



## Introductory notes on care in pedagogy

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### *2. The three dimensions of care*

Pedagogical care unfolds in three fundamental dimensions, strictly interconnected and interdependent from each other: care for oneself, care for others and care for the world. In reference to self-care, the contribution of Michel Foucault can be emphasized, who in his text entitled *Technologies of the self* (1992) underlines how care is a notion originating from antiquity, which then characterised Christianity and the modern age (14)

The task of "giving shape to one's time" and "drawing the paths of existence" precisely translates into learning to take care of one's existence, a concept that Socrates speaks of when he refers to the art of existing. As Mortari notes, "taking care of oneself means deciding to assume one's own ontological load, in order not to let time simply pass without any thread of meaning being drawn in space, however brief, of one's access" (15). Given the importance of self-care, educating means "offering the other those experiences, which significant with respect to every aspect of the person (cognitive, affective, ethical, aesthetic, and political ...), will enable him to take responsibility for his own formation; therefore, the ultimate meaning of educating consists in assuming the responsibility of giving form to one's way of being there" (16).

In essence, educating corresponds to taking care that the other learns to take care of themselves, in a self-training perspective: as Franco Cambi underlines, self-care corresponds to "taking care of one's own existence, one's own state of mind, his own character and destiny on the part of the subject, imposing himself as his own vigilante and his own theoretical and practical guide" (17). Returning to Socrates (and in particular to what Plato reported in *Socrates' Apology*), taking care of oneself means reflecting daily on the concept of virtue and on that of "the greater good" for the human being, trying to question oneself on essential issues that allow you to take on a "good life". In the *Alcibiades*, however, a further point of view emerges. Socrates explains to Alcibiades, who is too worried about wealth that the most important aspect of everyone's life is represented by the motto of the temple of Delphi, or by "know thyself": to excel in life and therefore in order to have the adequate skills to carry out government positions, that it is necessary to be capable of care and possess techniques (18). In this passage, according to what Mortari argues (19), it emerges that "knowing oneself" must be considered as a preliminary condition for taking care of oneself. Everyone should learn to know themselves, to understand what the forces are that act on the life of his mind, what implications they have on one's way of being and then assessing to what extent they help to become one's own being able to be in the direction of one's own existential implementation (20).

Another significant author for thinking about self-care is undoubtedly Friedrich Nietzsche, who uses the metaphor of the Marauder, the Barbarian and the Gardener to explain the importance of self-care in dealing with the Other (21). As Fadda notes, "if the Barbarian is the one who approaches others and the world in ways that are the opposite of care, plundering in a simply destructive way and if each of us is a predator to the extent that, not being enough for himself, takes from others, continuously steals from others to feed himself, to constitute himself as an individual, the Gardener is the man of self-care par excellence, the man who becomes the Gardener of himself, because only by taking care of himself, seeking his own individuality, and by affirming himself, will he then be able to recognise and affirm the other, and take care of the other, valuing their originality and uniqueness" (22)

Having defined self-care as a prerequisite for every educational action, it becomes possible to deal with the care of the other, which is care par excellence. It does not presuppose the abandonment of the egocentric model of subjectivity of the Western tradition in order to assume a paradigm that the other is constitutive of the self since this paradigm is based precisely on the experience of "giving oneself" and "offering oneself" to the Other, in its irreducible alterity and difference. The one who "cares" recognises the other as "the absolute other" (23) and becomes aware that no act of violence or appropriation can make it his own. In the encounter with the Other, each one puts his own vulnerability into play, offers himself and lets himself be seen in his "nakedness", in a mutual acceptance as a unique and unrepeatable person. Therefore, caring for the other is to be understood as welcoming the difference, seen not as a problem, but as a value and as a possible source of enrichment: caring for the other means preserving and protecting the difference, avoiding indifference, but

understanding the other as a face to which to show oneself authentically, assuming an ethical responsibility (24).

The third direction of care refers to the "care of the world": it refers to the care addressed to the collective dimension of our society, to traditions, culture, language, morality, politics, but also to other forms of life that inhabit the planet. Caring for the world can be understood as caring for both the "biosphere" and the "noosphere" and "semiosphere". A subject who "knows himself", who takes care of himself and takes care of the other, also has the task of taking care of the world that welcomes him at birth and which, thus vulnerable itself, requires responsible behaviour on the part of all its inhabitants. Just as childhood needs to be protected with special care so that none of the world's destructive faculties touch it, argues Hannah Arendt, so the world must be protected to prevent it from being devastated and destroyed by the wave of novelty that characterises every historical era (25). Caring for the world is closely linked to the task of "cultivating humanity" that Marta Craven Nussbaum identifies as urgent for our society, so that, while respecting specific identities, the common belonging to the human race is protected (26); and it also connects to the planetary perspective promoted by authors such as Edgar Morin (27).

In fact, taking care of the world means promoting sustainable development and enhancing an "eco-pedagogical" approach capable of showing how man does not have the right to dominate the Earth, but must become the "guardian" of its resources, its beauties and its forms of life: educational action should be characterised by "a foundation of the naturalisation of man, of the humanisation of nature, of the custody for existence, of welcoming the other, and of care for the present in defence of the future" (28) . Educating individuals as citizens, therefore, means assuming a responsibility towards the world, acting intentionally with a view of co-responsibility and solidarity towards all other men (and, therefore, the commitment to consider human development as a priority over economic development, to use the words of the economist Amartya Sen (29) and towards all forms of life on the planet, from an ecological perspective.



The project Writing for Inclusion (2020-1-ES01-KA201-081827) has been funded with support from the European Commission. This document reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.