

Pedagogy and Humanism from the Symbolic Condition of Man: Towards a Symbolic Rationality

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Resumen

El presente trabajo pretende hacer patente que la crisis del humanismo actual, y con ello la crisis educativa y de valores en la formación del hombre, radica en una forma escindida de concebir lo humano, en virtud de la preponderancia de la racionalidad propia de la modernidad y en detrimento al mito y el carácter simbólico de las creaciones culturales y humanas. Y pretende resaltar la condición simbólica del hombre así como la posibilidad de una racionalidad simbólica en la que dialogue y co-implique en la construcción de lo humano y sus valores tanto la razón como el símbolo, insertando esta posibilidad en el proceso de la formación del hombre en su actualidad

Abstract

The present work pretends to make clear that the current crisis of humanism, and with it the educational crisis and of values in the formation of man, lies in a splintered way of conceiving the human, by virtue of the preponderance of the rationality proper to modernity and to the detriment of the myth and the symbolic character of cultural and human creations. And it aims to highlight the symbolic condition of man as well as the possibility of a symbolic rationality in which dialogue and co-implies in the construction of the human and its values both the reason and the symbol, inserting this possibility in the process of the formation of the man in his present

Palabras Claves:Mito, Símbolo, Racionalidad, Homo Simbolicus, Ontología, Educación, Éthos.

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Introduction

Currently, because of the notable deficiencies that are recognized in western modernity, a serene critical reflection is imposed on the values that must weigh our daily life. It is obviously not a reflection that limits a list of patterns of strategic behavior, which now seem more desirable and profitable, but above all, you should look for the theoretical foundation of thought, action and feelings of the human being, that lead him to a greater degree of humanization, freedom, happiness and internal and external pacification. This theoretical reflection must have an inescapable incidence in the modalities in which we understand the real, that is, not reduce to the demand a univocal rationality that simplifies and objectifies, but a symbolic reason that co-implies and means, what amounts to an incessant language reform, that is, a serious rethinking of the modes of transmission of *scientia* and *sapientia*, which have had, and still have, validity in our society.

The search for criteria to be able to move significantly along the narrow paths of existence is one of the most urgent challenges for all those who wish to contribute to overcoming the global crisis, to which our society seems inclined. Who speaks of criteria must require the multi-expressive conjunction, especially the reason combined with the symbolic forms of the spirit, expressed in the variety and complementarity of the languages that are available to the

human being, which is inseparable from that in that the human being is transformed from what is already structurally, unless a series of dangerous simplifications and reductions of his humanity are carried out. Any crisis consists of a relationship altered by excess or default with tradition.

The current one, consequently, is not an exception. We can also say that any global crisis is no other than a pedagogical crisis (profound trans-formation of the transmissions carried out by the family, the churches, the school, the state, etc.). We are convinced that here lies the starting point of the dislocation generalized of individuals and groups that now characterizes the cultural, religious, social and political environment of our century. A good part of the unhappiness of our time comes from the fact that he has believed, or pretended to believe, in ideals that he is not capable of having and of sustaining, ideals proper to modern reason: equality, freedom, etc. But this fracture comes from a split in the face of culture alludes to the original break between reason and the creative (symbolic) imagination.

Schiller himself in full Romanticism had detected this split in his *Letters on the book aesthetic education of man*. For Schiller the increasing complexity of the mechanism of modern states, the increasingly widespread division of science, arts and crafts, the increasingly separation of classes have broken the harmonious link of human faculties. Culture

is the mirror of this split, of the isolation and devaluation of human faculties:

"Intuitive and speculative intelligence have moved away from each other, hostile, retiring to their respective fields from where they monitor the limits with distrust and envy; By restricting their activity to a single area, they have imposed on us a pattern that often ends up suppressing the other faculties as well. While the lustful imagination suffocates here the industrious plantations of the intellect, there, the spirit of abstraction, extinguishes the fire that the fantasy should have been inflamed with ... eternally linked to a small fragment of the whole, the man himself forms only like a fragment and, having not reached the ears any sound that was not the monotonous rumor of the spinning wheel, never develops the harmony of its being; instead of expressing humanity to humanity, it becomes a mere reflection of his occupation and his science ". Unfortunately the "more than the men are too tired in the struggle with the need" to aspire to the harmonious recomposition of the faculties, to the happiness of the beauty, "happy to be able to escape from the burden of thinking for themselves, they yield to others willingly take care of everything that corresponds to their own ideas, and, if by chance they are disturbed by demands of greater importance, they cling with blind faith to the formulas that the state and the clergy have ready for the case "¹

The human being, and this is relevant in relation to the creation and recreation of new values, and therefore in the educational process of self-creation has to tend to its internal unification through a process of harmonization of the various facets and demands that constitute what we usually call human reality. To this reality in classical antiquity it is denominated with the word *éthos*; the term refers us to a broad semantic field configured in the process of philosophical formation of 'the human', as Juliana González tells us in the text *El éthos del filosofo*:

"The *ethos*² has different senses. It means first of all 'character', not in the sense of emotional psychological expression, but of the 'proper character' of something, of its peculiar characteristics, its hallmark or distinctive mark. Ethos is thus 'way of being', way of existing, and markedly way of 'being' in the world; to be prepared in the face of reality. It refers to the fundamental attitude that man has before himself and before what is not himself. On the other hand the most archaic meaning, the ethos refers to 'lair', refuge or abode; meaning that is conserved in the sense of interiority, of an internal sphere of oneself in which man usually finds his own strength, his most precious strength. And ethos also means that kind of 'second nature' (the moral and cultural nature) that man constructs above the mere nature given (natural); expresses the power of transcendence that characterizes its own nature, so that the ethos corresponds to the humanization of the same existence"

In the present we will use the word ethos in the sense of that mark or distinctive seal of man that gives him a way of being in the world, and therefore an essential condition. The central idea of the present lines is that the symbolic

condition of man constitutes an essential *ethos* that configures and 'forms', in the widely educational sense of the term, in an original way 'the human'. The symbol is the pristine form of human expression. The expression is the original condition of man, *ethos*, in its confrontation with the world; in this, the being of man, the being of things are given in such an intimate way that there are no limits of separation or form of delimiting the limits of the soul with the limits of the world as such. The human being is a being of expression because it has as a distinctive note the dimension of depth, that is, to apprehend the world in its meaning and meaning through signs and representations. The being of man is thus given in the world of signification, and this is essentially and ontologically the only dimension in which it is a sense of things and the world is given. However, man does not have a way of representing things, but his ways of meaning acquire a broad beam of transfigurations in a complex network of sense organization from the most concrete and descriptive images to the most abstract and universal in which the Unity of the meaning of things is achieved by condensing into expressions realities that are impossible to perceive immediately. The ability to represent the most immediate in sensitive images, in a way that pretends to be faithfully descriptive, will not be the same as the ability to represent what is not presented to us immediately, much less in a sensible way. One can say that it is a direct representation and the other we can call it indirect, as Gilbert Durand points out in his essay on the symbolic imagination:

"Consciousness has two ways of representing the world. A direct one, in which the thing itself seems to appear before the spirit, as a perception or the simple sensation. Another, indirect, when, for one reason or another, the thing cannot be presented as 'flesh and blood' to the sensibility, as for example, when remembering our childhood, when imagining the landscapes of the planet Mars, when understanding how the electrons rotate around the atomic nucleus or when representing a beyond after death. In all these cases of indirect awareness, the absent object is presented before it by means of an image, in the broadest sense of the term ".³

The type of representation that shows through sensitive images what is not sensitive, the absent, the supra-empirical, the spiritual is what is called with the word symbol. The symbol is nothing other than a way of representing by means of images of the present what by nature is absent. We arrive at the symbolic imagination when the meaning is impossible to present and the sign can only refer to a sense, and not to a sensible thing. Thus the echo of meaning is given in this symbolic condition of man to signify through the sensible the intelligible and spiritual and this is the central idea of the conception that Mircea Eliade has of the symbol that can be summarized in the following expression:

"The symbols are able to reveal a modality of the real or a structure of the world that are not evident in the plane of immediate experience"⁴

¹Shiller. Cartas sobre la educación estética del hombre. Madrid, Aguilar, 1982, pág. 18.

²González V., Juliana y Lizbeth Sagols (coord.) El éthos del filósofo. Seminario de Metafísica. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la UNAM, Ciudad Universitaria, México, D.F., 2002, pág.7

³Durand, Gilbert. La imaginación simbólica. Trad. Marta Rojzman, Amorrortu editores, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 10.

⁴Eliade, Mircea. Mefistófeles y el Andrógino. Trad. Fabián García-Prieto. Labor/Punto Omega, Barcelona, 1984, pág. 261.

This central thesis indicates two fundamental things in the conception of the symbol in this thinker: on the one hand the symbols, far from being a product of an arbitrary and fortuitously subjective imagination, express a structure of the real, and therefore 'say' the being of things, that is, the symbol expresses the ontological foundation of the human being insofar as it is through this expression that the Being is given in an original way, the symbol; and on the other, the symbol 'speaks' of the absent, that is to say of what is not given to immediate experience, and therefore the reality to which it is referred is at a level of spiritualization beyond the factual, which it is equivalent to expressing the world of the sense from which the spirit is nourished. The symbol expresses, therefore, the erotic nature of the human being, that is to say, his incomplete and unsatisfied nature with the merely factual, always wanting something beyond himself and therefore his character of spiritual self-transcendence. The symbol, in a different way to the sign, includes in its comprehension the whole being or the "One-All". It does not speak only to reason, but encompasses in its comprehensive process at the same time: consciousness and unconscious, feelings and reason, body and intuition, mythos and logos, insofar as it alludes to the unveiling of the meaning of existence enclosed always in the mystery (of the Greek root *mystes*: what is closed in itself) and that no representation completely exhausts or can contain.

The human being is characterized by being *homo symbolicus*, that is, a being that makes itself and gives its being to itself through the symbol, or a being whose original expression is the symbol, and that the expressive character that constitutes it is at the same time symbol of itself. The symbolic expression of the spirit is at the same time symbol of the expression itself, because it is in this one where the beam of the *sense* of da.

Thus in this way the first and fundamental characteristic of symbolism is to consider that every symbol 'tends beyond itself'. The symbol has a 'figurative aptitude' in which it allows, indirectly, to confer a different meaning to the 'usual' or 'ordinary' or 'literal'. Man seeks first of all in religion the contact with the other or is mysteriously attracted to this Alterity invisible for all that can happen and he can see in his daily life, and that is precisely the reason why he comes to use symbols to express what he feels and is untranslatable to ordinary language. That is why we can say, with Eliade, that the symbol originally expresses us the original revelation of the sacred, what he calls *hierophany*.

Thus, the sacred manifests and expresses itself through symbols. With this I will enumerate six different aspects of the meaning of religious symbols, which is pertinent to consider:

1. They are capable of manifesting a modality of the real or a structure of the world that is not evident at the level of immediate experience.
2. They always point to something real, because in the symbolic world the real equals the sacred.
3. They are polyvalent: they express simultaneously several meanings whose continuity is not evident in the plane of immediate experience.

4. The symbol allows man to discover a certain unity of the world and to open, before his eyes, his own destiny as an integral part of it.
5. Religious symbolism can express paradoxical situations. Certain structures of ultimate reality, which would otherwise be inexpressible, seem manifest through symbols of the world that provide the material for further philosophical speculations. The symbol resolves dichotomies, paradoxes and antinomies that reason cannot solve and, on the other hand, it is nourished by the allusive expression of the intuitions of that one.
6. The symbols are always existential, insofar as they point to a reality or a situation in which human existence is compromised. They express a state, a radical way of being in the world, in which man exists in continuity with him and with the sacred. They offer the possibility of an authentic existence, while man joins empathically with the whole, affirming his encounter with the most intimate of him: he does not feel alienated from the world, the gods, or from himself. Such a way of existing is essentially different from the existence of modern man.

The symbolic is susceptible of infinite interpretations. Where there is a precise code of interpretation, it is properly deleted. Is the symbolic paired with polysemy, ambiguity or polyvalence?

The symbol apprehends the general in the particular and leads to an expression of the unspeakable, because its content escapes the reason, the immediate data, and the present. What happens to that kind of non-sensitive thing that is impossible to present and can only refer to its meaning?

What do we do with those referents that we cannot define in a clear and concrete way and, nevertheless, are, it seems, important for the life of individuals and the community: love, happiness, beauty and almost all those referred to scope of the sacred and transcendence?

The symbol, which cannot represent the unrepresentable, express the secret meaning of the unspeakable, is the epiphany of a mystery or the appearance of the ineffable through the transfiguration of the concrete in an abstract sense. Radically parabolic, it is crossed by a tension that never reaches its objective. Here the inadequacy of everything symbolic, its heterogeneity or strangeness regarding the symbolized.

Goethe pointed out that symbolism transforms experience into idea, and image into image, so that the first obtained in the second remains infinitely active and inalienable. The symbol expresses something that lacks manifestation in the world of the expressible. It is an image, and the sphinx is the symbol of the same symbolism.

In addition, it is situated in the domain of an indirect knowledge, of the absent, metaphysical, supernatural and surreal. That is why the symbolic imagination is there where the meaning is impossible to represent, and the sign difficult to refer to a sensible thing. It also evokes the absent: an

expression of an improbable meaning to be presented by another means. It is thus the best possible manifestation of something relatively unknown, therefore, it cannot be designated in the first instance in a clearer or more characteristic way.

So, what is the meaning of the interpretation of symbols? You cannot have the pretension to clarify it until you fix it, because it is to destroy it; only the mode of expression of a meaning will be clarified, accentuate or call attention to something, but never supplant it or fix it. It would never exhaust the content of a poem or end theologizing of a religious experience. The symbolic expression is always open and in an unstable, dynamic equilibrium, which distances it from dogmatic orthodoxy, fundamentalist fixation and leads it towards the revolution of mystical expression or the Jungian notion of melting pot, in which it is cooked and sublimated without stop the psychic energy.

To the symbolic knowledge belongs the being necessarily, an obscure and ungraspable revelation: dark light, silent music, the ambiguity of the chiaroscuro of the meaning of things. Hence, such unleashes a search without end of the absent, what is said without exhausting it in the expression.

If the symbol is radically parabolic it means that it lends itself to inexhaustible interpretations. There is a radical polysemy that creates and the condensation of an infinite discourse.

"The symbol occurs in the space of the signals when they lose their organically encoded directionality, their univocity, and communication becomes contaminated by possible interpretations, of polysemy: the signifier creates and the meaning is learned. The symbol can only happen in a fluctuation space of an organically determined order, in the drift of the instinct reduction. The other species have no symbolic possibility, the nullity of the effectiveness of its presentation structure of stimulus-response. Thus, by including himself through his works in the proliferation of the power-communicator of the symbol, man is permanently reducing his instinct and maintaining himself in the production of an incomprehensible polysemy, is contained in a continuous unfinished, situating himself in a surplus of possible and before a deficit of reality. In this tension, rather than an objectification or a structure, the symbol is a process of production of meaning: a consensus created of meaning, as possible as necessary, is its bifacial constitution: a continuity-discontinuity between the immediate and the mediate; concrete and the abstract, the sensible and the intelligible; the permanent interstice between the limits of the real and the imaginary overflow of the possible, the fragile balance that permanently fissures our cultural nature. Hence, every symbol contains in itself a concrete knowledge of reality at the level of significant a fluctuating diffusion of interpretation at the level of meaning (the moon, the tree, the cross)"⁵

The same etymological root of the word *sym-Bolon* indicated the piece that each one received from an object, ring or document and which served as a sign of recognition. The verb *ballein* (to throw) together with the prefix *sym* indicate a movement of reunification of the separated parts. Symbolic

knowledge is the human attempt to read an order in a pre-established world, which does not offer, at first sight, more than paradox and strangeness.

Symbol was the name given to that object that split in two was served to two separate people to recompose over time. The two halves would fit. There is a previous separation that the symbolic brings together, it generates a richer order with the reappearance that generates the most contrary concepts. The problems cannot be solved, only overcome, and settled on the wounds, the fissures. Through myth and mythology we have the impression of understanding some of the things that help us to stand up, thereby neutralizing the growing rift. The symbolic order is based on a fissure to which it covers: the dialectic between the order of the *SIM-Bólico* and the order of the *day-Bólico*.

The man remains prisoner of the rational or mythical code, but this protects him from the menacing absolute, violent reality. Symbolic language is a rodeo and a strategy of the animal that has word to overcome this violence that prints the pressure of reality in its *omnitudo*. It is necessary to lay a bridge that covers the abyss of duality, this is the symbol and, with it, the culture is implanted. In the deep recess, the myth is the first resource to regain balance, to ensure social cohesion, to match the interests of the species, and not annihilate, in perplexed disintegration, the egomaniac insatiableness of each individual.

Man is an animal victim of the symbolic. Origin, reality, energy, behold the absolute violence in which the *omnitudo* of the entity is imposed and which dislodges the nothingness, and in which the first order of sense; the myth is set as demarcation and boundary. The violence of the origin is tackled with the relative violence of the order. Through language man consecrates (surpasses) the fissure; the myth is the symbolic space that brings together the splinter, the circuit in which primitive society performs the union of the original fissure. In this one, man, the World and the gods form an indivisible continuum. The essentially mythical theme is Order and chaos. The myth is not irrational because it establishes an order and a *relationality* to make sense. The difference between a discursive network, myth, and another, reason, is that in one case it constitutes a logic of the concept and in the second one as a logic of the images. Mythical thought has a relational order and, therefore, its own logic is actually another 'rationality'.

"The hominisation is the emergence of a highly unstable system, with the ample space of possible that must be channeled by means of redundant axes of behavior to create waste of reality where to survive. It is a vital imperative: to create an order of things that restricts the potential of disorder that threatens the group from its own interior. And the main difficulty in drawing a line of consistency between the creativity and the error of individuals is that the product of the most elementary and decisive that marks the fold of the cultural over the natural, of the represented on the organic, and through which forms, speech and desire circulate, constitute in itself a disturbing condensation of the possible and the necessary: symbol"⁶

⁵A. Ortiz-Osés and P. Lanceros. Dictionary of Hermeneutics. University of Deusto, Bilbao, 2001, 317-318.

⁶Idem. P. 318

The symbolism is offered as the (cultural) suture of the fissure (natural), as the human mediator among the previous ones: the surprise of the tear and the conflict to seek an alternative cultural re-mediation.

The symbolism is regressive-progressive, put forwards to the origin, the pre-cosmic and prehistoric past, but, on the other hand, it also goes towards the exploration of the future, to the emergence of figures that anticipate our spiritual adventure. Two dialectics: between anguish and hope; among the archaeology of the archaic figures that govern the human being and the teleology that foreshadows and anticipates the reality; between myth Cosmogonic and Mito scatological. The symbol, in its apparent ambiguity, articulates these two dialectics; It indicates that in addition to the knowledge of the analytical rationality that breaks down the elements and runs the risk of not seeing the whole, there is a type of knowledge that is oriented to the whole process and captures it in a single glance, without analysis or conscious reflection. This is due to the force of the pathetic symbolic, to the rationality strongly impregnated with sensibility and affection. In the end we are faced with a conception of man who, apart from considering it *Zoon Politikon*, political or social animal, and *Zoon Logikon*, an animal that speaks and reason, of Aristotle, is *Zoon Pathetikon*, being of passions and sensibility.

So we can say today that as far as reason is concerned, it is very difficult to account for all the richness and diversity of the forms of the cultural life of man. All these forms are symbolic in nature. More than to see in man an animal *rationale*, one would have to see in him a *symbolicum* animal.

So that neither the sign, if the allegory, nor the metaphor, nor the emblem, figures all of which are often confused and degraded to the symbol, serve to limit its open meaning to perpetual recreation and interpretation. The symbol, therefore, more than constrained to the reduced scope of the semioenological significance, constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of man, ontological or trans-historical: *Homo sapiens*, *Homo talking*, *Homo faber*, *Zoon Politikon* but also, of the Same way and with the same statute, *Homo symbolicus* or *religiosus* that in the expansive scope of its expression involves the *Homo ludens* and *Artisticus*. Not only because, in fact, they are the best objectivations of art, the very environment in which we today recognize the authentic presence of the living symbol, or because it is ' a more poetic way ' of saying things, but because the symbol, as the foundation that It aims to give meaning to all that is, archetype, primal form, that gives rise to innumerable specific and specific symbols, historically links the existence with the being, connecting also precisely the rational processes with the imagination or impulse Creative. So since man is a man symbolically conjures death, renewal, anguish, fertility, connecting the mind with the deepest consciousness of the universal cycle Chaos-Cosmos.

Conclusions

In conclusion, what is symbolized is always beyond the form in which it is presented or re-presented; Although it needs it as an essential signifier to perform the *Metaforei* (to carry beyond) and to refer to the timeless, and/or pre-conceptual. It propels not only reason but supra-consciousness. To

receive the symbol therefore means to empty the mind of all preconceived meanings. You can't ' understand ' the symbol. Its complete decipherment makes it a concept and with it eliminates its vital radiation, it kills it as such. The symbol is made in us as soon as mind, feeling and body arouse a state of reconciliation between man and the natural flow of the universe.

The State of reconciliation and abandonment of the ego are the premises of contemplation, of the *Coincidentia* contained in the epifánica experience of the symbol. When we contemplate something, a cloud, the creek, a blade of grass, the symbol occurs or happens in us, the soul approaches its non-being and inadvertently disappears the observed and it happens the interweaving of the one with the whole.

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