

THE SOURCE OF AUTHENTICITY

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Each historical period has its own specific *mission*. If they want to contribute to its realization, the “children” of a given epoch are called to grasp its *coordinates, indications and signs*. Roberto Assagioli sensed something extremely important in relation to this: the changing of the world, the emergence of a new humanity, requires that “the good ones become strong”. Like the great masters of suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), it did not escape Assagioli that often behind “goodness” is hidden a certain form of “weakness” of the spirit.

Among the potential “world changers”, the “people of good will” referred to by the founder of psychosynthesis, those who are actively engaged in a process of evolution of consciousness, in an *initiatory path*, deserve particular attention. An initiatory path is a cognitive practice in which the knowing subject, in order to know the truth, *must transform*. The hypothesis emerging from multiple perspectives and research themes, is that this group of people who are intent on working on the development of their own consciousness will be able to constitute the evolutionary vanguard of this anthropological turn in progress.

In the context of the contemporary transpersonal movement we are talking about the emerging group that the American sociologist Paul H. Ray has called “cultural creatives”.⁽¹⁾ It is to them that it is necessary to “give power”, and the intent of this article is to clarify some decisive elements in this regard.

Let’s start by remembering that the phenomenological observations (on the lived experience) of those who have this drive to inner work, almost always report that the beginning of an initiatory path passes through an *underlying dissatisfaction with the parameters of ordinary life*. This has been observed by many sources, and Roberto Assagioli himself has also spoken about it in his

Principles and methods of therapeutic psychosynthesis. A vivid image of this starting point is given by the direct testimony of Peter Ouspensky, who describes this experience by calling it *byt*, a Russian word that indicates the sense of a “mechanical, incisive, petrified routine”. Ouspensky began his search for the “miraculous” precisely by proceeding from this underlying dissatisfaction:

“Leaving Petersburg for my trip, I said I would go *in search of the miraculous*. The ‘miraculous’ is very difficult to define, but for me this word had an absolutely precise meaning. For a long time I had come to the conclusion that, to escape the labyrinth of contradictions in which we live, we needed a completely new way, different from everything we had known or followed up to that moment. Even then I had recognized as an undeniable fact that, beyond the thin film of false reality, there was another reality, from which, for some reason, something separated us. Was the ‘miraculous’ the penetration into that unknown reality... ».⁽²⁾

This background dissatisfaction has been called by the supporters of Viktor Frankl’s important work “existential emptiness”. But crossing the threshold of the *existential* dimension and venturing into a *transpersonal* perspective, we can conceive this emptiness as an “ontological nostalgia”: a *nostalgia of being*. One who has experience of this “ontological void” or “nostalgia of being” does not live so much in fear as in *anguish*. Anguish has many interpretative keys, but its distinctive character is that it is an experience that does not immediately refer to a specific object (as it does *fear*, for example). It is instead a general experience, without an object: in fact, it is not something defined, it is not a space-time “entity”. The *experience of being* is missing.

This leads us to a decisive evidence: that “the miraculous” so much wanted by Ouspensky is not to be sought in the world, but in *identity*. Miraculous is *the experience of the authentic identity of man*. In other words, the ‘letter’ written by the experience of anguish, if read deeply (is in a transpersonal key), communicates to us precisely *the loss, the forgetfulness, the diminution* of our authentic identity. In order to read this letter which is anguish, an individual thus has the opportunity to “re-enter into himself”, *to realize* that he has lost himself.

From this point of view the human evolutionary path, what Jung calls “*individuation process*”, is in effect a “*process of authentication*”: a path of freedom from our inauthenticity to the finding of lost authenticity. This is the *movement* of that hero’s journey in which a person “*becomes what he is*”, to use Nietzsche.

But this “*what is*”, this *authentic being* that we must “*become*”, must be well understood. In fact this passage has been and is subject to many, to too many misunderstandings. It is also a critical problem, of primary importance in the individual and collective transformation to which we are called. In fact, if it is true that real power is *spiritual*, that is, it comes from the true source of our being, true power is the *power of identity*. That is to say, to understand how to access the power that comes from our way of being authentic. In other words, power in the spiritual sense is a *function* of the authenticity of the person. And if, as Assagioli intuited, “the good men must become strong”, this implies that the good ones “*must become authentic*”.

Therefore, what is needed is a serious, precise, evidence-based work of a *phenomenology of authenticity* that can begin to show its movements, principles and decisive distinctions. Distinctions, principles and movements that can help this evolutionary vanguard to have “*direct access*” to the concrete possibility of being oneself, and to exercise one’s own *power of identity*. I speak of “*phenomenology*” because, in addition to being the method adopted by Assagioli in the study of will and other phenomena of consciousness, it is a kind of *first-person* knowledge rather than *third-person*. Its purpose is to afford us *existential access* to the experience of life “*as it is lived*”. Chris Argyris, professor emeritus at Harvard, refers to this kind of knowledge by calling it “*actionable research*”, that is, *applied knowledge*. The purpose of this article is precisely to share the basis of this phenomenology of authenticity, its prime elements.

The zero element, the necessary foundation to move in this direction, foresees the dissolution of some *illusions* related to authenticity. In other words, it is necessary to bring to light, and therefore to free ourselves of some notions and concepts proper to the common mentality, from the “*natural attitude*”.⁽³⁾ According to this mentality, becoming oneself is something that “*becomes*”, that

“*is produced*” with a direct effort in that direction. But it is precisely the ordinary, egoic-centered consciousness which conceives the “*being*” in terms of “*having*”, “*doing*”, “*increasing*”, “*obtaining*”, and “*acquiring*”.

The notion of becoming authentic as a process in which we “*magnify*” or “*increase ourselves*” concerns the conceptual I, not the authentic Self.⁽⁴⁾ The real human I, is indeed «*Immutable*», «*unchanging, equal to himself*». We could say, but this would deserve further clarification, that the vision of becoming authentic as an «*increase of oneself*” is ultimately a *will to compensate* for a more intimate perception of existential precariousness, lack of control, finitude, mortality.

On the contrary, if we admit the existence of a transpersonal Self, of a “*human I*” that is “*transcendent*” and “*transparent*”, that which pre-exists and is different from the multiple events that we live without reducing ourselves to any of these, then it becomes absurd to conceive of “*becoming authenticated*” as a process of growth, of quantitative increase. In other words, the “*real I*” of which Assagioli speaks is that “*autòs*” (in Greek, “*himself*”) contained in the word “*authentic*”. This is *the deepest level of human subjectivity*.

That *autòs*, unlike the phenomenical I, is by no means an “*object*” of our knowledge. Instead it is the pure subject, *the first real datum* of our existence. Unlike the phenomenical I, therefore, we cannot in any way “*do it*”, as it already pre-exists. It is the starting point that “*always is*” in any human existential experience. Assagioli rightly says that the Self has an “*ontological*” nature, that is, it transcends every phenomenology of the psyche, and concerns the underlying dimension of being.

We can better understand what we are trying to say by making use of the work of the great philosopher Duns Scotus, who spoke of “*haecceity*,” as of the presence of Being (the spirit) in the man. We can therefore grasp the nature of the real I: it is “*a surplus*” of the consciousness that always transcends the circumstance we are living in. That “*excess*”, that field of consciousness and freedom, is the nature of the real I, of the “*autòs*” of the word authenticity; it is the foundation of the experience of the miraculous. When we *identify* that dimension in ourselves the world of life immediately seems more “*real*”, more “*vivid*”, more “*true*”. This comes about because

we are looking at it from our *real foundation*, without filters or distortions foreign to our nature.

So if that “autòs” already “is”, if we cannot become it in the sense of increasing it, of producing it, becoming ourselves means reconnecting ourselves to the already existing *life's drive*. How should we therefore have to interpret the “process” to become authentic? Another element that we must be clear about consists in this awareness: one of the decisive discoveries of the phenomenology of authenticity is this: *we cannot realize authenticity directly, “by intentionem”, but only “per effectum”*. Here the language I use is analogous to what the great psychiatrist Viktor Frankl employed regarding the phenomenon of self-realization. Indeed, in a polemic with Maslow, Frankl made it clear that human self-realization is a process that can only really take place “per effectum”:

“If it is true that self-fulfillment and self-realization have a place in human life, they cannot be attained except ‘per effectum’, and not ‘per intentionem’. Only in so far as we give ourselves, we donate ourselves, we place ourselves at the disposal of the world, the tasks and the needs that are asked of us in our life [...] we will satisfy each other and we will realize ourselves. [...] Consequently, man is himself to the extent that he overcomes and forgets himself. [...] The fulfillment of oneself, the realization of one’s own possibilities could not therefore represent a purpose consciously sought by the man himself: only a man who has missed the true sense of his life will dream of his fulfilment not as an effect, but as a purpose itself“.⁽⁵⁾

In a similar way, authenticity is one of those phenomena of consciousness which - in addition to not being *conceived*, in a trans-personal perspective, as an “augmentation” - cannot even be *grasped, purported or directly claimed*. . On the contrary, any direct and deliberate effort in this sense is counter-productive and makes us inevitably find ourselves in the opposite position: a little like the one who *claims* to be humble. And it is precisely in this area that we must be extremely precise, lucid, clear. If the path to authenticity cannot be “per intentionem” but only “per effectum”, then the question is: “*By effect of what ?*” The understanding of this fundamental

movement of the spirit is from my point of view enlightened by a passage from a conversation between Roberto Assagioli and Diane Freund (American psychotherapist) dating back to 1973:

‘If the I is the reflection of the Higher Self, then I would be able to perceive myself and act in a higher way as I come into contact with my Higher Self and experience it. But you said, by way of example, that if I met Beato Angelico, as a person I may not even like him, that the best of him could most probably be found in his paintings. *Why does our personal life not necessarily reflect our best part?* I want my personal life to reflect all the beauty that is in me. You seem to live the ideals of which he writes’.

“You go to the heart of things,” Roberto answered with his witty little smile. ‘Why doesn’t our personal life reflect the best in us? Because there are so many things in the middle. Between the personal Self and the Higher Self there are all sorts of things - opaque, not transparent - that obstruct the light, or refract it. Every kind of obstacle. But we are here for this, to eliminate the obstacles; and this is a great joy ‘.

Here is precisely what our per effectum consists of. The way to authenticity is accomplished by the effect of liberation from what obstructs the channel between the authentic Self and the overt one . In other words, the way to authenticity passes through the *act of distinguishing* what obstructs the channel. With the word “distinguishing” here we mean something very precise: “The act of evoking, of calling into being, of naming a phenomenon through appropriate language”. In fact, those “opaque obstacles” of which Assagioli speaks are so much *stronger*, have so much more *grip* on our consciousness, are such decisive energies, the more indistinct they are.

As one of the twentieth century’s greatest psychiatrists, Ronald Laing, intuited, on the ontological level⁽⁶⁾ there is a law according to which “*what we do not distinguish, determines us*”.

“The set of things we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And since we cannot notice what we fail to notice, we can do very little to change, until we notice how not to notice plasmas, thoughts and actions “.

Roberto Assagioli, fine observer of the psyche and endowed with great clinical sense, intuited and expressed the same principle on the correlated psychological plane with the law he theorized according to which “*what we identify with determines us*”⁽⁷⁾. He wrote: “We are dominated by everything by which our self identifies itself. We can dominate, direct and use everything from which we dis-identify”.⁽⁸⁾

These two intuitions correspond: they *touch* the same principle declined in two dimensions (of the being and of the psyche). This is because the act of *distinguishing* something immediately implies a *dis-identification* from it. In fact, bringing to light an “opaque obstacle”, naming it, calling it to being, means *being able to see it*. To be able to see it implies - to a certain extent - *to take a distance from it*. So it is precisely a portion of the real I, that autòs, which *can* accomplish this act of courage. The real I can distinguish a phenomenon because “its essential characteristic”, as Assagioli tells us, “is awareness”.⁽⁹⁾

Psychosynthesis is however a model strongly influenced by *pragmatism*. If we want to move all this into an applied life rule, however to be taken - as any indication - with the appropriate precautions, we can say this: *every single time we experience a decrease in the experience of being authentic, vital, expressed, corresponding to who we really are, there is an «in-authenticity» that we have not brought to light*. Even in-authenticity is a term that must be explained because it means something specific. It is a word that wants to represent the metaphorical definition of the “opaque obstacles” of Assagioli.

Why call it “in-authenticity”? For Assagioli, *semantics* was important because it is a way that can lead us to the *evidence* of the phenomena of consciousness. So let’s remember it again: the word “authentic” comes from the Latin *authenticus*, which in turn comes from the Greek *authenticos*, and is composed of two parts: *autòs* (himself) and *entòs* (interior). We refer therefore to the inner Self, to the real Self. As a result, with “in-authenticity” “we want to indicate all those phenomena which do not belong to us essentially, but which concern” the periphery of ourselves “or” the objects on the bright background of conscience “. These in-authenticities are

precisely the different opaque obstacles that do not allow light (the “vital sign”) to pass, to be identified by a *consciousness free to listen* and then formalized in the concrete of our historical existence. In-authenticity is a term that encompasses all those phenomena that, when not distinct, keep us at the periphery of our being. Assagioli makes this more explicit in the following passage: «[...] we generally live <outside> our true being; distracted by countless sensations, impressions, worries, memories of the past, plans for the future [...] unaware of what we are in reality ». ⁽¹⁰⁾

But the decisive step is to understand that, *taken together*, these elements are combined and organized in what Kant called “the extraneous reason” in man: a series of impulses, intentions, motives, desires, images, ideas, conceptions, etc. that are not directly *ours*, coming from the intelligent energy of life, from the autòs. They come rather from instances⁽¹¹⁾ external to whom *we are*. Here too we note how psychosynthesis is rooted in the acquisitions of psychoanalysis, starting from the view of *discomfort* as the experience of a “strangeness” with which we have to deal, interrogate, integrate.

But at any moment and under any circumstances, every human being has the power to take the first step towards authenticity. It is the *first movement* of the spirit, from in-authenticity to authenticity, is a movement of distinction. As Albert Camus wrote: “The *first step* of the spirit is to distinguish the true from the false”⁽¹²⁾. The simple but radical act of willingness to distinguish the obstacle - the in-authenticity - which is impeding the *experience of being* in some form, is a real and true step towards authenticity. It is for a specific reason, self-evident, which we must be able to grasp and which we must have clear: *in the exact moment in which we distinguish what ‘we are not’, we are also distinguishing ‘what we are’*.

In fact, in the precise moment in which I *distinguish* a certain present in-authenticity (a thought, an intention, a motive, a judgment, part of me, desire, fear, expectation, etc.), *who am I?* In other words: *who is that I who can see it?* By distinguishing (calling to being) the in-authenticity, I distinguish (call to being) myself, a definite portion of the infinity of my real I. In other words,

to be able to carry out this act *I have to go and find* that I a priori that - thanks to its uniqueness, my “consciousness” - *can* observe it. Assagioli saw this movement of consciousness it clearly. We can understand that precisely with this passage:

“Another advantage is that the revelation [distinction] of the different roles, characteristics, etc. highlights, through contrast, the reality of the I, of the Self that observes them ‘from above’ so to speak. [...] one realizes that the Self that is observing cannot be identified with any of them, but it is something or someone different from each. This is a very important recognition that constitutes the beginning of future psychosynthesis ». ⁽¹³⁾

But even here, if we want to pursue with precision and care a serious phenomenology of authenticity, we must make some clarifications. In fact, we do not want to *root* the attention on the in-authenticity or the opaque obstacle, because this - according to the psychological laws - would *feed* it. But we want to stay in the question of “which in-authenticity *is already present*, if we do not feel ourselves fully, alive, expressed”? We want to examine ourselves *enough* to be able to distinguish it, and therefore weaken it.

But above all, we want, *while* distinguishing it, to *notice* the emergence of the a priori I, which is reborn together with it. In other words, we want, by placing our attention, to *underline* the existence, the emergence, the presence of that “*living subject*” that has made this act. As Alberto Alberti has pointed out in some of his important writings and as Assagioli himself once taught him, *dis-identification is only a preliminary moment. The decisive moment (or movement) of self-consciousness is self-identification*. Doing this is the work of a few because it requires *courage*: the “courage to be” *in spite of* the in-authenticity discovered in us. ⁽¹⁴⁾

From a psychosynthetic point of view, it requires an *act of will*. This is why during a recorded person-to-person conversation, Jim Garrison (President of the State of the World Forum, of the Gorbachev Foundation / USA and of Ubiquity University) told me:

«[...] And I go back to Assagioli. I mean, Assagioli’s power is his recognition that at the end ... *at the end of the day, in the end* ... your life is an act of will. You must,

at the end of the day, make choices. And these choices have consequences. *Every* choice has a consequence. And this was what made him great. The authentic life is, in the end, an act of will “⁽¹⁵⁾

What seems to have escaped most of the studies on authenticity is that its *actual access* goes through exercise of *the entire volitional function*. This includes the exercise of the “wise will,” which comes through the “indirect” unveiling of the in-authenticities. But also through the active exercise of one of its most important “qualities”: *daring*. In fact, *by practicing* all of this on ourselves, in the “laboratory” of our existential experience, we will discover something important: *the stronger the in-authenticity, the more courage, audacity, and capacity for daring are necessary to distinguish it*. As a consequence, we will discover that it is not possible to cheat in the world of consciousness: the exact measure of our *ability* to be authentic is not so much related to our *knowledge*, but to the inner strength of our *being*. That which some brilliant pioneers of human consciousness have discovered for themselves and have communicated to us will make it even clearer:

«Daring is to lose our balance momentarily - not daring is to lose ourselves. And daring in its highest sense is precisely to become aware of one’s own Self.” (Søren Kierkegaard)