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Abstract:

This text focuses on the idea that philosophical inquiry can be understood as a practice for social development as far as a real social development requires a qualitative change in the way society carries out its activities, such as through more progressive and more reflective attitudes and behavior by the population, the adoption of more democratic and participative social forms of organization, the use of more advanced technology, and the dissemination and circulation of more advanced forms of knowledge. Philosophical inquiry is, indeed, a powerful means of spreading intelligence in all the contexts of associated life; since it enhances human intellectual potential through sound reflection both on human experiences as well as on the beliefs, understandings, values which frame and give meaning to these experiences. This practice requires and promotes contexts of shared meanings as well as contexts of social development, aiming at: clarification of ideas; construction of new meanings; and development of new interpretative perspectives of reality. In these terms it can be acknowledged as a social development device for the construction of new ideas and the transformation and emancipation of individuals and social groups as it introduces and enhances reflection in different fields of associated living. The outcomes of philosophical inquiry are, by consequence, new ideas, values, and actions (rationally oriented) that can make for a new sense of, and construct a new understanding of human experience, indicating new developmental directions to human societies.

Key words: social development; human experience; philosophical inquiry

La investigación filosófica como una práctica para el desarrollo social

Resumen:
Este texto se concentra en la idea de que la investigación filosófica puede ser entendida como una práctica para el desarrollo social en tanto un desarrollo social real requiere un cambio cualitativo en el modo en que una sociedad lleva adelante sus actividades. Serían necesarias para ello actitudes y conductas más progresistas y reflexivas por parte de su población, la adopción de formas sociales de organización más democráticas y participativas, el uso de tecnología más avanzada y la diseminación y circulación de más avanzadas formas de conocimiento. La investigación filosófica es, de hecho, un medio poderoso para diseminar inteligencia en todos los contextos de la vida asociada, en tanto realza el potencial del intelecto humano a través de una reflexión sonora, tanto en las experiencias humanas como en las creencias, entendimientos, valores que dan forma y sentido a esas experiencias. Esta práctica requiere y promueve contextos de sentidos compartidos tanto como contextos de desarrollo social, buscando: clarificaciones de ideas; construcción de nuevos sentidos; desarrollo de nuevas perspectivas interpretativas de la realidad. En estos términos, puede ser reconocida como un dispositivo social para la construcción de nuevas ideas y la transformación y la emancipación de individuos y grupos sociales en tanto introduce y destaca la reflexión en los diferentes campos de la vida asociada. Los frutos de la investigación filosófica son, como consecuencia, nuevas ideas, valores y acciones (orientadas racionalmente) que pueden producir un nuevo sentido para la experiencia humana y construir una nueva comprensión de ella. La investigación filosófica también indica nuevos direcciones a ser desarrolladas por las sociedades humanas.

Palabras clave: desarrollo social; experiencia humana; investigación filosófica

Investigação filosófica como uma prática para o desenvolvimento social

Resumo:
Este texto se centra na idéia de que a investigação filosófica pode ser entendida como uma pratica para o desenvolvimento social na medida em que um desenvolvimento social real requer uma mudança qualitativa no modo como uma sociedade conduz suas atividades. Para este desenvolvimento, seriam necessárias atitudes e condutas mais progressistas e reflexivas por parte da população, a adoção de organizações sociais mais democráticas e participativas, o uso de tecnologias mais avançadas e a disseminação e a circulação de formas mais avançadas de conhecimento. A investigação filosófica é, certamente, um meio poderoso para disseminar a inteligência em todos os contextos da vida em sociedade, porque realiza o potencial do intelecto humano através de uma reflexão lógica, tanto nas experiências humanas como nas crenças e entendimentos, valores que dão forma e sentido à essas experiências. Esta prática requer e promove contextos de troca e compartilhamento de sentidos, mais ainda nos contextos de desenvolvimento social, buscando: clarificação das idéias; construção de novos sentidos; desenvolvimento de novas perspectivas interpretativas da realidade. Nesses termos, pode ser reconhecida como um dispositivo social para a construção social de novas idéias e de transformação e emancipação de indivíduos e grupos sociais, porque introduz e destaca a reflexão dos diferentes campos da vida em sociedade. Os frutos de uma investigação são, consequentemente, novas idéias, valores e ações (orientadas racionalmente), que podem produzir um novo sentido para a experiência humana e construir uma nova compreensão da mesma. A investigação filosófica também indica novas direções a serem desenvolvidas pelas sociedades humanas.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento social; experiência humana; investigação filosófica;

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY AS A PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Maura Striano

> *Philosophy […] can make it easier for mankind to take the right steps in action by making it clear that a sympathetic and integral intelligence brought to bear upon the observation and understanding of concrete social events and forces, can form ideals, that is aims, which shall not be either illusions or mere emotional compensations*
> (John Dewey)

1. Social development: a goal for the new millennium

The United Nations' Millennium Declaration defines the development goals for the new millennium (Millennium Goals, 1996) pointing to integrated environmental, human and social development processes. Key developmental issues are, from this perspective, both social inclusion for all, with no limitations for race, gender, social position and education (Framework for Action on Education for All, Dakar, 2000).

This means that a society can effectively develop in a sustainable way only if two conditions are satisfied: a) the guarantee of equal opportunities to all its members so that they can be involved in all forms of associated life and in all development processes; b) the guarantee of significant educational experiences for all which provide people with tools for active participation

Within this framework, the U.N.'s *Agenda 21* – which identifies the conditions for the construction of a roadmap for development at international, national and local levels - also places a strong emphasis on education, public awareness and training, considering them as the leading forces in promoting environmental, human and social development (Agenda 21, 2001).

Education is here understood as a socially acknowledged practice, aimed at the promotion of human growth within a specific environment. Human growth takes places wherever there are essential conditions to make personal and collective experiences significant, with no limitations of the possibility to expand as well as to reframe and re-organize those conditions through reflective processes. As such, education is an essential condition for the development of public awareness, understood as a conscious, reflective

attitude orienting social actions and behaviours on the basis of a better understanding of life's rights and duties.

Social development is thus strictly connected to human development (as well as to environmental sustainable development), since it is a process which results in the transformation of social structures in a manner which improves the capacity of the society both to warrant the best living conditions to all its members within a specific environmental context and to produce and strengthen new forms of understanding and new forms of knowledge, which are considered to bethe main tools for future development.

According to social development theories, human beings are, for themselves, both the source and the primary motive force for development. This means that society progresses only by developing and bringing into expression the higher potentialities of its members; therefore the extent of people's education, the intensity of their aspirations and energy, the quality of their attitudes, beliefs, ideas, values, skills and information are crucial in each developmental process according to the environmental conditions available. Social development implies a qualitative vertical movement to a higher level of performance from whatever level of organization the society has reached in a particular field. This means that each developmental action or practice is aimed at promoting significant performances characterized by an effective and aware use of human potential. Social development implies also a qualitative change in the way society carries out its activities, such as through more progressive and more reflective attitudes and behavior by the population, the adoption of more democratic and participative social forms of organization, the use of more advanced technology, and the dissemination and circulation of more advanced forms of knowledge.

The same principles are applicable to development at all levels and units of human existence-- individuals, organizations, social sectors, nations and the international community. A society will develop by organizing all the human energies, material resources and knowledge at its disposal to fulfil its aspirations. The most limiting barriers to human and therefore social development are not physical but cultural and social. Cultural barriers impose strong restrictions on communication, dialogue, and exchange, and hinders the widening of the interpretative perspectives human beings use to make sense of their experiences; while deprived living conditions, limited possibilities to benefit

from significant formative experiences, are poor educational and training opportunities are the concrete expressions of visible or invisible social barriers limiting social advancement and bringing serious impairment to active citizenship and responsible participation in associated life.

Cultural and social barriers limit both human and social development because they block the possibility for all to benefit from chances and tools which let people actively participate in social processes of knowledge building, exchange, sharing and implementation. As we move towards the construction of knowledge societies, we must be aware that the starting point is to guarantee the best conditions for all to be able to participate in the above mentioned processes. This happens only by increasing social actions aimed at the development of the whole human potential and at the construction of new forms of understanding and knowledge for all, i.e. educational actions. Limitations in knowledge, vision, attitudes and aspiration for higher accomplishment can only be overcome through the dissemination of actions and practices aimed at breaking these limitations and promoting human growth at all levels of associated life. This requires also a qualitative change in the way these actions and practices are carried out in society, acknowledging them as essential developmental devices for individuals and communities and disseminating them in the different fields of associated living.

2. Awareness and critical consciousness as tools for social development

As we have seen, social development is a process of deep social change involving great levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity but also of complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. This means that social development requires conditions and practices in order to enhance levels of understanding, to express and develop creative thinking, to develop mastery and control of human experience, and to make it fulfilling and significant to human motives and goals in a broader sense.

If it is true that societies progress through the combined efforts of individuals and small groups, most of whom are only aware of and motivated to achieve their own limited goals, it is also true that the adoption of shared goals and common or similar strategies by individuals and groups is the leading force for elevating society. This means that social

development requires devices and practices aimed at defining and pursuing shared understandings and shared goals, and at constructing, disseminating, sharing, and using in an aware and reflective way different kinds and forms of thinking and knowledge, in order to promote real growth in all the fields of human activity.

Seen from this perspective, social development needs most of all devices and practices aimed at promoting significant transactions (not interactions)[1] between human beings and their environment as well as between individuals and individuals, individuals and groups. These transactions lead to co-evolutive and integrate patterns of development and deliver shared understandings, meanings, identities.

The basic mechanism driving social change is increasing awareness, which will generate a greater increase in the levels of social consciousness and participation in different forms of associated life. This means that everybody should take responsibility not only for her/his actions but also and most of all for her/his beliefs, ideas and values - which have a strong impact on political and social structures. Consciousness should be strictly connected to the emergence and consolidation of what social development theorists would define a "mental" dimension of social activities; the "mental" dimension of social life (that could be identified as a "philosophical" dimension as well) creates spaces to highlight the purpose of life, the role and nature of human beings, and the relationship between the individual and the collective, requiring and promoting high levels of awareness and consciousness[2] both for individuals and communities. This implies the need for the introduction of organizational patterns in human contextsaimed at promoting awareness, communication, negotiation, and reflection. The process grows through forms of social organization aimed at assessing and developing human levels of awareness and participation in social activities in order to meet new challenges and opportunities that lead to social development. We may therefore ask, which forms of organizational patterns and what kinds of devices and practices could be effective in promoting social development in nowadays scenarios?

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[1] Bentley A., Dewey J., *The Knowing and the Known*, LW, 1945.
[2]Cfr. Jacobs, G,, Asokan N., '"Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Social Development'" in: *Human Choice*, World Academy of Art & Science, USA, 1999.

3. Philosophical inquiry as a practice for social development

Community is a form of social organization characterized by a series of elements that warrants both inclusion and participation as well as potentially high levels of awareness and transaction at an individual as well as at a collective level: a) commitment to common and shared goals: b) reference to shared meanings, and c) the use of mutual forms of participation[3]. These elements are essential in promoting higher levels of reflection within different contexts of associated life because they drive individual motivation and interests towards broader goals and perspectives which come out of progressive negotiations and adaptations; require involvement in meaning-making activities which are essential to cultural growth and development; involve people in active and responsible patterns of activities and practices and provide inclusion and participation opportunities for individuals and groups. That is why community (intended as an epistemic social context) seems to be the most interesting organizational pattern to be fostered and diffused in societies in order to promote development. In productive contexts as well as in educational and political ones, the enhancement of a community pattern leads organizations to greater levels of development on the basis of a strong and active involvment of all their members in meaningful activities and practices, which generate shared forms of learning and knowledge.

Now the question is, in which kind of activities and practices should human communities be involved in order to achieve higher levels of understanding of their experience and make it therefore more rich and valuable? Which kind of practice help people in developing reflective attitudes and competences in order to actively participate in the process of construction/reconstruction and sharing of beliefs, ideas, knowledge structures which foster and promote social development? Philosophical inquiry seems to

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[3] As I am referring to the framework of *knowledge society*, I have chosen to refer to the concept of community as we find it in the pragmatist tradition, because it is a concept that has a strong epistemological implications/(see Peirce and Dewey) My use of the term community is therefore alien from the sociological one as it stems from the work of F.Toennies (cfr. Toennies F., *Community and society*, Transaction Publishers New.ed, 1988 who characterizes communities for a reciprocal relationships felt by its participants trying understanding each other, and based on a durable, intimate and exclusive living together such as mother-child, man-woman, siblings relationships.

have all the requisites to be considered the most effective practice to achieve these goals. But what do we mean here by philosophical inquiry?

Philosophical inquiry could first of all be considered a social practice, if we define a practice as a form of situated acting and making that mediates individual and collective interests within specific social context and promotes new forms of understanding. Each practice is a situated set of organized actions and activities (both material and immaterial) that give structure and meaning to human experiences, making use of cultural artefacts within different human communities. It is grounded on relationships of mutual implication and evolves in terms of shared learning stories.[4] Philosophical inquiry must be seen first of all as a form of situated social practice as well as a culturally grounded practice. This is true as it necessarily takes place within human communities which share codes, languages, problems, understandings and as it originates not out of intellectual material, but out of social and emotional material.[5]

Thus, philosophical inquiry is a powerful means of spreading intelligence in all the contexts of associated life; in this way it enhances human intellectual potential through sound reflection both on human experiences as well as on the beliefs, understandings, values which frame and give meaning to these experiences. Philosophical inquiry takes place through, justification and validation of beliefs, hypotheses, ideas, and values, and thus requires the use of a rigorous method. This method should have the cultural and social function of refining, broadening, and enhancing human understanding in order to make human experience more intelligent and meaningful by exploring its philosophical dimensions. In so far as it sustains the definition of interpretative codes for reality that lead to the construction of new forms of knowledge, philosophical inquiry can be also be considered as a social knowledge construction device as well as a social reflection device for the construction/negotiation of socially shared meanings, to be validated in different fields of human experience.

Philosophical inquiry is thus acknowledged both as a reflective practice with specific procedural patterns[6] that helps humankind to make sense of human experiences through investigation into their conditions and consequences; and as a device for social

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[4] Wenger E., *Communities of practice. Learning, meaning and identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
[5] Dewey J., *Reconstruction in philosophy*, MW.12. 155,156.
[6] Cfr. Dewey J. , Logic. *The theory of inquiry*. LW, 12, 1938.

reflection, useful both for the construction and negotiation of socially shared meanings and for the rationalization and orientation of intelligent social actions. As such, philosophical inquiry leads to clarification, mediation, negotiation of interpretations and meanings through a deep and sound process of investigation of individual and collective experiences. Philosophical inquiry materials are thus social events and social forces that are investigated and understood in order to provide new frames for social actions.

Philosophical inquiry requires and promotes contexts of shared meanings as well as contexts of social development, aiming at: clarification of ideas; construction of new meanings; and development of new interpretative perspectives of reality. In these terms it can be acknowledged as a social development device for the construction of new ideas and the transformation and emancipation of individuals and social groups as it introduces and enhances reflection in different fields of associated living. The outcomes of philosophical inquiry are, by consequence, new ideas, values, and actions (rationally oriented) that can make for a new sense of, and construct a new understanding of human experience, indicating new developmental directions to human societies.

Finally, if we consider education as the leading instrument that societies use in order to make discoveries, experience, knowledge and meanings more and more accessible, conscious and reflective, philosophical inquiry can be viewed and considered as the most powerful and effective educational practice and tool for human and social development within the framework of the Millennium goals. This is particularly significant and relevant in deprived social contexts, where cultural and social barriers are extremely strong and powerful. These contexts are, indeed, characterized both by the lack of sustainable living conditions as well as by the presence of strong biases and behavioral models which are transmitted and shared without the possibility of negotiating them or exploring their meaning or significance. These models may be considered to be social devices useful for survival in problematic realities, as they provide codes and rules but also references to frame human experiences and learning within shared paradigms. There is no chance to reflect upon them. They are and should be taken for granted. They warrant children, adolescents, and adults to be somehow acknowledged and protected within an associated life context characterized by its cultural frameworks and traditions, which indeed do not provide people with effective tools to really overcome social barriers, but only to survive and to maintain a fixed social order. In such contexts, children and

adolescents grow up within a framework of unexamined and unreflected understanding of human life, possibilities and destiny and with no chances for growth and emancipation.

That is why the introduction of philosophical inquiry through educational channels is particularly significant in these contexts. Schools and educational agencies and forces represent the only real opportunities to experiment with different living possibilities, to acquire tools to investigate and reflectively explore human experiences, to emancipate themselves, and move towards different social destinies. Philosophical inquiry would there make a real and significant difference in such contexts, especially if it is introduced as a communal practice, as it is in the model offered by Philosophy for Children[7].

In socially deprived contexts, people do not participate in communities as epistemic agents. They belong to families, clans, and organization that provide them with codes and references, which protect them, but which do not give them chances for autonomous judgment and reflection. The introduction of a different community model through educational experiences and institutions (which are the only institutions acknowledged and somehow valued in these contexts) would provide children, adolescents, and adults with a different model of associated life, and would lead them to understand and believe that there are other and different opportunities to think, live, participate in an active and responsible way.

Participating in communities of philosophical inquiry helps people to see that there is a chance for growth and for emancipation, and to escape from deprived living conditions by acquiring tools that would give them strength through an increased awareness of their living conditions, and an increasing consciousness of their own potential and power to change.

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[7] Lipman M., *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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