



Dialog— A Meaning for Education

Luiz Síveres, Idalberto José das Neves Júnior, José Ivaldo Araújo de Lucena

Catholic University of Brasilia (UCB), Brazil

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Abstract— *The objective of this study is to understand the absence of meaning of life in the context of a fluid society, offering reflections on the contribution possibilities of dialog to the recreation of existential meaning. This study can be described as a theoretical-reflexive essay dealing with the liquid modernity and existential void concepts of Bauman (2001) and Lipovetsky (2005), respectively. The results indicate that humankind is on a pilgrimage between light and darkness, revealing a disenchanted society and, on the other hand, a more hopeful one. In this context, the education process guided by dialog could be a signification of the human condition.*

Keywords— *Educative Dialog, Existential Void, Sense and Meaning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dialog is an inherent dynamic of the human condition since its constitution; therefore, it contributes to the existential meaning of the humanization experience. Even though such presumption has been practically incorporated to the development of personal projects or social systems in different moments of history, in the current context this procedure needs to be constantly created and recreated, including regarding the educational process.

This propensity becomes ever more relevant because we live in a society that lost track of the existential meaning of the greatest benchmarks, such as the experiences of more democratic and participatory governments, more spiritual and communal religious configurations, or with utopian projects getting closer to some sort of accomplishment.

Beyond these cross-sectional configurations, it is possible to notice that contemporary reality is in a liquefaction stage, according to Bauman (2001). This process, according to this author, is transforming relations, situations, and institutions in a state of constant fluidity, thus characterizing the liquid modernity that presents itself immediately as light, liquid, and fluid.

To the same setting, Lipovetsky (2005) introduces the era of the void concept. This period, despite the excess of products for consumption, presents itself existentially ever more void. This existential vacuum is mainly potentialized by technologically prompted values because they privilege

velocity, pace, and movement. Thus, for this social model, the more information gets in circulation and the more goods and products get in fact consumed, the deeper human beings get entrenched in emptiness.

To this narcissistic reality it is possible to add the Castoriadis (2009) understanding that the present society is extremely chaotic, an aspect that in part explicitly shows the deterioration of human dignity and the social systems frailty. This chaotic context, according to the author, is conducive for the existential meaning of constant deterioration.

In the understanding of these approaches, described by means of analogies on fluid societies, where the human being is turned into simple reflexes of existential void, and personal relations and institutions endure a chaotic reality, is it possible to create or recreate existential meaning?

II. THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MEANING

With the purpose of proposing dialog as one of the possibilities to exercise existential meaning, it is timely to begin with the contextualization of meaning, so that it can be configured as personal or social aim in the contemporary culture's construction process.

In front of the setting described above and perceiving that despite all the consumption offers available people are still empty; despite infinite entertainment offered by

technology people are still sad; despite the myriad of medications made available by the drug industry people are still sick, it is necessary to seek another existential paradigm.

In part, the meaningless world can be perceived by the previously described analogies because they reveal that we are experiencing a moment of existential meaning drainage, as well as a period of distancing in the humanitarian sense primarily due to a frightened relational context with regard to differences and diversity, and indifferent towards the other. Such aspects, among others, would contribute to a sharp degree of dehumanization of the very human culture.

Besides this reality perception, some scholars have been calling attention to the absence of meaning in the contemporary context. Among many authors, it is possible to agree with Jung (2011) when he affirms that the lack of meaning is modernity's general neurosis. Such a neurotic condition would be affecting primarily the western civilization because it is supposedly turning its back to the human soul's beauty.

The human soul is the energy that could awake the human being to value the diversity of relations and relationships that can be experienced in daily life, whether the ephemeral or the enduring ones. Contemporary reality has potentialized immediate, superficial contacts through digital technologies; however, it has not paid due attention to permanent, deeper bonds that only existential meaning can provide.

Thus, the contemporary subject is more often connected and less bound; he/she has more contacts but fewer meetings; sends and receives more information but dilutes the intensity of interhuman relations. It is like he/she were surfing the sea waves without plunging into the ocean. Such perception allows saying that human beings have lost a great deal of their identity because they can barely identify themselves with something, except for transient waves that keep crossing their lives.

According to Le Breton (2018), this procedure adds to the fact that human beings are "disappearing" from themselves because they are possibly being permanently diluted by daily activities. In this conjuncture, even if floating along these waves, it is advisable to search a reference, a compass for indication on where to retrieve individuality and, consequently, existential sense.

This initiative is even more urgent as technology is offering humans the possibility of living another identity. Humans put themselves in the movement's dynamic, which transports them to another reality where they assume the identification of someone else, proposed by the diversity of entertainments. In this move, the existential

void grows bigger and the absence of conviviality consolidates, leading people to desperately provoke void and absence, for this way they keep on feeling like navigating.

This dynamic is not only a segment that has detached itself from the human condition, but it has also transformed itself in a system that encompasses all existential realities. Along with this procedure, there has been an existential dynamic inversion in the sense that living in a different way, guided by values linked to the existential sphere, has become a mere thread in an immense net involving the human being and the set of social vectors.

The most evident movement in the human condition set of possibilities is directed towards externalities. In this sense, it is not the internal energy that propels in the external direction, it is rather the external dynamics that strongly influence the human existence. In this case, the gravity center is no longer the person, but the intricate net of connectivity and instrumentalities.

For this reason, it is timely to accept Frankl's suggestion, in the possibility of affirming that the meaning of life is something essential and worth searching, primarily because "this meaning is exclusive and specific, since it needs and can only be accomplished by that determined person. Only then this meaning assumes importance capable of satisfying the people's own longing for meaning" (2018, p. 124). According to the author, the existential meaning is unique to each subject and can only be proximal to the meaning of others.

From this statement, it is possible to affirm that the meaning of life is singular and specific, momentary and continued, aspects that demand a responsible answer to each moment, in each situation. Such an attitude of answering with responsibility is what reveals the subject's disposition to effectively search for the meaning of life.

In the sequence of this proposal, Frankl (2018) suggests that in the existential sense, the human existence self-transcendence should be taken as a relation process with the world, providing it with an existential meaning. That is, the meaning does not exist isolated from reality, it must be experienced in the world. That is why a person that dedicates to a cause or loves someone has more conditions to create and recreate the meaning of life.

Human existence is full of meanings, but it is necessary that it gets understood by the human feeling, thinking and acting. It is based on these possibilities that life can have a meaning, but it can also have none. As a meaning is indicated, it can assume a direction, that is, establish a geographical route (*telos*), as well as a reason to be (*pathos*), or characterize itself as a rational procedure (*logos*). This trilogy, among other considerations, can

contribute to a humanitarian project and to a significant existential meaning.

So, instead of pointing to a direction, the sense as a route (*telos*) is reflecting the person herself and her current existential condition. That is why meaning has been much more a mirror than a lens that could help humankind to visualize its own way better. Thus, in the current context, the human condition would be closer to the mass media screen than to the *telos*, that points to the utopia of a meaningful life, a life projected in a horizon of mysteries.

The second aspect of the existential meaning is the reason to be (*pathos*). To confirm this statement, it is advisable to resume Frankl's proposal, which says that "the human being is not someone in search for happiness, but rather someone searching for a reason to be happy" (Frankl, 2018, p. 162). Despite this proposition, it is noticeable in the current dynamic a search for happiness oriented much more by the purchase of goods and services than by a disposition to search for the accomplishment of the human essence as a reason to be happy.

And a third category for the understanding of meaning is oriented by the sapiential procedure, that is, the meaning understood as *logos*. Thus, *logos* is deeper than knowledge and information, that is why, according to Frankl (2018), the Greek *logos* is comprehended as existential meaning.

Therefore, the meaning of life through *telos*, *pathos*, and *logos* characterization, that is, the human condition inherent aspects, sets the meaning as part of the preoccupation and questioning, constantly explicit among the many cultural subjects and revealed in the distinct social spaces to answer the following challenge: Is it possible to contribute to the meaning of life?

III. THE DIALOG PROPOSITION

In the above-described context of meaning and awareness and in the dawn of a new millennium, humanity might be preparing itself for the era of the dialog. According to Swidler, after overcoming the period of logic and duality, modernity might be incubating the dialogic relation and the interactivity. The author states, for this reason, that "the age of monologue is coming to an end and the age of dialog is coming in" (Swidler, 1996, p. 69). Based on this statement, new positioning and choices should be exercised among humans.

With the objective of potentializing the dialogic context, different actions could be developed; however, the individual disposition to empathy, sympathy, and synchrony would be essential to create a favorable dynamic to trigger dialog, primarily from the manifestation of the dialogic subject. Subsequently, the respective

dialogic subject would need to increase his energy to potentialize involvement with the other and the commitment towards community, as well as the development of a social project. Such dynamics would be essential to recreate a dialogal net.

The mentioned net would be fed by different relations because, according to Kast, "the human being was designed for relationships" (Kast, 2016, p. 90). Such proposition would be fundamentally implemented by language, through which hearing precedes talking, understanding comes before judging, and learning is followed by teaching.

Through this referring, dialog constitutes a spiral energy, according to which the subject gets constructed. Bound to this proposition, there is also the relational dynamics through which the others start to interact in historical terms. Subsequently, would come the cross-sectional dimension, which points to the horizon of mystery.

With the objective of retrieving the meaning of life, offering a new reason for human existence, the dialog would be proposed with the features of a route covered by three pathways. Dialog would be understood in an educative perspective because it is comprehended in relation to itself, to others, and to the transcendent. Thus, this three-dimensional dynamic is being proposed to confer life a meaning.

IV. DIALOG WITH ONESELF

All individuals are unique, integral, and autonomous. The individual in its totality is an autonomous unit. According to Jung (2012), the individuation is this relationship between interiority and exteriority; that is, the interior reveals itself in the subjective integration while the exterior is revealed in the objective relation, which can be with the other, with nature, or with the transcendent.

The dialog with oneself would need initially to recognize the importance of corporeality because, according to Sousa, "every human body needs to know itself, feel itself and know everything around it. It needs to know its relations" (Sousa, 2011, p. 62). Therefore, corporeality is the clearest expression of every human being, and all human subjectivity is expressed through it.

Besides, of a body, the human being is constituted by a soul. According to Thibaudier, "in the search for his soul, man has discovered new ways that lead to his interiority; his inner space becomes a new place of experience" (Thibaudier, 2014, p. 5). This procedure becomes a movement of personal and trans-personal encounter, as well as a relational dynamic of unity and completeness.

Coordinating body and soul, or binding interiority to

reciprocity can contribute to the existential meaning because, according to Henrich, “human beings can confer sense to their own doing through objectives they propose to themselves. Also, what they do and implement to the life of others may become significant [*bedeutsam*]; from this emerges, in turn, a meaning for themselves” (Henrich, 2018, p. 184).

Therefore, to establish a continuous dialog between body and soul can result in a significant process of existential meaning to oneself.

V. DIALOG WITH THE OTHER

Human beings, for being incomplete and unaccomplished, always need the other to carry on completing and accomplishing themselves. It is in relation to the other, that is, in the acceptance of alterity, that the individuality reveals itself, whether by means of meetings, language, and/or a common project. In this meeting of the I's sound with the other's echo, is that a dialogic relation, in its turn, could be established.

The relation with the other contributes, therefore, to the fundamental experience for each human, in the sense that those who are involved in a dialogic relation can seek together a reason to live. In this sense, Henrich suggests that “the relation of the I with the you, where each one is, with the same weight of life, a meaning source for the other can be assigned to a first maturity in life (Henrich, 2018, p. 117). In other words, it is in the relation with the other that the human being becomes ripe and fulfilled.

Such process does not deplete itself just in the relation between two subjects, but the involved subjects exercise their citizenship. This perception was already introduced by the Greek culture when a new, dialog-based way of thinking called attention. This dialog became then a way of constructing citizenship because every human being is born a citizen, with regard to the citizenship construction.

While responsible for himself, the human being is also accountable in relation to others. The accountability for the other is characterized as an ethic option. Therefore, the alterity principle first acknowledges the singularity and the diversity of the other, but at the same time, acknowledges the multiplicity of languages that might arise from the recognition and interaction with the other.

VI. DIALOG WITH THE TRANSCENDENT

An authentic relation with the other awakes the transcendence awareness as well because the divine manifests itself in humanity and prompts the human condition into welcoming and revealing divinity itself.

Thus, one of the most important strategies in contemporary reality is to strengthen the dialog with the transcendent.

According to Guitton, “the universe has an axis. Even better: a sense. This profound sense is found in its own interior, under the form of a transcendent cause” (Guitton, 1992, p. 48). Dialog can contribute, therefore, to the existential meaning as it awakes inside itself the relational energy that points to the transcendent.

The transcendental dynamic is inherent to the human condition, but only in the disposition to openness and cross-sectionality it is possible to exercise this transcendental dimension. That is, human beings only find meaning in their existential dimension as they project themselves outwards, whether to establish new bonds with others or new relations to nature.

The human beings' richest and most expressive experience is, therefore, those through which they accept to connect with the transcendent, identified here by divinity. In the perspective of this targeting, human beings meet the higher mystery, which is, in fact, God's mystery.

Therefore, considering the propositions about dialog, would it be possible that it could contribute to the meaning of life in the educational process?

VII. DIALOG AS A MEANING FOR EDUCATION

Aiming at understanding the importance of dialog in the educational process, which appears as one of the possible conditions to exercise the meaning of life, a field research was performed with lecturers that, according to our perception, manage in dialogical perspective to make of the exercise of teaching a pathway to the meaning of life.

So, a questionnaire was sent to six lecturers of the Brazilian Federal District public and private institutions, all of them working in the training of lecturers. The survey had three questions: Why is dialog an essential dynamic in the educational environment? How could dialog contribute to the teaching and learning processes? How could dialog cooperate with the meaning of life in the educational environment?

Considering also that these lecturers have philosophy in the basis of their academic background, their names were identified as philosophers to protect their identities and meet confidentiality standards. So, they have been identified with names of philosophers of dialog. Socrates, Plato, Edit Stein, Hanna Arendt, Rosa Luxembour, and Simone de Beauvoir.

Data are analyzed according to the content analysis process based on Bardin (2002), under the perspective of emergent categories, as follows: dialog and education

relation; importance of dialog in the process of teaching and learning; and contribution of dialog to the meaning of life. Such subsidies are coordinated with the theoretical references developed about dialog and the meaning of life, composing an integrated and integrative framework.

Considering that dialog constitutes an essential procedure to the educational environment, Plato affirmed that *dialog seems to be an essential dynamic for human life. While education has no different purpose than accomplishing the task of man and woman's essentialization, namely helping them to become human.* This proposition corroborates Socrates's suggestion as well as he assured that the educational environment is conducive for the meeting of consciousnesses. In his turn, Socrates *demands the interlocution of individuals, which in their human condition seek to present themselves to the world as beings that think, get emotional, and act.* Thus, according to the contribution of these lecturers, dialog is an inherent element to the human condition and, therefore, linked to the educational process.

With the objective of accomplishing the human condition, it is necessary, according to Plato, to understand that people only accomplish whatever has been given to them in a dialog. The possibilities to implement this would be guided by the dialog *with the other of oneself (in soliloquy), with the other of others (in the conversation and in colloquium), with the other of the human (in the relation of care towards things), with the other of the real (reality itself), and with the non-other (that we call God).* *Being human is being-in-dialog.* According to this statement, the educational process is as well characterized by the dialog through which Rosa Luxemburg assures that *there is a group of actors that are in interaction all the time, so, for this interaction to happen in a way to foster a favorable environment, it is necessary to form the dialog as an effective dynamic in this process.*

According to Edit Stein, to characterize dialog as an inherent element to the educational process, it needs to be understood by the *establishment of a sensible hearing because it brings together and enables the formation of networks of learning, of exchange, interactivity, and sharing.* But at the same time, according to Hannah Arendt, *the classroom context is defined by the collectivity. This expresses individual subjectivities that are so important to the learning, which in turn needs dialog to accomplish itself.* In the same direction, Simone de Beauvoir states that *dialog is a significant learning generating human capability once it allows the linkage of I-you, of hear-talk, and of theory-practice, which are essential factors for any kind of learning.* According to the understanding of these female lecturers, dialog would be

connected to learning, revealing that hearing comes before talking and learning before teaching.

This procedure reveals an interactive dynamic or an approximation movement. According to Socrates, *the place of this approximation is what we call education, this particularly human invention. Then, without dialog there is no education.* Therefore, there is intentionality in the dialog exercise, which in Paulo Freire's (1987) view is called "dialogicity". Based on this proposition, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that *dialogicity is the foundation stone in an education that stands out for freedom. With absolutely no doubt, dialog contributes to the citizen's awareness on rights and duties of society living and for a culture of peace strengthening.*

Besides this attitude of proximity towards the other, dialog projects the human being towards the transcendent. This can be perceived in Plato's reflection, as he states that *to be a human being it takes to listen to a radical other of mystery, which, however, for being the closest intimate to ourselves, ends up being the non-other, namely, the one we invoke by the name of God.* Regardless of profession of faith, dialog encompasses a relation with oneself, with others, and with the transcendent, necessary aspects to characterize the education process related to dialog.

After understanding, with the lecturers' help, that dialog is a human condition inherent element and, therefore, an educational process intrinsic dynamic, the questioning shifted to establishing the dialog's input in the teaching and learning process. Such aspects were considered as determinants to upbringing, whether in the sense of personal development or of educational and professional background development. This process's defining element is, however, language. According to Plato, dialog may be the *most intense mode of teaching and learning in human conviviality.* According to him, *it is through speaking to one another, listening one another, silencing towards one another, correspondence, the very same that prompts us to think and challenges us to know and love, namely, reality and life.*

In the same line of reflection and in a very directly relation, Hannah Arendt ensures that *dialog can contribute to the teaching and learning processes as a thinking and affection motivating element, fundamental constructs for the learner's learning.* In the classroom, this motivating process could potentialize dialog, according to Rosa Luxemburg, as long as *this exchange is established without prejudices, respecting the other's timing, and seeking to understand this exchange beyond its capacities, abilities, and competences.* Thus, according to Socrates, *dialog not only contributes to the occurrence of the teaching and learning process but is actually its*

presumption. Both are totally accomplished when they contribute to making people “to be more” in the world.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, in this interactive dynamic between teaching and learning, the propositional element might lie in the fact that *dialoguing enables the possibility of thinking in a different way, of confronting ideas, to accept the different, and to open space for multiculturalism in the educational environment.* To corroborate this dimension, Edith Stein states that *dialog potentializes the exercise of alterity, of perceiving the importance of differences and daily challenges.* In the same line of thinking there is the answer of Socrates, who proposes *the establishment of collaboratively constructed teaching and learning networks. Dialog was not meant only at transmitting something to someone, but to make people able to share, reflect, and transform themselves.* According to the testimony of these lecturers, the teaching and learning processes pervade the relational dimension between teacher and pupil, establishes connections with knowledge diversity and prompts both pupils and teachers to a social commitment.

Such commitment, particularly in the relational dynamics, according to Plato, makes *pupils teach while learning. Teachers learn while teaching. Dialog, in my opinion, flows when this reciprocity is put into practice.* In this interactive dynamic, still according to the same statement, *teachers only point the paths. The key is that pupils, by following the paths based on teachers’ cues, let Life itself teach them.* Therefore, in this educational space dialog allows teachers and pupils to collectively design a pathway, considering, however, each one’s responsibilities and the potentialities of the subjects involved.

Maybe the aspect that arises in this dynamic is that dialog does not exhaust but always reveals a certain intentionality. According to Simone de Beauvoir, *using dialog in the classroom may contribute to make society more equitable, humanitarian, and egalitarian.* In this sense, dialog practiced in the teaching and learning environment causes interlocutors to think and project an actual possibility so that this experience may be implemented under broader social circumstances.

In addition to dialog being a constitutional element of the subject and characterizing as a dynamic that is inherent to the teaching and learning process, it can cooperate with the meaning of life. This potentiality should be recovered, particularly due to the disillusion that can be perceived in young students, as well as by the discouragement of people who live in a meaningless world. For this reason, we asked lecturers about the possibility of dialog contributing towards the meaning of life in the educational process.

Consistent with the lecturers’ contribution, dialog may cooperate for the discussion about the meaning of life and, according to Hannah Arendt, *as it becomes possible to share feelings, perspectives, stories of life, and countless other forms of livings and inhabiting the world, then obviously, one can reframe and produce new meanings to life.* Thus, as dialog fills the existential experience with meaning, Socrates recommends that *when this vocation is achieved through education, dialog is summoned to participate as a founding element. Here dialog comes in, which, in the scope of education, will arise through the exchange of feelings, impressions, and life projects.*

In addition to a more human interactivity, dialog is implemented, according to Simone de Beauvoir, *insofar as it is collaborative towards human beings’ intellectual, cultural, and emotional growth, that is, it should prepare us for life.* Likewise, Edith Stein suggests that *dialog demands elaboration, reflection and consequently transforms people and contexts. From dialog, we contribute to the consolidation of a cognizant, reflexive, and critical subject.* This would be, then, one of the main contributions from dialog, understood from the perspective of philosophy classics, as dialectics. Therefore, this process demands criticality and creativity to develop emancipatory education, able to construct new ideals.

That is why dialog becomes a dynamic that potentializes interlocutors and, according to Rosa Luxemburg, *strengthening the dialog that acts in a contributory way is more than exchanging, more than giving and receiving, its greatest purpose is to make the one affected by it able to also act as a citizen who is fit for dialog in all dimensions of life.* This proposition of understanding dialog as an exercise in citizenship may also be perceived in the philosophy classics, particularly in Plato. This concept, as previously stated by Paulo Freire, resembles the concept of dialogicity. However, it is necessary to match reflexive living with the experience of citizenship. According to Plato, *reflection is the ability to let experience resonate. It is the listening of sonance and the resonance of experience. It is about thinking about the meaning of what sounds and resounds in experiences, listening to their plea, corresponding to it in this listening.* In the correspondence between experience and reflection, the teaching and learning process in dialog, according to the same statement, *requires that, by listening to each other, and by talking to each other, we kick start the project of reaching an agreement in harmony with the mystery of Life.* The mystery is, in this case, the existential horizon, and according to this lecturer’s statement, *only if we learn to walk and inhabit in the shadow of the Mystery will the Meaning open to us as a pathway that will take us to happiness, beyond what we know, can do, and have, in the*

realm of not knowing, of not doing and not having. In this case, dialog in the educational process would be a sonance in the mystery of each human being and a resonance in the greater Mystery that encompasses humankind.

VIII. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to different factors, the first years of this new millennium are still revealing that humanity keeps on a pilgrimage between light and darkness. Despite numberless advancements, whether local or global, the shading of a disenchanting society, the disappointed cultural processes, and the misruled government systems are still prevailing. Such reasons, among many others, feed the need for recovering the possibility of an existential meaning.

The educational process could be proposed as a possibility to change this ever more subjugating reality for young people, keeping them submerged in boredom, anguish, and depression. That is why an educational project directed by dialog, here characterized as a singular and universal energy, encompassing a moment of inspiration, a process of reflection, and a meaning-provided life postulation project, is being proposed. That is why the future of humanity needs to go through the dialog among humans, their cultures, religious systems, scientific advancements, economic agendas, and ideological options. But it is particularly in the educational environment and in the teaching and learning processes that the dialog, as a dialogical procedure, needs to be present and to be exercised in a constructive, critical, and creative way.

Through the dialogic options diversity and regarding the numberless opportunities that dialog can reveal, the meaning of life could, according to Boff (2014), refer to the purpose of life, the reason to exist, or the existential values, aspects that require also the experience of the transcendent because God would be the meaning of meanings. The meaning of life assumes, therefore, a direction that conveys meeting its own soul, but encompasses possibilities of the other relations as well, including divinity.

At last, the poetic testimony of the lecturer here identified as Plato could be suggested for the conclusion of this work. *For that to happen, in my view, it is necessary to educate not only for the mastery and conquest of the real, for the diurnal clarity of scientific and technical knowledge, but also and above all for the thinking that meditates the Meaning and that, in non-knowledge, in not having, finds the black pearl of Mystery, and manages to see in the darkness of this black pearl the most noble shine, the shine of the Night.*

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