on the fact that its subject is the transcendental Spirit, but rather that it is a grounds of the expression of an irreducible tension that binds individual spirits. Von Humboldt therefore says clearly that the state should not be a major player in this process, rather reserving a subsidiary function. This profound difference separates von Humboldt from Hegel—for which the state has the unique role of giving education its ethical substance—while in von Humboldt we find the idea of science as a process constantly in process, never exhausted or exhaustible.

The public dimension, in von Humboldt, is public in the sense of inter-subjectivity, not institutionalization. Von Humboldt takes the need that knowledge is subjected to a communitarian validation very seriously, for which the institution has the task of simply leaving spaces open to the activity of individuals, not to provide these individuals with the ethical validation which comes from the Spirit's exterior objectification as historical reality. Precisely for this reason, for von Humboldt, the *Bildung* is a necessarily *collective enterprise*, each element of which is the ends and the means at the same time.

It is the German Enlightenment that is central, but not to that of the Kantian *sapere aude*, but that of Moses Mendelssohn, for which the Enlightenment, rather than a historical epoch, is instead neither a form of social consciousness, nor a philosophical theory, but a complex historical-theoretical capacity of the human being.

From Mendelssohn, von Humboldt takes not only the centrality of *Bildung* and *Kultur* in the Enlightenment, but also the *Harmonie* between the various components of the human soul as a regulative ideal of the entire educational project. The close relationship between *Bildung* and *Kultur* is important because it leads to the determination of the human being as a citizen, that is, as member of a community. Mendelssohn believed that humans as humans do not need any culture, they need Enlightenment, which means that the culture calls into question the person considered individually (human as human), but as a citizen, as a member of a social body. Persons spiritually formed, well-educated, make their training manifest when they act further in practical life, in social life. In the words of von Humboldt are echoes of his Kantian readings. Kant manifests himself in the acceptance of the doctrine on the moral law as an end in itself of human action, and *perhaps because of this proximity to Kant it is rather difficult to understand Humboldt's educational process as a collective action*. It would seem, in fact, that Humboldt's underscoring of the "beauty" of education that translates into practical activity refers more to the effects of a path already taken internally than to the mode of implementation of an action ontologically collective from the very beginning. We can only work on ourselves—writes von Humboldt—we can only know our present condition, and let this knowledge bring us fruit. But, on closer inspection, things are more complicated, since

von Humboldt firmly believes that what the individual man is not able to do, can be accomplished by the union of all.

Which leads us back to the beginning. *Bildung*, to be successful, requires the happy conjunction of two dynamics, the internal and the external:

when we speak in our language of cultivation [*Bildung*] we mean by this at the same time something higher and more inward, namely the disposition that, springing from the knowledge and feeling of the entire mental and moral endeavour, pours out harmoniously upon temperament and character.²

So writes von Humboldt in his most important philosophical essay and which marks the beginning of contemporary philosophy of language.

Insisting repeatedly on language as a joint venture of individuals and nations, von Humboldt recovers the collective dimension present in the writings on the University, mitigated by the use of Kant in the essay on the Eighteenth Century. This recovery also takes place on the one hand in the name of the aforementioned *Harmonie*—the true obsession of Humboldtian education that should be set aside in order to return to it later—with the other by *giving the nation the task previously denied to the state*.

In other essays—see the aforementioned essay on University and humanity—the author believes with conviction in the existence of nations more or less ‘educated’ by defining this level as the ability of some nations in particular to infuse the human race with a new direction with a effort comparable to that by which an individual can do the same. On this point, things are a bit more complicated, because von Humboldt speaks both of a force naturally inherent in all human beings, and of the way in which this can be hindered or seconded by the spiritual force present in various nations and peoples.

From this point of view, he says things about education very similar to those about language. Both are businesses that require the triggering of a virtuous circle between individuals and nations, allowing the identification of levels of development more or less advanced and

² W. von Humboldt, *On Language: On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, ed. M. Losonsky, Cambridge 1999, pp. 34–35.

concerning not only individuals but also much larger groups of people—nations—with both, finally, laying down a deep spiritual need of humanity.

Of course, all three of the points just enumerated have different characteristics within the two areas of application. Now, the positive interaction between individuals of genius and advanced nations in language calls into question the ease with which the insights of the first become pillars of a common linguistic identity. Von Humboldt explains that clarity, intuitive evidence of representations, penetration into the essence of the concepts and enjoyable pace and tone of the words themselves, are items kept on the basis of which you can compare different languages with each other and define its success rate. A possible *hermeneutics of linguistic diversity* would therefore require, in order to function, the identification of the parameters on the basis of which it is possible to believe that the fundamental objective of any language—giving expression to the thought—had been reached or not. But since this term implies that the human being clears his inner spiritual forces not only to himself but also to his fellows—hence the intersubjective extent of every language—this scale of values must be able to extend to those agglomerates or language-holders that we call *nations*.

And it is here that the application of what we might call a *hermeneutic of national diversity* reveals a very difficult, if not impractical, target to von Humboldt. Quite frankly, he admits the failure to find a link between the individual success—how and why a person of genius creates a new language—and the collective success—how and why a given nation is more or less than receptive to innovations—of a given language.

The language, in fact, is the work of nations, is not an asset, but an “involuntary emanation of the spirit”, a gift to the nations touched by their intimate fate. The nations use their language without knowing how they formed it.

Yet, even if one cannot therefore speak of merit, we can talk about languages, and nations which are more or less advanced, since languages must still have evolved with and among the people, following them in their bloom, and should have held the spiritual peculiarities of that which has imposed restrictions upon them.

Language is therefore the absolutely inexplicable and original element, a sort of *aphasia* that, paradoxically, embodies every possible

word. Languages, however, represent the way in which the various nations choose to take possession of this gift once it has been mysteriously ‘delivered’.

Now, while the existence of nations characterized by a language more or less rich is therefore likely to remain a somewhat obscure phenomenon, the existence of nations which are more or less educated is perhaps best explained as having to do with a process, such as education, which is not so ancient. Again, however, it has to do with a rather complex dialectic between the subjective and inter-subjective dimension. As we said earlier, each educational context cannot exist in the absence of collective sharing.

Furthermore, every educational context requires the training of the person to be effective; it requires first and foremost an ‘internal conversion’, without which all external stimulations can only be useless. Here the *Harmonie* of which von Humboldt speaks does not refer only to the attitudes of the individual man, but also to those of various individuals who interact with each other mutually.

Human beings must, firstly, be ‘educated’ towards the harmonious development of their faculties. However they are, in some way, prepared for what Tuomela defines

a framework of agency, that assumes that normal persons are thinking, experiencing, feeling, and acting beings capable of communication, cooperation, and following rules and norms.³

This impressive set of human capacities should not be taken for granted, however, since it appears as the culmination of an evolution, still in progress, of mankind. It is central, especially regarding the social life of individuals and their ability to profitably relate with institutions:

this capacity is central, for example, for a person’s understanding of the notion of institutional status. The disposition to have collectively intentional (we-mode) thoughts and to act in the we-mode seems to be a co-evolutionary adaptation (that is, based on a genetic and cultural evolutionary mechanism and history).⁴

³ R. Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View*, Oxford 2007, p. 6.

⁴ Ibidem.

The definition of a person as a framework of agency is very interesting, because in it Tuomela mitigates the modern idea of absolute, solipsistic freedom by introducing the term “framework” that is something that speaks of accepting limits. I think that the term “limitation” plays a key role here. The human being gains the status of a person, to be someone, just to the extent that it develops its action, namely its tendency to be infinite, limiting it. In von Humboldt’s words, one could argue that the *Bildung* consists in developing a *Harmonie* which is revealed in the growth of some faculties together with the limitation of others. The *Bildung* consists of an orderly growth of the idea of humanity in the breast of each single person. This is confirmed to be, therefore, not simply an individual enterprise, but a *collective* one. Von Humboldt defines that undertaking as *Verknüpfung unseres Ichs mit der Welt*; noting, however, that this thought may seem not only hardly understandable, but also quite odd. It calls in question the viability of the ideal of Humboldtian *Bildung*, once it has given a definition so difficult that requires a calling into question of the relationship between our I and the world. In the thought of von Humboldt, the answer lies in the application of *Bildung* to humanity, taken from the late German Enlightenment, for which he depends more on Herder than from Schiller. But the reference to humanity keeps the speech on a perhaps still too abstract level, which does not allow a clear answer to the question of *Bildung*’s practical feasibility.

Educational process as collective action? Raimo Tuomela and Michael Bratman between team-reasoning and planning

It is precisely in the acceptance of this challenge that I think it can be useful to reset the problem referring to what Tuomela calls switching from the I-mode to the We-mode, and combining this frame of thought to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s philosophy of education. The theme of the We-intentions is born within the framework of analytical thinking, in which some authors have begun to ask questions like “what does it mean to do something together? Who is, in this case, the subject of the action in question?”. To this basic question is soon added a second: “what is the relationship between social groups and their members?”. The answer to these questions is

often offered through the use of examples from very normal daily activities united by requiring a certain level of more or less explicit coordination, such as a walk in the company of a friend or a sport practiced by a football team. On the one hand, the problem requires reflection on the nature of the group, on the other hand it requires reflection on the nature and motivation required of the individual who chooses to join.

Now, the educational process is such that it requires a very complex kind of team reasoning, because it requires a planning capable of overcoming the traditional explanation of the actions in terms of Belief-Desire, integrating it with the pattern Belief-Desire-Intention. In the thought of von Humboldt it seems that you do not go beyond the level of Desire, as the relevance of the educational process is justified, especially since the response to a need for unspoiled nature. Intention is not a well-made theme.

The We-intentions are a special kind of intentions that the subject carries knowingly and voluntarily in a group as its member. What is required for a group of people to be created is for people to find an agreement on one or more common objectives, and that this agreement also extends to the ways chosen to achieve it. In this way, the human being realizes its unique prerogative among living species, which is to act consciously to limit itself in view of a greater good, accessible only through such collective action.

But the transition from the individual to the group, however, does not occur only as a partial waiver granted by the subject himself in the certainty that the group can achieve more significant results of the individual. On the contrary, the genesis of a theory of social action is justified only on the basis that the We-intentions will prove a form of *joint intention*, different from a shared intention as that which takes place when more people, operating in the I-mode, agree on a common goal. From which of the two types is it possible to approach the educational process? The first is acted by a group, the second by individuals who have agreed on a common goal. The same Tuomela makes an interesting example regarding the object of the present study:

for instance, suppose the members of an organization work together to promote its ethos. Think of a professor correcting term papers as non-joint action while also teaching a joint seminar as part of his required

duties. He is doing his correction work alone in one sense, but in another sense he is also by his correction of term papers performing his duties and working jointly with the staff to satisfy and promote the ethos of the university. His work is in the we-mode.⁵

The qualification to act in the we-mode appears to be guaranteed by having the end of its action to promote an ethos that, taken by itself, is made possible by the actions of individuals at the same time exceeding the sum of their effects. Suppose, now, that this same professor carries out his correction activities aiming not only at the promotion of the ethos of the university to which he belongs, but to a wider community's ethos. Suppose, for example, that his we-mode coincides with his nation of belonging. Or, again, suppose that his we-mode coincides with the entire human family as a whole. According Tuomela the key features of each plan in the manner of the We-mode are four: (1) those who carry it do this as a member of a group; (2) their intention suggests that other agents in the group will accept the content as required to meet the interests of the group; (3) those who carry it intend to participate in the realization of such interest; (4) those who carry it feel that the We-mode is met for all participants.

Let us try to apply these parameters to the educational action carried out by the aforementioned professor. (1) The professor could not give lectures or correct tasks if he did not have someone willing to listen to him or to give him his own exercises: in other words, if he could not act in a group. Under this point of view, the educational action is certainly based on an intention according to the We-mode. (2) The professor could not give lectures nor the correct tasks if the group (the school, the university, the state) had not recognized him as being worthy to serve a useful activity to the satisfaction of the group's ethos, *however* it is more difficult to transfer this point in terms of larger groups—the nation, the human family—since in this case it would be impossible to rely on a formal act of recognition. The point remains therefore open. (3) Just like Tuomela states, the professor acts to promote the ethos of the group of belonging. But this is true in the case in which such a group will require an official affiliation, while it is more difficult in the case of larger groups. Also in this case, the point remains open. Note that the second and third

⁵ R. Tuomela, *Social Ontology*, New York 2013, p. 67.

point present quite similar problems with concern to larger groups, namely regarding the lack of a formal act of recognition (in Hegelian terms, we could translate this into a lack of *Sittlichkeit*). (4) The professor can certainly act in the belief that those to whom the action is aimed share the same intention, but he can in no way be certain that they play according to the We-intention, that is not acting in view of the individual interest but in the group's interest. This difficulty is of course even greater in the case of larger groups. The point remains open in both cases.

Since the first point should be clearly solved, I begin to devote my attention to the second, in which it is considered not so much the activity of the individual acting in the We-mode, but the arrangement with which the other members of the group are related to it. As in this case a form of recognition is called into question, Tuomela distinguishes between groups as being *egalitarian* and *hierarchical*, according to the number of members whose consent is explicitly required in defining the goals of the group.

How could the human group lying at the basis of the educational process be defined? In the case of a school or a university, it is certainly hierarchical in the sense that there are members to which the task of deciding for others is entrusted. In the case of the nation or humanity as a whole, this classification is ineffective. If, in fact, no group of men can assume the right to speak for the nation or humanity, it is also certain that there is no possibility to make decisions affecting every single member of such a group.

At this point, the crossing of the we-intentions of Tuomela with von Humboldt's idea of *Bildung* provides a first result: education cannot be understood as collective action when it refers to very large groups like the nation or humanity.

This means that it is either necessary to give up the idea of Humboldt's education as a process involving all humanity, or it is necessary to give up the idea that this process can be done in the we-mode.

It remains possible for individuals to perform it if they are operating in the I-mode, thus acting in absence of an intersubjective validation.

In regards to the third point, the difficulty in this case is even more explicit since the validation of the commensurability of the professor's personal intentions with the interest of the group cannot be assigned either to some persons, since both nations and humanity

are not hierarchical, nor to all their members, since nations and humanity are not egalitarian.

Here too, then, nothing prevents the professor from carrying out their duty in participating in the national interest, but there is no way to allow such a plan to go beyond the I-mode and transform itself into the we-mode. In other words educational action cannot be understood as a collective action when it refers to very large groups like the nation or humanity.

The last point reveals a number of insuperable difficulties with the difference in this case being that the educational process is incompatible with the we-mode in the case of smaller groups, such as a school class or university. The educational activity cannot under any circumstances be understood as collective action, given the impossibility of verifying that each member adheres closely to the we-mode.

Trying to summarize this short experiment, it is possible to make a number of observations:

(1) On several occasions von Humboldt emphasizes both the collective dimension of knowledge and education and the fact that it is not the work of the individual but rather of what he calls the spiritual life of men. In other words, not only can human beings only learn and be formed by sharing activities and multiplying skills, it is also necessary to admit that the exchange that takes place in the educational process concerns something greater than the individuality of the learners and the teacher. At the same time, he suggests that the real purpose of education is to enable everyone to be a conscious and responsible member of the human family, to be caught up in the flow of educational philosophy inspired by the late Enlightenment.

(2) Tuomela provides a definition of joint actions supported by we-intentions that can help us to better define the collective nature of the educational process, how it really works and whether it may actually involve extremely large groups of people such as nations or the whole of humanity. Tuomela provides a list of four conditions from which one can define an action as a collective action performed with we-intentions.

(3) The terms and conditions listed by Tuomela prove hard to fit to the educational process and, if such activity is addressed to particularly large human groups, impossible. From this point of view von Humboldt's *Bildung* cannot therefore be classified as a collective action.

The reason for this negative result stems from the fact that von Humboldt does not care too much about how he intends to define in detail the involvement of all mankind in the *Bildung*, and from the fact that Tuomela's position does not dedicate the same attention to planning as it devotes to team reasoning. Under this point of view, the two authors may present the same weak point and, as recently noted by Raul Hakli and Pekka Mäkelä, Tuomela aims at providing a theory of group agency that applies, in addition to small social groups, to large organized groups such as nations, companies, and organizations. A theory of group agency requires an account of how the group's intentions guide the intentional actions of group members to satisfy the group's intentions. Tuomela has shown how the group's intentions guide the intentional actions of group members only in simple cases of selecting the next action. Groups, especially large organized groups, are temporally extended, and accounting for their agency requires accounting for cases of long-term planning in addition to simple cases of selecting the next action: therefore, Tuomela—just like von Humboldt—does not appear to fully succeed in accounting for the kind group agency that applies to large organized groups.

In order to approach this problem from another point of view, I will now take into account Bratman's position on planning.

The main difference between the theory of Tuomela and Bratman is that while the former focuses on team reasoning as social interaction, the second focuses on planning as interaction in time, i.e. as a bet on a series of actions expected to continue in the future. This, as is evident, immediately calls into question a remarkable level of complexity:

the planning theory is a theory about the nature of intentions understood as central elements in this fundamental form of human, temporally extended agency. Such intentions bring with them a complex nexus of roles and norms that is characteristic of planning agency. And these structures go well beyond simple, temporally local desire-belief purposive agency. So it seems reasonable to see intentions, so understood, as distinctive elements of the psychic economy of planning agency. This is the distinctiveness of intention.⁶

⁶ M. Bratman, *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory for Acting Together*, New York 2014, pp. 23–24.

Intentions, once inserted into a planning theory, reveal forms of extended agency and, as such, require a capacity for action that binds them not just to individuals, as do we-intentions in Tuomela, but also the present and the future. Thus it is clear that Bratman defines a continuity thesis as:

once God created individual planning agents and placed those agents in a world in which they have relevant knowledge of each other's minds, nothing fundamentally new—conceptually, metaphysically, or normatively—needs to be added there to be modest sociality [...] the deep structure of at least a central form of modest sociality is constituted by elements that are continuous with those at work in the planning theory of our individual agency.⁷

Crossing the theory of continuity with that of modest sociality it is possible to try to overcome the difficulties that emerged earlier when faced with particularly large and complex human groups. Bratman, in fact, reverses Tuomela's setting, but also that of John Searle and Margaret Gilbert, which provides that in order to explain any minimum basis of social—modest sociality—we should build on some disruption of the individual level—the I-intentions—to embrace the collective—the We-intentions, and develop an alternative proposal which

begins by distinguishing, in the individual case, between simple goal-directed agency and planning agency. Once individual planning agency is on board, the step to modest sociality need not involve a fundamental discontinuity.⁸

In this way, the decisive game to understand whether the educational process may or may not qualify as the result of a collective intention is not played on the collective level, but entirely on the individual. The distinction that matters is the one that exists between a simple act, one subject to the achievement of a goal, and a complex act, i.e. the result of planning. That explains why in Bratman it is not so important to reflect on the complexity of social interactions, as is the case for Tuomela, and on the contrary why it is important to reflect on the complexity concerning the relationship between an action, the time in which it is chosen and implemented, and the

⁷ Ibidem, p. 8.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 9.

one in which it is expected that it will bear fruit. Indeed, the same von Humboldt, in a passage quoted above, explicitly raises the inter-related and the interweaving of present action and future planning, as the man himself tries to escape his limitations “by bringing into spontaneous co-operation, at each period of his life, the gleams of activity about to expire, and those which the future alone will kindle into living effulgence”.

The connection between present and future is therefore inseparable from the complexity of inter-subjectivity: it is as if the output from the individual dimension and the entry in the intersubjective plan represents in ethical terms the overcoming of the dimension of a single action and the acceptance of the planning of the complex. The planning requires an understanding of agents as articulated beings, placing them within a dense network of relationships and roles, especially social, which is a prerequisite for most of the planned actions. While, in fact, it is possible to think of simple actions conceived and carried out by an individual operating in isolation, planning requires the implementation of additional conditions which are almost never manageable by one person. It is in this way that Bratman introduces policies, i.e. complex actions, highlighting the character of defeasibility, which means that they, unlike the moral imperative of Kant, do not normally prescribe actions to be taken at all costs. Once again, therefore, the fundamental game is not played in terms of the collective validation of the We-intentions as is the case in Tuomela, but on the ability of the individual, by the party, to carry out a complex plan that includes its own development over time in a community of others. Intersubjectivity is therefore required, but not as a main precondition.

Thanks to Bratman it is therefore possible to draw the following conclusions: (1) The importance and significance of planning, that a bet on the future is connected to every complex action. (2) The relative lack of importance, in this context, of institutional and public agents (the doctrine of modest sociality) thus underlining the importance of the personal dimension. (3) The idea of the human being as being endowed with constant, basic needs (doctrine of continuity).

Trying to apply all three points to the doctrine of von Humboldt’s *Bildung* shows the following. First, the education process is undoubt-

edly connected to the planning. As reported, von Humboldt stressed the need to understand the *Bildung* not only as a bet on the future of the individual, but also on the whole of the humanity to which the individual belongs. The fact that Bratman is not primarily concerned with the community status of collective action allows his position to circumvent the previously discussed difficulties on the issue of large human groups. In addition, the reduction in the role of institutional and public agents—the modest sociality—goes perfectly in the direction proposed by von Humboldt for which, as mentioned above, the State is solely responsible for making the educational process possible, not hindering it, expressly avoiding an active part in it. Similarly, the doctrine of continuity appears to be fully compatible with Humboldt’s approach in which educational need, although in differing degrees depending on the maturity of people, has always been common to every single human being as such.

In this way it is possible to define *Bildung* as:

(1) located at the meeting point between present and future, that is as planned intention: the educational process requires a complex chain of actions—the *policies*—geared to achieving results that will bear fruit in a more or less distant future;

(2) centered on a *weak* ethical-communitarian model: institutions and public agents are relegated to the background, since the educational process on the one hand requires the presence of several people (at least two, the learner and the teacher) and, on the other, it only matters to the extent that it challenges the interiority of the individual which only needs the minimum institutional conditions (modest sociality) for growth;

(3) rooted in one of the basic and perennial needs of human beings: throughout the history of mankind, no basic needs have come from scratch—thesis of continuity.

Concluding thoughts

It is time to cross the results of the comparison with Tuomela with those that have emerged from the comparison with Bratman. In terms of the issue of education as a collective action, the theory of Tuomela says clearly that the award of We-intentions to the educational actions appears problematic in the case of very large groups.

In Bratman, however, this problem does not exist. Because a plan can be shared—not collective—it is in fact required that there be a so-called *mutual responsiveness condition*, which is the main aspect of intersubjectivity focused on by Bratman. This is regarded as being satisfied when

our shared intention to J leads to our J-ing by way of public mutual responsiveness in sub-intention and action that tracks the end intended by each of the joint activity by way of the intentions of each in favor of that joint activity.⁹

These lines reveal the importance of the ‘in-time development’ factor in Bratman’s position. *An action that tracks the intended end is action jutting out into the future, and this continue verification on how the future is becoming what it was intended to be, once made public and mutual, gives in my opinion the key to access to education as von Humboldt intended it.*

There remain two things to say about the application of this position to particularly large groups of people—the nation, humanity. Now, of course, they remain obvious traits of concern, it being very difficult to think of a mutual and public recognition that can involve all members of such groups. Furthermore it remains difficult to frame such groups according to the basic division of Tuomela into hierarchical or egalitarian groups.

However, the meaning of planning in time which is absent in Tuomela at least provides a horizon for possible development. In this way, the utopian inspiration which is a backdrop to the theory of *Bildung* in von Humboldt—education as a process that can have humanity as a whole as its subject—receives some degree of feasibility, referring to an unspecified future, undefined but still possible and, most importantly, increasingly approachable.

Thus understood, *Bildung* is transformed into an always open horizon of possibilities, the more decisive for human beings the less it is directly reachable. In this view, the subject is a human condition which is always to be perfected, indefinitely interpretable, but never exhaustible.

⁹ M. Bratman, *Shared agency*, op. cit., p. 152.

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Streszczenie Summary

W powyższym tekście próbuję zestawić filozofię edukacji obecną w pracach i poglądach Wilhelma von Humboldta z refleksją na temat działania społecznego i kolektywnej intencjonalności, właściwą dla niektórych najnowszych prac z dziedziny ontologii społecznej, zwłaszcza dla dzieł Michaela Bratmana i Raimo Tuomeli.

W swojej analizie staram się skoncentrować na badaniach Humboldta dotyczących edukacji oraz na dociekaniach Bratmana i Tuomeli nad kolektywnym działaniem, by odpowiedzieć na następujące pytania: (1) czy proces edukacyjny może być badany i analizowany jako forma zbiorowego działania? (2) a jeśli tak, to jakie sposoby zespołowego rozwiązywania problemów oraz jakie sposoby planowania są skuteczne w procesie edukacyjnym?

In this essay I try to put in dialogue the philosophy of education present in the work and thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt with the reflection on the social agency and collective intentionality as presented in some of the most recent studies of social ontology, especially in reference to the work of Michael Bratman and Raimo Tuomela.

My analysis intends to meet the objects of the research of von Humboldt on education and those of Bratman and Tuomela on acting collectively in order to answer the following questions: (1) can the educational process be studied and analyzed as a form of a collective action? (2) if so, what kind of team reasoning and what kind of planning does the educational process require to be successful?

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